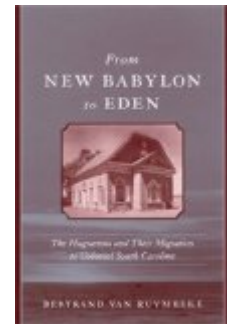


Bertrand Van Ruymbeke. *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and Their Migration to Colonial South Carolina*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. xviii + 396 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-583-8.

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## Refugees from France, Charter Group in the Lowcountry

Both the departure of Huguenots from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, known as *le Refuge*, and the colonization of the South Carolina Lowcountry have attracted significant attention from scholars. In *From New Babylon to Eden*, Bertrand Van Ruymbeke brings these two historiographies together in a study of Huguenot migration to South Carolina. *From New Babylon to Eden* is an impressively researched, thorough, and perceptive book. Indeed, this is precisely the sort of transatlantic project that serves as a reminder of the value of an Atlanticist approach to early modern history. Van Ruymbeke also makes a major contribution to our understanding of colonial South Carolina before about 1730 by giving us a surprisingly comprehensive portrait of one charter group that had an important influence on later generations of South Carolinians. In doing so, he directs our attention to the powerful irony of a group of religious refugees who fled to a brutally materialistic plantation colony (p. xv).

While historians have devoted some attention to the Huguenots in early South Carolina, Van Ruymbeke's study focuses more specifically on the generation that migrated to the Lowcountry. In the book's introduction, he uses this focus to differentiate himself from Amy E. Friedlander's more long-term work on the Huguenots in South Carolina, and from Jon Butler's more general book about the Huguenots in North America.[1] He sees himself "in historiographic continuity with these two works," but he also parts company with them on some key conclusions and offers a much more intense focus on the mi-

gration itself (pp. xvi-xvii).

Many Atlanticists will be most interested in the first four chapters of *From New Babylon to Eden*, because these chapters describe the background and characteristics of the migration, explore the broader Atlantic context of the Huguenot experience, and analyze related elements of politics, promotion, and demographics. Chapter 1 situates the Huguenot migrants within their early modern French context as a tiny minority of less than 4 percent in a vast and varied population of about twenty million. As Ruymbeke explains, the Huguenots were predominantly located in southern France, came from disproportionately urban locations, and tended towards a more middling and artisanal character (p. 9). By the middle of the seventeenth century most Huguenots maintained a comfortable French identity because of the relative tolerance provided by the Edict of Nantes. They probably failed to appreciate the tenuous nature of the Edict itself, which had been a limited, compromise measure from the beginning (p. 10). By the 1670s, the characteristically intractable Louis XIV implemented policies designed to force the Huguenots to convert to Catholicism. When these policies failed to yield the desired outcome, he revoked the Edict of Nantes altogether in 1685 (pp. 10-15). The disastrous consequences of this decision led to the often violent persecution of Huguenots within France and an increased resistance to Catholicism, instead of encouraging conversion; they also persuaded over two hundred thousand Huguenots to depart France. Chapter 2 describes the English background to the Huguenot mi-

gration, and explains how London served as an organizing point for colonial promotion efforts, mercantilistic English politicians, and other individuals who encouraged Huguenots to settle in Carolina. Van Ruymbeke's detailed description of the Huguenots' brief but intense bout of "Carolina Fever," from 1684 to 1686, provides an especially vivid glimpse of the international dynamics of seventeenth-century colonial promotion efforts. In this case, those who encouraged the Huguenot migration drew much impetus from hysterical English fears of French popery and from the political and economic aspirations of Lord Shaftesbury (pp. 29-34). Chapter 3 gives an account of the Huguenots' persecution and the migrants' flight from France. Most of them stayed close enough to return to a more tolerant France if the persecution subsided, and, because the law required them to stay in France, they tended to go where geography permitted the easiest escape. Chapter 4 provides a profile of the Huguenot arrivals in South Carolina, who tended to be urban, middling, and relatively familial compared to other groups of immigrants to colonial British America (pp. 94-96). Van Ruymbeke assembles this profile by using a cohort of 356 names identified on an imperfect but nonetheless invaluable 1696 South Carolina Huguenot naturalization list (pp. 71-73).

Chapters 5 through 8 analyze the Huguenots' experience in South Carolina. Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to religious matters. Much of the discussion of Huguenot religion explains the thorny issue of the French Calvinists' decision to conform to the established Anglican church. Van Ruymbeke stresses the complex, gradual, and, in many ways, only partial nature of this religious transformation, as he describes the "individual and idiosyncratic" dimensions of Anglican conformity that included a revolt against Anglican religious practices in St. Denis parish that lasted into the 1720s (pp. 99, 137-145). Chapter 7 depicts the Huguenots as important players

in the rough-and-tumble arena of early South Carolina politics by documenting their determined and ultimately successful efforts to secure naturalized status and attain a voice in representative government. The Lowcountry's plantation economy serves as the topic for chapter 8, but this chapter seems less illuminating than the others, perhaps because the Huguenot experience offers few surprises and fits so well with what we already know about economic life in early South Carolina.

Ultimately, Van Ruymbeke's book is limited only by obstacles that are familiar to most historians. Even the most resourceful researcher cannot fully overcome the challenges of working with the limited sources that exist for early South Carolina. Consequently, we may learn more about the Huguenots from social history methods and quantitative trends than we do from detailed personal narratives, but we are still learning far more about this topic than we could in any other way. Some scholars may also feel that *From New Babylon to Eden* deals with a relatively unimportant topic because of the small number of Huguenot migrants to the Lowcountry during this period. Van Ruymbeke acknowledges and answers this concern throughout the book by putting these migrants in a broader Atlantic context, and he makes a convincing case that the example of the South Carolina Huguenots is more meaningful precisely because of their disproportionate influence on the development of Lowcountry society and culture.

#### Note

[1]. Amy E. Friedlander, "Carolina Huguenots: A Study in Cultural Pluralism in the Low Country, 1679-1768," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1979); and Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

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