

(University of Melbourne) connected Atlantic and Pacific slaveries through the work of the British writer Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived and died in Samoa. Stevenson, Coleman showed, frequently referred to the Haitian Revolution in his writings on Samoa. The workshop's first day concluded with two papers that established further connections between the discourses of transatlantic slavery and unfree labor practices in the Pacific. Katharina Fackler (NAS, Bonn) explored forms of dependency and their intricate connections to slavery in nineteenth-century African American whaling narratives. Pia Wiegink presented research on nineteenth-century writings advertising German emigration, showing how antislavery rhetoric resurfaced prominently in these promotional texts as a way of encouraging emigration of German farmers to colonial Queensland.

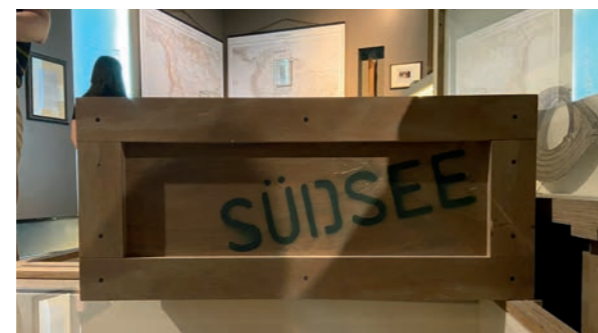
Following the already-mentioned opening lecture by Penny Edmonds, the workshop's second day featured two panels that focused on the remnants of colonial pasts and histories of slavery in the present. Christian Reepmeyer (German Archaeological Institute/KAAC) discussed how colonial buildings and colonial urban planning represented and enforced forms of dependency of colonized communities in the German Pacific. His paper also introduced contemporary heritage preservation initiatives which work to identify archaeological remnants of resistance and empower indigenous communities to control and supervise restoration processes. Anthropologist Tarisi Vunidilo (University of Hawaii-Hilo), who joined via Zoom from Fiji, reported on her involvement in the project "Sensitive Provenances – Human Remains from Colonial Contexts" at the University of Gottingen. She spoke on the complex procedure of returning ancestral remains from Germany to their places of origin and on the debates regarding restitution and repatriation that accompany this process. Complementing Vunidilo's discussion on repatriation, but shifting the focus towards Australia, anthropologist Carsten Wergin (University of Heidelberg) examined how the politics of repatriation are entwined with histories of (colonial) extractivism as well as with issues related to environmental injustice, the preservation of living cultural heritage, transnational institutional collabora-

tions, and with the empowerment Aboriginal Australian communities. The final presentation by Hilary Howes (ANU, Canberra) provided an overview and a critical discussion of the current practices (and problems) of Germany's engagement and reckoning with its colonial past.

With the concluding curators' conversation and the participants' visit to the Oceania collection of the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne the next day, the workshop came full circle as the two curators Oliver Lueb (Curator, Oceania Collection, RJM Museum) and Imelda Miller (Curator, First Nations Cultures, Queensland Museum) discussed their work in museums in Germany and Queensland. In their conversation, they highlighted visions and challenges of decolonizing collections and enabling communities to use and benefit from these collections. Both curators were asked to present one item from their collections that they found particularly relevant for the topic of the workshop. Oliver Lueb selected the contemporary artwork "Siamani-Samoa-Selu" (2011) by Michael Tuffery, an Aotearoa artist with Samoan roots. The artwork stylistically mimics traditional Samoan hair combs; at the same time, its design also reflects on German colonial history by featuring several symmetrically arranged coconut trees – a reference to the orderly-planted rows of coconut trees planted by German planters in Samoa. Imelda Miller – a third generation Australian South Sea Islander elaborated on her effort of connecting most of the more than 700 items in the Australian South Sea Islander Kastom Collection to labor trade vessels or the Queensland sugar economy. In this context, Miller selected a wooden club donated in 1878 by a South Sea Islander laborer called Wommilly. Given the scarcity of objects donated by South Sea Islanders, this labor tool is a particularly unique object within the collection. Both of the curators' objects – the comb and the club – showcased the workshop's twofold agenda of showing how practices that originated with Atlantic slavery travelled and transformed in different colonial contexts in the Pacific and of highlighting how the histories of enslavement, dependency, and colonialism are an integral part of today's visual culture and museum collections.



