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

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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

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the local and intercontinental networks that underpinned the private trade in slaves and the transportation of the enslaved in the VOC seaborne empire during the eighteenth century. We rely on two sets of complementary VOC records, with their respective shortcomings, to reveal information about those who were involved in this trade as sellers, buyers and traded. Our focus is on the Cape of Good Hope as a node with a high demand for slaves, and Cochin from where slaves were traded and transported to all regions of the empire, including the Cape. It is apparent from these sources that high ranking VOC officials, the Company rank and file, free citizens and Asians under VOC jurisdiction partook in this lucrative trade. Analyses of regions of origin, age, gender, and caste are provided, giving the reader a rare glimpse into the identity of the enslaved.

Introduction: labour, coercion and mobility

Throughout the Vereenigde Oostindische Company (‘Dutch East India Company’, VOC) empire, mobility and coercion were key elements in mobilizing labour and maintaining imperial order.1 With the exception of the Cape of Good Hope, most attention has been devoted to the European workers, employed in wage labour relations in which sailors and soldiers were free to enter, but not free to leave before the end of their contract ranging between three and seven years.2 Over several decades, a significant body of literature has excavated the work and lives of slaves, free Asians and free blacks at the Cape.3 For other regions, the scale of such scholarship is more modest. Only recently are historians broadening their scope more systematically to include the thousands of Asians, Europeans and Eurasians working through systems of slavery, corvee and convict labour.4 Several studies have pointed out the
importance of slave labour within the realm of the VOC empire and in Asia in
general.5 Other studies have started to explore the contours of the histories of
corvee and convict labour under the VOC.6

Increasingly, slavery and other forms of coerced labour are seen less as inef-
fective ‘oriental’ modes of production and more as part of labour-intensive
routes to economic development.7 Slavery is claimed to have been an ‘integral’
and ‘dynamic part of a permanently developing, globally connected and increas-
ingly capitalist economic system’.8 Recent studies have pointed out that contem-
poraries similarly perceived slavery as a modern, dynamic economic system of
production.9 Coercion and confinement, however, were not the only key
element crucial to these systems of labour. Especially for convict and slave
labour, it is now increasingly accepted that transportation or mobility was one
of the crucial elements underpinning these systems.10

Throughout the Asian empire of the VOC, various circuits ensured the con-
tinuous mobility of coerced labour. Part of these networks of forced transpor-
tation of convicts has been studied by Kerry Ward.11 Regarding slave labour,
various studies, such as those by Marcus Vink and Richard Allen, have started
to explore the dynamics and size of slave trade and slave transportation.12
One crucial point is that the VOC engaged in relatively little slave trading in
comparison to its involvement in the spice trade and later those in fabric, tea
and coffee. Moreover, the majority of the enslaved population in the VOC
empire was not owned by the Company, but by private slave owners, mainly
VOC personnel and European, Eurasian and Asian inhabitants of VOC cities
and rural regions. The VOC owned only a few thousand of the tens of thousands
of slaves living in Company regions, in some cases hiring additional slave labour
from local slave owners.13

Several studies have dealt with the transportation of enslaved Asians and Afri-
cans by the VOC, often for its own use as Company slaves.14 On the much larger
transportation of slaves for private slave trade and ownership, less is known.
Most studies have focused on the Company and private slave trade in and
around Batavia and the Company slave trade from Madagascar to the Cape of
Good Hope.15 This transportation of slaves to the Cape by private persons
and mid- to senior-level VOC employees has been dealt with to some extent
by several authors such as Robert Shell, Kerry Ward and Karel Schoeman.
Ward states that ‘individuals profited from their personal small-scale slave
trade, particularly if they had access to the Company’s transportation network
in which to sell their slaves at sites where they could obtain higher prices’.16
This access to the Company’s transportation network could mean that slaves
were ordered to be sent over from one settlement to the other with Company
ships as illustrated by one of Van Riebeeck’s slaves, Maria van Bengalen, who
was sent to him from Batavia.17 Slaves were brought over by owners for use
as domestics on the return journey, even ‘in spite of official prohibitions’.
They were also transported for sale at the Cape which was known to residents
in the East to have a demand for slaves. Despite this groundbreaking work, too little is known about these and other patterns of the private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world. This article explores the patterns of private slave trade in the VOC empire through the study of two crucial and partly interrelated nodes of the private slave trade that have received insufficient attention thus far: namely slaves transported to the Cape of Good Hope and slaves transported from Cochin. The Cape of Good Hope was, together with places such as Batavia, one of the main destinations for slaves. Cochin, on the other hand, was the most important settlement of the VOC on the Indian Malabar coast, which was one of the main regions of origin for enslaved subjects in the Asian and South African regions under Dutch control. This article also highlights the importance of circuits of private slave trade in general and studies the crucial role played by Company personnel in this trade. Their involvement in slave trading and slavery in different parts of the VOC world has remained largely invisible and understudied. In this way, the article contributes to the growing knowledge on the slave trade and slavery in early modern Dutch Asia, providing insight into the origins and backgrounds of the slave traders as well as the enslaved and scrutinizing the extensive nature of networks of the private slave trade. In order to do so, we first assess the existing literature on slavery and slave trade at the Cape of Good Hope, in Southeast Asia (especially Batavia) and in South Asia. The article will then analyse new data for the private slave trade to the Cape of Good Hope and data on slave transactions in Cochin.

