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## Global trade

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## Global Trade

On 10 October 1651, Arnold de Vlamingh van Oudshoorn, the governor of Ambon on behalf of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), made a visit to the private residence of Karaeng Pattingalloang, chancellor of the kingdom of Gowa-Talloq at Makassar, South Sulawesi. The VOC and Makassar were long-standing rivals for the trade in fine spices from the Moluccas, and tensions in the region were high. Six months before the meeting, peace between the two powers had been jeopardized after a local rebellion against the Dutch had ignited the Ambon War (1651–5). Van Oudshoorn and Pattingalloang, however, were both capable diplomats, and communications between the two men developed smoothly. Pattingalloang had a good command of Latin, Spanish, and Portuguese, and an avid interest in European books, globes, and scientific instruments. He also had an excellent knowledge of global affairs. In the interests of Makassar, Pattingalloang asked Van Oudshoorn if he thought the recent expiration of the Ten Years' Truce between Portugal and the Dutch Republic would affect Luso-Dutch relations in Asia. Van Oudshoorn immediately saw the bigger picture. He acknowledged that events in Brazil, where the Portuguese monarchy had tacitly supported a revolt against the regime of the West India Company (WIC), made it likely that the war would be resumed. For Pattingalloang this was highly relevant information, but it was no surprise. He admitted that the Portuguese had 'indeed behaved treacherously' in Brazil, and estimated that as a result, 'in *all* of the Indies', Portugal would suffer from the force of the Dutch.<sup>1</sup>

Both for the Amsterdam regent and for the Sulawesian ruler what happened in one part of the Dutch orbit had the capacity to influence geopolitics and trade in the other hemisphere. For citizens of today's

global village, where distance has practically disappeared and information barriers are increasingly regarded as artificial (and permeable), this is perhaps evident. For scholars of Dutch global trade, however, it is not. The narrative of overseas expansion in the Dutch Golden Age is still being dominated by the institutional dichotomy that was devised in the early modern Dutch Republic. The unbridled success of the VOC in the Indian Ocean is typically juxtaposed with the failure of the WIC in Africa and the Americas but, even four centuries after their establishment, the two companies are rarely studied together. The late seventeenth-century refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope might serve as a unifier between two hemispheres and two scholarly communities, but an authoritative monograph exploring that connection, too, is still waiting to be written.<sup>2</sup> This chapter provides an overview of the Dutch trade experience in seventeenth-century Asia and the Atlantic world, and seeks to explore, amidst some of the excellent historiography on the joint-stock companies, if there are new methodological possibilities for historians willing to dismantle the divide between East and West, and seek the global connections between Batavia and Recife, Ceylon and Curaçao, Deshima and Manhattan.

### **The Emergence of Dutch Global Trade**

Before the Dutch Revolt against Spain erupted, there was no strong impetus from the Low Countries to establish an overseas trading network. Individual merchants from Brabant and Zeeland already traded in the Atlantic world. They mostly co-operated with New Christians to transport sugar from plantations in Portuguese Brazil to Antwerp, the leading north European trade entrepôt. Several firms had close economic ties with the colonial sugar aristocracy, and Antwerp traders who owned sugar mills sometimes employed workers from the Low Countries. Their collective experiences in the Americas, however, did not make any headlines in Europe. The participation of a ‘well-mannered’ African slave from a Brazilian sugar plantation in an Antwerp procession of 1561 was as flamboyant as it was exceptional. In Asia, during the sixteenth century, the lucrative spice trade remained an exclusively Portuguese affair. Very little is known of individuals from the Low Countries who rounded the Cape of Good Hope and carved out a role in the *Estado da India* until 1580, when the Union of the Crowns



Figure 9.1 Hendrik Vroom, *The Return to Amsterdam of the Second Expedition to the East Indies, 1599*.

brought together the two Iberian empires. The succession of Philip II to the Portuguese throne radically changed the geopolitical complexion in Asia. Jan Huygen van Linschoten, a young man from Enkhuizen who spent five years in Goa in the service of the local archbishop, returned to the Low Countries in 1592 with valuable intelligence on the everyday practice of trade in the Indian Ocean. His book *Itinerario*, published in Amsterdam in 1596, is generally considered the real starting point of Dutch overseas expansion.