Curator Oliver Lueb with conference participants, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum Cologne. ©BCDSS



Permanent Collection, Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum Cologne  
©image courtesy of Oliver Lueb

## CHILDREN AT WORK AND CHILD SLAVERY IN THE LATE ANCIENT WORLD (C. 400 – C. 1000 AD)

by Christian Laes

*"During the millennium from the emergence of the Roman empire to its eventual decline, at least 100 million people – and possibly many more – were seized or sold as slaves throughout the Mediterranean and its hinterlands. In terms of duration and sheer numbers, this process dwarfs both the transatlantic slave trade of the European powers and the Arabic slave trade in the Indian Ocean. (...) The modern observer must wonder how to do justice to the colossal scale of human suffering behind these bland observations: the story of the Roman slave supply must count as one of the darkest chapters of human history." (Scheidel 2021: 309)*

### CONFERENCE HELD IN BONN, AUGUST 29, 2023

About the year 300, several changes transformed the Roman Empire into what is now known as Late Antiquity. As so often, these transformations sometimes were drastic, but more often they happened gradually, with people hardly being aware of them. The empire was divided into smaller units, both because of military and of administrative concerns. For most of the inhabitants, tax burden increased. The new Christian religion considerably gained importance and in the fifth century became important to the degree of what one could call state religion. The Latin West and the Greek East gradually grew apart from each other, not only culturally.

More than one language would take advantage of the new faith to start a literary tradition of its own. In the East, Coptic and Syriac-Aramaic flourished, with Armenian and Georgian literature starting on the Caucasian fringes from the sixth century on. In the West, only the Gothic and the Old-Irish language gained some importance in the written records, with Latin staying predominant in the various early mediaeval kingdoms with their strong cultural diversity. In more than one way, the fifth and sixth centuries were 'catastrophic' to the West: with disruptive invasions from so-called 'barbaric' peoples, and internal wars that set under pressure an intense economic network of trade and commerces between cities and provinces that had existed for centuries. For the provinces of the Greek East, relative prosperity continued into the seventh century, when clashes with the Sasanian Persians and the Muslim Arabic invasions had a similar disruptive effect. Historians usually have the

history of late ancient slavery run up to the year 1000, when large 'predatory' castles with huge amounts of serfs became predominant for the Latin West, while the Byzantine Empire in the East lived the high days of its Renaissance under Emperor Basilus II (976-1020).



Roman mosaic of a slave boy in a kitchen. ©Alamy

Children as a whole, and surely slave children, are cases par excellence of individuals facing the status of (semi)-dependency. Both were the topic of the conference at the BCDSS that took place in Bonn on August 29, 2023.



#### Prof. Dr. Christian Laes

is professor of Ancient History at the University of Manchester (UK) and a Heinz Heinen Senior Fellow from February to September 2023. His research involves human life course in Antiquity. He has previously worked on enslaved children in

Antiquity, and the topic of children at work in Late Antiquity was the main focus of his research at the BCDSS. Next, he is preparing a translation and commentary of the Life of Aesop – a source of novel evidence, often neglected in scholarship on ancient slavery.

In my introduction, I set out the challenges of the day. In most sources, the terminology does not allow to discern between children and slaves (a fact that is interesting by itself). Deprived of archives, historians of this period often have to do without numbers, though it is possible to formulate educated guesses. We should be aware of the danger of unjustified generalisation. The so-called 'collapse of the slave market' is one of these. The disastrous Gothic Wars in Italy (535-555) no doubt set the whole system under pressure, and numerous sources from the hugely depopulated City of Rome testify of the decrease of available specialised slaves, as there had been for centuries. At the same time, thousands were enslaved after being captured – with a possible collapse of the prices as a consequence. Yet, this did not happen contemporarily in the East. Also, we largely lack ego-documents for this period – again it should not hamper us from making an emphatical approach to enslaved individuals.

Our second presenter, Erin Thomas Dailey (University of Leicester) explored domestic slavery in the Late Antique Latin West: sexual exploitation was an inseparable facet of this, even in cases of manumission (the lines between free servants and slaves then seem to be blurred and vague). Oana-Maria Cojocaru highlighted the abundance of detail of the Byzantine hagiographical sources for this period. Despite the rich legal tradition, we are surprisingly poorly informed about many fundamental aspects in the Byzantine empire that existed for about thousand years. Such richness of detail also exists in the Greek and Coptic papyri of Early Mediaeval Egypt. It enabled April Pudsey (Manchester Metropolitan University) to ask intriguing questions about partial life stories and the possibility of sketching the bigger picture. John Latham-Sprinkle (Ghent University) ventured into a history that has never been explored before: children in asymmetrical dependency in Early Mediaeval Georgia. Research as this requires sophisticated skills in both Georgian and Russian – needless to say, only a handful of scholars over the world can achieve it. Enslavement by captivity (the case of the Georgian founder saint Nino), slave trade and eunuchs from Abchasia were key elements in this presentation. Similar rare and outstanding language skills emerged from Cornelia Horn's (University of Halle) talk on children at work in the Armenian and Syriac dossier. Again the, mainly hagiographical, sources surprised the audience. The coexistence of free and slave (child) workers and the specificity of an empire in which the ruling Muslims constituted a minority in their own region was a red thread through Julia Bray's (Oxford University) presentation on child slavery in the Umayyad and the Abbasid period. Bahar Bayraktaroğlu (BCDSS) took the audience to nineteenth century Ottoman evidence, but her revealing case stories and memoirs brought us very close to 'charming children' as they were held as