**Slavery and shipping in Dutch Asia**

The study of Indian Ocean slavery is not only complicated by the paucity of written sources, but also by its multi-directionality and the many players involved. The supply of slaves was often determined by catastrophes, both natural and manmade, indebtedness and more powerful polities raiding weaker ones expressly for enslavement. These dynamics of slavery and the slave trade seem to have existed before European powers arrived in South and Southeast Asia. The arrival of the Portuguese, the Dutch and other European trading companies meant the intensification of long-range slave trading networks. The trading companies of the Dutch, English, French and other European nations started to build upon existing trading patterns throughout the Indian Ocean area and Southeast Asia. In this way, European demand for both slaves and Asian commodities resulted in the intensification of the slave trade throughout the Indian Ocean world.

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the slave trade in Asia was conducted by both European and Asian traders. Gujarati merchants transported enslaved Mozambicans to Daman and Diu. The two major players in
Maluku trade, including slavery, were the Chinese and the Bugis. As in Maluku, Chinese slave traders were the major players in the export of Balinese slaves, mostly to Batavia, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indian slaves were exported by European powers to their colonies in the eastern and western Indian Ocean colonies. High-ranking VOC officials – merchants, administrators and governors,– were sometimes able to fit out their own private ships to engage in the slave trade. Lower- and middle-ranked personnel employed in intra-Asiatic shipping, used the opportunity of their voyages in Asia on board Company ships to transport slaves.

Slavery was widespread throughout the VOC empire. As the main centre of the VOC empire, Batavia played an important role in both the logistical and trading network of the Company, as well as slave ownership, slave-based production and the slave trade. The enslaved population in the city and its ommelanden (surroundings) grew from almost 26,000 in the late seventeenth century to roughly 40,000 in 1780. The share of the enslaved population in the total number of inhabitants nevertheless slowly declined from about 40% (around 1690) to 24% (around 1780). Slaves were hired out or employed in Company work places, by artisans, in sugar mills, in agriculture and in households.

Similar patterns can be discerned for other parts of the VOC empire. At the Cape, for example, slaves were used in urban production by artisans and the VOC, but also in the growing agricultural production in the greater Cape area. The number of slaves at the Cape rose from nearly 1000 around 1688 to 3000 at the beginning of the 1720s. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the enslaved population had risen to more than 15,000 in Cape Town and the rural hinterland. The VOC owned several hundred enslaved Asians and Africans, and hired slaves from Company personnel or local vrijburgers when the need for an augmented workforce arose. Stereotypes were important in the trade and employment of slaves. They could be reflected, for instance, in the price that slaves fetched, or in the type of labour that they were assigned to do. Bengali women had a reputation as skilled needlewomen while Malays were reputed to be excellent craftsmen. Forty per cent of slaves in the service sector were from the Indian subcontinent, while Africans were often put to labour in the fields. The effects of these stereotypes would become less marked as the supply of Asian slaves to the Cape dwindled towards the end of the VOC period. This period saw the majority of slaves coming from the western Indian Ocean, particularly Mozambique.

The importance of slave labour and slave-based production could vary significantly for different parts of the VOC empire. While the Banda islands depended almost entirely on the work of slaves, this could be less so in other regions. In Ceylon, for example, obligated corvee labour was an important source for much of the agricultural production of cinnamon and areca nuts, as well as many of the logistical tasks of the VOC. Such regions could, however, be intimately linked to slavery and the slave trade systems of the VOC world. The
Malabar Coast (southwest coast of India), for example, was an important producer of pepper but little is known about labour relations in this region. The Malabar region and its main VOC port, Cochin, were, however, strongly connected to the slave system as one of the most important slave exporting regions. The same could also be true for other regions. At the Cape, for example, the VOC procured slaves for itself through slaving expeditions to Mozambique and Madagascar.\textsuperscript{36} Other areas such as Bengal and parts of Southeast Asia were also important exporters of slaves.

All these regions were bound together by the intensive networks of intra-Asiatic and intercontinental shipping of the VOC and other Asian and European maritime merchants. Although Cochin has often been noted as one of the posts where the costs structurally surpassed the benefits for the VOC, the port and the region were important enough to maintain a relatively strong presence. Cochin was a vibrant trading port. All strata of the VOC hierarchy could develop networks with individuals who fell under the Company’s jurisdiction and others who did not. Indigenous merchants were the go-betweens that extended the Cochin VOC personnel’s networks to the wider Malabar world.\textsuperscript{37} Cochin was located on the shipping routes between Persia and Surat, the Coromandel Coast and Bengal, and the Indonesian archipelago.\textsuperscript{38} Most VOC ships would stop at Ceylon during their intra-Asiatic voyages to and from Cochin.

Ceylon could perhaps best be described as the second most important region in the VOC empire. After a series of conquests by the VOC in the middle of the seventeenth century, the Company controlled much of coastal Ceylon, important for the production of cinnamon, but also an important place in the shipping networks of the VOC. After Batavia, the Ceylonese port cities of Colombo and Galle were the most important destinations for the intercontinental shipping of the VOC between Asia and Europe. From the 1660s onwards, three to four ships per year would sail directly to Ceylon from the Republic, while 5 to sometimes 10 or even 15 ships would depart from Ceylon to the Republic via the Cape.\textsuperscript{39} The port settlements of Ceylon were also of crucial importance for the large intra-Asiatic shipping of the VOC, with most ships on routes between destinations in the Western Indian Ocean, Bengal and Southeast Asia calling at Ceylon.

