

Shifting the Tide: Data, Findings and Future of the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia Database

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Abstract

The chapter discusses information that can be obtained by an analysis of materials from a database. The authors share their experience in processing huge amounts of data about slave trade in the Indian Ocean World, in a wide geographical sense. As they explain, the Exploring Slave Trade in Asia (ESTA) project aims to remedy the discrepancy between the wealth of existing data and sources that document slave trade in the region, and the lack of resources to make detailed interregional and comparative quantitative analyses. The principles for the database are presented, and the possibilities are demonstrated by examples from places like Malabar, Lampung, and Bali where figures from European trading companies, in the first hand the VOC, highlight the structures of the slave trade.

Keywords: ESTA, Asia, Indian Ocean World, database, trading companies

1. Introduction

Decades of collaborative research efforts to extract archival data culminated in the launch of the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, which ushered in a new era of slave trade research. Documenting the details of the coerced transportation of more than 12 million enslaved Africans (2024 estimate) across the Atlantic, the database allowed unprecedented public access to information on slave trade voyages and has become a core reference for anyone studying the Transatlantic slave trade. This led to more detailed reconstructions of this trade and its patterns, as well as insights into the various agents in this trade since the recent launch of the

¹ We are also heavily indebted to everyone who contributed by providing data and intellectual input in various stages of this project. Most notably, we would like to thank in that respect: Samantha Sint Nicolaas, Ulbe Bosma, Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, Mike de Windt, Rafaël Thiebaut, Jane Hooper, Wil O. Dijk, Gerrit Knaap, Heather Sutherland, Menno Leenstra, Claude Chevaleyre, Hans Hägerdal, Stephan Conermann, Richard Zijdeman, Maartje Hids, Sam Miske, Hannah de Korte, Giacomo Mastrogregori and Aleksandra Modelina.

Enslaved and *Enslavers* databases. Yet, for Asia and the wider Indian Ocean world, slave trade is still understudied, even though we will see that recent estimates seem to confirm notions that human trafficking in the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia was likely as extensive as, if not more so than, the Atlantic slave trade.²

Scholars have increasingly noted that slavery and slave trade were widespread across maritime Asia from the 16th well into the 19th century.³ Re-evaluations of existing data and understudied sources have led to a surge in new insights into the mechanics of slave trade in regions, but these have focused especially on the Western Indian Ocean, and, to a lesser extent, on different parts of South and Southeast Asia.⁴ Some of these studies have also produced new data, especially on the structural European involvement in an extensive system of intra-Asian slave trade.⁵ However, the invaluable data that recent studies present remain geographically, periodically, and thematically fragmented.⁶

The uneven state of the field has limited the ability to properly analyse cross-regional structures, patterns, and connections, and make global comparisons and analyses. This is an especially pressing issue for the study of slave trade, which operated within a global network of interconnected structures of forced labour and relocation. Evidently, an important step towards integrating the field of Asian (and by extension global) slave trade studies is to set up an infrastructure to collect, connect and curate existing and new data. These quantifiable figures and reconstructions are paramount to coming closer to a more comprehensive and detailed insight in the size, structure, and patterns of slave trade in Asia beyond rough estimates.

Most of the current data collections draw on European (company) archives, which still hold a great wealth of detailed and yet understudied sources documenting the slave trade in Asia. These range from systematic demographic documentations of enslaved populations to daily logs of ship movements and cargoes to notarial deeds recording (re)sales including involved agents and sale

² See among others: Allen, 'Satisfying the 'Want for Labouring People'', pp. 45–73; Knaap, 'Slavery and the Dutch in Southeast Asia', pp. 193–206; Welie, 'Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial Empire', pp. 45–94.

³ Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', pp. 131–177; Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia*; Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*; Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean*; Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia*; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*.

⁴ See among others: Hooper and Eltis, 'The Indian Ocean in Transatlantic Slavery', pp. 353–375; Harries, 'Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean', pp. 173–190; Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*; Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*; Subrahmanyam, 'Between Eastern Africa and Western India', pp. 805–834.

⁵ For numbers on French slave trade in the Western Indian Ocean, see Thiébaud, 'French Slave Trade on Madagascar', pp. 34–65. For numbers on price developments, see Rossum, 'Towards a global perspective on early modern slave trade', pp. 42–68.

⁶ Chakraborty and Van Rossum, 'Slave Trade and Slavery in Asia – New Perspectives', pp. 1–14.

prices. With the possibilities that digital tools and techniques increasingly provide to extract relevant data from these rich sources, it becomes all the more urgent to locate and dive into these sources. Not only European, but also non-European local archives still hold much of the yet untold histories of slavery and slave trade in the region.

The *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* (ESTA) project aims to redress this discrepancy between the wealth of available data and sources describing the historical slave trade in this region and the lack of resources to perform detailed interregional and comparative quantitative analyses with.⁷ The project is hosted by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and consists of a data project and an international network of scholars that study slavery and slave trade in Asia. In this chapter, we would like to present some initial data analyses resulting from the first phase of the database project after a short account of several challenges and choices that have led the project to this point.⁸ Even though the following data survey is only a starting point for further research, we can already identify slave trading routes, mechanisms of private and Company slave trading, patterns of gender and age distribution, and fluctuations therein emerging from the current data corpus. In this way, the analyses also provide an urgent case for collecting and integrating more data into the Database.

⁷ The ESTA project was developed through collaborative efforts of colleagues of the International Institute of Social History (IISH, KNAW), ENS Lyon (Claude Chevalere), Linnaeus University (Hans Hägerdal), and the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies; further shaping the project, workshops were organised in Amsterdam, Kalmar, and Lyon between 2016 and 2019. At the IISH, those involved include 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), and Richard Zijdemann (co-applicant). Notable contributors of data and datasets on slave trade include Wil O. Dijk, Jane Hooper, Gerrit Knaap, Menno Leenstra and Robert Parthesius, Ronald van der Spiegel, and Rafaël Thiébaud, to whom we are most grateful. Between 2017 and 2020, data was further collected through several projects at the IISH by Alexander Geelen, Bram van der Hout, Matthias van Rossum, Merve Tosun, and Mike de Windt. In 2021, four student assistants (Maartje Hids, Pascal Konings, Hannah de Korte, and Sam J. Miske) were employed for the first large-scale data effort; resulting, too, in the aforementioned article ‘Exploring Slave Trade in Asia: First Steps towards an International Database’. In 2022, two internship projects by Alexander van Dijkman and Giacomo Masrogregori followed, as well as Pascal Konings’ work as junior researcher (2022–current) and coordinator (2024–current). More collaborative, international data entry and curation is expected in the (near) future; for more information, see <https://esta.iisg.nl>.

