



Workshop “Slavery, Law and Religion in the Early Modern Period”

UCLouvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, 8-9 March 2023

Call for papers

Colonial slavery and the global slave trade recently have received much attention in the historical disciplines. This interdisciplinary workshop seeks to bring together junior researchers - PhD candidates and early-stage postdocs – working on early modern colonial and Christian slavery in the fields of cultural, intellectual, religious and legal history.

Particularly regarding the 18th century, scholars have compared the transatlantic with the Indian ocean world. Researchers have also identified shifting attitudes to the institution of slavery as well as the extent to which sources reveal the agency and actions of enslaved human beings, and they have examined distinctions between various forms of dependency, servitude and slavery.

For example, European intellectuals at the time offered justifications as well as criticisms of enslavement and the slave trade, sometimes unquestioningly supporting the former, while rejecting the latter, sometimes rejecting colonial aspirations but not the enslavement that came with such endeavours. Furthermore, notions of an assumed self-evident nature of slavery that required no justification at all were articulated.

In the legal sphere, research has revolved, among further issues, around the legal status of not being able to own property, the agency of Europeans and non-Europeans in legal procedures, the role of contracts, and observable differences between theory and practice. The extent to which enslaved human beings claimed rights or took legal recourse has been a topic of research.

Besides the intellectual and legal dimensions, the cultural and political contexts of various governing entities such as trading companies, mission stations, and indigenous political powers have been analysed, including a range of motivations, from commercial interests to competing claims to political authority. Moreover, scholars increasingly have begun to turn to religious source material from Christian missions. For example, the extent to which slave holding pertained to religious settings of conversion, education and the membership in Christian communities has been reconstructed from the archival evidence.

The call for papers addresses researchers in the fields of cultural, intellectual, religious and legal history and is equally interested in methodical as well as empirically focused contributions. The aim is to address this topic by responding to a series of questions:

- To what extent does slavery offer a perspective on the entanglement between trade, colonial rule, and Christian mission?
- How did political culture motivate change in social formations that included slavery?
- What narrative figures and discursive patterns did individuals employ in order to communicate about slavery and servitude? What specific terms did they use?
- How did local colonial circumstances affect legal practices?
- What was the impact of intellectual texts, such as scholastic tractates or theories of empire, war and peace, on social practices of enslavement and slave trading?
- To what extent were the rules of natural law and classical Roman law, such as selling oneself or enslaving enemies, relevant in early modern colonial settings?
- In how far was the enslavement of Christians different from that of non-Christians?
- Did legal treatments coexist with supposedly scientific, anthropological assertions of inferiority, particularly of non-Europeans?
- What role did the Christian confessional perspective play? Was there a difference particularly between Catholic and Protestant practices of slavery?
- Can we consider a cross-confessional approach to early modern colonial slavery by way of a comparative analysis?

Proposal submissions

The workshop “Slavery, Law and Religion in the Early Modern Period” invites junior scholars studying for a PhD degree or having recently completed their dissertation to submit **a proposal of 200-250 words** for a 20-minute presentation by **31 July 2022** to Dr. Christoph Haar via email (christoph.haar@uclouvain.be). The primary conference language will be English. Proposal submissions in French are also welcome.

Registration and accommodation

There is no registration fee. Travel and lodging will be paid for, as well as breakfast at the hotel, refreshments during the discussions and two conference gala lunches.

A publication volume of revised papers represents the planned output of the conference. The conference and the publication are sponsored by UCLouvain, Institut Interdisciplinaire en Sciences Juridiques, and the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement number 101029867.

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