
Book Reviews

REVIEW ESSAY

Michiel van Groesen, ed., *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 363 pp. ISBN: 9781107061170. \$99.00.

Jaap Jacobs and L. H. Roper, eds., *The Worlds of the Seventeenth-Century Hudson Valley*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014. 277 pp. ISBN: 9781438450971. \$80.00.

Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, eds., *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014. 440 pp. ISBN: 9789004271326. €93.00.

Writing a history about the Dutch Atlantic used to be easy. First, one would pick and choose one or more quotes from either “the Dutch were not very important in that part of the world”, talking about a Dutch Atlantic “makes as much sense as ‘Dutch Asia’ or the ‘Dutch Mediterranean’”, “the Dutch ... were not until the nineteenth century an imperial power in any meaningful sense of the word”, or “there was no such thing as the Dutch Atlantic”.¹ Such positions make sense since the territorial claims by the Dutch were, except for short-lived adventures in North America and Brazil, relatively modest. The next step in writing a history of the Dutch Atlantic would be to carefully nuance or disagree with this view in order to position oneself vis-à-vis the existing literature. After almost two decades of such “revisionist” contributions, it is no longer possible to apply this tactic. In 2014, three edited volumes relegated past orthodox views to the wastepaper basket.

All three volumes have a different solution for dealing with the Dutch Atlantic. Michiel van Groesen’s *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* argues that through the study of the afterlife and the imagination of one colony, Brazil, we can identify an “Atlantic consciousness” (18). In the *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, Gert Oostindie and Jessica Roitman argue for an approach that looks beyond the companies and façades of “national” empires by studying the Dutch in other empires and vice versa: “The various chapters all acknowledge that the Dutch-controlled part of the Atlantic could only develop by developing strong trans-imperial connections” (10). Despite the lack of an introduction or conclusion with a clear mission-statement, it is clear that L.H. Roper and Jaap Jacobs, in their book on the Hudson Valley, have taken—what David Armitage has called—a cis-Atlantic approach. They position the region of the Hudson Valley

¹ P.C. Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880: Trade, Slavery, and Emancipation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); P.C. Emmer and W. Klooster, “The Dutch Atlantic, 1600-1800: Expansion without Empire,” *Itinerario* 23.2 (1999); A. Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, C.1500-C.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); B. Schmidt, “The Dutch Atlantic: From Provincialism to Globalism,” in J.P. Greene and P.D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

in an Atlantic context and compare English and Dutch (as well as a little bit of French) approaches to the same colonial issues in an attempt to characterize the different styles. Nevertheless, in his individual chapter, Jacobs reveals how he views the book and its relationship to Atlantic historiography. Instead of an Atlantic context, he would prefer “a triangular comparison, composed of the Dutch Republic, New Netherland, and other Dutch colonies, whether Asiatic or Atlantic” (159).

Such a position illustrates the general historiographic change that all three volumes are part of. For example, Jacobs, who now advocates a “Dutch” approach, argued in the 1999 commercial edition of his dissertation that, “A Dutch perspective on New Netherland is not better or more proper than an American perspective”.² Moreover, Piet Emmer, Wim Klooster and Benjamin Schmidt, who were responsible for the quotes in the introduction, are all part of the revisionist books. In other words, it seems like a consensus has been reached in 2014: there was indeed a Dutch Atlantic. It was already largely accepted that the Atlantic had important implications for the Dutch Republic economically but these new books convincingly argue for the cultural, socio-economic, intellectual and political consequences of a Dutch Atlantic.³ After assessing these consequences in the three books under review, this review essay will suggest two avenues that seem promising for future research.

The Legacy of Dutch Brazil tries to answer questions about why Brazil persisted in the colonial imagination and how its mythologies emerged in different times, shapes and places. Dutch Brazil should be understood as the period between 1624 and 1654 when the West India Company (WIC) conquered several captaincies in northeast Brazil from the Portuguese. The book traces the impact of the colony in the Dutch Republic, Brazil, West Africa, Iberian peninsula, France, Germany, the Caribbean and British North America. It does so divided over three different legacies: the geopolitical, cultural and national legacy. Especially the first two legacies are suited to trace the impact on the Atlantic World, whereas the national legacy “from memory to mythology” attempts to position the book on the crossroads between Atlantic and Latin American studies. Van Groesen correctly points out that Dutch Brazil is usually studied in relative isolation and provides three arguments for why it makes sense to study this WIC colony in an Atlantic context. First, because it challenges the historiographical distinction between a northern European Atlantic, a Spanish Atlantic and a Portuguese Atlantic that—according to John Elliott—did not merge until the later seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁴ Second, due to the fact that historiography has privileged connections, continuity and comparative coherence: Dutch Brazil, a narrative of breaks and disruptions, does not fit this history and thus should be given the right attention. Third, to challenge Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra’s opinion that the Atlantic perspective has been liberating for North America by allowing it to overcome traditional nationalistic historiographies but too exclusive for Latin America.