⁸ Sint Nicolaas, ‘Towards an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slave Trade Database’; Hids et al., ‘Exploring Slave Trade in Asia’, pp. 153–172.

A collaborative effort

The ESTA Database was initiated within an international network of slavery scholars with the goal of providing the field with quantifiable data for new research. The project aims to collect, connect, and curate existing data on slave trade around the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia, and explore the still obscured information contained in various archives to add to the data corpus.⁹

The first phase of the project was dedicated to data collection and the development of a database structure that addressed both i) the diversity of source materials and the types of information they provide, and ii) the complexities of slave trade voyages undertaken throughout the Indian Ocean.¹⁰ Forced transportations of people across the Indian Ocean and Asia transpired in a variety of (often interconnected) contexts, ranging from commodified and legalised slave trade to ‘illegal’ (private) human trafficking, and tributary exchanges between polities to penal slavery. In order to understand the interactions between different manifestations of slave trade and their connections to other forms of bondage and coercion, it is important to record these distinct but connected forms of slave trade in as much detail as possible. This is paramount to getting a better grasp on the structures of slave trade in this region.¹¹

An additional challenge to creating a data model was brought forth by the multidirectional and interconnected character of forced relocations in early modern Asia. Even though the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* serves as an important example, its structure would severely limit the reconstruction and analysis of the complex and multidirectional slave trading voyages around the Indian Ocean. The relational ESTA Database has therefore developed an advanced model that centres around the ‘subvoyage’ as the main unit of analysis to allow for a detailed record of each singular journey from one location to the next. These individual journeys are then linked together with a specification of their relation to each other to form an overarching voyage. Conversely, we define the voyage as a chain of interlinked subvoyages. This allows for recording (sub)voyages between different locations in any complex series. The structure of the ESTA Database thus ensures the compatibility of the ESTA data with its Atlantic inspiration (through the level of the voyage), while allowing for a more refined documentation and analysis

⁹ Data contributions are durably stored and accessible in a dedicated section of IISH Dataverse: <https://datasets.iisg.amsterdam/dataverse/IOMASTD>.

¹⁰ This first project phase was funded by the NWO *Internationalisation in the Humanities* Grant Programme (2018–2020).

¹¹ A compelling recent case for a more global and connective approach to bondage and coercion: Ekama, Hellman, and Van Rossum, ‘Slavery and Labour Coercion in Asia’, pp. 1–16.

of the ‘many’ and multidirectional ‘middle passages’ of the wider Indian Ocean and Indonesian archipelago world.

Each subvoyage contains information on dates, means of transport, the actors orchestrating the transport (whether that is a private person or a group of people), enslaved people, and cargo (see Figure 10.1). Information on enslaved people is recorded at the supra-group level, when we are only given numbers of transported enslaved, and at the group level for more detailed records of ethnicities, genders, age groups, and mortality. Importantly, each subvoyage also specifies the type of forced relocation in order to accommodate these different forms and facilitate more accurate analyses. Several fields are included to denote (un)certainities around for example departure and arrival dates / locations or the status of a slaving voyage arising from source materials.¹²

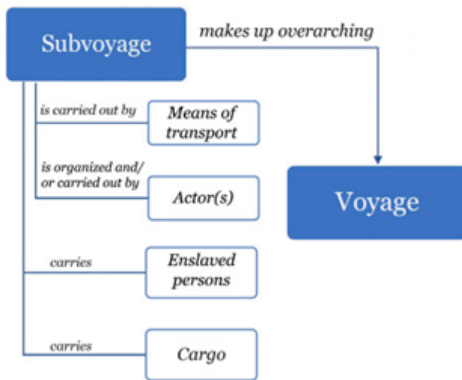


Figure 10.1. The ESTA Database's simplified data model.¹³

This model allowed us to curate data from six independent, separately structured datasets that researchers generously contributed to. After collection, these sets were then curated and (wherever possible) standardised over the period of roughly a year. This first collection of data is focused primarily on available data drawn mostly from French and Dutch Company archives. Consequently, this highlights slave trading activities of mostly European actors around Madagascar, in the Bay of Bengal, and across the Indonesian Archipelago. Apart from the six sets that were published with the launch of the ESTA Database Viewer (December 2023), three new

¹² For more detailed information on our data model, see: Sint Nicolaas, 'Towards an Indian Ocean and Maritime Asia Slave Trade Database; Hids et al., 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia'.

¹³ Published before in Hids et al., 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia', p. 160.

sets have been collected and curated; these will be included in the ESTA Database soon. These sets, too, draw partly from VOC source material, although they tend to focus much more on private Asian slave traders, as well as early 17th-century VOC involvement in slave trading. An important inclusion, however, is a dataset on Portuguese observations of slave trade in 16th and 17th-century Japan, the Philippines, East Africa and Mauritius.

Activities of other European traders in enslaved people, such as the Spanish and British, have not yet been included. At this point, it also leaves regions with a structural slave trade such as the South China Sea out of view, although a dataset on Chinese slave trade is currently being curated. Therefore, the (published and unpublished) sets in the current Database are not representative of the total slave trade in Asia. Yet, by bringing together the previously scattered data, the Database does provide a breakthrough in Asian slave trade studies. And so, for the first time, we can undertake quantitative, interregional, comparative studies of slave trade in Asia over a period between the 16th and 19th centuries.

