

David Freeman, *A Silver River in a Silver World: Dutch Trade in the Rio de la Plata, 1648-1678*. Cambridge Latin America Studies 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 222 pp., ISBN 9781108417495).

Our comprehension of the Dutch role in the early modern Atlantic World has substantially deepened in the past three decades. Whereas most of the studies focus on the West India Company (wic), the Dutch Atlantic slave trade, or specific Dutch colonies, more recently historians have focused on the activities of private Dutch merchants in non-Dutch colonies across the Atlantic World.¹ The American historian David Freeman contributes to this new scholarship of interimperial entanglements by presenting a detailed case study of Dutch trade with Buenos Aires during a period in which the wic lost its position as an imperial power in the Atlantic. What makes Freeman's book particularly valuable is that it examines Dutch and Spanish perspectives. Befitting a monograph on interimperial trade, *A Silver River in a Silver World: Dutch Trade in the Rio de la Plata, 1648-1678* is based on research in Amsterdam's *stadsarchief*, the Spanish colonial archives in Seville, the Argentinian national archives, and the Archives nationales d'outre-mer in Aix-en-Provence.

This slim book consists of an introduction and eight chapters. The first three chapters supply the background to Dutch trade in the Rio de la Plata estuary during the 1650s and 1660s. The first recorded Dutch visit to Buenos Aires took place in 1599. The main attraction of the South American port was silver which came from the mines in Potosí in contemporary Bolivia. While most Potosí silver was shipped from Lima to Spain and to China by way of the Philippines, a substantial amount of unregistered silver made its way to Buenos Aires through trade routes that crossed the Andes. Because of the ongoing Dutch-Spanish War, Dutch visits to Buenos Aires initially remained limited. Despite the Treaty of Munster of 1648, Spain continued to prohibit direct Dutch trade with Spanish America. Amsterdam merchants circumvented this prohibition by using Flemish and Spanish ship-owners and traders as front men on their vessels. Other Amsterdam merchants fitted out voyages to Rio de la Plata directly. The captains of many of these vessels evaded trade restrictions in Buenos Aires by claiming that their ships were in need of repair. According to Spanish legal provisions, foreign ships could unload their cargo for the duration of the repair. Once the cargo was onshore, it was relatively easy to sell the goods with permission of local officials.

The remaining five chapters detail the actual experiences of Dutch merchants in Buenos Aires during the governorships of Pedro de Baygorri

y Ruiz in the 1650s and Alonso de Mercado y Villacorta in the early 1660s. Baygorri's tenure as governor overlapped with the collapse of Dutch Brazil. As Dutch privateering against Portuguese shipping in the South Atlantic intensified, a growing number of Dutch ships frequented Buenos Aires to obtain silver and hides. In return, they brought a variety of European goods and enslaved Africans from Angola. Some merchants such as Albert Jansen even established semi-permanent residences and warehouses in the port city. However, the situation changed in 1660 when the Council of the Indies in Spain, alarmed by the growing number of Dutch ships in Buenos Aires, appointed Villacorta to enforce the prohibition for foreign vessels to enter the strategic Rio de la Plata.

Freeman devotes considerable attention to an incident that took place during the transition from Baygorri to Villacorta. In 1660, two Dutch ships arrived in Buenos Aires, both using Spanish names and Spanish flags to disguise their Dutch identity. One of the vessels carried no less than 850 enslaved Africans from Angola. First Baygorri and later Villacorta had their suspicions and they refused the Dutch to unload their valuable cargo. Complex negotiations unfolded in which go-betweens such as the aforementioned Jansen, who were familiar with local conditions, played a prominent role. Eventually Villacorta arrested the Dutch captains as well as Jansen. Villacorta sent all of them to Spain to stand trial. In Madrid, the Council of the Indies eventually absolved Jansen of any wrongdoings although it is not clear what happened to the two captains. However, from the trial the Council of the Indies had learned so much about the extent of Dutch trade in Buenos Aires that they urged Villacorta to enforce the prohibition on foreign trade more forcefully. From then on, Buenos Aires officials increasingly turned away Dutch ships. Moreover, after the end of the Portuguese-Spanish War (1640-1668), Portuguese traders from southern Brazil resumed their visits to Buenos Aires. By the late 1670s, Dutch visits to Rio de la Plata had declined to only one or two ships per year.

The Dutch historian Wim Klooster also covered the topic of Dutch trade in Buenos Aires in his monographs *Illicit Riches: Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648-1795* (1998) and *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World* (2016). However, Freeman gives a much more in-depth discussion of the subject. Additionally, Freeman uses extensive Spanish archival records to analyze the actions of local officials. Overall, this book is an interesting case study of how interimperial trade worked on the ground. It clearly shows that local conditions were critical in facilitating trade. Without cooperation from officials and without establishing close ties with the local merchant community, Dutch visitors could not sell their cargoes.

1 See Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie, *Realm between Empires: The Second Dutch Atlantic, 1680-1815* (Ithaca 2018), especially Chapter 1; and

Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman (eds.), *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden 2014).

Freeman further highlights the role of Buenos Aires and Amsterdam notaries in legitimizing interimperial trade.

While Freeman thoroughly examines Spanish-Dutch interactions in Buenos Aires, there is comparatively little discussion of Dutch-Portuguese relations in Luanda, where the Dutch purchased their African slaves. This is arguably not the subject of Freeman's book but an analysis of how the Dutch traded with the Portuguese in Luanda, which the WIC had occupied from 1641 to 1648, would have made for a more comprehensive and trans-Atlantic study of interimperial trade. Also insightful would have been an examination of the identity of the more than 850 enslaved Africans aboard the Dutch ship in 1660. It is possible that some of those enslaved Africans had been allies of the WIC in Angola. Nevertheless, Freeman has produced a well-researched microhistoric study of interimperial trade that is a model for future studies of private Dutch trade in other Atlantic locales.

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