The Cape had an equally important position within the VOC shipping network. It functioned as a provisioning post between Asia and Europe. After the Cape settlement was established in 1652, all ships from Batavia and Ceylon were ordered to call there before continuing their journey to the Dutch Republic. It was the last stop or barrier in intercontinental voyages. The VOC put up barriers to the migration of Eurasian and Asian subjects to the Dutch Republic: this included free persons, slaves and even wives and children of Company servants.\textsuperscript{40} As Asian and European subjects were not allowed to travel beyond the Cape of Good Hope without permission, the VOC tried to control the movement of people on intercontinental voyages to and from the
Cape as much as possible. In 1636, the VOC forbade ‘natives to secretly board homeward vessels’ and ‘Europeans to take slaves on their (homeward) voyage’ to the Dutch Republic. Bans on transporting slaves to the Dutch Republic were frequently repeated in the following decades, but complaints of slaves actually reaching the Dutch Republic without permission would persist in spite of this. Company servants who wanted to travel to the Dutch Republic with a slave – often as a servant – needed to request permission and pay the Company a fee for the cost of provisions and transport. From 1713 onwards, the fee was raised to include the return of slaves to Asia.

**Regulation and administration of the (private) slave trade**

In order to increase the control over transportation via intercontinental voyages, these regulations were extended to include the first half of the journey to the Cape. Licences were provided to transport slaves on the first half of intercontinental voyages (from Batavia, Ceylon or Bengal) to the Cape. It has been noted, however, that the regulations seem to have applied primarily to slaves transported for burghers or Company servants who were repatriated without performing active service on board the ship in which they made their voyage to the Republic. In a recent study, it has been noted that: ‘None of the licenses were for the captains, officers and other high-ranking employees of the returning ships.’ This seems the case at least for the years 1694, 1700–1702. It seems likely, however, that captains, and perhaps other high-ranking crew members, did take slaves to the Cape as private cargo or merchandize, as is known from cases such as the revolt on the Slot ter Hoge. These slaves seem not to have been registered in the permissions.

On intra-Asiatic voyages, captains and petty officers were allowed to bring privately owned slaves on board the ships for the purpose of private trade. It was only allowed to embark and disembark private slaves in ports that were part of the voyages of Company ships, although the case of the Delfland (1743) indicates that ships’ officers would sometimes illegally sail to other destinations for the purpose of the private slave trade. It was only in 1776 that the private trade in slaves by ships’ officers was subjected to further restrictions, limiting the number of slaves for captains to a maximum of eight, while the other officers were allowed four privately owned slaves per person. In the 1780s, the restrictions would further limit the number of private slaves allowed on board during intra-Asiatic voyages, but this seems to have only a very limited effect on the practice of the private slave trade via Company ships. For example, the crew of the Slot ter Hoge carried at least 20 slaves as private cargo from Batavia to the Cape in 1783.

The regulation of the slave trade meant that we have a number of important sources. Two are of primary importance for this study: the records for permission for transport and the registers of slave transactions. Both sources are
of pivotal importance, providing information on different parts of the networks carrying out the private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world. Together these sources provide a more complete picture of the patterns of slave trade. To gain insight into the slave trade to the Cape of Good Hope, the records for permissions for transport, preserved in the overgekomen brieven en papieren (OBP) of the VOC archive, are used.\textsuperscript{54} Besides the owners and transporters of the slaves, information was recorded on their given names, gender and for the most part their toponyms. These eighteenth-century lists bring to life people who are otherwise difficult to trace due to their underrepresentation in the written record. The lists of permissions provide unique and valuable information on some the owners and actors involved in slave transportations, uncovering the forced mobility of slaves and the trans-oceanic networks of the slave owners and traders. For this article, 153 registered permissions have been analysed for different years covering the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{55}

Two main limitations must be noted for the permissions for transports. Firstly, the lists with permissions do not provide information on \textit{illegally transported slaves}. The illegal slave trade as well as the semi-legal or condoned slave transportation occurred and could even take on significant proportions, as is indicated by the suspected revolts by slaves on the \textit{Slot ter Hoge} (from Batavia to the Cape, 1783) and the \textit{Delfland} (from Batavia to Banda, 1743).\textsuperscript{56} Secondly, the permissions display an overrepresentation of high-ranking VOC personnel, burgurers and others described on the passenger lists. They concern the slaves \textit{transported by everyone who was not a regular member of the crew}, including repatriating workers travelling with their own slaves, passengers with slaves for whom passage was paid and slaves being transported by low ranking members of the crew for others. The VOC rank and file – and their privately owned slaves – are conspicuously absent from these lists.

The silence in the records left by the permissions for transport to the Cape from the Indian Ocean region can be filled by the crucial information found in the slave transactions. The \textit{acten van transport} provide extraordinarily detailed information on the trade in slaves by ships’ crews. These sources also provide more detailed and unique information on the enslaved giving us a rare glimpse into the lives of those whom the VOC’s accounting machine mostly reduced to vague references of names and regions, or even to mere numbers in columns. These \textit{acten van transport} have been preserved for the main Dutch port of one the most important slave exporting regions, the VOC settlement of Cochin on the so-called Malabar coast, from 1753 onwards. This provides the opportunity to elucidate the nature of the slave trade in Cochin by studying these records.\textsuperscript{57} For this purpose, a sample of 168 transactions of enslaved persons in Cochin in the beginning of the year 1753 is analysed – all transactions from 2 January until 3 March.\textsuperscript{58} The \textit{acten van transport} were used by the VOC to register the sales of slaves to Company subjects. Information was registered about the seller (name, occupation and status), buyer
(name, occupation and status) and slave (new name, old name, caste, gender and sometimes age). In combination, these sources will allow us to study the practices of permitted transportations of slaves to the Cape as well as the dynamics of private slave trading from Cochin to other destinations. Among these destinations – indirectly via Ceylon and Batavia – a significant number were directed to the Cape.

