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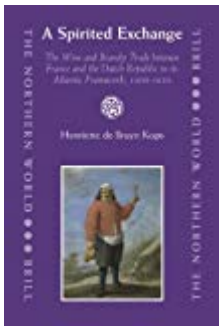

Henriette de Bruyn Kops. *A Spirited Exchange: The Wine and Brandy Trade between France and the Dutch Republic in Its Atlantic Framework, 1600-1650.* Leiden: Brill, 2007. Illustrations. xiii + 371 pp. $139.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-16074-3.

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A Spirited Exchange is aptly and cleverly titled. Literally, the book is about the intra-European trade in spirits, mainly brandy, in the first half of the seventeenth century. More figuratively, the project is about the people who worked to creatively reconfigure that trade to meet the economic and political vicissitudes of the age of crisis through the exchange of information, ideas, and social capital. It is also a spirited exchange about history and historical methods. Henriette de Bruyn Kops's work connects conversations across several significant historiographical divides. The result is a hybrid work that displays the qualities, for better and for worse, of those methods and perspectives that it incorporates. The exchange is indeed a spirited one and should provoke conversation and reflection about how transnational histories can and/or should be written.

In the past year or so, there have been spirited debates, both online and in print, about defining the nature of Atlantic history.[1] Practitioners of Atlantic history, a hybrid field itself, have struggled to articulate not simply the physical and chronological parameters of their field, but also the methodological ones. *A Spirited Exchange* is an interesting test case for how robust these definitions are. De Bruyn Kops uses the term "Atlantic Framework" as part of her subtitle, and she does pay some heed to the Atlantic context of her work, most notably as a postscript in the first chapter and in the first part of her last chapter which argues that the European coastal trade properly belongs to the Atlantic world. Surprisingly, she attributes the role of the Sephardic Jews in the trade to their essentially Atlantic outlook and not to any ties they might have developed with their adopted homelands, among them the Dutch Republic. Perhaps most striking, though, is De Bruyn Kops's extension of the Atlantic to include not only regional trades, such as that in wine between France and the Republic, but also the Dutch trade with the Baltic, the so-called ***moedernegotie*** or mother trade. As recent discussions on the Atlantic world indicate, whether or not (and to what extent) the trade between France, the Republic, and, albeit to a lesser degree, the Baltic constitutes Atlantic his-

tory, as De Bruyn Kops would have it, is open to debate. Moreover, the design of ***A Spirited Exchange***, which does not employ or overtly engage with the methodologies often associated with Atlantic history, is not tailored to providing any definitive answers on this score.

That said, De Bruyn Kops displays a masterful command of the archives and source-critical technique in her study. She modestly describes her method as primarily prospographical. This single term does not do justice to the formidable and meticulous research represented in the text and its lengthy appendices. Her accomplishment is remarkable on several counts. Working outside of the traditional national boundaries, she marshals a vast array of archival sources from multiple archives (primarily those in Rotterdam and Nantes) in multiple languages, and is able to painstakingly and convincingly reconstruct a complex economic network working from this wide range of flawed and/or incomplete sources. She takes the strengths and weaknesses of her assembled sources and plays them off each other, frequently using one source to supplement the weakness of another to complete a narrative thread or extend an interpretation. She is especially effective when she plays the two national historiographic traditions off against each other, using the Dutch sources and historians to speak to omissions in the French sources and historians, and vice versa. Her reading of the ***Moyens d'Intervention***, a formal complaint about the activities of Dutch traders in Nantes, is a case in point. When contextualized, she contends, the document is neither an indictment (the French view) nor a whitewash (the Dutch view) of the prevailing commercial practices but rather a complex statement about the relationships between the two communities. As this example shows, her portrait is the more robust for her considerable and varied arsenal. At the same time, for those acquainted with the work done in many graduate programs at Dutch universities, the basic technique De Bruyn Kops employs should seem familiar. Sticking fairly close to her sources throughout the main part of the book, she provides a confident and empathetic reading of them, presented in a coherent framework that takes shape as she moves deftly from describing the people to examining the places and the goods that make up the networks of production and exchange. The result is essentially a critical narration of the assembled sources.

While this usually suits Dutch tastes, it does not always appeal as much to historians trained in the United States. This divide seems to derive from a difference of opinion about the purpose of historical research that is not likely to be resolved soon. Interestingly, the genesis of ***Spirited Exchange*** was De Bruyn Kops's dissertation at Georgetown University (for which it won the Glassman Dissertation Award in 2006). This is perhaps the reasons why she combines her close reading of the sources with a historiographical and theoretical framework that, while not exactly Atlantic, is certainly cosmopolitan and confronts much of the conventional wisdom about how economic systems operated in the premodern era. More specifically, she takes on Jonathan Israel's contention that the luxury trades were the basis for Dutch economic success and not the mother trade of staples in the Baltic, as other historians have contended. De Bruyn Kops's response to Israel is that economic situations cannot be reduced to a single cause or set of causes. She also calls to task those scholars who emphasize network economics. For although the reconstruction of information networks sheds more light on the complexity of economic exchange, the portrayal of economic behavior that such historians describe is a static one that belies the shifting dynamics inherent to systems of exchange that those caught up in these webs seem to feel instinctually. In the end, De Bruyn Kops calls for a "Rubik's cube" model, i.e., an ever-changing puzzle of multiple, interconnected dimensions, to illuminate the complex topography of economic change.

This claim to broader theoretical relevance and innovation places her work more clearly in the genre of historiography produced at American institutions. The result is a work that shifts between the macro- and micro-levels of conceptualization and perspective and one that constitutes a refreshing attempt to marry the two research traditions in a way that would be palatable to both sides. The work is, as its title says, about an exchange and not a reconciliation, nor even a step toward a predetermined goal of historical understanding. Just as the terms of trade for the brandy merchants of the seventeenth century kept changing with the times, so do the terms of trade for historical scholarship shift as the contexts in which we work keep changing.

Note

[1]. See, for example, one of the earliest of these, Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 3 (2006): 719-720.