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David Ormrod. *The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in the Age of Mercantilism, 1650-1770.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xvii + 400 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81926-8.

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Passing the Baton: Anglo-Dutch Competition in the Early Modern

Sometime during the second half of the seventeenth century, primacy in world trade passed from the Dutch to the English. Most scholars have tended to think of this shift being played out in Anglo-Dutch competition far from home in Asia or in the Atlantic. David Ormrod suggests that it was not in the far-flung corners of these countries' commercial empires that the war for economic hegemony took place; rather, it was in the North Sea/Baltic arena. Trade in the North Sea/Baltic milieu constituted the "mother trade" for the Dutch–and English dominance in the area was necessary for them to be successful in the face of Dutch entrenchment.

Ormrod begins by discussing the contemporary seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notions that Britain became an empire as a result of commerce. He sets the theoretical framework of his study by adopting a Braudelian world systems approach in place of the core and periphery model suggested by Wallerstein. It is because of this perspective that the North Sea and Baltic trades form the focus of his work.

The model Ormrod sets up is one in which the Dutch economy represented an older staple market-based structure, while the English economy was developing into an entirely new structure–the "national economy." The characterization of early modern Dutch economy as old style might rankle people like Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, who have emphasized the modernity of the Dutch commercial miracle.[1] But pointing to "national economy" as the concept that defines modernity is another way to look at what is certainly a very complex and important issue. Indeed, Liah Greenfeld has examined the connection between modern capitalism and the rise of the nation-state, which gave rise to the "national economy" in her book, *The Spirit of Capitalism: Nationalism and Economic Growth* (2001).

Ormrod divides his book into three parts. Part 1 looks at the differences between Dutch and English modes of commerce: the Dutch idea of the primacy of staple market trade, and the two-fold organization of English commerce through formal corporate monopolies on one hand, and "open trade" on the other. Ormrod points out that by the middle of the seventeenth century, English commerce was moving in the direction of the Dutch model in most respects. But the English trend toward Dutch commercial models did not lead to closer integration between the two countries' economies; it led to an intense rivalry between them. Instrumental in the transformation of English commerce was the strengthening of the Navigation Acts, which helped forge a clear relationship between merchants and the state. Indeed, the idea of mercantilism plays a very big role in Ormrod's work. But it was the ability of English merchants to dominate several "great circuits of trade" (p. 60) that allowed them to challenge Dutch hegemony in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic economy, the Asian markets, and the North Sea/Baltic area.

The second part of the book, "English Trade with the Dutch Staplemarket," examines the English/Dutch rivalry across various trades: woolen cloth, linen, grain, and coal. The most interesting chapter in this section (chapter 6, "The Dutch Staplemarket and the Growth of English Re-Exports") focuses on the strategy the English employed to counteract the balance-of-payment shortfalls resulting from England's import-driven growth. Rather than curbing imports, the English concentrated on re-exporting surplus luxury goods to other parts of Europe. Ormrod suggests, therefore, that the English had learned to use the Dutch model to their advantage.

The third part of the book completes the story of an English rise and a Dutch decline, but as Ormrod explains in the conclusion, the economic interdependence of England and Holland means that the rise of one and the decline of the other "cannot be discussed in isolation" (p. 337). For Ormrod, it was English mercantilist state action that was the deciding blow for Holland and that led to the emergence of London as Europe's commercial pow-

erhouse.

The Rise of Commercial Empires represents thirty years of research by Ormrod; it began as his doctoral dissertation in the 1970s. Ormrod's book is very dense and full of detail. It is a treasure trove of information that students and scholars will mine for years to come. However, this book can be laborious to read and one can easily lose sight of the point the author is trying to make. Make no mistake, this book makes an important contribution to early modern economic history, but be prepared to spend a fair amount of time digesting it.

Note

[1]. *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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