

Exploring Slave Trade in Asia

First Steps towards an International Database

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Abstract

Since its inception in 2016, the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia (ESTA) project has been working towards solidifying research on the slave trade in the Indian Ocean region and Maritime Asia world by means of a collaborative database. This article briefly discusses ESTA's roots and goals, showcasing the first results that its database has yielded. We discuss and evaluate the database's structure and content up until this point, as well as its ramifications, aspirations, and challenges. Based on the first observations, this article further signifies the value of the ESTA database for comparative slave trade research, taking its first steps towards a reconstruction of the Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia slave trade by connecting global long-distance slave trade with local systems of slavery and forced labour.

The enslavement of Zacharias Jansz

On 30 October 1716, Zacharias Jansz went to see Dutch East India Company (VOC) officials at Fortress Speelwijk in Bantam, on Java's western coast.¹ Jansz, a Bantam-based *Mardijker*, had recently returned from a four-and-a-half-year absence in Sumatra's southernmost region Lampung.² While there, Jansz had overheard talks among Lampung

1 'Register van sodanige brieven en voorname bijlagen als in desen zijn ingeschreven en successievelijk ontfangen van Bantam', in the Nationaal Archief Den Haag (hereafter NA), Archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811) (hereafter VOC), inv. 7673 fo. 6-9/scans 306-309.

2 Term used by the VOC to denote a group of freed, mostly Christian, slaves and their descendants.

people about suspiciously friendly relations between the rival British East India Company and the Javanese Sultanate of Mataram. Worse, though, was talk of an impending British invasion, to be facilitated by Mataram troops. Furthermore, Jansz claimed to have heard about scheming residents from 'Bantam, eastern Java, and Bali intending to block and poison all rivers leading to Batavia'.³ Such information – an unmistakable threat to VOC dominance on Java – meant that Jansz had the officials' full attention. However, loyal as he might have been to the Company, Jansz did have ulterior motives for disclosing this to the VOC. Jansz sought recognition of his suffering and sought to prevent its repetition, as he had been enslaved while sailing from Batavia along with his two children, a fellow *Mardijker*, and a slave called Jan. Soon losing track of these companions while being transported inland, Jansz met, saw, and heard of 'countless stolen people, both freemen as well as slaves', including an enslaved VOC sergeant who Jansz found to be sold to a blacksmith, 'bound hand and foot to heavy timber, completely ill, who consequently died this way and was dragged [...] to the woods as prey for wild animals'.⁴ During these four-and-a-half years, Jansz himself was bought and sold no less than nine times before encountering a Bantam acquaintance of his by chance, who arranged for his release by paying 30 Spanish *reales*.

Zacharias Jansz's account is perhaps as striking as it is unique. On the one hand, it shows how Jansz was caught up in a well-established, complex, and widespread Asiatic trade network, both maritime and land-based, in which all kinds of commodities as well as enslaved changed hands constantly through a variety of traders who, in Jansz's case, came from regions such as northern Sumatra and central Java. It also showcases a well-established slave trade that crossed boundaries of regions, empires, and legal frameworks, and in which European traders became central actors all too eager to act. Let us therefore take a closer look at what these sources are telling us, at their context, and their biases. After all, Jansz's account seems to be tailor-made for his audience. For example, certain elements of the Asiatic slave trade were considered illegal from a VOC point of view. It is for good reason that Jansz stressed to the VOC officials not the gross injustices of slavery *per se*, but rather the 'illegality' of enslaving 'free Christians' and 'subjects of the Company' like himself, thereby demonstrating not only their rights within VOC territories, but also the European companies' more indirect

3 *Ibid.*, fo. 8/scan 308.

4 *Ibid.*, fo. 7/scan 307. The VOC's payroll administration recorded said sergeant's disappearance from Bantam: see 'Ijsselmonde: Grootboek en journaal, 1696-1697' in NA, VOC, inv. 5439 fo. 221/scans 460-461.



Map 1 Overview of the main slave trade ports, regions, coasts, and islands currently covered by the ESTa database, 1621–1856. Note that in some cases, historical or colonial names have been used for clarity.

and limited influence once removed from the major trade centers and military settlements.⁵ Jansz chose to talk in detail about the fate of the missing VOC sergeant, yet he showed no further concern for the fate of Jan, his own Bantam slave.

This source is quite unique in terms of the amount of detail with reference to slave trade around Lampung, recording names of fellow enslaved persons and slave buyers, as well as prices paid. Interestingly, Jansz's account presents an enslaved perspective, an experience which many shared but very few would be able to pass on, but which he managed to escape owing to his previous status of being a free *Mardijker* and the social networks he was part of before slavery. This account, however, serves as an important reminder of the widespread histories of slavery and slave trade outside the Atlantic, and of the value and importance of collecting data on the complex and still understudied slave trade in the (wider) Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago.