Within a decade of *Itinerario*'s appearance, the Dutch had replaced the Portuguese as the leading European mercantile contingent in Asia. The first expeditions into uncharted waters had been difficult: the so-called *Eerste Schipvaart* (First Maritime Expedition) of 1595 was characterized by diplomatic mishaps, leadership struggles, and misfortune. Only one-third of the crew returned to Amsterdam in 1597, and investors received little revenue. The search for an alternative, northern route to Asia resulted in heroic failure at Nova Zembla (Novaya Zemlya) and was not attempted again until the late nineteenth century. Subsequent expeditions, however, demonstrated the ability of the Dutch to make unprecedented profits in the Indonesian archipelago. The *Tweede Schipvaart* (Second Maritime Expedition) returned from the East Indies in 1599 with a rich cargo of pepper, nutmeg, mace, and cloves (Figure 9.1). In the subsequent three years, more Dutch than Portuguese ships rounded the Cape of Good Hope, reflecting not only rapid expansion and continuing profits but also increasing competition

between merchants and investors from the Dutch Republic. In order to channel Dutch interest in Asia, the States General in 1602 decided to establish the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company or VOC), the world's first joint-stock company.<sup>3</sup> Led by a board of seventeen directors, the Heeren XVII, and supported militarily by the federal government, the Dutch East India Company quickly succeeded in ousting the Portuguese from the Moluccas to obtain a monopoly in fine spices, for which there was great demand in Europe.

Institutionally, the newly established Company reflected both the federal set-up of the emerging Dutch Republic and the mercantile predominance within the federation of the maritime provinces Holland and Zeeland. Of the seventeen directors, eight originated from the 'chamber' (*kamer*, or the head office) in Amsterdam, four from the one in Zeeland, and one each from the chambers of Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn, and Enkhuizen. The seventeenth director was appointed in turn by one of the four small chambers, thus ensuring that the Amsterdam elite could not impose its will on the others. Investments and revenues were divided accordingly. Each chamber had considerable autonomy, with its own capital – raised by shareholders from all layers of society, and its own regional board of directors, usually formed by the main investors, one or more of whom were sent to the Heeren XVII as representatives of the local chamber's interests. Each chamber also fitted out its own ships. The Company charter (*octrooi*) stipulated a monopoly on trade for twenty-one years from the Cape of Good Hope eastwards to the Strait of Magellan, and was regularly extended and renegotiated. In due course, the VOC would appoint a governor general in the East Indies who would make decisions that required knowledge of local customs or that could not be delayed until orders from home had arrived.

In 1619, VOC administrators founded Batavia, on the island of Java, as its headquarters in Asia. Under the accomplished yet occasionally ruthless leadership of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen, the Company extended its monopoly in spices throughout the Moluccas, safeguarded Batavia against attacks from the Sultanate of Mataram, and used its strong position in the archipelago as the vantage point from which to establish *factorijen* (trading posts) across the Indian Ocean littoral. By the early 1640s, the VOC trade network extended from Gamron (Persia), Surat (India), and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), along the Coromandel coast to Bengal and further east to Siam (Thailand), Formosa (Taiwan), and the

artificial island Deshima in Nagasaki Bay (see Map 3). Here the Dutch enjoyed exclusive access to Japanese commodities for more than two centuries. In this myriad of different cultures, the Company skilfully navigated between its bullish ambitions as a trading company and its more awkward role as an unofficial diplomatic actor.<sup>4</sup> The VOC would gradually expand its trade also to the southern part of the Malabar coast and to China and would increase its efforts to develop the plantation at the Cape of Good Hope. Together these trading posts formed the nodes of an elaborate intra-Asian trade network that long predated the presence of the VOC in the Indian Ocean, but in which the Company now excelled as the main carrier of goods, with access to a wide variety of oriental markets. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century, the hemispheric trading network was so successful that the High Council in Batavia no longer needed financial injections from Europe to finance its Asian operations. All products that the VOC returned to the Dutch Republic could be sold there purely for profit.

The Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie (WIC) was designed to be the sister company of the VOC.<sup>5</sup> Its charter was originally drawn up around 1606 in the wake of seemingly unlimited success in Asia, but its foundation was suspended in negotiations with Spain over the Twelve Years' Truce. Individual trade was thus allowed to continue (and with considerable success) until designs for a monopolistic company were revived as the armistice reached its conclusion in 1621. Institutionally, the WIC mirrored the VOC. A board of nineteen directors, the Heeren XIX, was made up of representatives from Amsterdam (eight), Zeeland (four), the northern quarter (two: Hoorn and Enkhuizen), and the Meuse (two: Rotterdam and Dordrecht), and further expanded by a regional chamber in Groningen (two). One director represented the States General, evidence of the 'national' importance of a company that was explicitly designed to enter into military conflict with Habsburg America. Public confidence in the success of a monopolistic company in the western hemisphere, however, was not as unrestricted as it might have been twenty years before. The VOC had acquired notoriety for not paying dividends to its shareholders as promised, which undermined the appeal of the WIC as it attempted to assemble capital. Further negotiations were required because merchants in Hoorn and Enkhuizen wanted dispensation for their *de facto* monopoly on the trade in Venezuelan salt. And because many would-be shareholders considered the risk of taking on Spain in the Atlantic world too great,

it took until 1623 before the Company could finally embark on its 'grand design'.