Quite successful in bridging the northern and southern Atlantic and highlighting the inter-imperial connections is the chapter by Mariana Françaço (105-123). She argues that a gift

² J. Jacobs, *Een Zegenrijk Gewest: Nieuw-Nederland in De Zeventiende Eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker/Prometheus, 1999), 27.

³ For the economic implications see: J. Postma and V. Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1585-1817* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003); V. Enthoven and M.J. van Ittersum, “The Mouse That Roars: Dutch Atlantic History,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 10.3 (2006).

⁴ J.H. Elliott, “Afterword: Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation,” in D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick, eds. *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 234.

exchange by the Dutch Governor-General Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen and the Congolese king Dom Garcia II shows connections on an Atlantic scale. The exchange consisted of several objects but Françaço focuses on two in particular: a silver basin and a hat made of beaver fur. The silver basin is from Peruvian origin and dedicated to Philip II, the King of Spain. It had, at some point, been used as an instrument of payment for the purchase of slaves. When Dom Garcia II gifted it to Johan Maurits, the silver basin crossed the Atlantic once more. This comes to illustrate, according to the author, Dutch Brazil as a node in a broader transatlantic colonial network and the inter-imperial exchanges that happened in the Atlantic. The beaver fur used for the hat came originally from North America. Bringing northern fur into a gift exchange between a northern European nobleman and a Congolese king in the South Atlantic is used to show the artificial divide between a northern and southern Atlantic. It can, of course, be questioned to what extent this exchange is exemplary for an “Atlantic”, but the rest of her article contains additional supportive arguments.

Other contributors show how Dutch Brazil was not simply an anomaly or an intermezzo but had far-reaching consequences for the Atlantic dynamism. Stuart Schwarz (41-58) argues that the colony had an economic legacy in the Atlantic through the spread of expertise in sugar cultivation. Evan Haefeli (124-145) posits that the tolerance in the WIC colony inspired other colonies and fractured the once self-evident hegemony of Christianity overseas. Roquinaldo Ferreira (77-101) and Mark Meuwese (59-76) show how the WIC takeover of a colony influenced the relations between indigenous peoples and colonizers and the Portuguese shipping system. Rather than transcending the national narrative, the chapters by Julie Berger Hochstrasser (248-283) and Rebecca Parker Brienen (229-247) argue that Brazil shaped the national mythological narratives of colonial expansion. The legacy was not strictly Atlantic but also national. The chapter that argues in favour of the most far-reaching legacy of Dutch Brazil is by Arthur Weststeijn (187-204). His chapter transcends the Atlantic dynamisms and discusses how the debate on free trade to the WIC colony in the 1630s laid the foundation for an ideology of free trade. Via the writings of Pieter de la Court, he traces the impact on the making of the “modern” free trade dogma in the Enlightenment (particularly in the writings Raynal, Diderot and Adam Smith).

The book tells the compelling story of an Atlantic and European legacy of the WIC colony in Brazil. It is clearly positioned within a historiographical lacuna of neglected cultural connections and that of Dutch Brazil in particular. However, a lacuna in itself does not legitimize a book and the book fails to provide a clear answer to this question: So what? So what that the relative short WIC interlude in Brazil had cultural consequences, memories and mythologies? The imagination and afterlife of a colony is interesting in itself but what does it mean for our understanding of a “Dutch” Atlantic that this colony was—as Joan-Pau Rubiés puts it in the epilogue—“appealing to a variety of national and cosmopolitan identities” (317)? How can someone who is not necessarily interested in Dutch Brazil, but perhaps is interested in the implications of the Dutch in the Atlantic, benefit from this book? How does the book transcend the particular focus on one colony?

By its silence on such questions, the book suggests that it has little to add while it does, in fact, contribute. Through its focus on the national appropriation of the history of the colony by the Dutch and the Brazilians (after all the chapters that have shown the Atlantic implications) the book is a bit of two minds. The introduction and the conclusion could have been stronger on the point that there was something resembling a Dutch Atlantic and we see this through the afterlife of a colony. This would bring this particular colony into the narrative of a Dutch Atlantic and would expand our understanding of its economic implications. The book could

have been driving the point home that one does not necessarily need territorial possessions to speak of a Dutch Atlantic but that the imagination of an Atlantic was strong, both by contemporaries and afterwards.

