

Martine Julia van Ittersum. *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies 1595–1615*.

Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 139. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006. x + 538 pp. index. illus. map. bibl. \$199. ISBN: 90-04-14979-1.

Profit and Principle is an interesting accomplishment in (at least) two ways. It first is an excellent study of the juridical, political, and diplomatic activities of a single Dutch jurist: Hugo Grotius. At the same time, it presents the reader with a comprehensive and detailed study of the many (legal) internal and external implications of the sudden rise of the young Dutch Republic as one of Europe's economic, military, and diplomatic powers. Van Ittersum accomplished both effects by analyzing Grotius's printed works and unpublished papers and manuscripts, as well as an admirable variety of other Iberian, English, French, and Dutch sources. Consequently, she successfully demonstrates how the printing of Grotius's tract on free trade — *Mare Librum*, taken from his extensive unpublished tract *De Jure Praedae (On the Law of Prize and Booty)* — was entirely part of his engagement as the most successful legal advisor of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) in the first two decades of the seventeenth century.

Van Ittersum shows how Grotius's involvement in the national and international maneuvers of the VOC was built on current legal issues and how he based his arguments on natural rights theories as well as events reported in correspondences, diaries, reports, and legal verdicts. Van Ittersum analysis of Grotius's activities for the VOC makes apparent how important the role of learned jurists was in streamlining occasional arguments from day-to-day trade, warfare, and legal practice and fitting them into international legal thought. Arguments arisen in practice thus acquired solid intellectual underpinning and became suitable for the justification of VOC policies for the Dutch public, in legal proceedings, in diplomatic missions, and in economic and political negotiations. These legal exercises also helped the VOC (and Dutch political institutions) to conceive consistent and rational strategies on national and international levels.

Grotius became involved in justifying the VOC's role in warfare against Iberian interests when the new company was pioneering the East Indies. This first

required the insistence on the right of free trade of both the Dutch and the Asian rulers, and the development of the VOC's right to defend itself against Iberian aggression in the early stages of Dutch interloping in the East Indies. Soon enough, the legal strategies of the VOC, as formulated by Grotius, had to account for the interloping of new competitors from France and England. Whereas Dutch diplomatic pressure aborted the French initiatives, the initiatives of the English East Indies Company required a second line of thought, already existent in *De Jure Praedae*. In negotiations with the English in the 1610s, Grotius elaborated on contract law, arguing that the English natural right of free trade did not preclude the (natural) right of the Dutch to enforce the observance of contracts. He thus helped formulate the VOC's strategy in the East Indies that was increasingly becoming one of protecting (even by force) the interests of its trading empire against breach of contract: meaning Asian trade partners trading with new competitors from England.

In short, *Profit and Principle* convincingly argues how *De Jure Praedae* and *Mare Librum* were part of the day-to-day legal, political, and diplomatic practices of a talented young jurist, politician, and diplomat. Legal principles served profit and national interest. Instead of presenting him as one of the great champions of contemporary international law, Van Ittersum pictures Grotius convincingly as one of the masterminds behind the making of the Dutch Republic as a major economic, military, political, and diplomatic power and of its aggressive policies. In the introduction, Van Ittersum criticizes the Cambridge School for not having attempted to contextualize the works of political theorists more radically. In this book, convincingly and comprehensively, now and then somewhat redundantly, she demonstrates what such a contextualization brings us. This book would have had even more poignancy if Van Ittersum had returned to her initial criticism, further elaborating on it from the arguments presented in this well-researched study.

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