In comparison to the VOC, historians have traditionally regarded the WIC as a costly failure, but as a flurry of recent scholarship on the Dutch Atlantic has demonstrated, this is only half the story.<sup>6</sup> The WIC's first campaign against Habsburg Brazil in 1624 was a resounding success, culminating in the conquest of Salvador de Bahia, the colonial capital, and the capture of the Portuguese governor and the provincial of the Jesuit order. It required the largest-yet Iberian armada to cross the Atlantic Ocean to recapture Salvador the following year. Spurred on by Piet Heyn's capture of the New Spain treasure fleet at Matanzas Bay, Cuba, in September 1628, the WIC invaded Brazil for a second time in 1630. Dutch Brazil, for more than two decades, would be the centre of a flourishing Atlantic empire. John Maurice of Nassau-Siegen, the colony's charismatic governor, extended its borders to Sergipe in the south and Maranhão in the north, ultimately controlling seven of Brazil's fifteen captaincies. The WIC supplied the sugar plantations of Pernambuco with slaves from Elmina (Ghana) and the great slave station of São Paulo de Luanda (Angola), taken from the Portuguese in 1637 and 1641 respectively. A well-functioning triangle of Atlantic trade briefly resembled the intra-Asian trade network of the VOC (see Map 2). Dutch Brazil, however, collapsed as quickly as it had emerged. The planters' revolt of 1645 that Van Oudshoorn and Pattingalloang would be discussing in Makassar six years later sparked an extended war that the WIC narrowly lost. Bitter feuding at home about the maintenance of the Company monopoly catalysed military defeat and eroded popular support for another attempt to build an Atlantic empire. As the memory of Brazil faded, and Peter Stuyvesant's New Netherland finally succumbed to English pressure in 1664, the WIC scaled down its ambitions to 'expansion without empire', with lasting settlements only on the Gold Coast of West Africa, in Suriname (taken from the English in 1667), on the Wild Coast of the Eastern Cape, and in the Lesser Antilles.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Nature of Dutch Expansion**

The question of why the Dutch were so successful in establishing a global trade network has inspired generations of historians, and can

be answered in a number of ways. That the ‘general crisis of the seventeenth century’ played a part in the rise of the Dutch Republic as a worldwide power is not always emphasized by scholars today. Few would disagree, however, that both the institutional disjointedness of the vastly stretched Iberian empires, and the religious and political turmoil the English and French monarchies experienced until the 1650s, enabled the Dutch Republic to extend its maritime supremacy beyond Europe and corner the trade in fine spices, sugar, and – briefly – slaves. Cinnamon and elephants from Ceylon (on which the VOC also obtained a global monopoly), pepper from Malabar, silk and textiles from Bengal, porcelain from China, salt from the Lesser Antilles, and beaver fur from the Hudson Valley were some of the other main products in the Companies’ extensive trade network. Both Companies excelled at finding the most lucrative markets for their expanding portfolio of exotic merchandise.

Naval and military support from the States General was crucial in advancing the mercantile cause of both Companies.<sup>8</sup> In the Atlantic world, the WIC employed many thousands of European soldiers to invade and defend Brazil. The VOC used force to remove the Portuguese from strategic locations such as Malacca (1641), Ceylon (1658), and Cochin (1663) and continued to dominate the main trading routes in the Indian Ocean until the turn of the century. The Companies’ aggression was directed at all European competitors, not just the Habsburgs. In 1623 VOC employees tortured and executed ten servants of the English East India Company and their Japanese associates to preserve their monopoly on nutmeg and mace in what became known as the Amboyna Massacre. The scandal resonated far and wide. Thirty years later, when Dutch colonists in New Netherland stirred up their Narragansett allies to take up arms against their Puritan neighbours in Connecticut, English pamphleteers observed that ‘Amboyna’s treacherous Cruelty [has] extended itself from the East to the West Indies.’<sup>9</sup>

Military clashes with Spain, Portugal, and England were essentially overseas chapters of European wars. But most encounters in Asia and the Atlantic world were intrinsically global in character. In theory, as part of the many overseas conflicts, the Companies were meant to respect the liberties of the indigenous peoples they encountered. In the Americas in particular, this was seen as a projected correction to the ‘tyrannical’ way in which Spain had sacrificed any lingering moral obligations to repress and enslave the non-