2. Preliminary passages

In December 2023, the ESTA project presented the first version of the Database with more than 4,000 slave trading voyages, and the transportation of an estimated 340,000–342,500 enslaved persons between 1621 and 1856.¹⁴ Currently, as this chapter is written (late December 2024), the ESTA Database contains explicit references to the coerced transportation of at least 420,000–425,000 enslaved persons between 1520 and 1856, based on both published (six) and unpublished (three) datasets. Implicitly, this number rises to an estimated 690,000 enslaved persons, signalling an upper range estimate still based upon minimum numbers. If the current data in the ESTA Database would represent even 5 percent of maritime Asian and Western Indian Ocean-based slave trade (though it is most likely less), then these implicit numbers confirm the aforementioned notion that slave trade around the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia was as extensive as its Atlantic counterpart. Origin-wise, the majority of cases of the published datasets in ESTA are currently based on either French, Dutch or Portuguese colonial sources, and are mainly split between the French East India Company (CdI), the Dutch East India Company and private (French, Dutch, and Asian) traders. Although bringing such a collection of data

¹⁴ This version of the dataset is available for searching and browsing here: <https://exploringslavetradeinasia.com>. More information on the data can be found in Hids et al. 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia'.

together means a major leap forward in scholarship, it also leaves open significant gaps that can and will need to be filled in the decades to come.

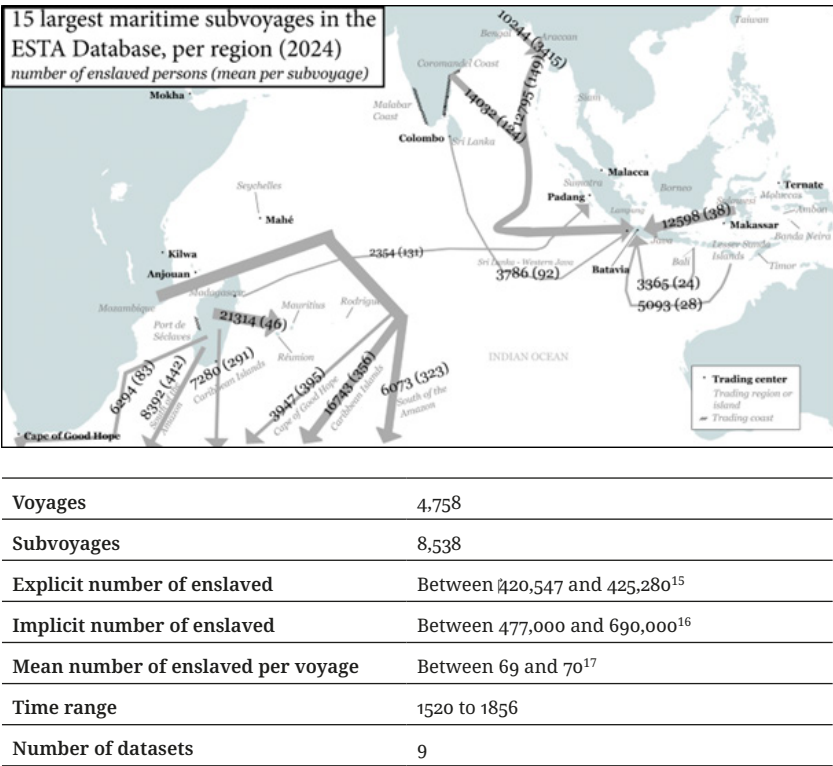


Figure 10.2. Overview and scope of the ESTA Database (2024 data).

As shown in Figure 10.2, the largest confirmed maritime subvoyages transporting enslaved persons in ESTA are centred around several slave trade hubs or regions. Per route on the map, a total number of enslaved persons is displayed, as well as a mean number in parentheses. Although a significant portion of the ESTA Database

¹⁵ This number represents bare minimums; qualitative denominations have been curated for this purpose at its minimum (for instance, ‘enslaved’ will result in a minimum of a plural, i.e., 2; ‘dizaines’ (tens) will result in ‘20’; and so on).

¹⁶ Estimate based on frequencies of subvoyages and its missing data.

¹⁷ Weighted mean. The ESTA average was based on a cut-off point of 1167 as the maximum number of enslaved persons per subvoyage, based on the highest capacity of slaving vessels present in the published ESTA Database (the *Zeelandia*, 1622); other large-scale estimates (mostly third-party observations) have been largely disregarded.

revolves around Batavia (20 percent) and the Indonesian Spice Islands (14 percent), much of its focus is on Madagascar (61 percent). Here, 69 percent of slave trade traffic coming to or going from the island was passing through the Mascarene Islands (Mauritius and Réunion), as well as via other ports on Madagascar itself. Other noteworthy Malagasy flows depart for the Americas, although missing data – mostly numbers of enslaved people aboard particular vessels – indicate that Asia-bound voyages formed a substantial portion of Madagascar's slave trade, particularly towards South and Western Asia. In contrast, Batavia operated primarily as an arrival hub for slave trade, from where the VOC pursued stimulation and regulation of the trafficking of enslaved persons.¹⁸

The ESTA Database holds more information on these areas as a result of its underlying corpus of data, consisting of datasets that cover mainly colonial French and Dutch sources. This emphasises the need for more scholarship to further collect data from e.g. Portuguese, British, Spanish and vernacular source material. At the same time, the more advanced state of the data from the French and Dutch sources is deceptive, and does not mean work here is complete. The frequencies of subvoyages with missing data from Madagascar to the Mascarene Islands and vice versa, as well as intra-Madagascar slave trade routes, suggest for example that at least twice as many enslaved persons were transported along these routes than currently recorded in ESTA. And despite the rich scholarship relying on the archives of the Dutch East India Company, several important gaps are distinctly visible. Our recent work with the data entry environment that we have developed for the ESTA Database, TIDES, has made clear that even for the well-documented Dutch slave trade from the Bay of Bengal, especially the Coromandel coast and Arakan in the 17th century, many hitherto undocumented slave trade voyages can be traced.¹⁹ In similar fashion, it can be established that various well-known slave export regions in the Indonesian archipelago are still lacking or underrepresented in the current Database. Such gaps are even clearer when we look at the wider slave trade in Asia. Notably absent from the ESTA Database are flows between South Asia and Africa, as well as the extensive slave trade in the South China Sea referenced in literature.²⁰

¹⁸ Sint Nicolaas, 'Maritime (Im)mobility', 55.

¹⁹ This has been made possible by the work of a number of IISH colleagues, especially Britt van Duijvenvoorde.

²⁰ Chatterjee and Eaton (eds.), *Slavery and South Asian History*; Mbeki and Van Rossum, 'Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world', pp. 95–116; Subrahmanyam, 'Between Eastern Africa and Western India', pp. 805–834; Schottenhammer, 'Slaves and Forms of Slavery in Late Imperial China', pp. 142–152; Chevaleyre, 'Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China', pp. 150–177.