**Trans-oceanic networks and mobility**

The networks involved in transporting and trading slaves were extensive and complex. The permissions for transport provide information on parts of the networks and the mobility involved, indicating connections between high officials, higher and middle-ranked crew members, burghers and local populations, which spanned the various VOC settlements across the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian archipelago. The permission roles, as mentioned, mostly provide information on the very well to do and influential VOC servants with their domestic slaves. These VOC servants enjoyed the services of domestics, could invest in buying multiple slaves, were able to pay for travel costs in the hope of turning a profit, or simply to send a slave to family and friends at the Cape. In 1703, a year before he became governor-general of the Indies, Joan van Hoorn sent a slave to the Cape by the name of Stephanus in the care of skipper Croes. Cornelis Chasteleijn, famous for freeing his more than 100 slaves upon his death and leaving them his lands, sent a slave called Francis of Mallabaar under the care of Theunis Cartensz. Mattheus de Haan sent a slave to the Cape in 1703.59 De Haan was vice president of the council of justice in Batavia at the time and would later become *Governeur Generaal* of the Dutch East Indies.

A former member of the council of India, Jacob Faas, travelled on the *Zandenburg* with his five children and seven slaves. Five of the enslaved, who are not named, presumably acted as his domestics, while a further two, Antena and Pedro, were to be delivered to the Cape to the then *gesaghebber* Willem Helot.60 Helot would later become *commandeur* of the Cape. Abraham van Kervel of Den Haag, the former *fiscaal* of Malacca, travelled with three slaves on his repatriation trip to Texel in 1712: Anthonij van Bengale, Ramme van Mallabaar and Dalbier van de Cust on the *Korssloot*. These slaves were only permitted to be transported from Batavia to the Cape, so they must have disembarked during the two months stop at the Cape, and were probably sold.61

Some cases shed light on extraordinary situations such as the children of Harmen van Baijen of Hellevoetsluis travelling back on the ship *Nieuwwalcheren* in 1736 to Europe after the death of their father on the 6th of May of that year. Three slaves were assigned to the children Anna, Anna Lucretia and Alexander van Baijen. Van Baijen had worked for the Company since 1717 when he held the rank of *kapitein* (*militair*). At the time of his death, he had risen to the rank
of sergeant major. The male slave Simon and the female slaves Alima and Jamila all came from Mandhaar.

The records indicate that it was not only the highest ranked officials who were granted permission to be accompanied by their domestic slaves on ships, but indicate other uses and networks as well. In some cases, slaves were transported for non-European inhabitants of the VOC settlements. For instance in 1703, Albertina van Ambon, a free ‘black’ woman judging by her name, had two enslaved men transported from Batavia to the Cape. Pasquael van Mallabaar was transported on the Westhoven under the supervision of surgeon Hugo Penck while Jan van de Cust was transported on the ship Flora under the supervision of skipper Clemindent. It is not known whether Albertina van Ambon was involved in the informal slave trade for profit or whether she had other motives, but it was clear that she was part of a network that included high-ranking VOC employees and apparently free black individuals as well.

Most permissions, however, were used by high officials or burgHERs to send their slaves between different VOC settlements. The previously mentioned official Jacob Faas, for example, transported one of his slaves, by the name of Adolph, with a ship he was not himself travelling on in 1712 (the Korssloot) in order to be delivered with the other slaves to the commander Willem Helot. In 1703, the skipper Pieter Wijman of Hamburg travelled from Batavia to the Cape on the Abberkerk destined for Texel with Quinus, a male slave belonging to Mattheus de Haan who at this time held the position of vice president of the Raad van Justitie (Court of Justice) in Batavia.

The permissions for transport explicitly indicate the existence of this informal private trade in slaves from the east to the Cape. The permission list for the transport of slaves with ships to the Cape in 1703, for example, was described as a ‘note of the slaves who in this year 1703 with the following return ships will be shipped to the Cape to the service of their masters in order to be delivered or sold there’. In 1700, the permission list noted even more explicitly that ‘the aforementioned slaves, both males and females, are not allowed to be transported beyond Your Honourable Government, but must stay there and be sold, or otherwise must return to here’.

Captains and officers would not only transport slaves for others, for which they were undoubtedly compensated, but brought along slaves in their own possession as well. During a voyage in 1703, Captain Pieter Wijman also had two slaves of his own on board this ship: Thomas of Mallabaar and Rachel of Macasser. Captain Harmanus Driesman from Amsterdam made a homeward bound voyage from Ceylon via the Cape with the slaves Matthijs from Mallabaar (Malabar) and Fortuijn from Mallabaar on the ship Trinconomale in 1790. Driesman had arrived with the Trinconomale in Ceylon on 9 September 1789 and left again in February 1790. At the Cape, the ship spent nearly a month which would have allowed Driesman time to sell Matthijs and Fortuijn.
Buyers and sellers

The Cape

As we know, there was ample opportunity to engage in the trade in slaves. Even ministers of the church were not above making a little money for themselves through this informal trade in souls. In a report on smuggling and illegal activities by VOC employees, Radermacher complained in the late eighteenth century that even ministers tried their best to participate in private trade, as the most [trade] in every settlements in either slaves, tea, etc.

For the slave trade to the Cape, this is illustrated by the predikant Florentius Camper of Leiden traveling with no less than six enslaved persons on the Barneveld in 1712. Camper enlisted as a minister with the VOC as early as 1701. As the Company paid poorly, a priest would not have received a large salary to afford the luxury of many slaves. Granted he travelled with his wife, two children and mother-in-law, the widow Ketting, but considering the transport and food costs for each enslaved, the luxury of having the service of one slave per person must have been offset by the future returns on their sale.