Europeans they encountered.<sup>10</sup> The opening exchanges in both hemispheres did indeed suggest that the Dutch would adopt a slightly more tolerant approach – perhaps partly as a consequence of their own propaganda. In Asia, where the VOC had no choice but to cooperate with local traders in order to obtain pepper and spices, however, diplomatic pragmatism was abandoned in 1621 when Jan Pieterszoon Coen committed genocide against the population of the Banda Islands (subsequently repopulating them) to enforce the monopoly in nutmeg and mace – still seen as one of the darkest chapters in the history of the Dutch Republic. In the Atlantic world, the ‘Black Legend’ narrative of Spanish cruelties against ‘innocent’ Americans compelled the WIC to adapt to the trading habits of indigenous groups such as the Munsees on Long Island and the Mohawks in the Hudson Valley, but here too relations turned sour after disputes with the Raritans over land and property led to Kieft’s War (1639–45), and several other bloody encounters. In Brazil, the Dutch struck an awkward military alliance with the cannibalistic Tarairiu.<sup>11</sup> Initial objections against the morality of the slave trade turned out to be paper-thin when the economic situation on the plantations in Brazil required the import of enslaved labourers from West Africa. By the late 1630s, compliant ministers at home legitimized John Maurice’s increasing demand for African slaves. Ultimately the Dutch would transport around 600,000 enslaved men and women to plantations across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>12</sup>

These painful stories must be integrated into a historiographical narrative of the Dutch Golden Age that is still being dominated by trade. There is every reason for change. The Netherlands were the last colonial power in Europe to abolish slavery – on its Suriname plantations in 1863 – seven months after Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, but, perhaps more tellingly, fifteen years after France and thirty years after Britain. Views of the Dutch contribution to global history are rapidly moving beyond the economic perspective, but substantial emancipatory histories of the Dutch empire in Asia and the Americas remain to be written. There are as yet no studies of seventeenth-century life on the plantations in Brazil and Suriname that incorporate new developments in social and cultural history. In a similar vein, there are still no major works that study the ‘Asiafication’ of the VOC over the course of the Dutch Golden Age, even though more and more indigenous workers – often involuntarily –

facilitated the Company's smooth integration into the Indian Ocean trading system in the second half of the seventeenth century.

One myth of Dutch global expansion which has been pierced by a number of historians in recent years is that of religious toleration.<sup>13</sup> All colonial administrators were members of the Reformed Church, at least in name, and the presence of the public church in the colonies was strong. In the late seventeenth century only the city of Amsterdam housed more ministers than Batavia. On ships and inside fortresses both the VOC and WIC maintained strict religious discipline. Sailors and soldiers were of mixed religious descent, and potential threats to homogeneity from German and Scandinavian Lutherans were closely monitored. When the Lutheran Church in Amsterdam paid for a minister to preach to its flock on Long Island, the WIC ordered the staunchly Calvinist governor Peter Stuyvesant to send him back to Holland immediately. Nowhere in the seventeenth-century Dutch world would Lutherans be allowed freedom of worship, despite their numbers. Yet Calvinist orthodoxy rarely flourished. The Companies generally did extend freedom of conscience to other Christians. In formerly Portuguese colonies such as Brazil, Malacca, Timor, and southern India, the overwhelming presence of Iberians and the proximity of Catholic clergy meant that there was little the Companies could do to eradicate Catholic practices, despite the indignation of Reformed ministers. Jewish merchants were officially accorded freedom of worship in Brazil (where they were allowed to build the first synagogue in the Americas), on Curaçao, and in Suriname. Toleration, however, was pragmatic rather than ideologically driven – a means to an end. In a 'Dutch' world in which the Dutch never made up more than 40 per cent of the population, and often less, calls for orthodoxy were simply unrealistic.

Even more disappointing, from the perspective of the church, was the lack of missionary success. Although the Companies professed to spread the Reformed faith on behalf of the States General, efforts at conversion along both oceanic basins were haphazard. Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims were not generally susceptible to Reformed doctrine, unless Catholic missionaries had paved the way. Only in Formosa did the VOC succeed in attracting considerable numbers of non-Christians to the Reformed Church. In the Atlantic world, religious campaigners faced an uphill struggle to convert indigenous inhabitants after warnings from orthodox factions in the church that the

