

Foundations of Republican economic development: GDP of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek and the Oranje-Vrijstaat, 1854 -1909.

Historians have written descriptive narratives on the economic conditions of the ZAR and OVS, emphasizing poverty, currency shortages and limited trade. No systematic attempt has to date been made to reconstruct the gross domestic product of the two Boer Republics prior to the mineral discoveries and the onset of structural change in the economies of southern Africa. The lack of systematic data on economic conditions in southern Africa prior to 1910 was lamented by various researchers (Schumann, 1938; De Kiewiet, 1942; Feinstein 2005). This lacunae handicapped systematic comparative work on the performance of settler economies in the British Commonwealth. It contributed to wild guesswork and sometimes unjustified intrapolations since the seventeenth century Cape history, which were based on assumptions unsuitable for the economies of the Boer Republics. As part of the wider research project to reconstruct the nineteenth century gross domestic product of the four British colonies that would ultimately merge into the Union of South Africa in 1910, the researchers have completed the first ever systematic and comprehensive GDP data series for the Cape Colony and the Natal Colony between 1850 and 1909. The research outcome offered the first opportunity to compare the performance of the two British colonies in southern Africa to other British colonies, such as Victoria and New South Wales in Australia during the late nineteenth century. This paper now offers the first preliminary data on the GDP of the two Boer Republics since formal state formation in 1852 and 1854 and 1909, prior to the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The expenditure method applied to the reconstruction of the two British colonies could not be applied to the Boer Republics, as a result of the incomplete statistical data from Government sources and the rudimentary data in official censuses of the republics. The value added by kind of economic activity method is used in this case, because more systematic data was compiled from archival sources on agricultural production, exchange between inhabitants and the so-called 'Overberg' trade between die republics and the two British colonies. Once the Boer Republics were defeated in the Anglo Boer War of 1899-1902, the British administration reported in a more systematic fashion on overall economic development. The compilation of the Boer Republic GDP data will provide the first ever historically substantiated series on the economic development of the two republics since state formation, prior to the formation of the Union.

Keywords: Boer Republics, gross domestic product, value added, expenditure, poverty

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