Introducing the ESTA project

The *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* (ESTA) project was conceived and developed through a series of workshops in The Netherlands, Sweden, and France between 2016 and 2019, to investigate further the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago.⁶ In 2018, the

5 NA, VOC, inv. 7673 fo. 7/scan 307.

6 The ESTA project has been developed through the collective efforts of many colleagues at the International Institute of Social History (IISH, KNAW) and internationally. At the IISH, these were: Samantha Sint Nicolaas (coordinator 2019-2020), Merve Tosun (coordinator 2020-current), Ulbe Bosma (applicant ESTA grant Dutch Science Foundation NWO), Matthias van Rossum (co-applicant), Filipa Ribeiro da Silva (co-applicant), Richard Zijdeman (co-applicant). We thank our scientific programmer Rob Zeeman (Digital Infrastructure, Humanities Cluster, KNAW) who developed the basic framework and data entry environment of the database). The support of members of the international network of the project has been instrumental to ESTA. We thank our very dedicated collaborating partners Claude Chevalyre (ENS Lyon), Hans Hägerdal (Linnaeus University), and our colleagues of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies; the many engaged participants of the workshops in Amsterdam, Kalmar, and Lyon; and the generous contributors of data and datasets on slave trade, most notably Wil O. Dijk, Jane Hooper, Gerrit Knaap, Menno Leenstra and Robert Parthesius, Ronald van der Spiegel, Rafaël Thiébaud. Between 2017 and 2020, data has also been collected at the IISH in the course of several data and research projects by Alexander Geelen, Bram van der Hout, Matthias van Rossum, Merve Tosun, and Mike de Windt. In 2021, four student assistants were employed at the IISH for the first large data entry and curation effort: Maartje Hids, Pascal Konings, Hannah de Korte, and Sam J. Miske. This article reports on the results of this stage of the ESTA database project. In 2022, these efforts were followed up in two internship projects by Alexander van Dijkman and Giacomo Mastrogiori. Further data entry and curation are anticipated in the years to come. For more information on the ESTA project, see <https://esta.iisg.nl/>.

project received funding from NWO (Dutch Organization for Scientific Research) to take the initial steps in establishing an international slave trade database at the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. The project had three main objectives: to facilitate networking and collaborations between European and Asian historians of the Asian slave trade in the early modern period; to collect and curate various datasets and construct a publicly accessible and participatory database on the same topic, broadly centered around the Indonesian Archipelago and the Indian Ocean; and, finally, to seek follow-up funding for the database and the research it enables. Central to these objectives is that ESTA intends to reconstruct and study Asian slave trade as part of larger, global flows of slave trade in a comparative way. It intends to provide the field with detailed, systematic, and quantifiable figures and reconstructions for slave trade instead of merely rough estimates and to make full use of the ‘wealth of available historical and quantifiable data’, thus including categories of less overt sources on maritime slave trade in Asia, like Jansz’s account.⁷ The project is now nearing the publication of a first set of data in spring 2023; this article will outline the context, form, and content of the database, as well as discuss the underlying historiographical problems the ESTA project has had to take into account.

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TASTD), created in the 1990s, was an inspiration and an example for this project but could not serve as its model. Apart from the various criticisms of TASTD that have arisen over the years, the main differences between the TASTD and the ESTA database resulted from historical differences between the nature of the slave trade in the Atlantic world and in Asia.⁸ The slave trade in Asia was characterized by multidirectionality and interconnectivity. This situation meant that the main unit of analysis selected for the TASTD – the single slave trade voyage – was ill-suited for our project. In contrast to the Atlantic slave trade – where a slave trade voyage could be defined by the single ‘middle passage’ crossing the distance between Africa and the Americas – a database on the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago must account for slave trade movements that were not marked by a single direction

7 Samantha Sint Nicolaas, Matthias van Rossum, and Ulbe Bosma, ‘Towards an Indian Ocean and maritime Asia slave trade database. An exploration of concepts, lessons, and models’, *Esclavages & Post-Esclavages [Online]* 3 (2020) § 3.

8 For more on these criticisms as well as a longer discussion of the nature of the slave trade in early modern Asia, see *Ibid.*

or one ‘middle passage’. Enslaved people were transported to many different regions, leading to a multitude of middle passages in various directions. Sometimes, slave groups were quite homogeneous due to them being bought and transported together. In other cases, ships went from harbour to harbour to ensure sufficient ‘human cargo’. Enslaved people could just as well be parts of tributary gifts, prisoners of war, or kidnapped at sea, as Zacharias Jansz’s tale demonstrates.