Algonquian and Tupi languages were too unsophisticated to transmit the Word of God. For African slaves on the plantations of Brazil and Suriname, conversion to the Reformed faith served only the rational (and understandable) cause of obtaining freedom from slavery. Once Dutch missionaries understood the reasoning behind the Africans' susceptibility to Reformed austerity, they stopped their efforts at conversion altogether – an approach that would be copied in several English plantation colonies in North America.<sup>14</sup> Occasionally, insisting on Reformed principles was outright counterproductive, and was hastily abandoned. In the Kingdom of Kongo, the local ruler ordered an auto-da-fé of Calvinist catechism books the WIC had distributed, while in Japan any mention of Christianity could jeopardize diplomatic relations (and thus trade) with the shogun.<sup>15</sup>

### **Decline in the Atlantic World, Consolidation in Asia**

The weakness of European rivals, naval and military strength, and ideological flexibility, then, came together to build a global trade network in the Dutch Golden Age. Political developments within Europe also contributed to its gradual decline. Due to the nature of the two most significant geopolitical changes, the WIC's Atlantic empire collapsed very rapidly. The VOC's trade network in the Indian Ocean proved more robust and continued to be profitable, although in relative terms its revenues too began to shrink by the end of the century. The first cause of the gradual decline of Dutch global trade was the end of the Eighty Years' War in 1648. Both Dutch trading companies had been set up to counter the global dominance of Habsburg Spain. By the time Spain faded as an enemy, the Dutch system in Asia was well developed and crucially positioned to resist a new geopolitical threat from France and especially England. The only significant setback in Asia came with an indigenous uprising in Formosa, inspired by Ming China, which led to defeat in 1662 – coined in Dutch contemporary historiography as *t'Verwaerloosde Formosa* (Neglected Formosa). In the Atlantic world, the main WIC territory in Brazil did not play a role in upcoming battles against north European rivals. According to contemporaries, Brazil too was lost because of negligence (*Verzuymd Brazil*), as were the trading stations in Angola and at São Tomé. A short-lived war with Portugal (1657–61) did not provide enough impetus for an aggressive

return to the South Atlantic. In 1674, broken by the surrender of Brazil twenty years before, the West India Company went bankrupt. The Second WIC that was immediately established had more modest ambitions.

The second reason for the Companies' decline was the lack of a population surplus in the Dutch Republic. The expansion of the economy in the seventeenth century had pulled many thousands of foreign labourers to the province of Holland, and those who joined either the VOC or the WIC were often Germans, Scandinavians, and later Huguenots. Yet the continued availability of work in Holland, and the relative religious tolerance, meant that there were no classic push factors, either for locals or for immigrants, to seek adventure across the ocean. Once again this did not develop into a problem in Asia, where European companies and regimes more generally had accepted from the very start that their employees would be vastly outnumbered by local inhabitants and made plans accordingly. In the Atlantic world, however, settlement colonies relied for their prosperity on European immigrants. Both on the plantations of Brazil and in the fertile valleys of New Netherland, more settlers meant greater production and greater control for the Company. Here the lack of a population surplus had grave consequences. In Brazil, Portuguese sugar planters who had initially co-operated with the Dutch regime made their numbers count during the revolt. In New Netherland, on the eve of the Second Anglo-Dutch War, 5,000 Dutch inhabitants were no match for the more than 35,000 English immigrants who had settled in New England and were keen on expanding to the south in search of more land.

What distinguished the Dutch empire in the Golden Age was that it prospered as long as it remained 'alongshore'.<sup>16</sup> The preferred locations for urban settlements were along deep-water natural bays (such as New York Bay or Table Bay – despite the storms that plagued the latter), or on sandy reefs just off the main coast (such as in Brazil or on Formosa), both ideal for conducting maritime trade. The similarities between towns such as Batavia and Recife, both located in a sheltered bay and facing towards other port towns across the water rather than to the hinterland where fortifications were constructed, were arguably bigger than the differences, especially when we consider the urban extensions and canals that were laid out at times when trade flourished (Figures 9.2 and 9.3). Many of these newly founded settlements or new discoveries received identical names, east and west. Staten Island, after