Lower personnel, mainly officers and petty officers of ships, also participated in the transactions. Two boatswains on the ship Trinconomale were granted permission to travel with slaves from Ceylon to the Cape as well. Tobias Scholte of Furstenau travelled with Meij of Mallabaar. Pieter David Louis of Danzig brought along a slave by the name of Julij van Mallabaar. The bookkeeper Christiana Ludolf Timmerman of Dannenberg arrived at the Cape from Batavia with Pieter van Batavia and Regina van Boegis (Bugis) in 1738 on the ship Hillegonda. The ship was moored at the Cape between 12 February and 9 March 1739 before heading to Texel, allowing Timmerman time to sell Pieter and Regina.

These servants were all being repatriated back to the Dutch Republic. Not all slaves transported to the Cape were listed in the permission lists, leading to an underrepresentation of lower and middle-ranked personnel. Of the personnel being repatriated and needing permissions for the transport of slaves, many had started out in low ranks and made significant career advancements in the service of the Company. They also knew their way around the various settlements. Captain Wijman began his career as a simple matroos (sailor) in 1689. Captain Driesman’s career with the VOC spanned two decades (1770–1790). On his first journey to the east, he was recruited as a hooploper (a young sailor). He had travelled to Ceylon a number of times. Boatswain Scholte signed three contracts with the Company between 1786 and 1794 when he died. He began his career as a schiemansmaat and ended it as a bootsman. Boatswain Louis spent six years in the service of the VOC (1784–1790), during which time he was promoted from bootsmansmaat to bootsman. Louis also had travelled to Ceylon once before. Bookkeeper Timmerman began his career with the VOC as adelborst in 1723.
The slave transport to the Cape must have been a profitable business. The ships’ officers and military men returning from Ceylon to the Netherlands on board the VOC ships *Trinonomale* and *Huisduinen* in 1790 were only stationed in Ceylon for two months, yet during this time they managed to procure slaves and the necessary permissions to have them transported to the Cape. In total, 36 enslaved men were registered for permitted transport to the Cape. Nearly all of them were from Mallabaar (29), four were from Ceylon, yet another two were from *de kust* (Coromandel), while the origin of one enslaved was unknown. Information on slave trading opportunities may have been widely available, such as the preference for slave men at the Cape. Such knowledge must have been exchanged among the VOC workers working on ships and in the settlements throughout Asia.

**Cochin**

The *acten van transport* of Cochin provide a detailed picture of the people involved as buyers and sellers in the earlier stages of the chain of private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world. The buyers of slaves registered in the *acten* of Cochin were mostly European personnel (89%), but also Asian personnel (5%), Toepases and burghers citizens of Cochin (3%) and others.72 The sellers of slaves were much more diverse. Among the group selling slaves to Company subjects in Cochin were European VOC employees (39%), but also Asian Christians (38%). Slaves were also sold by Toepasses (7%), Moors (5%) and Burghers (5%). European VOC employees bought slaves mainly from Asian Christians (including Catholic Toepasses: 45%) and from other European VOC workers (43%). Burghers and Toepasses mainly bought their slaves from Asian Christians. Asian VOC workers, however, bought most of their slaves from Moors (Tables 1 and 2).

Some of the slaves registered in the *Acten van transport* were bought by VOC employees working in or around Cochin. Frederik Cunes, the commander of Cochin and the Malabar district, the *meesterknecht* of the smiths’ store, Hans Casper Thiel, and the bookkeeper Jacobus Legrand are examples of the diverse ranks of Company employees who bought slaves. The Asian VOC

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<th>Table 1. Ethnic and social background of buyers and sellers of slaves in Cochin (1753).</th>
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<td>Sellers Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>European VOC worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian Christian</td>
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<td>Toepas</td>
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<td>Moor</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>Burgher</td>
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<td>Jew</td>
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Source: Sample from Acten van Transport, Cochin. NA, Tamil Nadu Archives Chennai (TNAC), 1.11.06.11, 554.
workers were officers of the Asian regiments stationed in Cochin, such as Captain Sanij Poeloe Nanka, the lieutenant Sembaan and the sergeant Moela. The mason (metseelaar) of Cochin, Mighiel Kruijs, bought three slaves over a period of two months. All three slaves received a new name. The 28-year-old woman registered as Diana by Kruijs was a slave of the Bettua caste, previously named Aijapen. The eight-year-old girl was named Rosinda (Bettua caste, previously named Chakij) and the five-year-old boy Februarij (Paria caste, previously named Coren).\(^{73}\) The soldier and leather worker Frans Groll bought two slaves: a 16-year-old boy he called Januarij, a slave of the Chego caste previously named Coemaren, and a female slave he called Susanna.\(^{74}\)

A significant number of the slaves were sold to the crews of the VOC ships anchored at Cochin. In the first two months of 1753, 54 of the 161 slaves registered in the Acten were sold to crewmembers of ships. One of the ships anchored at Batavia ready for departure around this time was the ship *Akerendam*. The ship arrived in the fall of 1752 from Batavia and left early in the spring of 1753 to return to this city. In the meantime, Captain Claas Anderse had bought five male slaves from different sellers: the burghers Jan and Claas Long, the overseer of the gun powder mill Barent Jansz, the mocquadon (overseer) Parandoe and the previously mentioned soldier and leather worker Frans Groll. The five slaves bought by Anderse were all men. The slave Januarij bought from Groll must have been the 16-year-old boy of the Chego caste previously named Coemaren. From the mocquadon Parandoe, Anderse bought a slave he called Februarij, who was also 16 years old and was previously named Aijen (Poelia caste).\(^{75}\)

