

Jonathan Scott, *How the Old World Ended: The Anglo-Dutch-American Revolution, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, xvi+392 pp., ISBN 9780300243598).

Most reviews in BMGN are written in Dutch. However, since Professor of History at University of Auckland Jonathan Scott himself does not read Dutch (xii), it seemed unfair to review this book in Dutch even though it engages with Dutch history and historiography. The central argument of Scott's book *How the Old World Ended: The Anglo-Dutch-American Revolution, 1500-1800* is that between 1649-1702 an 'Anglo-Dutch revolution' took place in which Britain built on Dutch transformations of agricultural, political, and commercial life. It was these transformations that allowed Britain to lead the first Industrial Revolution.

Should the Industrial Revolution not have happened in the Dutch Republic then, considering the Dutch were leading the changes that were so crucial? Certainly, Scott argues, had it not been for Britain's availability of cheaper energy (coal), centralised military-fiscal and imperial power on a large scale, and most importantly a demand for manufactured products. The availability of coal in Britain and its relationship to the Industrial Revolution has been well-established, and it is certainly true that, compared to the Dutch Republic, Britain had a centralised fiscal-military state. Britain had a captive market for British exports in the colonies and, as Scott specifically points out, this included half a million enslaved Africans. In other words, the consumer culture of the enslaved population in British colonies was a key factor in Britain's Industrial Revolution.

At other times Scott ignores the existence of slavery, production of cash crops, and the Indigenous populations in the Americas altogether. For example, on the very first page he writes that British North America was 'a unique type of European colony, one established for the settlement of people and culture, rather than for the extraction or cultivation of things'. You would think it cannot possibly get worse, but then on page 2 he continues that European colonists in the Americas were 'on their seventeenth-century errand into the wilderness'. That is indeed one way of describing the Great Dying of Indigenous civilisations.

*How the Old World Ended* is built up, chronologically, of three parts that discuss early modernity before 1649, revolutions between 1649 and 1703, and state-formation until 1783. The book is not intended as a research monograph, but it is largely based on secondary literature available in English. As a consequence, the book is at times cumbersome to read because of the sheer number of subsequent quotes and can feel like a copy-paste of other

people's work without much added value. Pages 50 and 51 are particularly striking; more than 81 per cent of the text on these pages comes in the form of citations. Some quotes in the book are left to speak for themselves, while others are accompanied by the names of those who wrote them – the latter category are coincidentally all contributions by male historians (Donna Merwick on page 158 is an exception that proves the rule).

On top of these shortcomings, the book is unconvincing. A central point of the author is that English-speaking America was a captive market for British exports which 'boomed partly because it was populous, and that [the] population was expanding faster than any other in the world' (274). This emphasis on demand-driven industrialisation falls short in two main ways. The first is its attention for the Americas as a captive market for exports. Here, Scott completely ignores the abundance of literature that stresses how merchants in the colonies had ample opportunity to avoid metropolitan trade restrictions. Moreover, circumventing these restrictions was in fact essential for the survival of colonies.<sup>1</sup> Scott therefore seems more interested in repeating what contemporaries claimed states did, rather than studying what states actually did or were able to do. For example, he quotes Jack Greene, who quotes Adam Smith, saying that in 'everything except their foreign trade the liberty of the English colonists is complete' (272). Furthermore, imports of Indian cotton had been indeed restricted in Britain 'since the 1720s' (268), but what the American historian Jonathan Eacott has termed the 'Imperial Compromise' meant that these bans on Asian cloths did not extend to the Americas.<sup>2</sup> As a result, colonists in the Americas had easier access to Asian textiles than Europeans. In other words, Scott either misunderstands the legislation introduced by Parliament, overlooks the work by Eacott, or both.

The second shortcoming of Scott's main argument is that he fails to explain how raw cotton from America could pay for endless consumption of British industrially processed cotton, on top of purchasing enslaved Africans. Both Italian scholar Giorgio Riello, who the author does not cite, and German historian Sven Beckert, who the author accidentally calls Steve, provide simpler and much more convincing arguments for industrial innovation in production. They explain this through cheaper and more efficient production to overcome higher costs of labour.<sup>3</sup> This underlines how Scott

1 See multiple examples in the contributions in Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman (eds.), *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1600-1800* (Brill 2014). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004271319>.

2 Jonathan Eacott, 'Making an Imperial Compromise: The Calico Acts, the Atlantic Colonies, and the Structure of the British Empire', *William and Mary Quarterly*

69:4 (2012). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0731>.

3 Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric that Made the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press 2013) 214. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511706097>; Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (Vintage Books 2014) 65-66.

attempts to make a field-changing argument without properly engaging or understanding the existing historiography.

Finally, I have some reflections on the relationship between Dutch trail blazing and English leap frogging that allowed British to lead the Industrial Revolution. Although the book is well supplied with quotes of contemporary English admirers of the Dutch, such as John Milton, William Penn, and Thomas Hobbes, Scott is unable to establish a link between these writings and a transformation of trade policy, of the military-fiscal state, and what economic historians call the Financial Revolution. Moreover, the orthodox narrative points out the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the establishment of the Bank of England (1694), which heralded a system of parliamentary and judicial constraints that secured property rights, as key factors in the lead-up to the Industrial Revolution.<sup>4</sup> In one single paragraph Scott both presents the revisionist view that 1688 'did not introduce the institutional foundations for economic growth', while simultaneously defending the orthodox view that from 1688 onwards property rights allowed resources to be 'allocated to their most productive uses' (123). These cannot both be true. Scott is quick to follow his contradictory statement with a seventeenth-century example block quote to demonstrate how the English diplomat William Temple looked at the Dutch and other commonwealths as a model of securing property rights. However, how writings like these would have resulted in legislative changes that secured property rights remains a mystery.

In sum, it is a disappointing and unconvincing book that is at times frustrating and tedious to read. In terms of Dutch history, it tells us nothing new as it draws exclusively on secondary literature that is available in English. In terms of history beyond the Dutch Republic, the author's conclusions far exceed the book's evidence and argumentation.

Joris van den Tol, Cambridge University

4 Douglas North and Barry Weingast, 'Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in

Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of Economic History* 49:4 (1989) 803-832.