

## RECENSIES

brenge een zo volledig mogelijk beeld, dat echter nog wel in wetenschappelijke vakken uiteenvalt.

Deze drie artikelen samen bieden de lezer heel wat interessante informatie over de adel. Het zijn goede bouwstenen voor een synthese van het leven van deze klasse.

Walter Baeten

Frank C. Spooner, *Risks at Sea. Amsterdam Insurance and Maritime Europe, 1766-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, xi + 306 blz., £27,50, ISBN 0 521 25275 x).

In a growing body of scholarship that is always stimulating, always based on a combination of fresh archival and thoroughly combed printed sources, Frank Spooner has set forth a thesis of considerable importance. The thesis is that European and world markets moved toward integration in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the latest addition to this work, Spooner takes up the story by examining marine insurance in Amsterdam at a critical moment in the history of the old economic regime and of the Republic. After a long era of prosperity gradually narrowing into the competitiveness which is, for the merchant, the leading signal of market integration, Amsterdam insurance shifted into a period of turmoil. It emerged from that in the nineteenth century into an industrial rather than an agrarian world, and a world less Eurocentric, to play a smaller than customary role in marine insurance, as it also played a smaller role in European trade.

This is a story well told by someone who can probe the probabilistic issues always raised by insurance, as Spooner does. Historians of insurance will be excited about this book, for it provides a model of how the abstract and theoretical treatment of risk can be integrated into business and economic history. The world of insurance, Spooner tells us, is divided into two types of risk, structural and event. Structural risks are composed of the characteristic threats to maritime intercourse posed within the 'economic ecology'. They include distance, season, naval control of piracy, ship technology, port quality, and other factors. The Amsterdam market knew this ecology, and long before 1766 had developed institutions and habits in keeping with its hazards. Of these the crucial habit was the organization of trade around the 'risk leader' - the northern trade. The Baltic trade best occupied the summer months, so that other routes were arranged around this priority. Spooner provides both a careful explanation of the insurance effects of this reality, and a number of maps and charts revealing its month-by-month form in premiums.

What unsettled the insurance market was the event risk: 'unforeseen disturbances, ruptures, and catastrophes outside the normal sequence of events' (11). In this period these included especially the liquidity crises of 1763 and 1772-1773 and the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War of 1780-1784. From Spooner's treatment of these three event uncertainties it emerges that the Amsterdam market was caught unaware by the crisis of 1763, and lacked institutional ways of diminishing the effects of calls for higher margin coverage. But the commercial and financial markets retained the capacity to adapt and innovate, so that when liquidity pressures reappeared, in 1772-1773, the scale of the crisis was much smaller and its effects short-lived. These famous events have therefore very little to do with the transition in the marine insurance market, which figured as a small but not negligible part of the financial markets, a part competing with other short-term credit interests.

What, in Spooner's opinion, disrupted the development of the insurance market was the

reappearance of waran activity the Dutch had avoided since 1714 (except for a minor lapse in the late 1740s). Conflicts with Britain over the identification and supply of munitions to France and the United States, which brought the Republic out of its neutrality and into war against Britain in 1780, 'altered the prognosis of risk and uncertainty' (115) in a way for which the Amsterdam market was not prepared. 'The limitations of received experience and incomplete information combined to create commercial acatalepsy among the practitioners of protection on the Dam' (115). Why, in a business whose foundation is acatalepsy - the notion that all knowledge is probabilistic and nothing is certain - should war make so much difference?

One of the drawbacks of looking closely at a brief period is that events which seem extraordinary in the short-run may come to seem extraordinary in a general way. Spooner is as alive as any economic historian to the events of history, which in the eighteenth century focus on war. His view is that wars in general, and not just wars in which the Republic participated, and certainly not only the war of 1780-1784, brought into relief 'the imperfections of the system, the shortcomings in information, and the inadequacies of scientific knowledge' which together 'left the marked in general and dealers in particular ill-equipped to predict the incidence or even handle the scale of resulting losses' (11). But it was the war of 1780-1784 that is said to have had such a large effect. What makes this a provocative argument is the banality of war within the Amsterdam financial world of the eighteenth century. Around war the Dutch had developed a significant industry, including gazettes gathering and transmitting early warnings of conflict. Moreover, Spooner shows that diplomats watched such signs as munitions orders, so that they learned of impending conflicts from the merchants. It is easy enough to see how a wholly unexpected war, or a war coming in an age of peace, might play the role that Spooner assigns the conflict of 1780-1784. What remains puzzling is why the Dutch would have been caught unawares by the war of 1780-1784.