Other members of the crew of the *Akerendam* invested in slaves as well. The lieutenant Roelof Aarentsz, the mate Jan Fontijn, the first mate Hendrik Jansz Vorst, the surgeon George Hendrik Reveeling and preacher Dirk van der Meer all bought three to five slaves. They bought them from Pieter van Wullem, messenger of the Court of Justice in Cochin, sailmaker Jan Pietersz, head of the ships’ carpenters Warnaar Florijn, vaandrig of Chettua Govert Cornelisz, quartermaster Jan Wake, the soldiers Hendrik Dedel and Philip Wast, the sergeants Fredrik Boekoven and Jacob Smit, and the lascorins Barkij and Anthonij Mattaj. The slave children’s ages range from 6 to 18.\(^{76}\) A number of crew members bought only one or two slaves. The constables’ mate Christoffel Michielsz bought two male slaves. The slave registered as Steven was bought from the European cooper Harmen Kunde Jansz. The slave registered as Jupiter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buyer/seller</th>
<th>European VOC worker</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Toepas</th>
<th>Moor</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Burgher</th>
<th>Jew</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European VOC worker</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toepas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian VOC worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sample from Acten van Transport, Cochin. NA, Tamil Nadu Archives Chennai (TNAC), 1.11.06.11, 554.
(previously named Ittij, Poelia caste) was bought from the Asian Christian Anthonij Mattaij, who would sell the six-year-old boy Mattoe (registered as April, Poelia caste) to Jan Fontijn only a few days later. Pieter Calliber bought a boy of only three years from the lascorin Thonij Paijlou. He changed the name of this boy of the Chego caste from Candon (in ‘Malabaars’) to Aron. Jan Albert Leijden bought a young woman, the 20-year-old Coelij of the Parea caste, from the Chettua burgher Abraham van Rosse and changed her name to Dorotea.

The ship Akerendam departed shortly after this and arrived in Batavia in April 1753. Its official cargo included only six slaves who were transported for the VOC. The crew bought a total of 34 slaves in Cochin and probably transported them to port cities such as Colombo or – in this case – Batavia. In the first two months of 1753, slaves were also sold to crew members of the ships Sloterdijk and Tulpenburg, both engaged in intra-Asiatic shipping, and the regionally employed vessel Maria Lourentia. Most of these slaves were bought by captains, mates, boatswains, and – to a lesser extent – by constables, surgeons, lieutenants and ministers. Slaves for this private trade were supplied especially by other European servants and Asian Christians and burghers living in Cochin and surrounding places such as Chettue, Paloertij and Sint Andres.

The enslaved and traded

The Cape

The sources have revealed much about the buyers and sellers in the slave trade as well as the local and intercontinental networks that must have been behind their transactions. But what can these sources teach us about the enslaved and traded humans involved? The eighteenth-century sample of slaves transported to the Cape (207 in total) consisted for the most part of men (58%), while a minority were women (18%). In 24% of the cases, it is unclear whether the individuals were men or women. Male and female slaves were not evenly distributed over the different regions of origin, or over time. Almost all slave women came from places in the Indonesian archipelago, making up roughly half of the slaves from this region. The sample from the year 1790 with permissions for the transport of slaves with ships from Ceylon to the Cape contained exclusively male slaves. Such patterns can be attributed to racial attitudes in existence at the Cape, but may also reflect changing demands and the economic make-up of the Cape colony, with a rapidly increasing slave population and growing agricultural sector. Only a few slave women were transported to the Cape from other regions such as Bengal, Ceylon and Malabar by official permissions.

The regions of origin are sometimes specifically stated (Macassar, Batavia, Surat), or otherwise a more general geographic origin is given (Malabar, Bengal, Bali, Timor). It is crucial to stress that the slaves’ toponyms are often
more likely an indication of the place of purchase or transhipment as opposed to geographic origins. Many of the individuals from the coasts of South India, Bengal, Madagascar, South Sulawesi and other regions in the Indonesian archipelago could well have begun their journey of enslavement further inland. Often, they only came into contact with the Dutch once they arrived at the coast or in specific cities or settlements. More information, therefore, is needed to complement (or sometimes even contradict) the indications provided by these crude toponyms. Such data are scarce, but one fruitful method is to employ additional information from other sources such as the *achten van transport*.

The lists of permissions do provide some more general indications on the geographic spread of Indian Ocean slavery in the eighteenth century. For the general imports at the Cape during the eighteenth century, it has been estimated that slaves came from Africa (mainly the east coast, 26%), Madagascar (25%), South Asia (26%) and the Indonesian archipelago (23%). The patterns of slave trade changed over time. During the eighteenth century, the imports slowly shifted from South Asia to Southeast Asia and finally the Southwest Indian Ocean region. The enslaved individuals transported with permission mainly came from the west or Malabar coast of India (45%). The second largest groups come from the east coast of India (23) and from Bengal (25). Individuals from South Sulawesi (19) and Java (11) in the Indonesian archipelago are also present in the sample. Even Madagascar is represented (3). Of the individuals whose toponyms are available, 99 were from South Asia (65%), while 51 were from the Indonesian archipelago (33%).