Complexities concretised

What can the current body of data in the ESTA project tell us about the slave trade in the wider Indian Ocean, Indonesian archipelago and East Asian seas? Already the fifteen largest enslaved subvoyages displayed in Figure 10.2 indicate the high level of complexity of the slave trade in maritime Asia and the wider Indian Ocean region. Whether we consider the multidirectionality of routes, the frequencies, total and mean numbers of enslaved persons per route, and even more so patterns in age and gender of the enslaved, there is not one story to tell. Some of these aspects will be addressed later in this chapter. Let us first consider what this complexity and multidirectionality entails, especially when compared to the rather concrete triangular patterns of the Transatlantic slave trade.

The southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent, the so-called Malabar Coast, cantered around what now would be called the state of Kerala, was for a long time a major hub for (European) slave trading. This was also one of the main regions of departure for Dutch ships transporting enslaved people across the Indian Ocean region, leaving us with detailed source material for (aspects of) the slave trade. Cochin (Kochi), where the Dutch settled in the second half of the 17th century, was at the centre of these transactions and transportations. Private slave trade by *burghers* and Company personnel played a crucial role here. With mediation of local merchants, they could extend their reach to the wider Malabar world. The institution of slavery and slave trade was therefore also strongly regulated and controlled by the VOC. The Company archives hold a large collection of notarial sale deeds and transport permissions that allude to the mechanisms that the VOC put in place to control the trade and movement of enslaved persons.²¹

This is how we know that VOC official Reinier van Harn had bought some 70 enslaved persons between 1770 and 1786, including a three-year-old boy named Thebben. Records of his transactions illustrate the multidirectionality of slave trade in this region. In May 1780, for example, Van Harn bought twelve enslaved men, women and children, seven of whom were sold at the estate sale of the major of Cochin's Company militia.²² This major had only recently moved to Cochin from Batavia, and at least three of the enslaved people auctioned in Cochin were also brought over from Batavia. Amelia van Cochim was one of them. The toponym to her given name suggests that she was transported first from Cochin to Batavia (in or

²¹ Mbeki and Van Rossum, 'Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world', pp. 95–116.

²² M. van Rossum, A. Geelen, B. van den Hout, M. Tosun, 'Slave Transactions (Acten van Transport) – VOC Cochin, 1706–1801', <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/CH97SE>, IISH Data Collection, V1 (2018), ID's 886-133-1, 957-91-1, 957-92-1, 957-93-1 and 957-94-1; National Archives (The Hague), 1.04.02 (VOC), inv. no. 14763, scan 669; M. van Rossum et al., 'Slave Transactions', ID's: 1126-92-1, 1126-86-1, 1126-85-1.

before 1769), and then back to Cochin again a decade later.²³ Amelia's case is an individual and direct illustration of the multidirectionality of slave trade in this region.

In other, less-overt regions in Asia, the impact of slave trade could also be felt ubiquitously. For example, in Lampung, the southernmost part of Sumatra that belonged to the Sultanate of Bantam, *mardijker*²⁴ Zacharias Jansz and his group were held in slavery. Around May 1712, Jansz (whose fate was briefly discussed in an earlier ESTA paper²⁵) set sail in his 'prauw conting', a local type of vessel characterised by its sloped sail. Leaving Batavia for his hometown of Bantam, along with his sons Jacob and Israel, his acquaintance Domingo and his slave Jan, enslavers raided their ship halfway, and the group was taken to the Lampung settlement of Nibung and subsequently sold into slavery.

A descendant of enslaved people as well as an enslaver, Jansz found himself stuck in this Lampung slave trade network. The Bantam-to-Lampung route was a popular choice among local enslavers, showcasing the extensive use of the Sultanate's trade networks. Regularly, subjects of Company territories disappeared into these networks; very much against the sore leg of the VOC, whose officials had complained as early as 1684 about this practice.²⁶ Soon losing track of Domingo and Jan while being taken further inland, Jansz personally met or heard of 'countless stolen people, both freemen as well as slaves'.²⁷ Eventually, Jansz encountered a Bantam acquaintance of his by chance in Putih. This captain, a Malayan by the name of Padaesra, agreed to manumit Jansz. Free once again, Jansz sailed from Telukbetung back to Bantam, leaving behind his sons, Domingo, and Jan in Lampung. When VOC officials recorded his account in October 1716, he had been sold and bought no less than nine times.

Overall, the level of detail in Jansz's account is remarkable. For instance, he remembered the locations where he was transported, the names of buyers and sellers, and even the prices paid for him. Notably, Jansz's 'value' seemed to increase with each transaction, demonstrating how enslaved individuals were often treated as investment assets. Most importantly, his account underscores the intricate nature of the many (sub)voyages documented in ESTA, highlighting how enslaved individuals were fragmented into distinct journeys, thus resulting in separate sub-voyages. While the traceability remains relatively intact in this particular instance due to said details – names, origins, locations – on involved individuals, it raises

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Term used in Company territories to denote a group of freed, mostly Christian slaves and their descendants.

²⁵ Hids et al., 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia', pp. 153–172.

²⁶ NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv. no. 7662, fo. 261/scans 513–514.

²⁷ NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv. no. 7673 ('Register van sodanige brieven en voorname bijlagen als in desen zijn ingeschreven en successievelijk ontvangen van Bantam'), fo. 6–9/scans 306–309.

the question of how to deal with instances of subvoyages that contain numerical data alone. Currently, we address this issue by assigning ID numbers to (groups of) enslaved individuals if their identities are ascertainable, thereby facilitating traceability across various (sub)voyages.

3. Sizeable sails

The map in Figure 10.2 already brought to light some interesting patterns of trade. Besides highlighting the routes carrying the largest numbers of enslaved people, its display of voyage frequencies and mean numbers of enslaved people on these routes can be used to analyse the types of trading carried out across the wider Indian Ocean region. Based on the data that the Database currently holds, we can also identify fluctuations in time, as well as mass and trickle trading patterns. From large scale transportations of enslaved people from war-torn regions, to private traders circumnavigating Company regulations – the following will present some of our preliminary analyses of types of slave trading activities based on current data.

