

## N5 – Research network ‘Economy and Society of the Pre-Industrial Low Countries in Comparative perspective’

### *Urban provisioning in the pre-industrial period*

By their very nature cities have always been centres of consumption. Not only do cities need a great deal of natural resources for manufacture, construction and infrastructure, they also require necessities like water, food or fuel for their daily survival and form a major market for all kinds of luxuries. Often, raw materials, staples and other goods came ‘from the outside’ and required complex flows between the city and its immediate and remote surroundings. Moreover, many of the urban goods needed heavy regulation to ensure a stable supply, good quality and fair distribution. How did cities cope with this constant need for supplies? Who, within the city itself, had access to these supplies and who was in control of their organisation? And what effect did urban demand have on ecological hinterlands, commodity frontiers and other (extra-urban) economic networks? In this session we delve deeper into the issue of urban provisioning in the pre-industrial period by turning our attention to the early modern city.

### Bas Spliet (UA)

#### *A colonial consumer revolution? Slavery-based household goods in 18th-century Amsterdam*

The early modern ‘consumer revolution’ emerged from the depths of the economic history discipline in the last quarter of the twentieth century, following on the heels of decades of historiographical preoccupation with the production side of the economic equation. The turn of the twentieth-first century marked a new watershed, as historians started to (re-)integrate supply and demand in the midst of renewed interest in the evolving production relations inside Europe and the expansion of global (colonial) trade that underpinned the provision of new luxuries to European consumers. Only very recently, however, have historians seriously attempted to integrate the role of slave plantations into narratives of the consumer revolution. Taking a leaf from these novel endeavours, this presentation explores the role of slavery in the material culture of the leading eighteenth-century European trade metropole, Amsterdam. Although slave plantations did not form a necessary cause of the consumer revolution, I aim to demonstrate how they helped shape some of its key characteristics. Conversely, the presentation explores how shifting consumer demands inside Europe gave rise to, sustained or exacerbated the trade in and exploitation of slaves.

### Milja van Tielhof (Huygens Institute - KNAW)

#### *Drinking water crises and the poor in Amsterdam, c. 1650-1800*

Drinking water crises probably seldom occurred in the Early Modern Netherlands and they have not attracted much attention. Amsterdam was exceptional in the sense that scarcity of fresh water was a frequent phenomenon, even deteriorating

in a real crisis once in a while. The paper will first introduce these crises and discuss their causes and their seasonal character. It goes on to describe how authorities tried to soften the consequences, especially for the urban poor who were the main victims, and how they attempted to prevent future crises.

As we will see, a new strategy to diminish the risk of seasonal shortages gained importance in the course of the eighteenth century, the building of large rain water reservoirs. The paper will examine where and when these cisterns were built and try to put these into an social and political context. Which social groups took the initiative, and what were their motives? Fresh water was clearly a vital concern for the urban community, but the question who was responsible for guaranteeing a sufficient supply, was also contested

**Merit Hondelink (RUG)**

*No shit?! What historical research can learn from bio-archaeological analysis of cesspits with regards to early modern food consumption*

We all eat, as we need food to survive. However, what people eat, i.e., the food items selected, and how they are prepared and combined, is culturally, environmentally, politically, religiously, and socially determined, and therefore differs per region and changes over time. Different disciplines have used different methods to unravel what was eaten by our ancestors. For instance, historians may study account books, cookbooks, ego-documents, and probate inventories, among other sources, to deduce what was for dinner. Bioarchaeologists analyse the remains of food items actually eaten, and excreted into culinary contexts such as cesspits, to understand what was consumed. On a species specific level they can inform culinary historians what was consumed, and sometimes even how it was prepared, by all different layers of society. The bioarchaeological data might be difficult to digest, but - with some help - a multidisciplinary and integrated approach will improve our understanding of past food consumption patterns in general. This presentation will highlight some of the bioarchaeological databases available for research in the Netherlands and illustrate how an integrated approach expands our knowledge of past food consumption, based on the case study of the Delft Orphanage, with a focus on 1650-1725.

**Robin Rose Southard & Wouter Ryckbosch (both VUB)**

*Grub governance: regulating the urban food market in eighteenth-century Brussels*

No abstract in print available as yet.