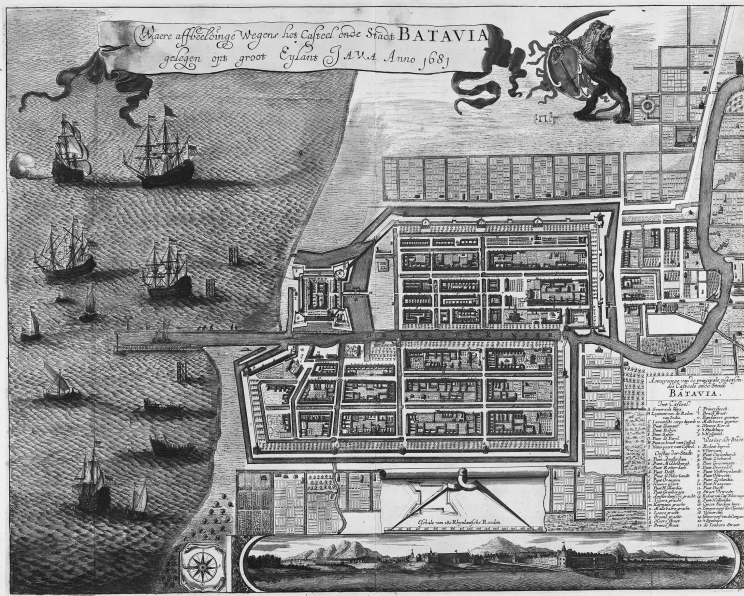


Figure 9.2 Anonymous, *City plan of Batavia*, 1681.

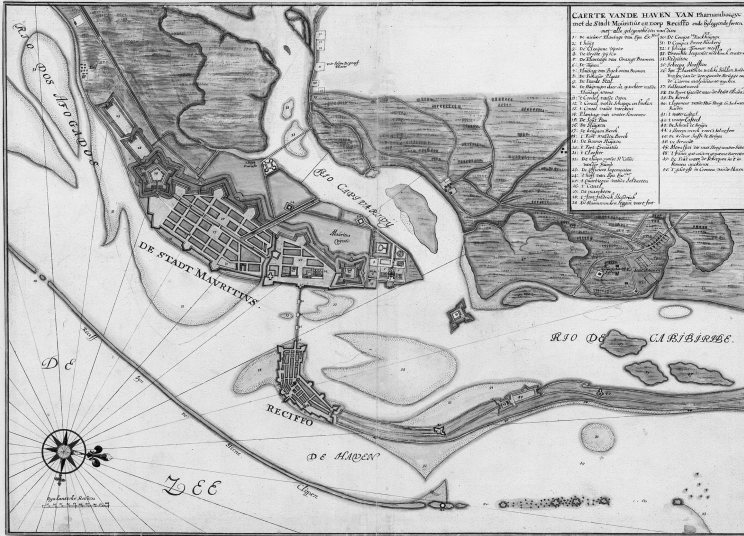


Figure 9.3 Anonymous, *City plan of Recife*, s.d., Nationaal archief, The Hague.

the States General, could be found not only in New York Bay, but also off the coast of Tierra del Fuego (Argentina). New Zealand too was first named Staten Island by Abel Tasman in the 1640s. Fort Zeelandia was established first in Taiwan, and then along the Suriname river. New Holland was an alternative name for Dutch Brazil before VOC employees used it to denote Australia.

What *was* different was the environment the Dutch faced, the plantation system in the Americas being less suited to the trade-and-transport dynamics of the joint-stock companies than the scattered market of the Indian Ocean which facilitated European involvement only on its fringes. Around 1630 the VOC's investments in a well-balanced trade network in the Indonesian archipelago and on strategic points along the Indian Ocean littoral began to bear fruit. By charting and shaping demand in Asian markets for products the Company obtained elsewhere in the Orient, revenues increased in spectacular fashion. Private investors of the first hour who had held on to their original shares until 1650 would have received a cumulative dividend of around 800 per cent. In the third quarter of the seventeenth century, mainly as a result of the flourishing intra-Asian trade, the Company's profits continued to grow, albeit at a somewhat slower pace because of substantial overhead costs. Yet increasing competition from the English East India Company in the wake of the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–4), especially in the pepper trade, and the changing terms of trade in Japan, where the shogun's prohibition of the export of gold and silver deeply affected the Company's flexibility, required the Heeren XVII to maintain their high-level military and diplomatic investments. In the final decades of the seventeenth century, the relative value of the trade in spices began to dwindle, heralding the shifting balance of trade in the eighteenth century.

In the Atlantic world, the Dutch had encountered strong competition, and hence a financially draining demand for guns and soldiers, from the very beginning. Although the WIC too had laid the foundation for a thriving trans-oceanic trade network by the early 1640s, it never managed to reap the benefits of its early investments due to the volatile indigenous politics of Angola along with Luso-Brazilian reluctance to pay for African slaves the WIC had delivered on credit. Local contexts were thus a major factor in distinguishing success and failure. This implies, however, that the difference between the two Companies traditionally emphasized by historians has been exaggerated in hindsight.

The (failed) attempt to create a merger between the two Companies in the mid 1640s when the WIC's first charter expired just at a time when it was going through the first of its financial crises is generally interpreted as indicative of their different political and economic trajectories. Ultimately the VOC was not prepared to take on the debts of its Atlantic sister company.<sup>17</sup> Yet the fact that the merger was contemplated in the first place, and debated for more than three years in the highest political circles in The Hague indicates that, for contemporaries, the two Companies were not all that different. Historians are increasingly open to this view, and comparative studies of the different hemispheric trade networks will be able to provide new insights on the role of the Dutch in global history.