Though clearly distinguished from the Atlantic slave trade, the varieties within the Asian slave trade complicate defining single voyages, much like the challenges faced by the intra-American extension of the Atlantic slave trade database.⁹ Furthermore, the intra-Asian slave trade was not only conducted by large European companies, but to a large extent by private traders – including Asian merchants as well as employees of European companies.¹⁰ This added dimension meant that, compared to the Atlantic, large shipments of enslaved people did occur, but enslaved people were also shipped in smaller numbers and alongside other ‘commodities’.¹¹ A database based exclusively on the extensive official records of European companies would therefore strongly underestimate the scale of the trade in enslaved people. A final major concern is the concept of slavery itself. Commodified slavery, much like (Atlantic) chattel slavery, did exist and was at the heart of the maritime Asian slave trade. At the same time, commodified slavery was only one of the various wider coercive labour regimes that existed alongside and interacted with each other. It included not only *corvée* labour and other forms of coercion and dependency, but also other forms of coerced transportation, from colonial deportations – as the population of Siau Island experienced when they were forcibly moved to the Banda Islands by the VOC in 1615/1616 – to coercive contract migration and the long history of ‘coolie’ transportations.¹²

9 ESTA’s solution is to have a so-called ‘subvoyage’ level as the database’s focus (see *Structure*).

10 Linda Mbeki and Matthias van Rossum, ‘Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean World. A study into the networks and backgrounds of the slavers and the enslaved in South Asia and South Africa’, *Slavery & Abolition* 38:1 (2017) 95-116.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Matthias van Rossum and Merve Tosun, ‘Corvée capitalism. The Dutch East India Company, colonial expansion, and labor regimes in early modern Asia’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 80:4 (2021) 911-932; Anthony Reid, ‘Introduction. Slavery and bondage in Southeast Asian History’, in: *Idem*, (ed.), *Slavery, bondage, and dependency in Southeast Asia* (New York 1983) 1-43; Matthias van Rossum, ‘Global slavery, local bondage? Rethinking slaveries as (im)mobilizing regimes from the case of the Dutch Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago Worlds’, *Journal of World History* 31:4 (2020) 693-727.

The ESTA project has taken up a strategic role in the midst of recent historiographical shifts. While the (European) slave trade and slavery in Asia have long been neglected, downplayed in scale, or characterized as 'less harsh' than their Atlantic counterparts, this narrative is being challenged increasingly – partly through re-evaluations of existing data, partly through studies of previously neglected source material.¹³ European companies encountered an already existing, extensive system of intra-Asian slave trade and would deeply impact and transform it – in different ways and to various extents – through their participation.¹⁴ While the historiography and available data are highly fragmentary and uneven across different European powers and periods, a recent article which compiled data from various secondary sources nonetheless showed intense and large-scale participation of these European powers in the slave trade in Asia.¹⁵ Regarding the Dutch East India Company, scholars have recently argued that the Company employed slave labour on a large scale, both in urban and rural contexts. In 1687/1688, the VOC itself employed around 6,000 enslaved labourers, out of a total of 40,000 employees.¹⁶ While these figures are by no means insignificant, they underestimate the extent to which the Company relied on slave labour, as enslaved people owned by private individuals were exploited by the VOC in various ways. For instance, beginning with the VOC's genocidal conquest of the Banda Islands in 1621, the valuable spices

13 For the quote, see Reid, 'Slavery and bondage', 16; for examples of this historiographical development, see Richard B. Allen, 'Satisfying the "want for labouring people". European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500-1850', *Journal of World History* 21:1 (2010) 45-73; *Idem*, 'Ending the history of silence. Reconstructing European slave trading in the Indian Ocean', *Tempo* 32:2 (2017) 294-313; Pepijn Brandon, 'The political economy of slavery in the Dutch empire', *Comparativ* 30:5/6 (2020) 581-599; Pepijn Brandon et al. (eds), *De slavernij in Oost en West. Het Amsterdam-onderzoek* (Amsterdam 2020); Gerrit J. Knaap, 'Slavery and the Dutch in Southeast Asia', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty years later. Antislavery, capitalism and modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995) 193-206; Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek. De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Hilversum 2015); *Idem*, 'Labouring transformations of amphibious monsters. Exploring early modern globalisation, Diversity, and shifting clusters of labour relations in the context of the Dutch East India Company (1600-1800)', *International Review of Social History* 64 (2019) 19-42; *Idem*, 'Global slavery, local bondage'; *Idem*, 'Towards a global perspective on early modern slave trade. Prices of the enslaved in the Indian Ocean, Indonesian Archipelago and Atlantic Worlds', *Journal of Global History* 17:1 (2022) 42-68; Markus Vink, "'The world's oldest trade'. Dutch slavery and slave trade in the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century', *Journal of World History* 14:2 (2003) 131-177.

14 Allen, 'Want for labouring people'; Reid, 'Slavery and bondage'; *Idem*, *Southeast Asia in the age of commerce, 1450-1680, Volume 1: The lands below the winds* (New Haven, 1988) 129-135.

15 Allen, 'Labouring people'.

16 Jan Lucassen, 'A multinational and its labor force. The Dutch East India Company, 1595-1795', *International Labor and Working-Class History* 66 (2004) 12-39, 15, table 1.