household slaves from Roman Antiquity on. They seem to have been closely tied to their households, even after manumission. The nomadic way of life existed throughout the whole period under study in Eurasia, and lasted up to at least the eighteenth century. Christophe Witzzenrath (BCDSS) not only managed to rectify some clichés about nomads, he also put into perspective most relevant issues such as the involvement of nomads in slave trade (and their close contact with cities), the early introduction of children into shooting a bow or horse-riding, supply-demand and the Mongol tradition of enslavement due to debts.

Last but not least, Julia Hillner (BCDSS) paved the way for a vivid and fruitful discussion on global perspectives. We discussed how much of the source material for this period has never been systematised, let alone been made available for a larger audience. We asked questions about a possible distinction between typical slave chores and tasks for free children. Was there in fact even a great deal of intermingling between both categories? We again discussed the apparent fluidity of words for 'slaves' and '(free) children' in the various language traditions under study. We looked at how gender came in. Were there 'traditional' female roles, and did they also count for young female slaves? How does the position of (slave) children in the late ancient period compare to the broader global picture, also of later periods? Did Christianity make a difference? And do the sources allow us to reconstruct agency and personal choices of the children involved?

The reality sketched in the quotation by Scheidel at the beginning of this article counted for innumerable families and their children. Drawing on the expertise of scholars in 'less studied languages' (Armenian, Coptic, Ge'ez, Georgian, Turkish, Syriac), the conference paid attention to voices often unheard, in language traditions often unknown, and therefore underexplored. It is a starting point and an invitation to share further expertise.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

De Wet, Chris L., Kahlos Maijastina, Vuolanto, Ville (eds.), *Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150 – 700 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Perry, Craig, Eltis, David, Engerman, Stanley L., Richardson, David (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Volume II. AD 500 – AD 1420* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

Scheidel Walter, 'The Roman Slave Supply', in: Bradley Keith, Cartledge Paul (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, 1. The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 287-310.

Forthcoming in the BCDSS Dependency and Slavery Studies Series: Laes, Christian (ed.), *Children at Work in a Period of Transition. 400 – 1000 AD* (Berlin: De Gruyter),



The conference delegates listen to the welcoming address by Serena Tolino and Stephan Conermann.

## SLAVERY IN ISLAMIC LAW AND MUSLIM SOCIETIES

by Omar Anchassi

### CONFERENCE HELD IN MURTEN, SWITZERLAND, 30 AUGUST – 1 SEPTEMBER 2023

On 30 August, delegates convened in the idyllic lakeside town of Murten, Switzerland, for a conference on slavery in Islamic law and Muslim societies. The conference, co-organised by the TraSIS project team at the University of Bern and the BCDSS, represents the first major collaboration between the two initiatives, fostered by Serena Tolino and Stephan Conermann. The TraSIS project (Trajectories of Slavery in Islamicate Societies), funded by the SNSF and headed by Professor Tolino, explores three key concepts in Islamic legal thought diachronically from an intersectional perspective. Taking the 'strong asymmetrical dependencies' framework developed at the BCDSS as its point of departure, the project team understand slavery, unfreedom and coercion as continua, rather than discrete categories. This framework enriches the research of the project team, which focuses on *kafāla* (a modern form of labour guarantee based on premodern legal notions of surety), the *umm al-walad* (a slave concubine who bears her owner's child, with his recognition of paternity) and *kitāba* (manumission of an enslaved person based on a contractual agreement with their owner, involving the fulfilment of different contractual obligations). The intersectional element of the project's theoretical framework entails scrutiny of how different aspects of legal and social status – including age, gender, race, class and religion – cross-fertilise to produce various forms of exclusion. The papers presented at the conference brought these analytical concerns to a diverse range of temporal and geographic Muslim contexts, ranging from the Near East in the seventh and eighth centuries to West Africa in the late nineteenth. Other regions including Western Europe, Central and South Asia also figured.