### **Globalization of People, Commodities, and Ideas**

The history of overseas trade is no longer solely about ships and the goods they carried, but also about people. In the institutional idiom that has dominated scholarship of the joint-stock companies, focused on monopolies, shareholders, dividends, and state sponsorship, individual merchants and their networks have not received adequate attention, despite their importance as cross-cultural agents or interlopers.<sup>18</sup> But there is good reason to view Dutch global trade through the prism of the individual, whether merchants, sailors, or members of groups that have traditionally received less attention. For women who remained behind, it made little difference if their loved ones were stationed east or west. Their contributions to the maritime sector at home are more and more appreciated by scholars today.<sup>19</sup> One interesting recent development is that historians have emphasized that the slave trade was not confined to the Atlantic world, but was also ingrained in the networks of the Indian Ocean. Although the numbers were considerably lower, the VOC transported forced labourers from the hinterlands of Batavia and Cochin to the Cape of Good Hope, a lucrative trade that is only beginning to be understood.<sup>20</sup> National and international studies on the slave trade have traditionally been dominated by numbers – all essentially addressing the question ‘How many?’ Perhaps the different nature of the slave trade in Asia can lead to a broader horizon for research on the Dutch contribution to the history of enforced labour that also focuses on values and ideas, and on who exactly the Dutch enslaved. Throughout the

Dutch Golden Age, individual merchants and armchair travellers continued to oppose and condemn the trade in human beings. Much of our current knowledge of representations of the slave trade, however, is still based on scholarship from the 1980s.<sup>21</sup>

European soldiers, sailors, and administrators connected both hemispheres (and both Companies), each one individually contributing to a global network of mercantile and maritime expertise. It is little known, for example, that the career of Dirck Gerritsz Pomp, possibly the first 'Dutchman' ever to reach China in the service of the Portuguese around 1570, ended with his imprisonment at the hands of Spanish colonists in Valparaiso, Chile. On a more successful note, Hendrick Brouwer was selected as head of a mission to Chile's Mapuche Indians in 1642–3 partly because of his achievements as a navigator in the Indian Ocean, where thirty years earlier he had first discovered the so-called Roaring Forties – the strong westerly winds around 40 degrees latitude that drastically shortened travel time between the Cape of Good Hope and Batavia. Margrieta van Varick accompanied her first husband, a merchant, to Malacca and her second one, a Reformed minister, to Flatbush, New York. Here she set up a textile shop and accumulated books and exotic possessions which are testimony to a life beyond both horizons.<sup>22</sup> There must have been many anonymous global adventurers like them. Given the chronology of Dutch expansion, their voyage was usually the other way around: young men first participated in the trade network of the Dutch Atlantic before making a career in Asia. Johan Nieuwhof is an obvious example. One of thousands of Germans who populated the Dutch orbit, Nieuwhof spent almost a full decade as a soldier in Dutch Brazil before embarking for China in the 1650s, where he famously took part in an embassy from Canton to Beijing. In the 1660s he was a diplomat first in Kerala, India, and later on Ceylon, before returning to Batavia. In 1672, when collecting fresh water on Madagascar while on a return voyage to Europe, he was probably killed (a belatedly organized retrieval mission, in any event, was unsuccessful). His observations of Dutch global trade – from corruption in Pernambuco to ship-building in China – were published in Amsterdam, rapidly translated into French, German, Latin, and English, and remain an important source for historians today.<sup>23</sup>

Another German, Zacharias Wagner, can perhaps be regarded as the ultimate global servant of the Dutch cause. Born in Dresden, he started his career as a draughtsman in the service of the Blaeu family, the official



Figure 9.4 Zacharias Wagner, *Slave Market at Recife*, 1630s–1640s.

cartographers of first the VOC and later also the WIC. In Brazil, under the approving eye of John Maurice, he composed a *Thierbuch*, a sketch book which included not only exotic insects and other animals, but also plants, indigenous Brazilian life, and – most memorably – a depiction of the slave market in Recife (Figure 9.4). In 1642 he returned to Amsterdam and moved on to Batavia, where he joined the Company’s hydrographic bureau, which was responsible for drawing maps of the different Asian trading routes and destinations. A strategic marriage to a widow fourteen years his senior saw him enter the colonial elite. In 1656 he was appointed commander of the trading post in Deshima, Japan. Twice he made the long journey on foot from Nagasaki to Edo, where the VOC presented gifts to the shogun in an annual ritual that was meant to cement their exclusive status. In 1657, Wagner had the honour of presenting to the shogun a globe, made for this purpose by Joan Blaeu, with a diameter of 130 centimetres. The gift was highly appreciated. In subsequent years, the shogun ordered further globes, as well as world maps and atlases – all made by Blaeu – a remarkable feat of cultural diplomacy and a telling reminder of the global scope of the Dutch world-view during the Golden Age.<sup>24</sup> Wagner was awarded a high post on the only continent where he had not yet served: in 1662, he succeeded Jan van Riebeeck as commander of the Cape Colony, where he developed a court culture that attempted to emulate

the artistic and scientific achievements he had witnessed as a young man in Brazil.