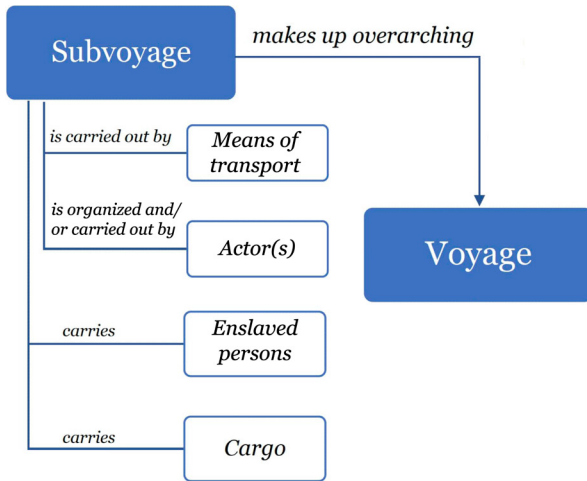


Figure 1 Schematic overview of the ESTA database's main structure (adapted from Sint Nicolaas, Van Rossum, and Bosma, 'Towards an Indian Ocean and maritime Asia slave trade database', 18.)

nutmeg and mace were thenceforth produced by slave labour – around 1680, approximately 55.6 percent of the Bandanese population was made up of enslaved labourers.¹⁷ A similar figure (52.4 percent) has been reported for late seventeenth-century Batavia, the central commercial and administrative hub of the Company, while for the agricultural-industrial lands surrounding the city (the 'Ommelanden') it was 26.6 percent.¹⁸ In the Ommelanden, slave labour was widely used in agriculture as well as in various industries such as sugar production and arak distillation, often in small numbers and accompanied by other kinds of workers.¹⁹

This shift in the perception of the significance and nature of the Asian slave trade has been accompanied by various attempts at quantifying its overall scale.²⁰ Matthias van Rossum has distinguished three main methods of doing so: firstly, empirically reconstructing the actual supply of enslaved people (as in the TASTD); secondly, estimating supply based on known slave trade routes and commercial

17 Knaap, 'Slavery and the Dutch', 197, table 1.

18 Calculated based on data in Hendrik E. Niemeijer, *Batavia. Een koloniale samenleving in de 17e eeuw* (Amsterdam 2005) 400-401, tables 2 and 3.

19 Bondan Kanumoyoso, 'Beyond the city wall. Society and economic development in the ommelanden of Batavia, 1684-1740' (PhD dissertation, Leiden 2011) 134.

20 E.g. Lucassen, 'A multinational'; Matthias van Rossum, "'Vervloekte goudzugt'. De VOC, slavenhandel, en slavernij in Azië, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 12:4 (2015) 29-57; Markus Vink, 'The world's oldest trade'.

relations; and finally, estimating demand, using empirical data on slave populations to calculate the supply necessary to reproduce these populations.²¹ The latter method is perhaps the least precise but, since data on actual supply are still highly fragmented and incomplete, has been used until now as the best way to provide indications of the scale of the slave trade. Employing this third method, Van Rossum has estimated that, in total, 660,000 to 1,135,000 enslaved people were transported to Dutch settlements in Asia.²² While calculations like these are useful for providing indications of the scale of the slave trade and disproving those who have characterized this trade as small-scale, it is time to develop a more precise understanding of the history of slave trade. It is therefore the objective of the ESTA project to further our comprehension of the scale and the patterns of the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago slave trade through empirically founded reconstructions of the actual supply flows of enslaved people.

Structure

The ESTA database is currently designed for the compilation of what could be called ‘meso-level’ data on slave trade, meaning data pertaining to individual voyages and groups of enslaved people rather than to particular enslaved individuals (micro-level) or to large-scale demographic flows (macro-level). While the long-term goal is to compile and integrate data on all three levels, the meso-level was taken as the entry point for this project due to data availability and the historiographical questions discussed above. This approach will also lead to the combination of quantitative and qualitative forms of data on voyages and the enslaved.

The structure of the database is centered around the *subvoyage* as the main unit of analysis, so as to allow for a more detailed record of each singular voyage from point A to B. A subvoyage in this context is a single journey from one location to another, whether it is the (intended or incidental) final destination of the overarching voyage or a brief stop on the way. These subvoyages are then linked together to form one overarching voyage. A voyage, then, would be defined as a chain of subvoyages unified by a varying degree of continuity in movement of enslaved people. For example, imagine a ship sailing from St. Paul to Ste.

21 Van Rossum, ‘Vervloekte goudzugt’, 33.

22 *Ibid.*, 42, table 1.

Marie, from Ste. Marie to Antongil, and from Antongil to Port Louis. This journey would be registered as one overarching voyage from St. Paul to Port Louis, divided into three separate subvoyages. The information for every subvoyage has been divided into five sections: voyage, subvoyage, means of transportation, cargo, and enslaved people.