Prisoners of war for profit

‘Regarding the purchase of enslaved persons, you are admonished and commanded to satisfactorily continue gathering them and sending as many of them as the ships are able to transport to [Batavia] at every possible opportunity’, Jan Pietersz. Coen wrote to Marten IJsbrandtsz, the VOC’s governor to Coromandel, in June 1628.²⁸ In other words: the demand of enslaved persons in the recently founded Batavia was high and, much like Coen’s aspirations for Company dominance, nevertheless ambitious. As the topmost VOC official in Asia, Coen saw plentiful business opportunities around the Bay of Bengal, as a large-scale war was raging between the states of Araccan (nowadays in Myanmar) and Bengal, roughly current-day Bangladesh. And though Coen ceded that ‘in Bengal it was impossible to trade, since the country was war-torn and in turmoil’, it did provide the Company with a steady influx of enslaved people into Batavia, which were mostly Bengali prisoners of war – much to Coen’s and the Company’s benefit.²⁹ This flow of slave trade, which ran directly via Araccan or through the Indian coastal region of Coromandel, can clearly be traced in ESTA’s Database, shown by Table 10.1 that summarises the distribution of departure locations of individual subvoyages to Batavia.

²⁸ Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen*, vol. 5, p. 296.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Table 10.1. *Departure regions/locations of Batavia-bound subvoyages, 1621–1660 (2024 data).*

Departure region/location	Enslaved persons	Percentage of total
Coromandel Coast	14,197	50.3%
• <i>Masulipatnam</i>	2,161	7.7%
• <i>Pulicat</i>	3,138	11.1%
• <i>Coromandel (no specifics)</i>	4,635	16.4%
• <i>Fort Geldria</i>	4,263	15.1%
Araccan	8,641	30.6%
Strait of Malacca	1,852	6.6%
• <i>Malacca</i>	759	2.7%
Madagascar	487	1.7%
Lesser Sunda Islands	366	1.3%
• <i>Pulau Solor</i>	256	0.9%
• <i>Timor</i>	108	0.4%
Other locations/regions	2,682	9.5%
Total	28,225	100%

The ESTA Database currently shows that between 1621 and 1660, no less than 80 percent of all enslaved persons to Batavia were transported either via Coromandel or Araccan. The rather high mean number of enslaved people per subvoyage from these regions – 131 and 147 respectively – indicates that enslaved people were mass-transported to Batavia, mainly by Company ships of sufficient capacity. This first phase should be seen in light of the development of Batavia as the Company's Asian headquarters and the initial expansion of Company markets, when Batavia required massive amounts of manpower for various purposes, such as the construction of trade-related and administrative buildings like offices and warehouses, military structures such as forts and redoubts, and city infrastructure and drainage works. Furthermore, Batavia opted to use enslaved labour for the development of agriculture in the Ommelanden, its rural surrounding area.³⁰ In line with these physical labour-fuelled ambitions, there was a large-scale influx of enslaved labour. The supply of enslaved people from Araccan and Coromandel was also preferred by the VOC due to its administrators' fear of mass escapes and social unrest, were the Company to make use of enslaved Javanese instead.³¹ Other regions – apparently deemed sufficiently removed from Java – that supplied

³⁰ Van Rossum, 'Global Slavery, Local Bondage?', pp. 701–702.

³¹ Abeyasekere, 'Slaves in Batavia: Insights from a Slave Register', p. 286.

enslaved labour included the Strait of Malacca (5.6 percent) and the Lesser Sunda Islands (2.1 percent), notably Pulau Solor.

To the mineworks

Another route with large mean numbers of enslaved on ships is the one from Madagascar to Western Sumatra. For certain ‘projects’ in the VOC’s Asian colonies, Company directors opted to recruit enslaved labour from specific areas, instead of using local or regional networks. The exploitation of the gold and silver mines at Sillida, coerced into the Company’s possession in the 1660s and unprofitably exploited until the 1690s, was to be reinstated from the 1720s onwards. Now, the choice was made to employ enslaved Malagasy in these Western Sumatran mine-works, instead of European miners who had been working there previously, and who were prone to illnesses. Interestingly, while most VOC directives to their ships have been lost, the one to the ship *Binnenwijzend* has survived. This vessel was sent from the Cape of Good Hope to Madagascar to purchase enslaved persons for the mines.³² Company directors were very clear to the *Binnenwijzend*’s crew about their slaving mission: ‘It will not be necessary to remind you that you should always prefer strong enslaved males above females and children; and young, strong and sturdy black persons above old and weak ones – because, as you know, these enslaved will be sent to the mineworks for hard labor’.³³

The same directive also voiced the VOC’s opinion that enslaved Malagasy would make an excellent fit for Sumatra’s humid climate, as well as the Company’s intentions with females and children, should they be bought; the directors mainly saw a specific ‘use’ for them in future continuation or preservation of the enslaved population at the mines. In other words: the intended employment for the enslaved – hard physical labour for the adults, who had child ‘substitutes’ working beside them – and the particularities in health, age and gender set out by VOC directors dictated the form of these slaving voyages. Of course, the conditions in the mines of Sillida were hazardous to the enslaved Malagasy as well, and many died quickly. The total and mean number of enslaved persons per subvoyage on this route indicate furthermore that the VOC was not particularly successful at this trade, especially compared to the Transatlantic slave trade, including the other routes from Madagascar to the New World.³⁴ The *Binnenwijzend*’s ship log, which has also been preserved, shows why: they had little experience and network contacts in Madagascar, while the ship was suboptimal for transporting hundreds of enslaved

³² ESTA voyage ID #4037.

³³ NA, VOC (The Hague), 985, fo. 65/scan 93–94.

³⁴ Thiébaud, ‘De Madagascar à Sumatra: une route négrière peu commune’, § 26; § 37–38; § 49.

persons.³⁵ Of the 190 enslaved people that were transported on the *Binnenwijzend* to Sumatra, 36 (19 percent) died during the crossing. It must be noted, however, that the VOC regularly sent enslaved Malagasy via the Cape of Good Hope to various other destinations in Asia; therefore, it cannot be ruled out that enslaved persons from Madagascar were transported to Western Sumatra indirectly – much like Amelia van Cochim was.

