

Call for Papers

Households as Coercive Labour Regimes II

*Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), University of Bonn, Germany & International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
January 15-16, 2027*

International conference organized by Stephan Conermann, Ulbe Bosma and Gijs Kessler

Historians have long recognized the household as one of the building blocks of human societies that shapes human dependencies and social hierarchies. In this conference we want to put our gaze on coercive labour regimes through the lens of the household. We define the household as composed of a head and those within the unit enjoying the patronage of the head. Kinship relations are considered to be secondary, as members of the household head's family are not necessarily included in the household.

During the conference, we would like to focus on larger household-type organizations, including the private households of the military, political and economic elites, but also, for example, army barracks or ships, plantations, prisons, labour camps, haciendas and estates. All can be considered as households where the head wields extensive if not absolute power over its members. Such households represent labour regimes based on an asymmetrically dependent work force consisting of servants, peasants, enslaved and other coerced labourers. Various forms of such labour regimes have existed throughout human history in all parts of the globe. This is why we start out from the hypothesis that they are without exception formative for societies. Against this backdrop, we aim to cross the usual historiographical divides between modern and pre-modern. Neither is modernity as a paradigm our immediate concern. We would like to inquire into the various forms, functions, developments, justifications and changes of the different types of coerced labour we can identify in these households. As we are working towards a transcultural comparison, we prefer applications with case studies from different regions and time spans.

Participants are invited to write a paper dealing with a fixed set of questions, such as

- How do you define the household?

- How do people enter and exit the household?
- Who belong to the household?
- What is the division of labour?
- How does it function as a unit of production and/or economic unit?
- What are the mechanisms of control within the household?

The conference will take place on January, 15-16, 2027 at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, Bonn. It is co-hosted by the International Institute of Social History and organized by Stephan Conermann (Bonn), Ulbe Bosma and Gijs Kessler (both Amsterdam).

Participants will be invited on the basis of both an accepted abstract (200-300 words) and a paper outline (1500 words). Please submit your abstract (which should not exceed 300 words) by **April, 15, 2026** to stephan.conermann@uni-bonn.de. If the abstract is accepted you will be invited to write a paper outline by June, 15. Upon approval of the outline participants will be invited to submit a paper (5000 words) by November 15, 2026. We invite contributions from scholars across the field of humanities and social sciences.

Further information:

Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies: <https://www.dependency.uni-bonn.de/en>

International Institute of Social History: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en>