The variation in the origins of enslaved subjects brought to the Cape via different routes was large. On the ships from Batavia to the Cape, a large share of the slaves (almost half) came from regions in the Indonesian archipelago, such as Bali, Timor, Mandhar, Macassar and Nias. More than half of the slaves on the ships from Batavia, however, did not come from the archipelago, but from regions such as Bengal (22%), Coromandel (18%), and Malabar (14%). On the ships arriving at the Cape from Ceylon, a different trend emerges. Only a few slaves originated from Ceylon (11%) and the Coromandel

Table 3. Origin of slaves permitted for transport to the Cape (1701–1703, 1712, 1718, 1736, 1739, 1790).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of origin</th>
<th>To Cape (all routes)</th>
<th>Batavia–Cape route</th>
<th>Ceylon–Cape route</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ind. archipelago</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengal</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceylon</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coromandel</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malabar</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sample based on NA, VOC, 1628, 1630, 1641, 1651, 1653, 2419, 2360, 3843, 7534, 7538, 7545.

As referred to in list of permission (i.e. the region of origin reflects very crude toponyms).
Coast (6%). There were no slaves from places in the Indonesian archipelago transported via this route. By far the most important slave supplying region for the ships from Ceylon in the late eighteenth century was the Malabar Coast (83%) (Table 3).

Cochin

What more can we find out about the background of these slaves via the *Acten van transport* for Cochin? This is a significant question as the slaves from Malabar were one of the most significant groups of enslaved subjects in the private slave trade, being shipped from the Malabar coast to the Indonesian archipelago (especially Batavia), but also to Ceylon (especially Colombo) and to the Cape of Good Hope. The slaves traded in the 168 transactions studied through the *Acten van transport* of Cochin in the first months of 1753 were mainly, but not exclusively, male (71%).

For those transactions involving slaves sold by Asian sellers, additional information such as the caste, the previous name (plus from which language this name came from) and sometimes the ages of the slave were registered. A number of examples have been mentioned, such as the 16-year-old slave Februarij of the Poelia caste bought by captain Anderse of the ship *Akerendam* from the mocquadon Parandoe, who was previously named Aijen in the ‘Malabar language’. Similar additional information was registered on the five slaves bought by the mate Pieter Martensz of the *Akerendam* as they were all sold by non-European sellers. For example, the girl Manij, sold by Bonjoe Toernij, a resident of ‘Proetikacherij’ was said to be of the Chegotta caste. The 11-year-old girl was renamed Christina. Three boys, all between 10 and 18 years of age and of the Polia caste, were renamed Februarij (previously Ramen), Neptunus (Toemaoij) and Januarij (no previous name registered). The 15-year-old girl Ittij Callij of the Chegotta caste was sold by the lascorin Manoel Anthonij. She was renamed Helina after she was sold to Martensz and brought to the ship *Akerendam*.85

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sold to ships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polia</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chego</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bettua</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanaka</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mocqua</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oellada</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sample from Acten van Transport, Cochin. NA, Tamil Nadu Archives Chennai (TNAC), 1.11.06.11, 554.
Most slaves sold in Cochin were recorded as originating from the Polia or Poelia caste (42%) and the Chego caste (39%). Pulaya have been referred to as the lowest Dalit caste in this region.\textsuperscript{86} Persons of this caste were engaged in agricultural work and were probably not protected by law from being sold and alienated from the land they worked.\textsuperscript{87} The Chego caste seems to refer to communities that originated from Malayalam Buddhists.\textsuperscript{88} Some slaves were registered as originating of the Bettua (8%) and Kanaka castes (5%), but only a few were from the Parea (2%) or other castes. Enslaved persons registered as having a Chego and Poelia (Pulaya) caste background were also dominant among the slaves sold in Cochin to crew members participating in the private slave trade via the intra-Asiatic shipping network of the VOC (in both cases the share of slaves from these castes amounted to roughly 80–85%) (Table 4).

The slaves were strikingly young: on average they were only 13 years old. The minimum age set by the Company for the recruitment of Europeans sailors and soldiers in the Dutch Republic.\textsuperscript{89} Perhaps the lower prices paid for children might explain the strong preference for slaves of a very young age.\textsuperscript{90} The girls were on average somewhat older (15.7 years) than the boys (12.4 years) at the moment they were sold in Cochin. It is interesting to note that slaves from the Chego caste in turn were younger (on average 11.6 years) than slaves from other castes. Some of these differences are difficult to explain and further research into this data is therefore needed.\textsuperscript{91} This might indicate differences in patterns of employment. The same can be said for the gender patterns since most of the slaves sold in Cochin were male (on average 71%). The preference for men (or boys) was even greater in the transactions involving crew members of VOC ships buying slaves in Cochin (83%).

**Conclusions**

We have demonstrated that there was ample opportunity for VOC personnel to engage in private slave trading and that they took full advantage of the Company’s intercontinental transport network in the Indian Ocean to do so. The OBP shed light on slaves’ migrations for the purposes of acting as domestics to their masters/mistresses on repatriation voyages and to be sold or delivered to the Cape. Limited information about the enslaved is available in this record and it over-represents the higher echelons of the VOC hierarchy and vrije burghers. A few examples, however, seem to indicate that free blacks had access to this network too. The majority of the enslaved transported to the Cape were men; of the few women in the sample, the majority were from the Indonesian archipelago. Mostly slaves of Indonesian ‘origin’ were transported on the Batavia–Cape route, with significant numbers also originating from Bengal and the Coromandel and Malabar coasts. The majority of slaves transported on the Ceylon–Cape route were from the Malabar Coast.
On this part of the VOC private slave trade networks, the *Acten van Transport* of Cochin, the main VOC settlement of the Malabar Coast, provides more information. Whereas the *OBP* are silent on the involvement of the Company’s rank and file in the private slave trade, the *Acten van Transport* speak volumes about slaves traded and transported by VOC personnel in Cochin and on VOC ships engaged in intra-Asiatic shipping. The transactions of slaves in Cochin indicate that the participation in the slave trade by the higher and middle ranks of VOC personnel was extensive. Within Cochin, slaves were sold and bought by a large variety of local and European actors, ranging from *lascorins* (soldiers) to *mocquadons* (overseers) and burghers, and from merchants to artisans. A significant number of the slaves were sold to VOC personnel on board ships, moored at Cochin and waiting to leave for other destinations such as Batavia or Colombo. Most of the crew members buying slaves were captains, mates and boatswains, although others, such as constables, surgeons, lieutenants, ministers, would also participate. The intra-Asiatic voyages with VOC ships provided the infrastructure for the extensive patterns of the long distance private slave trade.