Trickle-trading turmoil

In total, 3,409 enslaved persons from Bali have been recorded in the ESTA Database as coercively transported between 1646 and 1724. Figure 10.3 demonstrates that the trade in enslaved people from Bali to Western Java (predominantly Batavia) steadily picked up after the 1660s. From the *Babads*, the genealogical narratives or state chronicles recorded across Indonesian archipelago states, it is known that Balinese power relations began to shift rapidly after 1650 from the centralised Gelgel kingdom to ‘nouveau riche’ kingdoms that were based on Bali’s coastal areas: the so-called Gelgel revolt (1650–1686).³⁶ Afterwards, though power formally and ritually remained with the Gelgel line of the now-new Klungkung *negara*³⁷, their influence was henceforth severely limited.³⁸ The impact of the revolt was nonetheless tangible in Western Java, as various upcoming Balinese kingdoms such as Badung and Mengwi sought ways to accumulate wealth in order to cement and reflect their newfound position as independent states. And as elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago, slave trade presented a sure-fire way of amassing wealth for the Balinese nobility.

Before the revolt, slave trade on Bali was already deeply rooted in the factional political situation on the island; the various Balinese kingdoms – especially those with access to Bali’s shores – were enslaving and subsequently selling their subjects *en masse*. Especially poignant here is the mean number of enslaved per subvoyage (23), mainly indicating a ‘trickle trade’ pattern in which enslaved persons were being transported in relatively small numbers yet in high frequencies. Usually, this pattern suggests private trade due to their use of relatively small vessels. The Bali–Java slave trade was characterised by the prominent role of local and regional traders. Unlike European trading companies, they operated smaller vessels and often organised fleets of ships rather than sailing individually. On average, 2.2

³⁵ NA (The Hague), VOC, 11257.

³⁶ Schulte Nordholt, ‘Origin, Descent, and Destruction’, pp. 27–58, 38–39.

³⁷ Term used to denote a precolonial Indonesian state.

³⁸ Schulte Nordholt, ‘Origin, Descent, and Destruction’, p. 42; Vickers, *Bali: A paradise created*, p. 58.

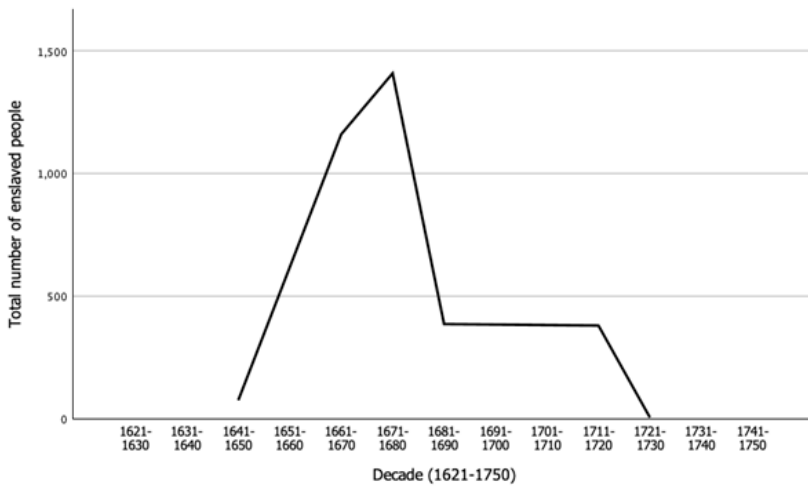


Figure 10.3. Total number of enslaved persons from Bali in the ESTA Database per decade.

vessels with 22.2 enslaved Balinese persons on board left Bali for either Batavia or Bantam during the Gelgel revolt. These ships and their crew originated from all over the Indonesian archipelago, such as Sulawesi, Southern Sumatra, or Bali itself. While typical private vessels partaking in Balinese slave trade were generally relatively small, larger vessels were employed as well. For instance, an ESTA-recorded voyage saw three ‘native vessels’ arrive in Batavia from Bali in 1665 with 215 enslaved men and women aboard. And even in the case of smaller vessels, large-scale slave trade was undertaken. A voyage in September 1672 demonstrates how the sheer size of a fleet, totalling 10 to 12 vessels from Macassar, amounted to the mass transport of about 300 enslaved Balinese individuals to Bantam.³⁹

Interestingly, the character of Balinese slave trade seems to have shifted again post-revolt. Most of the slave trade to Western Java seems to have been carried out by Balinese traders then, instead of the regionally diverse traders that were partaking during the revolt. This might indicate that by the time the revolt was over, Balinese internal tensions had reduced. Perhaps reclaiming their transport agency, the Balinese trade in enslaved people continued. For instance, local Balinese chief Bappa Diera from the town of Sukawati (Southern Bali) transported 101 enslaved men and women to Batavia in two vessels in 1718.⁴⁰ To Balinese private traders, Western Java clearly remained an important market for their enslaved kinsmen. In

³⁹ ESTA voyage #3463.

⁴⁰ In NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv.no. 7545, the captain is called ‘parbachal’, meaning chief or administrator.

fact, in the fall of 1717 alone, 216 enslaved Balinese men, women and children were transported to Bantam by Balinese vessels.⁴¹ If this early-18th-century Bali–Bantam trade was performed on a regular basis – which is yet unclear – it would equate to about six times the recorded annual average of the revolt-era Bali–Batavia route, showing the sheer scale of this Bali-initiated transport. Important to note, however, is that the demand for enslaved labour in Batavia caused many regulations to be relaxed by 1720, although this is hardly visible in *Image 16*.⁴² This means that either Bantam remained in place as a ‘transit port’ for Batavia, or that there is a lot of missing data on Bali–Batavia routes in the Database.

Similar trickle-trade patterns could be discerned in other regions in the Indonesian Archipelago as well, such as the Lesser Sunda Islands and Sulawesi. The island of Sulawesi formed one of Batavia’s – and more generally, Western Java’s – main suppliers of enslaved labour: nearly 23 percent of the total number of enslaved persons transported there originated from Sulawesi. But although this route was a high frequency one, it is also typical of a trickle-trade route, pointing again towards the prevalence of private trade here. Both Asian, Company and *burgher* private traders were active in the Sulawesi to Java slave trade, with at least half of the known vessels belonging to Asian private traders. The VOC tried to actively regulate these flows by several measures, such as bans on Sulawesian enslaved adults to Batavia in 1685 by Governor General Joannes Camphuys and again in 1740 by Adriaan Valckenier.⁴³ As a result, surviving VOC court cases shed some light on how these patterns were formed, and how the perceived (il)legality of enslaved routes impacted both the lives of enslaved and the colonial society that sought to benefit from them.