The voyage section shows the summary of the overarching voyage including the year and the start and end locations of the voyage. It also shows the relationship between and sequence of subvoyages. The subvoyage section records the logistical information of the subvoyage, such as place of arrival/departure, date of arrival/departure, and the actors of that subvoyage. The transportation section records 'practical' aspects of the voyage, such as the type of vehicle the enslaved people were transported in (including non-vehicular transportation over land), its designation, and its capacity. The cargo section contains information on various commodities that were transported during the voyage, excluding enslaved people who were registered as human 'cargo' at the time.

Information on enslaved people is recorded at two levels: the supra-group level – when more precise information is lacking – and the group level. Important types of information include those pertaining to enslaved individuals, such as their quantity, ethnicity, gender, and age as well as to the voyage, such as the mortality rate and the type of forced relocation. Including a specification of the type of relocation for each voyage allows us to identify and accommodate the different forms that forced relocation took across the regions within our database, thereby facilitating more accurate analyses. Because of the multilinear and complex nature of many voyages, individual slave groups – each with a unique identification number – can be linked to individual subvoyages, so that quantitative and qualitative changes across subvoyages can be registered. This system was developed during data curation and is expected to be implemented soon across the database.

Datasets

The first round of data entry, as executed from the fall of 2021 onwards, focused on the five largest datasets that had been collected up to that date. These five datasets now make up the current base of data in the ESTA database.²³ For the first dataset, we extracted the slave trading

²³ The ESTA database registers the references to the location of voyages in the original datasets, as well as to the archival sources to which the different datasets refer. Some of these sources have been

voyages from the *Boekhouder-Generaal* ('Bookkeeper-General') in *Batavia* (BGB) database created by the Huygens Institute between 2008 and 2013.²⁴ The Bookkeeper-General in Batavia was responsible for registering all trade within the regions under VOC control. These sources thus provide a financial overview of the goods and enslaved persons that the VOC traded and transported between its settlements. Unfortunately, most of the books of the Bookkeeper have been lost: only 55 years of data from the eighteenth century are still available. From the books that remain, 417 slaving voyages were entered in the database.

An additional 174 slave trade voyages were extracted from the dataset 'Dutch Ships in Asian Waters in the 17th Century',²⁵ originally compiled by Robert Parthesius and Menno Leenstra and containing more than 57,000 ship movements from the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth century. This dataset was originally compiled using a variety of sources – the VOC archives, the Dutch Asiatic Shipping database, source publications, and contemporary travelogues, among others – to record detailed information on voyages, crew, and cargo of VOC (and its earlier companies') ships in Asia.

The third dataset, 'References to Slave Trade in VOC Digital Sources, 1600-1800', created by Matthias van Rossum and Mike de Windt, is also VOC-focused.²⁶ This dataset records instances with observations of slave trade from digitized VOC sources like the *Generale Missiven* (General Missives) or the *Dagregisters* (Daily Journals) of Batavia Castle. This dataset is not exclusively focused on VOC slave trade, yet includes all observations of slave trade and related events from these sources. In contrast to the BGB, the underlying source material served different purposes within the VOC administration, reporting general and local developments on different locations. At times, this difference means that rather vague descriptions of slave transactions or transportations were recorded, for example, concerning the number of enslaved persons or certain geographical locations. From this dataset, 1,406 voyages were entered in the database.

published in open access and are therefore freely accessible. Others can only be accessed on location in the archives.

24 Huygens Institute, *Bookkeeper-General Batavia. The circulation of commodities of the Dutch East India Company in the eighteenth century*, 2013, <https://bgb.huygens.knaw.nl>.

25 Menno Leenstra and Robert Parthesius, 'Dutch ships in Asian waters in the 17th Century', V1, *IISH Data Collection*, 2022, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/YP2COP>.

26 Matthias van Rossum and Mike de Windt, 'References to slave trade in VOC digital sources, 1600-1800', V1, *IISH Data Collection*, 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/YXEN6R>.

The last two datasets share an emphasis on slave trade centered around Madagascar. A dataset created by Rafaël Thiébaud focused on the French and Dutch slave trade on Madagascar between 1641 and 1810. Thiébaud used a variety of sources like ship journals, correspondence, and daily journals of ports.²⁷ Most of these sources can be found in the French colonial archives. The 1851 slave trading voyages of Thiébaud's dataset were recorded in the ESTA database. Jane Hooper created a dataset on slave trade voyages to and from Madagascar between 1640 and 1856.²⁸ Much like Thiébaud's, it is based on correspondence and ship journals, resulting in various voyages being recorded in both datasets. In total, 310 voyages from Hooper's dataset were entered into the ESTA database.

