

# **Sunil Amrith** receives Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History 2022



Sunil Amrith  
Photo: Bram Belloni



Amsterdam, 3 June 2022 – Sunil Amrith, professor of History at Yale University, will be awarded the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History 2022. The award honours his search for the historical origins of the great inequality that exists between and within countries as well as the connection that he has identified to the impact of climate change.

The Heineken Prizes are the Netherlands' most prestigious international science prizes. Every two years they are awarded to five distinguished researchers. The Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences is responsible for the nomination and selection process. During the first week of June, a 2022 laureate will be announced every weekday. Previous laureates of the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History include Lorraine Daston (2020) and John McNeill (2018). The award was established in 1990 by Alfred H. Heineken.

## Amrith explains why water plays such an important role in the history of South and Southeast Asia

### **About the study**

Amrith studies the history of South and Southeast Asia. He is interested in the transnational connections between these two regions, focusing mainly on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among other things, he has studied the large-scale migration around the Bay of Bengal, and the circulation of cultural, religious, and political ideas that followed. He also focuses on the history of the environment in this region, and the relationship between climate and water cycles around the Indian Ocean. He recently wrote the book *Unruly Waters*, in which he explains why monsoons and rivers play such an important role in the history of South and Southeast Asia. The recurring theme in his work is the effect of imperialism and colonialism on the inequality between and within countries. Again, he makes the connection to environment: Amrith is researching how climate change affects socioeconomic issues such as migration and inequality. He explains: *'Our current environmental crisis is best understood in relation to a history of increasing inequality, both between and within countries. Moreover, we can*

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*better equip ourselves to understand the challenges we all face if we listen to and learn from the widest possible range of voices, including those that have been marginalised or silenced.'*

## **Jury praises Amrith's new perspective on environmental history**

'*Unruly Waters* is an extraordinary broadening of the history of the Indian subcontinent, from a whole new perspective,' says the jury, with chair Judith Pollmann, historian, and professor of early modern Dutch History. Amrith combines political, social, and cultural insights, micro and macro perspectives. In doing so, he combines administrative and popular sources, such as film and drama. In addition, he ties his research to the perspective of the individual and the way in which life is affected by climate. For example, he makes a connection between colonial exploitation and climate change in India. This new approach to issues such as ecology, migration, politics, health, and climate makes Amrith a leader in the field of environmental history.

## **About Sunil Amrith**

Sunil Amrith (Kenya, 1979) grew up in Singapore and then moved to the United Kingdom to study history at Cambridge University. He received his PhD in history from the same university in 2005. After working briefly as a researcher at Trinity College, Cambridge, he was appointed lecturer at Birbeck College, part of the University of London. In 2015, he was appointed Mehra Family Professor of South Asian History at Harvard University. Since 2020, he has been Renu and Anand Dhawan Professor of History at Yale University. In addition to the Dr A.H. Heineken Prize for History, awards he has received include the John F. Richards Prize, the Infosys Prize in Humanities, and the MacArthur Fellowship.