There were clear differences in routes: slaves transported from Ceylon to the Cape mainly came from the Malabar Coast, while slaves brought from Batavia to the Cape mainly originated from Indonesian archipelago or from other parts of South Asia (especially Bengal and the Coromandel Coast). The slaves registered in the slave transactions of Cochin provide interesting and detailed information on the large groups of ‘Malabar’ slaves who were privately traded to Batavia, Ceylon and via Colombo to the Cape. Slaves were often renamed. This was not only the case when they were sold by Asian sellers to European buyers, but could also be the case for European slave sellers as well. Slaves were mostly children or young adults, with average ages of around 16 years (for girls) and 13 years (for boys). Most slaves were male, especially the slaves that were sold to crew members of VOC ships destined for the overseas private slave trade. The enslaved boys and girls were mainly from two specific caste backgrounds that seem to indicate a lower status in society, namely the Poelia (or Pulaya) caste and the Chego caste.

The vibrant slave trade throughout maritime Asia and the active and extensive participation of high and middle-ranked Company personnel confront us with questions about the position of the VOC. The Company only periodically took up large scale slave transportations, but in the long run the Company slave trade paled in comparison to its monopoly in the spice trade and later the trades in fabrics, tea and coffee. The private slave trade in the VOC world was more important. Here, the Company was strikingly lax in regulating the engagement of captains and petty officers in slave trading on intra-Asiatic voyages on board VOC vessels.

This article has explored the patterns of the private intra-Asiatic slave trade by VOC personnel, burghers and others from Cochin to the Cape. It indicated that the networks of private slave traders, using the extensive intra-Asiatic shipping
network of the VOC to transport human cargo, either through their own presence on these ships as crew members or through permitted transportation by others, tied together the different Asian and African parts of the VOC empire. This study indicates the importance and widespread character of the private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean region. Yet much more detailed research needs to be done to excavate the still understudied histories of the slave traders and the enslaved.

Notes


2. The literature on European workers in the service the VOC is too long to list here, for a recent overview see footnotes 76 and 77 in M. van Rossum, *Werkers van de wereld: Globaliseren, arbeid en interculturele ontmoetingen tussen Aziatische en Europese zee- lieden in dienst van de VOC, 1600-1800* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014), 31–2.


25. Andaya, ‘Local Trade Networks’.


32. Worden, Slavery.
34. Shell, Children.
43. Fatah-Black and Van Rossum, ‘Slavery in a ‘Slave Free Enclave’?’. Fatah-Black and Van Rossum, ‘Slavery in a ‘Slave Free Enclave’?’. The lists of 1700, 1701 and 1702 mention mainly passengers, burghers or (repatriating) personnel not part of the ships’ crew, only sometimes captains. NA, VOC, 1540, Batavia, 363–4; 1628, Batavia, 100–1, 157–8; 1640, Batavia, 134–7.
53. Worden, Slavery, 43.
54. Nationaal Archief, Archief van de VOC (VOC), 1.04.02.
55. NA, VOC, 1628, 1630, 1641, 1651, 1653, 2419, 2360, 3843, 7534, 7538, 7545. The lists of permission studied cover the years 1701–1703, 1712, 1718, 1736, 1739, 1790.
57. Nationaal Archief, VOC Tamil Nadu Archives (TNAC), 1.11.06.11. The records of slave transactions (acten van transport) have been preserved in the judicial archives of the VOC settlement of Cochin. The year 1753 is the first covered in these records.
58. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 1–136.
59. NA, VOC, 1653.
60. NA, VOC, 7538.
61. NA, VOC, 7538.
62. NA, VOC, 2360. Careers are derived from the database VOC Opvarenden (www.vocopvarenden.nationaalarchief.nl).
63. NA, VOC, 7534.
64. NA, VOC, 7534.
65. NA, VOC, inv.nr. 7534.
67. NA, VOC, 3843.
69. NA, VOC, 7538.
70. Schoeman, Portrait, 44.
71. NA, VOC, 2419.
72. Toepasses were Asian Christians with a claim to (mixed Asian-) Portugese descent.
73. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 9, 108, 124.
74. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 71, 76.
75. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 70, 72, 114, 115, 122.
76. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 58, 60, 63, 80, 82, 84, 97, 98, 101, 105, 106, 109, 110, 111, 118.
77. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 61, 74.
78. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 118.
79. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 133.
81. Shell, Children.
82. Schoeman, Portrait, 177.
83. Shell, Children, 41.
85. NA, TNAC, inv.nr. 554, scan 89, 90, 91, 93, 100.
87. Allen, European Slave Trading, 125.
88. S.N. Sadasivan, A Social History of India (New Delhi: APH, 2000), 338.
90. Allen, European Slave Trading, 127.
91. A dataproject dealing with the Acten van transport will explore the opportunities to study the intra-Asiatic (private) slave trade in further detail in the period 2016–2019 as part of the research project Between Local Debts and Global Markets: Explaining Slavery in South and Southeast Asia, 1600-1800 (NWO Veni grant, Matthias van Rossum, International Institute of Social History).
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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