It is important to note that the scope of the datasets processed so far creates several notable biases in the current body of data in the ESTA database. The first one is an obvious VOC bias: more than half of the total number of voyages in the database can be traced back to VOC sources. Two datasets exclusively used VOC sources. The BGB and 'Dutch Ships in Asian Waters' only recorded movements and slave trade by the VOC itself. The Van Rossum and De Windt data collection also included non-VOC, often *vrijburger* or local Asian slave trade, but its scope is mainly focused on regions where the VOC was active (and on those regions better covered by digitized source editions that were available at the time the data were collected). This approach accounts for a strong focus on Dutch East India Company voyages and regions in the current ESTA data. It, however, does not mean that, with this data, a complete picture of the VOC slave trade can be painted. On the contrary, there are still plenty of sources to be located and processed into the database to uncover the VOC slave trade in its entirety. The other evident bias is towards the slave trade on Madagascar and the Mascarene Islands. As the locus of the two other large datasets that have been processed, it resulted in a strong focus on the Western Indian Ocean region in the study of Asian slavery and slave trade. Combined, these two datasets contain more voyages than the datasets focused on VOC sources. Overall, this concentration results in a strong bias towards East African and Madagascar slave trade in the database. Consequently, both biases influence the rest of the data, such as cargo details.

27 Rafaël Thiébaud, 'French & Dutch slave trade on Madagascar (1641-1810)', V1, *IISH Data Collection*, 2018, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/NZ4YS8>.

28 Jane Hooper, 'Dataset on slave trade voyages to and from Madagascar, 1646-1856', V1, *IISH Data Collection*, 2019, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/E7RMO4>.

Table 1 Summarization of key data within the separate data sets and a total for the current ESTA database.

	Boekhouder-Generaal Batavia	Van Rossum & De Windt	Thiérbaut	Hooper	Parthénius & Leenstra	Total ESTA-database
Number of voyages	417	1406	1851	310	174	4158
Number of subvoyages	417	1520	4869	691	221	7718
Year of first voyage	1701	1621	1641	1640	1622	1621
Year of last voyage	1801	1790	1810	1856	1683	1856
Percentage of voyages 17 th century	0%	63.8%	2.2%	7.2%	97.7%	23.7%
Percentage of voyages 18 th century	99.8%	6.2%	73.0%	28.4%	0%	62.7%
Percentage of voyages 19 th century	0.2%	0%	22.3%	5.1%	0%	13.6%
Most common places of departure in the voyages	1. Makassar (20.4%) 2. Timor (18.5%) 3. Batavia (17.3%)	1. Unknown (14.6%) 2. Makassar (10.9%) 3. Bali (10.1%)	1. Port Louis (54.6%) 2. Unknown (33.4%) 3. Réunion (4.3%)	1. Unknown (35.1%) 2. London (7.7%) 3. Mauritius (6.1%)	1. Arakan (20.7%) 2. Pulicat (14.4%) 3. Batavia (11.5%)	1. Port Louis (23.2%) 2. Unknown (20.5%) 3. Makassar (5.8%)
Most common places of arrival in the voyages	1. Batavia (68.3%) 2. Sri Lanka (15.6%) 3. Bantam (2.4%)	1. Batavia (60.1%) 2. Unknown (6.3%) 3. Banda Islands (3.7%)	1. Port Louis (53.7%) 2. Unknown (29.2%) 3. Saint-Paul (4.2%)	1. Mascarene Islands (34.8%) 2. Unknown (23.2%) 3. Barbados (6.8%)	1. Batavia (71.3%) 2. Banda Islands (8.6%) 3. Pulicat (2.9%)	1. Batavia (30.3%) 2. Port Louis (22.9%) 3. Unknown (15.7%)
Most common places of departure in the subvoyages	1. Makassar (20.4%) 2. Timor (18.5%) 3. Batavia (17.3%)	1. Unknown (13.9%) 2. Makassar (10.4%) 3. Bali (9.3%)	1. Port Louis (52.8%) 2. Unknown (39.5%) 3. Foulpointe (33.5%)	1. Unknown (23.9%) 2. Madagascar (15.8%) 3. Mozambique (3.6%)	1. Arakan (18.6%) 2. Pulicat (12.2%) 3. Batavia (10.4%)	1. Unknown (13.1%) 2. Port Louis (12.6%) 3. Foulpointe (8.2%)
Most common places of arrival in the subvoyages	1. Batavia (68.3%) 2. Sri Lanka (15.6%) 3. Bantam (2.4%)	1. Batavia (55.6%) 2. Unknown (6.1%) 3. Cape of Good Hope (3.8%)	1. Port Louis (52.0%) 2. Unknown (35.7%) 3. Foulpointe (33.6%)	1. Unknown (18.5%) 2. Mascarene Islands (17.7%) 3. Madagascar (13.9%)	1. Batavia (59.3%) 2. Banda Islands (8.1%) 3. Jepara (4.5%)	1. Batavia (16.5%) 2. Port Louis (12.4%) 3. Unknown (10.4%)
Most common voyage (at least one known location)	Makassar – Batavia (19.5%)	Bali – Batavia (9.8%)	Port Louis – Port Louis (35.1%)	Unknown – Mascarene Islands (15.5%)	Arakan – Batavia (16.7%)	Port Louis – Unknown (23.2%)
Sex of transported enslaved persons	Unknown: 55.5% Male: 39.7% Female: 1.7% Mixed: 3.1%	Unknown: 65.7% Male: 6.3% Female: 6.6% Mixed: 21.4%	Unknown: 89.9% Male: 5.6% Female: 4.3% Mixed: 0.2%	Unknown: 98.6% Male: 1.4% Female: 0% Mixed: 0%	Unknown: 93.2% Male: 4.1% Female: 2.7% Mixed: 0%	Unknown: 69.0% Male: 12.4% Female: 4.7% Mixed: 12.4%

