

## **Description of Chair ‘SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD’**

**Faculty of Humanities, Utrecht University**

### **1. Introduction**

The Economic and Social History (ESH) group at the Department of History and Art History (GKG) is among the most prominent research units in this field worldwide. One of its main intellectual assets has been the study of processes of change over the very long run. In the group’s attempts to chart such long trajectories, the early modern period (roughly 1500-1800) has always had a prominent place as an historical era in which major changes occurred that still affect lives around the globe today (globalisation, modern warfare, the Industrial Revolution). Due to the retirement (Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden) and departure (Oscar Gelderblom) of three experts in early modern history, the department is seeking to recruit a professor dedicated to the ‘Economic and Social History of the early modern period’. She or he will be asked to contribute outstanding scholarship, inspiring teaching and supportive leadership to the ESH group, and in the Department as a whole. In terms of chronological focus, the chair will be placed between chairs that focus on medieval (Bas van Bavel) and modern history (Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and a second chair in quantitative economic history currently in the process of recruitment), and asked to collaborate with the team as a whole, which includes an Associate Professor in early modern financial history (Christiaan van Bochove).

### **2. Academic Profile**

Recent research by early modern historians, including those from Utrecht, has demonstrated that many dimensions of modern life have their roots in the early modern period. These revisionist histories, refuting the image of static societies and economies before circa 1800, have fundamentally changed our understanding of processes of change. The Industrial Revolution, for example, is no longer seen as the product of some fortuitous inventions in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, but as the outcome of long-term changes in knowledge production and human capital formation, interactions between various continents, the emergence of new institutional regimes, and warfare, to name some of the areas where new knowledge has revised interpretations.

These interpretations contributed to one of the most topical debates in social and economic history focused on the development trajectories of Europe and Asia, captured under the heading of ‘Great Divergence’. One school claimed that until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these two regions were more or less equally developed, when more or less by coincidence Europe (and England in particular) managed to leap forward. Another school claims that Europe was already on a different growth path since the late Middle Ages and continued on this trajectory during the early modern period. This latter school found much of its inspiration in the history of the Dutch Golden Age, when for a while the Dutch Republic dominated world trade and became the richest country in the world, well before the invention of the steam engine.

New research seeks to integrate the so far more or less separate histories of globalization in Asia and the Atlantic. It also wants to better understand the interactions between economic development, institutional change and human agency in these processes of change. The role of the family, gender relations, and family labour, has become more prominent in these debates, but cultural dimensions, including religion and education, are also offering exciting new directions. Moreover, the Utrecht ESH group aims to extend its research line on how societies in the early modern period responded to natural disasters and climate change, thus providing a long-term perspective to topical present-day issues of environmental as well as microbiological challenges, such as the depletion of energy resources or pandemics.

### **3. Embedding in the Department of History & Art History and the UU Strategic Research Theme ‘Institutions for Open Societies’**

The chair will be embedded in the Economic and Social History (ESH) group, at the Department of History and Art History (GKG). The research profile of the chair aligns with the ‘global turn’ of this group over the past decade, its interest in global inequality, as well as with the interdisciplinary approach of most members of the ESH group, who combine quantitative and qualitative research methods and are inspired and informed by social science theories (see below under 5). Within the wider context of the GKG Department, the new chair might want to collaborate with scholars dealing with issues of human wellbeing such as environmental history (e.g. Liesbeth van de Grift), sustainability (e.g. Johan Schot) and democracy (e.g. Annelien De Dijn and Ido de Haan).

The newly appointed professor will be expected to play a prominent role within the university’s strategic themes, most notably Institutions for Open Societies (IOS - <https://www.uu.nl/en/research/institutions-for-open-societies>) and Pathways to Sustainability (<https://www.uu.nl/en/research/sustainability>). In this capacity, the chair should have, or develop, a research agenda that on the one hand is interdisciplinary and on the other hand fits within the research program of the ESH group.

### **4. Contributions to teaching**

The newly appointed chair will be teaching in the Bachelor History (for instance in the courses “Early Modern History” in the 1<sup>st</sup> year, “The Great Divergence” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year) as well as in the History (Research) Master programme of the Department of GKG (e.g. Research Design). Also the chair can be involved in providing interdisciplinary courses.

