



Michiel van Groesen (ed.), *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, x + 363 pp., ISBN 978 11 07 06117 0).

The Dutch West India Company (wic) occupied Brazil's capital, Salvador de Bahia, from 1624 to 1625, and it occupied northeastern Brazil from 1630 to 1654. For about three decades the colony took up most of the wic's time and resources. Brazil was supposed to be the cornerstone of a growing Dutch Atlantic empire, a lucrative sugar colony that would enrich company investors and enrich the Dutch Republic at the same time. English-language scholarship on the period is scarce in part because Dutch Brazil didn't last: the Dutch overextended themselves and the Portuguese retook the land that they had lost. They then tried to erase all signs of occupation.

*The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* gives us many reasons to care about the short-lived experiment anyway. As the title suggests, this book isn't about how the Dutch took an interest in Brazil in the first place; it isn't really about the nature and details of Dutch rule, nor their most famous governor, Johan Maurits. While he still enjoys a prominent place in this collection, the book is more concerned with the legacy of the colony, its long-term national and international influences, which require only an occasional foray into the years before the wic lost its most prized possession. In the words of editor Michiel van Groesen, *Legacy* represents 'a radical shift in interpretation by broadening the scope, both geographically and chronologically, and arguing that developments in Dutch Brazil had an impact well beyond traditional colonial and national narratives' (3-4). Some of the book's twelve essays (fourteen, if we count a long introduction and longer conclusion) are more valuable than others, but overall, it is an unquestionable success. It provides countless fresh insights on the Dutch Brazilian moment and many thought-provoking answers to Van Groesen's two key questions: Why has the colony persisted in the imagination (especially the Brazilian imagination, it seems)? And how do we explain the different 'mythologies' surrounding it today?

*Legacy* is divided into three sections. The first, on Dutch Brazil's geopolitical legacy, covers topics ranging from the Caribbean to West Africa. Chapters One and Two seem to contradict each other somewhat in arguing, first, that Dutch militarism in Brazil did not provide the necessary distraction or space for other Europeans to found their first American colonies – though the Dutch did apparently spread themselves so thin that they diminished their own colonial potential in the Caribbean in the future – and second, that the Dutch disruptions triggered an economic crisis in Brazil, ending

its golden age and prompting everyone to seek a ‘new Brazil’, meaning slave-based sugar colonies like the ones that soon emerged in Suriname and Jamaica. Perhaps the most valuable contribution to this section is Roquinaldo Ferreira’s essay on the Dutch-Portuguese rivalry in West Africa and the fallout from the Dutch conquest of Elmina, launched from Brazil in 1637. Ferreira shows how the Portuguese declined there afterward and how they had to pay the Dutch a 10% tax to trade in the region, even if they were trading with others. Formalized in a 1661 treaty, these arrangements discouraged direct trade between Lisbon and West Africa, encouraged gold smuggling from Brazil, and thus strengthened Brazilian-African connections. Portuguese attention shifted ultimately to the South Atlantic.

The second section explores Dutch Brazil’s cultural legacy, though ‘intellectual legacy’ might have been a more appropriate title. Most revealing, Neil Safier and Arthur Weststeijn write about the decades- and even centuries-long reverberations in European circles from Dutch advances in natural history and free trade ideology, respectively. Both had roots in Brazil. *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (1648) was a ground-breaking work because the authors (Georg Marcgraf and Willem Piso) had lived in Brazil, and with some exceptions, they based their descriptions and drawings of Brazilian flora and fauna on their own observations. Prominent humanists and naturalists cited the book as a model study until at least the late eighteenth century. The WIC’s free trade faction never got what it wanted in Brazil – more accurately, it got too little, too late – but ironically, ideas developed in that period were soon reborn in the 1660s in the Dutch Republic, and Pieter De la Court’s writings on the topic were, like *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae*, read and cited for many years to come, most notably by Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, Denis Diderot, and Adam Smith. Safier’s and Weststeijn’s essays highlight Dutch intellectual contributions to western developments that the Dutch don’t always get credit for, maybe because, in the case of free trade, De la Court was working from negative examples like Brazil.

The third and shortest section of *Legacy* grapples with issues of nationalism and the questions raised at the start about memory and mythology. On the Dutch side, naval officers from the Brazilian period enjoyed a long life in print, despite the colony’s eventual failure, because Dutch writers celebrated them in collective biographies, using stories about their successes as a tool for building and maintaining provincial pride and a national consciousness. Similarly, but even more influential, Brazilians have used and continue to value the work of Dutch artists Frans Post, who mostly did landscapes, and Albert Eckhout, who painted life-sized portraits of Africans and Native Americans (among others). One of the most fascinating aspects of this book, explored especially in the essay by Julie Berger Hochstrasser, but relevant to other essays, as well, is the tension between the Brazilian desire to celebrate their victory over the Dutch and erase their enemy’s footprint, on

the one hand, and on the other, their dependence on Dutch imagery to foster a notion of themselves as a diverse people, an amalgamation of different cultures and races. From the perspective of Brazilian nationalism, the war against the Dutch and the visual residue of the Dutch period have both been useful. That Dutch Brazil has any legacy at all is due in large part to Post and Eckhout.

Readers may find that *Legacy* sometimes puts a little too much weight on Dutch Brazil. Isn't it likely, for example, that competitive European rivals would have searched for a 'new Brazil', replicating its sugar-slave model in the Caribbean, without the Dutch invasions and the ensuing sugar crisis? Does Maurits's collection of foreign curiosities really show the colony's 'more inclusive history' (107), as Mariana Françaço claims in Chapter Five? To be fair, in the rest of the chapter she favors more convincing arguments about global connections and the place of gift-exchange in early modern diplomacy. On a related note, in his essay on Dutch tolerance, Evan Haefeli probably could have made a stronger case by focusing on the Jewish experience in Brazil (and afterward). Despite his best efforts, the discussion about African slaves and the lack of Christianization among slaves feels like a distracting *non sequitur*.

Because of its murky association with Governor Maurits's deliberate, after-the-fact reputation-building, the myth of Dutch tolerance is one topic that *Legacy* could have confronted more directly. But that might be an unreasonable personal preference. The book certainly doesn't ignore the problem of conflicting sources and competing, self-serving viewpoints: Van Groesen addresses it in the introduction, and all the authors are sensitive to the complexities of the historical record. Again in the conclusion, which is really a long, insightful book review, Joan-Pau Rubiés warns against accepting any myth about Dutch Brazil too quickly because so many individuals, institutions, provinces, and states had a stake in how it was remembered. This collection explores and unravels those interests and relationships about as well as anyone possibly could.

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