Observations

The factsheet above summarizes the content, size, and extent of the database. Note that this database is still a work in progress. The data on the cargos and types of ships are incomplete and therefore are not presented here. At the time of this writing, the ESTA database contains 4,158 voyages, which can be broken down into 7,718 subvoyages (for a breakdown of these data, see table 1). Of the latter, 2,427 subvoyages (31.4%) contain quantifiable data on enslaved persons, which account for about 312,000 directly identifiable enslaved persons in ESTA. About 270 subvoyages (3.5%) within researchers' datasets contain contemporary estimates of slave trade or transport (such as '600-800 noirs', '70/100/170'), as well as other quantitative denominations ('diverse slaven', 'quelques 10s'). Consequently, no definite estimate of the entire ESTA database can be made. Taking into account the absolute minimum that such quantitative denominations represent,²⁹ the number of enslaved persons within ESTA – including estimates and denominations – may lie between 325,000 and 330,000. These figures include rough VOC estimates of slave trade and transport, as well as forced resettlement and combined fleet numbers of transported enslaved individuals.

As only about 31 percent of subvoyages provide us with actual numbers or some form of quantitative data, the sum total of enslaved persons both directly and indirectly referred to in ESTA is no doubt considerably higher. As ESTA's recorded number of enslaved individuals has generally been connected to just one subvoyage per voyage to account for uncertainties regarding the main slaving routes in researchers' data sets, these subvoyages must be seen from the perspective of total voyages. This frame of reference means a minority of voyages (33.6 percent), consisting of maritime ship-by-ship slaving journeys, remains unaccounted for.

Consequently, using a number of 700 enslaved persons – the largest 'capacity' of slave ships between roughly 1600 and 1850, as well as those present in ESTA – as a cut-off point might provide us with a plausible average for voyages without numbers: 61.14 enslaved persons

²⁹ For 'quelques 10s', a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 40 enslaved persons; 'quelques noirs' likewise, namely minimum of 2, maximum of 4. For terms like 'slaven' and 'esclaves', 'diverse', or any term that signifies a plural and so a number greater than 1, a minimum of 2. For 'duizenden', a minimum of 2,000 and maximum of 4,000 has been used.

per voyage.³⁰ Considering the fragmented and privatized nature of the Asian slave trade, this average should not be seen as a ‘regular’ number of enslaved individuals per (sub)voyage or per ship. This aspect brings the number of enslaved persons indirectly referred to in ESTA to about 80,000 to 85,000, although it is not unreasonable to suggest that, had accurate quantitative figures been available for all qualitative indications, this number would be twice as big. Thus, a total of at least 392,000 to 415,000 enslaved persons can be identified directly or indirectly in ESTA at this moment.

This quantifiable scope of the slave trade is a breakthrough in the research into the Asian slave trade. Despite the growing interest in the past years, due to a lack of data only very crude guestimates have been made of the size of slave trade in the wider Indian Ocean world. The ESTA database will provide this data and more, potentially leading to new research and insights. For example, it is possible to compare different regions with each other. The factsheet already demonstrates clear differences between the slave trade surrounding Madagascar and the slave trade of the VOC. Whereas the VOC had one major headquarter – Batavia’s function as slave trade hub is clearly shown in the factsheet – around which most of the voyages, both intercontinental and intra-Asiatic, are centered, the slave trade surrounding Madagascar seems to be based more often on roundtrips, with ships starting and ending in the same port. Comparisons between periods will also be possible, focusing on the trading routes, the enslaved persons’ sex, or the type of ships, for example. All of these possibilities will lead to a clearer picture of the slave trade in Asia in the early modern period.

Future of ESTA

In 2023, the first body of data that is currently collected in the ESTA database will be published in open access. The integration of five key datasets into the ESTA database provides a major breakthrough, but further development of the database is of the utmost importance to facilitate the ongoing acceleration of research into the history of slavery and slave trade in the Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago. The ESTA project aims to reconstruct the slave trade in the maritime realm of the (wider) Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago as

30 This cut-off point has been based on the maximum capacity of individual ships within the ESTA database.

comprehensively as possible. Of course, due to loss of archival material and the occurrence of undocumented activities, it will most likely not be possible to find traces of all the slave trade that existed. By collecting and analyzing as much evidence as possible for the slave trade on the (sub)voyage level, however, it will be possible to reconstruct and analyze slave trade patterns as well as to identify and assess possible gaps in archival documentation. The ESTA project will continue collecting (sub)voyage data primarily. This approach will allow researchers and users to answer questions not only on specific slave trade voyages (which ships transported enslaved, when, and where?), but also on the development of slave trade patterns (how many enslaved were transported from where to where; how did slave trade routes develop over time?), and hopefully also on the background of the enslaved (regional origin, descriptions), the development of slave markets (price levels), and more.

