

**Symposium the West India Company in Africa, in particular in Elmina,
3-11-2022, Nationaal Archief
Programme 14-17**

14.00-14.05

Words of welcome

Arjan Agema

Nationaal Archief

Head of Digitalisation department

14.05-14.15

Introduction

Marianne L. Wiesebron

Chair person

14.15-14.35

**The Atlas of Dutch West Africa
*Towards new insights into Dutch Atlantic slave trade***

Oscar F. Hefting

In 1637, after several earlier attempts, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) finally succeeded in conquering Castle El Mina from the Portuguese. A Dutch fleet was sent from Recife, because of the local need for enslaved labour at the Brazilian sugar plantations. Four years later the WIC conquered Luanda in Angola for the same reason. These conquests were the starting point for a long-lasting Dutch influence in West Africa. This presentation will shed light on a new project of the New Holland Foundation, 'the Atlas of Dutch West Africa'. This Atlas will consist of an inventory of all relevant historical and archaeological material and thus provide new insights into Dutch participation into the Atlantic slave trade.

14.35-14.45

Questions and comments

14.45-15.05

**“Captains, Terre Grandes, Brokers & Enslaved Servants” Edina’s Complex but Enduring
Cooperation with the WIC, 1637-1792**

Natalie Everts

Throughout the age of the trans-Atlantic trade, Elmina was a major point of embarkation for enslaved African women, men and children but at the same time a location of enduring encounters between the local population - mostly *Akan* speakers - and European traders. The inhabitants of the densely populated *Edina Oman* (Elmina state) continued to live under their own laws and administration, as did the Portuguese and subsequently the Dutch men who resided in Castle São Jorge. Over the course of time, these commercial partners developed a complex system of rules and customs to regulate their intercultural economic as well as their social interaction. Including rulings governing conflict management, military support, funeral rites and even mixed marriages.

Many inhabitants, of freeborn descent as well as those born in slavery, were employed by the WIC, or somehow involved in the Company's presence. Who were these functionaries, varying from political leaders to lineage elders, brokers, military men and large numbers of artisans, canoe men, keepers of the enslaved and domestic servants? What roles did they perform and how did they manage to safeguard their economic and social positions? Choosing a micro-historical approach, I intend to explore a few cases (unearthed from Dutch archival collections) of cooperation and conflict as to see how their positions within this contact situation changed over time.

15-05-15-15

Questions and comments

15-15-15-45

TEA BREAK

15-45-16-05

The WIC and the Trade in Humans to Dutch Brazil: Smuggling Strategies (1636-1646)

Carolina Monteiro

From 1630 to 1654, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) established control of part of the north and northeast of Brazil in order to benefit from the profit generated by the local sugar industry, until then under Iberian rule. As previously implemented by the Portuguese colonizers, Dutch Brazil maintained the colony's structure based on the use of African enslaved labour, through both the internal commerce of captives and the transatlantic shipment of enslaved Africans. With the WIC officially entering the trade in humans after acquiring the post of Elmina in 1637 in order to maintain a steady supply of the enslaved labour force to Brazil, such business opened up an array of possibilities for those closely involved in the acquisition, transportation and the upkeep of Africans in bondage to illegally profit from their private commercialization. A closer look at the documents preserved in the Dutch archives shows us, that not only can we find enough material to better understand the Company's political and legal stance on transatlantic slavery, but also the Company officials' personal

involvement in the smuggling and subsequent sale of enslaved Africans for illicit enrichment. This communication aims, therefore, to present part of this research based on documents from Dutch National Archives, arguing that it is infeasible to understand social relations between Africa and Dutch Brazil without taking into account the political structure and the mechanisms of corruption that accompanied it.

16-05-16-15

Questions and comments

16-15-16.35

Afro-Brazilian women and their fight for freedom in Amsterdam

Mark Ponte

It is well known that slavery was not formally permitted in the Dutch Republic and Amsterdam in particular. How this *principle of free soil* turned out in practice is a historical debate that has hardly been discussed in the Netherlands. Literature on slavery in the Republic focuses mainly on Suriname and Curaçao in the eighteenth century, but it was Afro-Brazilian women who first successfully claimed their freedom in the mid-seventeenth century. In this paper I will discuss the role of a small group of Afro-Brazilian women and their struggle for freedom in the city of Amsterdam.

16-35-16-45

Questions and comments

16-45-16-55

WIC-opvarenden: new databases on the crews and ships of the Old West India Company

Jirsi Reinders

For large historical research the archive of the Old West India Company (1621-1674) is too incomplete to create a thorough history of the company and its people on a micro level. With the disclosure of the notarial deeds at the Amsterdam City Archives there are new possibilities to reconstruct the history of the Company. And that is exactly what the new project WIC-opvarenden tries to do in 2023. Combining new techniques such as handwritten text recognition and entity extraction would eventually lead to two databases containing approximately 10.000 names of seafarers and the ships they served upon.

16-55-17-00

Questions and comments

17.00 Closure Symposium