

Monday, 14.03.2022 16:15 - 18:00 CET

Magnus Ressel, University of Frankfurt, Alfried Krupp Kolleg Greifswald:

**Giving the orders for the transportation of African slaves. A source-based inquiry into the accounting mentality of European slave traders in the 1780s**

Abstract:

Giving the order to send out European ships to transport Africans to the Americas was a rather discreet operation that was strongly connected to the perception of the slave trade by its traders via account books and sheets. The effects of bookkeeping on entrepreneurial activities has lately been discussed more intensely: Due to the abstraction and organizational performance of bookkeeping, heterogeneous objects and services were homogenized and transactions got evaluated in monetary terms. Accounting thus contributed to a perception of the economy as a set of components that interacted with each other only via money flows. The resulting detachment of the slave traders from the practical realities of the slave trade was – as shall be argued here – a pillar of the asymmetrical power relation in the transatlantic slave trade. To exemplify this, accounting files of the Belgian slave trade of the 1780s will be presented in detail alongside public writings of the same slave traders.

Bio:

PD Dr. Magnus Ressel is fellow of the Gerda-Henkel Foundation at the chair of Early Modern History at the University of Frankfurt and junior fellow of the Alfried Krupp Kolleg in Greifswald. He is currently writing a study on the business ventures of Frederik Romberg (1729-1819), an important eighteenth-century colonial trader.