In the current phase of the ESTA project, the IISH and Digital Infrastructure department of the Humanities Cluster (HuC) have developed a database editor which allows entering slave trade data on the (sub)voyage level. This tool can be used for data entry by researchers and assistants working for the ESTA project, yet will also be opened up to researchers of related research projects and the international network. The initiative will proceed along three routes: 1) developing the ESTA database in terms of content and accessibility; 2) collaborating with research projects related to ESTA; and 3) collaborating with an international network of (external) researchers and users. With regard to the first route, the ESTA project aims to acquire funding for the development of an interface and for processing and curating more data. The scale and speed of this data collection will depend on funding, yet will focus on processing existing datasets that have been collected and on processing more easily accessible archival material that is expected to contain a high number of (new) observations of slave trade. In this regard consider, in particular, parts of the digitized VOC archive, such as the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren*, as currently unlocked by the digital research infrastructure project *GLOBALISE* (NWO Groot, 2022-2026), in addition to source publications of other European empires.

Simultaneously, the Editor allows for the possibility of external researchers contributing to the database by entering new data in the Editor and submitting it for evaluation by an ESTA team member. This option creates a second possibility for collaboration with research projects dealing with related topics, as will be the case, for example, with the upcoming project *Resisting Enslavement: A Global Historical*

Approach to Slavery in the Dutch Atlantic and Asian Empires (1620-1815) (NWO Vidi, 2023-2027). Researchers for these projects will be asked to enter new data each time they encounter archival references to slave trade voyages in the course of their research. In return, the scholars for these research projects will have the data collected by ESTA available for their investigations. The third route for future activity focuses on a wider international network of interested researchers and users, who are invited to contribute data to the ESTA database. The aim is to open the ESTA Editor to this wider group of users. Alongside the option of contributing datasets that are deposited on Dataverse and then processed into the ESTA database by research assistants, this accessibility opens up the possibility for a more interactive and direct method of collaboration. Researchers can contribute individual instances of slave trade or entire collections of finds. In the spring of 2022, two interns working at the IISH on the addition of new VOC data (*Daghregister Batavia*) and Portuguese slave traders' data to the ESTA database became the first to test this way of operating.³¹ The development of an interface with the possibility to search the database and to visualize results on a map is intended not only to make the current body of data available, but also to strengthen the visibility of the database initiative and to encourage external users to contribute.

Hopes are that involving the wide international network of scholars working on different archives will accelerate the inclusion of data of other (non-)European nations involved in Asian slave trade that is vital to ESTA's goals. Now, the great majority (96 percent) of all voyages has its origins in either Dutch or French sources, that is to say, mostly VOC and its French counterpart, *Compagnie des Indes*. While this prevalence indicates a need for sources and datasets that go beyond this scope, there is still ground to cover in these companies' archives, too. In terms of timespan, ESTA would also benefit from new and alternative sources, as only voyages from 1640 to 1856 have been recorded, most of these dating from the mid- to late-eighteenth century.

The main challenges ahead for ESTA are fourfold. Firstly, the continued collecting of existing datasets will have to be complemented by a large-scale search for new data in sources that are located in the archives of the various European trading companies, as well as in other bodies of source material in archives across the globe. Secondly, new database entries added by associated and independent scholars have to

31 By Alexander van Dijkman (based on Menno Leenstra) and Giacomo Mastrogregori.

be checked continuously to ensure quality and consistency standards in terms of dataset structure, as well as to avoid double entries. Thirdly, locations, slave numbers and ethnicities, mortality figures, as well as recorded prices and cargo on board need to be standardized. Lastly, an accessible and comprehensible presentation and visualization of ESTA's data needs to be created; its first realization is due in the first half of 2023.

The relevance of doing so, we believe, lies in the potential of the ESTA database to show the widespread presence of slave trade and commercial slavery outside the Atlantic realm, especially in the early modern Indian Ocean and Indonesian Archipelago. The abundant data on slave trade in this part of the world indicates that societies and regimes of slavery across the globe were shaped by the continuous interactions and connections forged especially by the slave trade and its acceleration under the pressure of early modern colonial expansion.³² How exactly slave trade patterns developed over the course of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries throughout the Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago, what its scale was, as well as its impact on local societies, are questions still waiting to be answered. We believe that the data collection efforts of the ESTA database project are pivotal for developing better insights and for catching up with the tremendous developments in Atlantic slavery studies over the past decades.

32 M. van Rossum, 'Slavery and its transformations. Prolegomena for a global and comparative research agenda', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63:3 (2021) 566-598.

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