### **5. Research profile of the chair**

No specific area of expertise within the field of social and economic history is privileged in this search, but it would be important for the chair to adhere to some of the general features of the group’s research profile. Firstly, most of the research is either transnational, or internationally comparative. In recent years, the group has shifted its regional focus from of the Low Countries to other geographical areas within and outside Europe. The group would benefit from further contributions in the history of the early modern Atlantic, including slavery, or alternatively more expertise on Asian history, possibly in connection with European history. Secondly, the group is interested in long-term developments and would welcome applications from those with a similar interest. This might include work that goes

beyond the confines of early modern history. Thirdly, the group values interdisciplinary work, especially in collaboration with other disciplines, including Economics, Sociology, and Environmental Studies.

## **6. National and International positioning**

In the Netherlands, most chairs in Social and Economic History (except VU) are occupied by modernists:

- Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: Herman de Jong, 20<sup>th</sup>-century economic history
- Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen: Jan Kok, demographic history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries
- Universiteit Leiden: Leo Lucassen and Marlou Schrover, both migration history, mainly of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Universiteit van Amsterdam: no chair in economic and social history
- Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: chair Pepijn Brandon, an early modernist, social and labour history.

Internationally, on the other hand, most universities with prominent ESH groups have chairs that either focus on the early modern period or have contributed significantly to early modern history. By way of benchmarking, we mention the colleagues on the 1997-2007 ranking established by Cioni, Federico and Vasta (2018), on which Utrecht ranked 6<sup>th</sup>:

- London School of Economics: professors Sara Horrell, Jane Humphries (emerita), Oliver Volckart, Patrick Wallis
- University of Oxford: professors Stephen Broadberry, Sheilagh Ogilvie
- University of Cambridge: professors Craig Muldrew, Paul Warde
- Universidad Carlos III de Madrid: (three professors in modern economic history, but none on the early modern period)
- University of Warwick: professors Maxine Berg, Anne Gerritsen, Giorgio Riello

## **7. Profile of the occupant of the chair**

The criteria on which the candidates will be selected are the following:

- Applicants must be at the top of her or his league either as a high potential or as a world-class research leader.
- Applicants must have an excellent publication record in social and economic history, especially of the early modern period.
- Based on past performance, successful applicants show a potential for doing outstanding multi- or interdisciplinary research.
- Successful applicants have a keen eye for the societal relevance of the research in their field, and actively seek to contribute to public engagement/outreach.
- Successful applicants have demonstrable experience in acquiring additional and external funds to extend research in social and economic history, especially of the early modern period.

- Successful applicants have extensive experience in academic teaching as well as experience in managing a research group, and have successfully supervised PhD students.

## **8. Required competencies**

The tasks of the chair will be divided in principle in 50% research and 50% teaching. Corresponding to the criteria indicated above, the position includes in particular the following tasks:

- Doing research and publishing internationally on social and economic history, especially of the early modern period.
- Playing an initiating role in new research and teaching in social and economic history, especially of the early modern period, and the coordination of such initiatives.
- Collaborating with researchers within the strategic theme Institutions for Open Societies inside and outside the Faculty of Humanities.
- (Co-)supervising PhD students who are doing their research in the field of social and economic history, especially of the early modern period.
- Teaching in the BA and MA and RMA programme in History, possibly also in the BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics.
- Supervision of bachelor and/or (research) master theses.
- Taking up management tasks and board functions within the ESH group, Department and/or strategic theme.
- Candidates are expected to be proficient in both Dutch and English; non-Dutch candidates will need to master the Dutch language on an academic level within two years.
- In possession of a University Teaching Qualification (BKO or equivalent)
- Good communicative skills and proven ability to cooperate in teams

## **9. Contextual analysis**

The chair will be a member of the Economic and Social History group. The chair is expected to be able to take a central position in the management of this group and/or contribute to organizational tasks within GKG, which includes taking up rotating board memberships/directorates. Also, the candidate is expected to play an active part in the multidisciplinary strategic themes of Utrecht University.