For example, a 1743 court case against a Company ship surgeon who was caught smuggling a group of enslaved people into inner-city Batavia underscores ESTA’s pattern in which enslaved Sulawesians were very frequently transported, yet in smaller numbers.⁴⁴ Aboard the vessel *Gaasperdam*, ship surgeon Van Diepe smuggled eight girls and two men, while 39 others may have been either on the same Company vessel or on another anchored at Batavia’s roadstead; all were caught in the course of several days in mid-July 1743. They had attempted to enter Batavia by crossing the river blockade next to Batavia’s Castle, the city’s main seaward entrance. While it is known that Company personnel participated in private trade of all kinds and rather substantially in enslaved persons, the precise mechanisms

⁴¹ NA (The Hague), 1.04.02, inv.no. 8085, scans 130, 132, 155, 164–166, 170–171.

⁴² Sint Nicolaas, ‘Maritime (Im)mobility’, p. 70; Kanumoyoso, ‘Beyond the City Wall’, p. 111.

⁴³ Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, vol. 3, pp. 147–148; vol. 4, p. 519; *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden* (GM), vol. 10, p. 574.

⁴⁴ NA (The Hague), VOC, 9405, scans 653–656.

behind that are severely understudied – after all, private Company traders had plentiful reasons to keep their additional earnings out of the Company's books, and consequently, out of today's sources.⁴⁵ This court case, therefore, provides some insights into similarities and differences marked by ESTA between routes and vessels of Asian and Company private traders.⁴⁶ And not only the testimonies and the verdict (the forfeiture and sale of the enslaved) survived, but also the estimated ages of the enslaved (on average, they were perceived as 37 years old). The purchase deeds for Van Diepe's claimed group of enslaved were included as well, indicating that he had purchased them in Makassar, and that they were mostly Buginese people. This court case furthermore indicates that enslaved routes that were – at least, in the VOC's view – considered illegal might tend to follow broader lines of the 'regular' trafficking of enslaved people. Elements such as ethnicity, religion, age, and gender played central roles in the monitoring and regulating of slave trade and enslavability in Company territories and have been included in ESTA's Database, as well.

4. Incomplete identities

Even though historical sources do not disclose much information on the people transported in slavery across Indian Ocean settlements, they often do record minimal information on gender, age and (in even rarer cases) ethnicities and physical dispositions of people. These were deemed important signifiers for agents of this trade, especially as indicators of a person's 'enslavability' and 'worth'. For example, the VOC institutionalised their perceptions of local customs regarding 'enslaveable' social groups in South Asia through laws, recordkeeping, and surveillance.⁴⁷ Recent research also indicates the importance of categorisation of people into gender and age groups (man vs. woman; child vs. adult) for price assessments of enslaved persons in the Indian Ocean world.⁴⁸ There is nevertheless still a paucity of studies into the patterns of gender, age, and other identifiers, in slave trading activities around the Indian Ocean – and how they interact and fluctuate. The mechanisms of determining and registering information around gender and age (perceptions) also need much more scrutiny. However, the Database might be

⁴⁵ Van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*, pp. 45–48.

⁴⁶ The similar mean numbers of enslaved persons in private Asian and Company-personnel-initiated maritime trade might be attributed to the former mostly employing smaller vessels, and the latter carrying enslaved persons 'on the side', either as contraband or not.

⁴⁷ See: Van Rossum et al., *Testimonies of Enslavement*.

⁴⁸ Van Rossum, 'Towards a global perspective', pp. 42–68.

able to provide a starting point for further research and analyses of gender and age patterns. Keeping in mind that gender and age categorisations were not consistently recorded, the data collection does allow for preliminary analyses based on various routes where this information is available.

A gendered gulf

Going forward, it is important to point out that the ESTA Database shows a disparate overall gender pattern compared to existing literature, as enslaved (adult) men dominate across all regions and routes covered in the Database. This is especially pronounced around the Arabian Sea region. Data for voyages departing from the Arabian Sea region show a remarkable gender pattern of almost exclusively adult men (83 percent of all known cases). Most of these men would either arrive in Sri Lanka or Java.

Indeed, enslaved persons from the Malabar Coast were mainly transported to Sri Lanka, the Indonesian archipelago, and the Cape of Good Hope, whereas Sri Lanka served as a port of call on the way to Indonesia or the Cape.⁴⁹ As it stands currently, of the 89 voyages recorded as departing from the Malabar Coast in the Database, 45 were destined for the Indonesian archipelago transporting at least 1,612 people between roughly 1700 and 1750. The second largest route with 37 voyages was destined for Sri Lanka, mainly around the second half of the 18th century, transporting 754 enslaved persons. The average number of transported enslaved persons on each voyage ranges between 34 and 44 people, who were almost all adult men. This preference for enslaved men from this area is also attested to in sale transactions recorded by the VOC, but the mechanisms behind this pattern need to be further studied.⁵⁰

Bypassing bureaucracies?

We can see that for voyages departing from the Spice Islands, there is a relatively equal gender ratio. However, more than half of all transported individuals have no gender registration (i.e., ‘unknown’). In the case of Bali, specifically, we see an interesting development in these registrations that might be related to the 1665 VOC ban on the transport of Balinese enslaved men to Batavia (Table 10.2). Enslaved Balinese men were regarded as being ‘of wicked disposition,’ frequently rebelling and rioting.⁵¹ Moreover, enslavers and transporters were ‘constantly risking the

⁴⁹ Mbeki and Van Rossum, ‘Private slave trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean world’, pp. 108–109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107 and p. 110.

