

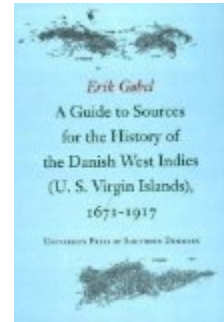
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Erik GÖbel. *A Guide to Sources for the History of the Danish West Indies (U. S. Virgin Islands), 1671-1917*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2002. 349 pp. KR 250.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-87-7838-721-9.

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Guide to Sources for the History of the Danish West Indies - a review

Present-day U. S. Virgin Islands in the Caraibic were Danish colonies until 1917 when they were sold to the United States. The island of St. Thomas was acquired in 1670, St. John in 1718 and St. Croix in 1733. Until 1755 they were run by a Danish trading company but from then on they came under direct Danish governmental rule. However small they might be areawise, the Danish colonial period has nonetheless resulted in a tremendous amount of archival material concerning these islands. This material is mostly Danish language and written with Gothic handwriting. But furthermore, although most of it is being kept in the Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet) it is very disparate and kept within the records of several Danish authorities which were in charge of running (various parts of the administration of) these colonies which has made it difficult for scholars to identify, locate and find relevant material. But as the archival material from the former Danish West Indies comparatively seen has been preserved to an extraordinary copious extent it is of interest not only for scholars of Danish colonial history but for scholars of the Caraibic world as well.

Danish language and Gothic handwriting are factors that cannot be helped, the disparity of the archival material can, however, be made less confusing by expert guidance. And this is precisely the aim of this book. The author, Erik Gbel, is a historian and senior research archivist at the Danish National Archives who has published a considerable number of books and articles in both Danish and English on archival matters and eco-

nomie and social history and an expert on the history of the former Danish colonies, particularly the Danish West Indies.

The book is subdivided into four main parts. Firstly, there is a commented survey of printed literature on the Danish West Indies, both Danish language and otherwise. Secondly, the various Danish authorities and institutions which have produced archival material about the Danish West Indies are being described with general remarks of each institution and what kind of West Indian material in particular that can be found here, information on finding aids and literature about these authorities and institutions. Thirdly, there are detailed catalogues of the archival material of those four institutions of the central administration in Copenhagen that, one after another, had administrative responsibility for the West Indian colony, i.e. those authorities which were in charge of the West Indies exclusively and did not have West Indian matters as only one among many of their administrative responsibilities. These catalogues are detailed and it should be possible to order material from the Danish National Archives on the basis of these. Fourthly, there is a list of the names of institutions and authorities both in Danish and in English so that terminological confusion can be avoided.

By far the larger part of the archival material described here is being kept at the Danish National Archives, both what has been produced by governmental authorities and institutions and by private individuals. Certainly, there is also relevant material kept in other archives and libraries. E.g. material can be found in the manuscript collection of The Royal Library (Det kon-

gelige Bibliotek) in Copenhagen. This is certainly being mentioned, but in comparison with the material within the National Archives this is being given rather scant attention.

The book is concentrated on the archives produced by the central Danish authorities, not the local ones on the three islands themselves. However, in the introduction of the book the prospect of a coming sequel to this guide

dealing with archival material from the local authorities is being held out. And till then, information about this local material now kept in the Danish National Archives can be found at: www.virgin-islands-history.dk.

All in all, Gbels book as a most welcome, valuable, useful, and till now strongly missed aid for anyone working with West Indian history.

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