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Johannes Postma, Victor Enthoven, eds. *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817.* Leiden: Brill, 2003. xxxiv + 526 pp. $161.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-90-04-12562-9.

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For Richer or for Poorer: The Promise and Limitations of Dutch Atlantic History

In *The First Modern Economy*, Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude characterized the history of the Dutch Atlantic World as one of "repeated cycles of hope, frustration, and failure,", a depiction that seems to pervade the field (p. 386). For the Dutch, their Atlantic dream, that is, to establish an empire in the west comparable to their eastern dominions, never reached fruition. Because of this failure, the attitude of the modern Dutch has largely been to ignore the subject, leaving it as merely a footnote for a history that never was. This attitude is most evident from its neglect in the hands of academics, especially Dutch historians. In the introduction, Johannes Postma notes that, among other indicators, the national source publication series (RGP) has never published a work on Atlantic history and few, if any, contemporary Dutch scholars study Atlantic history. It is no wonder that before 1995, there were fewer than four hundred published sources on the history of the Dutch in Africa, West India, and the Americas combined (p. 9). Without the support of the Dutch academic community, Dutch Atlantic studies has languished elsewhere and is often under-represented in publications claiming to deal with the whole of the Atlantic world, an oversight *Riches from Atlantic Commerce* (the first volume of the E. J. Brill series in Atlantic World history) seeks to redress.

Contributions to the volume came from first a seminar then a symposium held at the University of Leiden in 1996 entitled "Dutch Atlantic Shipping, 1600-1800," with a number of new articles added later. The fourteen articles are organized into four sections. The first three deal with specific areas of Dutch involvement, roughly in order of their chronological significance, including Dutch ventures in Brazil, the Caribbean, and the Guinea Coast. The final section provides two overviews of the Dutch Atlantic networks for the entire period, namely the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. The contributors are largely affiliated with either Dutch or American institutions (with the exception of Claudia Schnurmann of the Georg-August University, Goettingen), though none from a Dutch university, underscoring its relative neglect from these institutions. The volume includes lengthy appendices, plentiful maps, conversion tools, references, and several interesting pictures, the latter of which are regrettably located at the beginning and end of the text and not with their corresponding articles.

The Dutch were initially lured into Atlantic trade by the prospect of profits from trade with Brazil and the volume begins with a discussion of these earliest, largely private, ventures (Enthoven and Christopher Ebert). The section broadens out to explain the rationale behind the establishment of the Dutch West India Company and how its monopoly functions shaped the development of Dutch interest in the Americas (Henk den Heijer). All of the initial articles consider how the Dutch positioned their Atlantic ambitions to fit into the larger scheme of international relations. The outlines of that story have been well-covered elsewhere, but these articles flesh out the theories, shifting the discussion from intentions to actual practices, a tendency which runs throughout the collection. The second section, on the slave trade, concentrates on the efforts to build and collect data on the volume and importance of Dutch slave trading across the Atlantic (articles by Postma and Henk den Heijer). This is especially problematic in the case of the Dutch because of the large number of private merchants involved in the slave trade, some legally and some illegally. Other articles discuss the impact of the slave trade on relations with other colonial powers (Stuart B. Schwartz), and the

day-to-day operations of a colony whose existence is defined by slave trading (Han Jordaan). Even for those not primarily interested in the Dutch, the intricate descriptions of logistics in the latter article are evocative and accessible, making the article a strong candidate for classroom reading selections on the Atlantic slave trade. The following two sections cover trade in specific geographical domains, including CuraÃ§ao (the Dutch entrepot in the Caribbean), Suriname, Essequibo, and Demerara (on the northern coast of South America). Collectively, these articles attempt to stake claims for the respective importance of each of these smaller pieces to the Dutch Atlantic as a whole. Finally, articles by Wim Klooster and Victor Enthoven connect these smaller histories to a larger conception of a cohesive economic system, either divided into chronological phases (Klooster), or characterized by the financial tools pioneered and inspired by the particular difficulties of Atlantic commerce over time (Enthoven).

This is a field still in its early stages, which is evident in the tentative nature of some of the conclusions and the tendency to report on the state of information gathering, rather than directly proceeding to in-depth analysis and/or historiographical questions, but these growing pains should not detract from the volume's accomplishments. On the contrary, the emerging quality of the material makes it a treasure trove for researchers, as potentially fruitful future projects are frequently suggested and the appendices include a list of relevant archives as well information on how to access major database collections. Further research is also encouraged by the remarkable coherence of the articles around the same thesis: a resounding claim that the significance of Dutch trade in the Atlantic has been vastly underrated, not only in terms of its contributions to Dutch prosperity, but also to the wider Atlantic system.

Riches from Atlantic Commerce is a volume about Dutch Atlantic trading networks, but in a subtle way it is also a comment on the organization and study of the Dutch Atlantic world more broadly. The editors explain the relative dearth of material on colonial New Amsterdam (with the exception of Claudia Schnurmann's article on the merchant Jacob Leisler) with the comment that there is "deficient current research", but the omission suggests a more troubling lack of integration between colonial and continental historians (p. 10). With the on-going publication of Dutch colonial sources by the New Netherland Project, this is a field currently experiencing a renewed vitality, but its findings and historiography have more in common with American colonial historians than Dutch economic or imperial historians. The Atlantic World model of doing history encourages crossing over these institutional and geographical barriers, a process that would appear to be in its early stages for the Dutch experience.

Perhaps because it is such a small field, Dutch history tends to be conservative and many of the trends that sweep through other historical fields either arrive late or not at all. In Atlantic World history as a whole, the earliest contributions focused on trade and the creation of a quantitative foundation for later models and theories concerning the movement of people, goods, and ideas around the tempestuous ocean. More recently, cultural history has come to fill many of the explanatory needs, building on and playing off the earlier literature. Changing conceptions of identity formation, moral geography, and political imagination are all topics with recent innovative and significant contributions. *Riches from Atlantic Commerce* evinces the time lag of Dutch historiography, showing the field to be at a much earlier stage of development. Only one of the articles (Schnuurmann's) even suggests questions of identity formation, for example, which is a particularly complex subject in Dutch history. Dutch colonials were leaving behind a state and society with questionable cohesion to arrive at small, usually very cosmopolitan, colonies, upon which their hold was often tenuous or temporary. If David Hancock's Anglo-Scottish merchants can become "citizens of the world," then the Dutch may have an even stronger claim to that title.

Taken as a whole, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce* paints a picture of the tenacity of the Dutch and their ability to squeeze profit from an empire that was crumbling and to find opportunities in a system that they were systematically being forced out of. The cycle of hope, frustration, and failure might justly be turned around to frustration, failure, hope. It seemed that despite being unable to dominate the Atlantic side of the world as they did the Pacific, the Dutch continued to reinvent themselves and their role in order to continue pursuing what turned out to be, in both volume and magnitude, a trade more significant than their celebrated counterparts in Asia ever enjoyed. Contemporaries of the Dutch Atlantic merchants likely underestimated their impact on the Atlantic economies, a mistake this volume seeks to prevent modern historians from repeating.

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