More compelling is Spooner's case from a long-run view. It holds that the integration of European commercial and financial markets brought increasing competition, which showed up in lower insurance rates. By 1766 the Dutch insurance premiums look like having returned no more, and perhaps a little less, than investment in government securities (after deducting losses). In such circumstances is there any wonder that marine insurance ceased to thrive, that turnover among underwriters was high, that Amsterdam, the eighteenth-century center of this trade, cast about for better things to do. And it is in these conditions that war erupted, war that sharply changed the risk picture in a world of incredibly small margins.

Like the other scholars who have worked in the economic and business history of the Republic, Spooner offers some remarks on the trend of the economy. His view is that the signs of growth remained strong, although not as many-dimensional, into the nineteenth century, a view sustained by the continued growth of national income. Where the Dutch had made their fortune as shippers and insurers was preeminently in Europe. The East India trade notwithstanding, the Dutch excelled in building ships for close-in movement, ships that could navigate the shallow ports of Europe yet carry a large volume of goods cheaply. The organization of the insurance market supports this view, for the VOC was self insuring, so that in this market activity centered on Europe rather than the Atlantic.

In a book so rich there is still more: impressive findings in diplomatic archives in The Hague, London, Simancas, Genoa, Paris, and elsewhere; an appendix of monthly insurance premiums for January 1766 to March 1780; and a wide range of citations to theoretical and practical works that shed light on the subject. This is a book of rare insight. It

## RECENSIES

will have a large influence on future thought about the history of marine insurance and trade.

J. C. Riley

## NIEUWSTE GESCHIEDENIS

W.J.C.C. van den Hurk, o. praem., *Het verborgen leven van de Abdij van Berne in haar parochies 1797-1857* (Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van het Zuiden van Nederland XXXIX; Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact, 1977, xxix + 276 blz.).

De in het Brabantse Heeswijk gelegen praemonstratenser- of norbertijnenabdij van Berne ziet terug op haar achthonderdvijftigjarige geschiedenis. Ze werd in 1134 te Berne bij Heusden gesticht als 'achterkleindochter' van het door Norbertus van Xanten opgerichte Franse moederklooster Prémontré. Aan het eind van de tachtigjarige oorlog door de Staten van Holland opgeheven, had de abdij anderhalve eeuw lang haar centrale bestuurspost in Vilvoorde bij Brussel. Het eigenlijke corpus was verspreid over een aantal parochies in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, zowel in de Bossche Meierij als in Holland. Als gevolg van de revolutionaire gebeurtenissen in het Zuiden moest de abt zijn heil zoeken in de vlucht en belandde hij eind 1796 op de sinds 1639 in het oude 'Slotje' of 'Speelhuis' gevestigde pastorie te Heeswijk. Daarmee was het leven van de abdij geheel en al opgegaan in dat van de acht parochies die haar leden bedienden. Dit verborgen voortleven heeft haar door de moeilijke tijden van Napoleon en koning Willem I heengeloodst. Kort na het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie, in 1857, werd op het Slotje het kloosterleven officieel weer hersteld. In de daaropvolgende decennien groeide de nieuwe kloostergemeenschap uit tot een convent van ongeveer veertig leden en ontstond er rond het Slotje een groot gebouwencomplex. De achtereenvolgende abten wisten de ordeleden die in de parochies werkzaam bleven (de extra-conventuales of buitenheren) meer met de bewoners van het klooster (de conventuales of binnenheren) te verbinden. Sinds het eind van de eeuw ontwikkelde het Heeswijkse Berne zich tot een centrum van onderwijs en missie en van sociaal en liturgisch apostolaat. 'Witheren' - aldus genoemd naar hun witte habijt - als Van den Eisen, Nouwens, Van Beurden en Knaapen hebben daarbij naam gemaakt.

Zoals uit de titel blijkt heeft de norbertijn Van den Hurk zijn als Nijmeegse dissertatie verdedigde boek in het bijzonder willen wijden aan de tijd dat er feitelijk geen convent bestond. Om de ingewikkelde bestuurlijke, juridische en financiële aspecten te kunnen beschrijven, is de schrijver diep in de voorgeschiedenis gedoken. Om de betekenis van de schimmige zestig jaar 'abdijleven' dat er niet was - 'toen de abdij alleen als geestelijk instituut bestond' (v) - te doen uitkomen, heeft hij op zijn eigenlijke verhaal een uitvoerige wordingsgeschiedenis van de nieuwe kloostergemeenschap laten volgen. Dit leidde tot het enigszins merkwaardige resultaat dat ongeveer de helft van het werk niet door de titel wordt gedekt. Meer nog: voor- en nageschiedenis zijn, met gebruikmaking van archiefmateriaal uit de abdij en onder vermelding van veel details, op ongeveer dezelfde wijze geschetst als de geschiedenis zelf. Is er dus enerzijds een teveel, anderzijds is er een te weinig in die zin, dat inzake de eigenlijke periode andere bronnen dan die van de eigen abdij niet volledig zijn benut. Opvallend is bijvoorbeeld dat in de lijst van archivalia wel stukken