



Jaap R. Bruijn, Ronald Prud'homme van Reine, Rolof van Hövell tot Westerflier (eds.), ***De Ruyter: Dutch Admiral*** (Protagonists of History in International Perspective; Rotterdam: Karwansaray Publishers, 2011, 280 pp, ISBN 978 94 90258 03 0).

In the Netherlands, Admiral Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter (1607-1676) is considered one of the greatest figures in its national history, the naval hero who successfully defended the country in its hour of greatest need. The official commemoration of his quadricentennial birthday in 2007 was the occasion for the publication of several new books, most of which were intended for a broad readership of non-specialists and were not based on original research. In addition, the Royal Netherlands Navy instituted a high-profile biennial 'Admiral's Lecture', the first of which was given by Paul Kennedy. It was at the 2011 lecture, given by Nicholas Rodger, that the first copy of the sumptuously executed and beautifully illustrated book *De Ruyter: Dutch Admiral* was presented to Vice Admiral Matthieu Borsboom, the present commander of the Dutch naval forces.

The first book in the 'Protagonists of History in International Perspective' series of the young publishing house Karwansaray, *De Ruyter: Dutch Admiral*, aims to break away from the conventional 'national' biographic perspective by presenting the admiral as a figure in the context of European history. Dutch specialists cover his life and career as well as his image in contemporary biography and painting, while non-Dutch authors seek to 'position De Ruyter as a man of international significance in relation to their own countries' (8). The result is a collection of essays that vary greatly in approach and style as well as quality.

Jaap Bruijn provides a useful overview of the Dutch maritime sector in the seventeenth century. Discussing the various economic branches, the labour market, daily life in seaports, shipbuilding, insurances, banking, the stock exchange, the admiralties and the navy, he gives the (non-Dutch) reader a good insight into De Ruyter's world. Bruijn's second essay, based principally on his earlier work, relates the development of the 'new navy' during and after the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654) and the professionalization of the officer corps. Ronald Prud'homme van Reine's first contribution combines a brief life of De Ruyter with a discussion of Gerard Brandt's seventeenth-century biography. The story of De Ruyter's progression to his heroic role is told in a rather deterministic and uncritical manner. Any curiosity the reader might have regarding, for example, why in 1652 De Ruyter gave up his plans to retire from life at sea, to spend the next twenty-four

years in the service of the Dutch navy, remains unsatisfied. Prud'homme van Reine states only that 'just at that time, duty called' (38). His second essay deals with the paintings made of De Ruyter and his family members. While it is erudite, it is also unclear how this piece relates to the central theme of this book. Henk den Heijer's account of the 1664-1665 expedition to Africa, the West Indies and Newfoundland is solid, but contains no new information.

Karim Bejit discusses De Ruyter's contacts with Salé in the wider context of the charged interaction between Europeans and North Africans. Using mostly published European sources and overlooking vital secondary literature such as Leïla Maziane's *Salé et ses corsairs* (2007), his account contains few new insights. The late Jan Glete's account of the Dutch Republic as a great power, on the other hand, is of a very high quality. Comparing the nature, size and consistency of the Republic's military capacity with that of its rivals, Glete concludes that its decentralized institutions were, in fact, very effective when it came to mobilizing resources. John Hattendorf's contribution about naval strategies and tactics is equally stimulating. He first explains, in general terms, the transformation that naval warfare underwent during the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and then moves on to discuss the tactical developments that sprang forth from the Anglo-Dutch naval rivalry during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. He concludes that while De Ruyter was not a great innovator, he was very competent at implementing English tactical advances in the Dutch fleet.

David Davies' essay on De Ruyter's image in England is the most innovative chapter in this book. Drawing primarily from the first English biography of De Ruyter, published anonymously one year after his death, Davies argues that De Ruyter's press, depicting him as an honourable, courageous, civilized and highly dangerous opponent, was at least partly intended as a negative mirror image to English officers, most of whom were considered haughty, quarrelsome, factional and corrupt. He also touches upon the remarkable contrast between this laudation of De Ruyter, as the Republic's champion, and the general aversion for the Dutch nation and state. Unfortunately, however, Davies does not elaborate on either point. The innovative quality of Davies's piece stands in stark contrast to Niels Probst's discussion of the Danish image of De Ruyter. In Probst's essay De Ruyter is merely a stereotypically heroic bystander in a context-heavy chronology that focuses on the Danish admiral Niels Juel. Michel Vergé-Franceschi, too, concentrates on a foreign admiral, Abraham Duquesne in this case, but does not lose track of De Ruyter. Relying mainly on French primary sources, he provides something new to readers already familiar with De Ruyter's own correspondence and journals.

*De Ruyter: Dutch Admiral* offers the non-specialist reader a good if somewhat fragmented overview of the great admiral's world, life and career. People already familiar with Bruijn's and Prud'homme van Reine's older work, however, will find much less to their liking. Only Davies's and Vergé-Franceschi's chapters contribute to a deeper understanding of De Ruyter's image abroad, while Hattendorf's excellent chapter positions him as a tactician. Taking into account its ambitious objective and its academic

pretention, it is regrettable to conclude that the new 'Protagonists of History in International Perspective' series has made a less than convincing start.

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