The two joint-stock companies relied on journeymen like Pomp, Brouwer, Nieuhof, and Wagner – and on women like Van Varick – whose experience in one hemisphere must have served them well in the other. They are only five of many hundreds of thousands of Europeans who sailed the oceans in the interests of Dutch trade. In the seventeenth century, more than 300,000 men (and occasionally women) boarded a VOC ship heading for Asia, a number that would triple by the time the Company was dismantled in 1795. But only a fraction of those who set sail for Asia settled there (semi-)permanently. The ‘resident’ European population in Asia by the end of the seventeenth century did not exceed 25,000; in a city like Batavia, with a total population of approximately 32,000 around 1680, the Dutch elite were vastly outnumbered by Chinese, Malay, and Javanese inhabitants.<sup>25</sup> In the Americas the numbers of settlers were even lower. Although it is worth noting that Portuguese chroniclers in Brazil felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of soldiers fighting on behalf of the WIC – 7,000 men participated in the invasion of Pernambuco, and shipments to Brazil of up to 3,000 auxiliary forces were not exceptional – very few Europeans stayed in the disease-ridden tropics for much longer than was necessary. Those who did settle in the New World adopted an embattled cultural attitude. In the Hudson Valley, the Dutch community was sizeable enough to protect and retain its distinctive identity until the end of the nineteenth century, when the last traces of the Dutch presence (language, liturgy, architecture) finally disappeared.<sup>26</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Collectively, people in the Dutch orbit transported not only commodities across the globe, but also knowledge of the non-European world, which, as we have seen in the meeting between Van Oudshoorn and Pattingalloang in Makassar, intimately connected the two hemispheres. If the Spanish empire, thriving in the sixteenth century, can be regarded as trading mainly in gold and Catholicism, and the English and French in the eighteenth century battled to tip the geopolitical balance of power in their favour, the VOC and WIC in the seventeenth century, besides their obvious interest in trade and political prowess, supplied other Europeans

with information about the world beyond the horizon – much more confidently than the secretive Portuguese empire it most closely resembled. Maps by the likes of Joan Blaeu dominated Europe's world-view long after the two Companies had been dissolved. Astronomical, botanical, and zoological works by Georg Marcgraf, Willem Piso, Jacob Bontius, and Georg Eberhard Rumphius exerted great influence on early modern science – and tied in with similar works on the Arctic, the Levant, and Russia, areas that were outside the charters of the two Companies. For readers of these works, the institutional division between the Atlantic world and the Indian Ocean world no longer determined the way they perceived Dutch global trade networks.<sup>27</sup> By the eighteenth century, as Dutch commercial dominance gradually receded, the encyclopedic interest in Europe had conflated the West and East Indies to such an extent that paintings of the Brazilian landscape by Frans Post could be sold at public auctions as exotic views of China.<sup>28</sup>

In a scholarly culture focused on two oceanic basins that were institutionally separated, each with its own historiographic traditions, these examples of cultural conflation have been considered eccentricities in an era that was efficiently organized by trade and monopolies. This is of course perfectly understandable. Trade, closely intertwined with the geopolitical urgency of the war against Habsburg Spain, was the main driving force behind Dutch expansion from the late sixteenth century onwards, and the chartered companies served as two of the most important economic pillars of the emerging Dutch Republic. Yet recent research suggests that to contemporaries – as shareholders, mapmakers, missionaries, sailors, soldiers, or administrators in the service of either of the two joint-stock companies, or even as interlopers trying to liberate themselves from their constraints – the Dutch trade network may well have appeared to be a truly global one long before it became a fashionable scholarly term. Seen through the eyes of these individuals, Dutch global trade in the Golden Age connected the seven seas unimpeded by censorship, monopolistic charters, or hemispheric historiography.

### Notes

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14. E. Haefeli, 'Breaking the Christian Atlantic: The Legacy of Dutch Tolerance in Brazil', in Van Groesen (ed.), *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*, 135–40.
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