The fact that *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* does not completely address the issue of the Dutch Atlantic is especially pity because *Dutch Atlantic Connections* neglects the period before 1680. The main questions of the book edited by Roitman and Oostindie are how the Atlantic mattered to the Dutch and why the Dutch engagement in the Atlantic was important for all the other actors. The answer is that the interactions between the Dutch and the others were very important but that, “As much as we may acknowledge that there was room for self-organization and cross- and inter-imperial connections, we cannot dismiss the centrality of the metropolitan state and its institutions” (2).

The interactions between the Dutch and non-Dutch in the Atlantic were, according to the different chapters in this book, far-reaching. Wim Klooster (25-51) and Silvia Marzagalli (103-118) highlight connections with the French. Marzagalli goes as far to state that, “French colonial trade originated, flourished and persisted only through the collaboration of non-French merchants and non-French markets” (117). Being a case in point, the Dutch certainly were not the only example. The chapters by Karwan Fatah-Black (52-71), Christian Koot (72-99), Kenneth Morgan (119-138) and Karel Davids (224-248) focus on Anglo-Dutch interactions. Fatah-Black reiterates Marzagalli’s point when he argues that non-Dutch trade, especially that coming from northern America, was of paramount importance for the colonisation of Suriname. Davids brings booming Anglo-Dutch Atlantic intellectual exchanges to the fore. However, he emphasises multiple times that colonial possessions were not a *sine qua non* for actors to play a part in the exchange of knowledge. For a connection between Dutch and respectively Spanish and Scandinavian possessions one should read the chapters by Ana Crespo Solana (139-158) or Han Jordaan and Victor Wilson (275-308).

Slightly outside the scope of cross-imperial connections are the chapters by Henk den Heijer (159-182) and Gert Oostindie (309-335). Den Heijer focuses on a more classic study—primarily on the WIC as a company and the role of that company within the Dutch Republic. From the starting point in the literature that states there was a West Indian interest in England, he wonders if there was a West Indian interest in the Low Countries too. He concludes that there was, despite the decentralized nature of the country. Oostindie does link the Dutch Atlantic to other empires but highlights to what extent the Dutch possessions were a plaything in the middle of bigger more powerful countries. This provides a different perspective than the international merchants creating their own global empire without a state, nuancing the central argument of the book. The remaining chapters by Aviva Ben-Ur and Jessica Roitman (185-223) and that by Benjamin Schmidt (249-272) centralise identity and identification. Schmidt’s contribution would not have been misplaced in Van Groesen’s book as Schmidt discusses the painter Frans Post, who portrayed Dutch Brazil and is often associated with a nascent imagination of the Dutch Atlantic. However, Schmidt comes to a different conclusion as he argues that Post represented the “exotic”, appealing to and representing a European colonial image. If anything he portrayed a European Atlantic rather than a Dutch Atlantic.

The book consistently argues for an approach of the Dutch Atlantic as an Atlantic of cooperation and collaboration. The nationalistic identification with a colony as a part of a European metropolis should thus be reconsidered. Most of the chapters, like in the double conclusion (one by Pieter Emmer and one by Alison Games), keep emphasising that any colonial possession was merely a façade. No matter how many regulations or limitations were created by the colonial administrations, empires were built on cooperating individuals.

However, all these fertile collaborative efforts needed the framework created by early modern European states. In arguing this, the book brings the Dutch Atlantic in-line with the current Atlantic historiography of other European states. It is thus very good that this book is made available for everyone through open-access since it contains a new body of articles in English. Both measures increase the book's readership.⁵

A main point of critique is that the focus of the book is very heavy on the Caribbean and the Wild Coast. Considering the WIC possessions after 1680, this focus is understandable but were the Dutch not cooperating with other empires in different locations, for example Brazil, after the façade changed back to Portuguese? If not, why is this not the case? Moreover, additional attention could have been given to the African coast. The excuse that the Dutch Atlantic is geographically limited to settlements and that the African coast was not colonised is insufficient. A minor additional point of critique is the final editing. Slightly more time could have been devoted to this in a book that costs more than one hundred dollars. For example, the spelling for the highest political authority in the Republic changes back and forth to States General and States-General. Granted, this is not a big error, but it is an unnecessary distraction from the content.