⁵¹ Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, vol. 2, p. 405.

loss of life and means due to the impertinence and murderousness of that nation'. These perceptions primarily reflect the scale of internal conflicts among the various Balinese kingdoms, which were in a de facto state of civil war. However, enslaved males from Bali were still being brought into the Company's territories in high numbers. For example, the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* (OBP) collection shows that private traders – regional Asian traders, *burghers* and Company officials alike – saw plenty of opportunities to bypass VOC regulation, for example via the Sultanate of Bantam. Consequently, the Sultanate could unintentionally benefit from Company regulations such as these, as closing off Batavia for Balinese enslaved males only meant a shift to ports such as Bantam. From Bantam, they could subsequently be transported to Batavia.

Of course, circumvention also must have happened by 'illegal' means. Interestingly, a pattern is discernible in registrations of age groups of enslaved people coming from Sulawesi after Batavia's 1685 ban on the import of enslaved adults from the island.⁵² Of the 205 transported enslaved in the period 1646–1685 (before the ban), 48.3 percent were adults and 48.3 percent have been marked as 'unknown'. In the period after the ban up until 1789, there was a striking shift in these registrations, with 90.6 percent of all 160 transported enslaved having no known age group attached to them. The shift in gender registrations that comes to light from the data might signal strategies of circumventing restrictive regulations. Of course, more data and further research is needed to confirm this thesis.

Table 10.2. Enslaved groups from Bali per gender in the ESTA Database, 1661–1724.

	Mixed	All male	All female	Unknown
1661–1665 (28)	67.9 %	0.0 %	7.1 %	25.0 %
1666–1670 (35)	28.6 %	0.0 %	62.9 %	8.5 %
1671–1675 (30)	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %
1676–1680 (28)	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %
1680–1724 (23)	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	100 %

⁵² Van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek*, vol. 3, pp. 147–148. This ban mentioned similar motives as the ban against Balinese enslaved, as Sulawesi enslaved were 'prone to violence' because they would 'settle very difficultly for slavery', as they had been 'free-born people' that had been robbed, transported, and brought to slave markets.

Approaching age

A relatively high number of enslaved children are recorded to have been traded around the Indian Ocean islands and to southern Africa: more than a third of the total number of transported enslaved within the Indian Ocean islands and from the islands to southern Africa. How childhood was defined and operated within systems of slavery around the Indian Ocean is still a relatively underdeveloped section of scholarship on Asian slavery. Conceptualisations of age were connected to physical attributes, gender, and ideas about (re)productivity. For the Dutch Transatlantic slave trade, it has been pointed out that the age of 15 was seen as a demarcation between a (less productive) child and (more productive) adult in slavery. These age conceptions would, of course, vary across settlements and over time. On 19th-century Surinamese plantations, for example, enslaved women and men were considered adults at 16 and 18 years respectively, while British traders used height to determine age.⁵³ These fluctuating methods and guidelines make it difficult to extract a generalised definition of age, but this should not deter researchers from peeling the layers of archival records – especially considering the importance of age conceptions in sale and employment patterns.

5. Conclusion

As we are moving towards more global approaches to the history of slave trade, the need for data and tools to perform comparative analyses with becomes more apparent. Collecting and curating this data for the Indian Ocean and maritime Asia region is necessary to understand the scale, structures, and connections of regional slave trade systems as well as mechanisms of slave trade worldwide. The crux of this exercise lies in, amongst others, accounting for regional differences in manifestations of slave trade and the diverse recordkeeping practices across the region. The *Exploring Slave Trade in Asia* project provides a general structure for a collective database to record as much data on the various slave trading activities across the regions, and aims to locate new sources for further data extraction and addition to the database.

The preliminary analyses of the data collected thus far in the ESTA Database provide fruitful ground for further research and data collection. We now have quantifiable data on types of slave trade activities and age and gender distributions on certain routes, while these routes can be characterised by examining patterns over time. The ESTA Database shows clear distinctions between trickle and mass slave trade patterns (mainly divided between routes inside and outside

⁵³ Negrón, 'Pieter Volkmar, Amsterdamse handelaar in slaafgemaakte kinderen', pp. 123–124.

of the Indonesian Archipelago), and shows how private local/regional/*burgher* and Company-initiated trade affected the form and frequency of slave trade routes. The Database proves to be a solid instrument to examine mechanisms behind slavery and slave trade, such as the impact of local or regional developments – wars, revolts, regulations – on societies that are associated with enslavement, slave trade or the assimilation of enslaved people in colonial systems. Fluctuating patterns of slave trading activities across the Indian Ocean region clearly had far-reaching effects on populations and social relations in both regions of departure and arrival that should be further examined. The Database's results furthermore interact with existing literature, deepening our understanding as well as highlighting contradictory patterns, such as the unexpected dominance of enslaved males instead of females and children on many of ESTA's routes. In addition, we pointed out possible signs of tension between the registration of transported enslaved groups and individuals in colonial sources and the regulation of slave trade by colonial authorities, connected as well to the realms of private trade and smuggling. Lastly, as illustrated in this chapter, the Database can also form an entryway into individual histories of slavery and displacement, whilst providing contextualising data for these stories.

On top of that, the Database shows us more clearly where we lack data and formulates practical ways forward. For example, we still need data on well-known but missing slave trade routes like the South China Sea trade, and more complete survey of archives known to hold data on slave trade. For one, the Dutch VOC archives have not yet been fully inventoried for data on slave trade. Finding such references to slave trade in the Dutch archives will become easier through the GLOBALISE infrastructure that combines HTR and NLP techniques to make the archives more searchable.⁵⁴ The ESTA project will collaborate with GLOBALISE to locate relevant documents and (automatically) extract as much relevant data from the Dutch colonial archives as possible. In the coming year, ESTA and GLOBALISE will also collaborate with the IISH/Radboud University research projects *The Global Business of Slave Trade* and *Voices of Enslavement* in creating more text recognition (HTR) of Dutch and other European digitised colonial archives to aid the search for slave trade observations.⁵⁵ Still, it is important to locate and inventory other archives in Europe, Africa, and Asia for data extraction. We especially lack insights into (and from) non-European archives on histories of slave trade. Finally, in order to ensure durability and compatibility, we continue to collaborate on research projects with a (slave trade) data component and invite researchers to contact us for new collaborations.

⁵⁴ For more information on the GLOBALISE project, see: <https://globalise.huygens.knaw.nl>.

⁵⁵ More information: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/blog/global-business-slave-trade-patterns-actors-and-gains-early-modern-dutch-and-iberian-slave> and <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/Voices-of-Resistance>.