The Worlds of the Seventeenth-century Hudson Valley offers, just like the *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, some nice case studies on Anglo-Dutch colonial interactions. Moreover, it provides chapters on colonial interactions with the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. As Erik Odegard, rightfully, noted in a recent *Itinerario* book review, it is a pity that the editors did not provide a nice introduction or epilogue to tie the individual chapters together. However, throughout the book, we can find hints on how they do link together and contribute to our understanding of the Dutch Atlantic. Moreover, it is a choice that makes sense if we take its targeted readership into account: "Teachers and others interested in this period of the region's past" (ix).

The book's aim is less Atlantic oriented than the other two books because it focuses on the relationship between a colony and its motherland. This focus leads to different answers to similar questions from the other two books. For example, the chapter by Willem Frijhoff (197-224) contradicts Haefeli's chapter in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*. Whereas Haefeli traces the policy of tolerance throughout the Atlantic to the WIC policy in the colony of Brazil, Frijhoff states that these political and socio-cultural dimensions went "perfectly parallel to the evolution in the European Netherlands" (220). Jaap Jacobs (147-168) argues for a trans-Atlantic (i.e., comparative) approach as well by advocating for a triangular comparison between two colonies and a motherland. It becomes clear from the contribution by Joyce Goodfriend (237-252) that these two contributions are exceptions in book that has a cis-Atlantic approach focused on a specific place. She argues that we should not make a dissociation between the people coming from Africa and those coming Europe when studying them as immigrants. Such a trans-regional view significantly contributes to a better understanding of a specific place in the Atlantic: New York.

The consensus of the books under review is that there was a Dutch Atlantic and that this Atlantic superseded the national boundaries of settled colonies. As Alison Games points out in her conclusion (357-373) to the *Dutch Atlantic Connections*, this consensus makes the "Dutch moment in Atlantic historiography" tie in with a broader international trend in the history of the Atlantic basin, a trend that, after the publication of Armitage and Braddick's *The British Atlantic World* in 2002, is shifting away from national and imperial Atlantics and is increasingly focussing on entanglement. Atlantic history generally privileges connections shaped by commodities and people. However, individual chapters in all three books make convincing

⁵ <http://www.brill.com/products/book/dutch-atlantic-connections-1680-1800>

cases for ties that were cultural, ideological, intellectual and traditional. The types of interactions shaped by economic networks created for commodities and people had consequences that reached beyond these categories. It becomes clear from all the book chapters that these networks were never nationally bound and were usually based on reciprocity. The three books reviewed and the different intellectual routes that they take reveal two different solutions for studying the Dutch Atlantic: either the influence *of* the Atlantic, or the influence *on* the Atlantic. When studying how the Atlantic shaped locations, actions and interactions—whether in Europe, Africa, the Americas, or even Asia—there is an obvious lacuna for news and information. Studying the circulation of information and news, especially when it crossed imperial and national borders, might shine additional light on the “cloud” of networks that was lying over the Atlantic. The circulation of updates on current events was not confined to or monopolized by any imperial or national power. This, ultimately, questions whether it makes sense at all to talk in national terms about an Atlantic and whether national façades had influence on the outcome of events and the reality of empire.

To provide a better understanding of how all the different networks shaped and changed the Atlantic and its institutions, it seems highly beneficial to study political connections. It seems unlikely that all the inter-imperial and transnational networks stood idle by as the different European States negotiated the form of the Atlantic. An example of the initiative and importance of networks can be seen in Fatah-Black’s chapter that shows how colonists preferred commercial ties across imperial borders despite the wishes in the metropolis for a colony that functioned in a transatlantic economic system. The power of these networks shaping the Atlantic can be studied in social, economic or cultural ways. For example, given the different contributions that keep highlighting the inter-imperial connections and transnational cooperation, it seems very unlikely that governmental policies were predominantly influenced by a strictly national rationale. In other words, the state, institutions and its effect on the outcome of the Atlantic can be explained beyond geopolitical circumstances through a study of the interaction between these networks and the European powers. Especially in the case of the decentralised Dutch Republic and its myriad interests, there were many opportunities to influence and/or pressure the outcome of the Atlantic and its institutions.

In his chapter in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, Evan Haefeli concludes, after Dutch Brazil, that, “The Atlantic world would never be the same” (145). If this is the case, the historiography of the Dutch Atlantic world will never be the same after 2014 and the research contained in the three books under review.

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ASIA

Shu Jyuan Deiwiks, Bernhard Führer and Therese Geulen, eds., *Europe Meets China—China Meets Europe: The Beginnings of European-Chinese Scientific Exchange in the 17th Century*. Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2014. 224 pp. ISBN: 9783805006217. \$60.00.

The field of Jesuit studies has long been a fertile arena for historical research and *Europe Meets China—China Meets Europe* is certainly a worthwhile addition to it, especially for those who