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0521819261 - The Rise of Commercial Empires: England and the Netherlands in the Age of Mercantilism, 1650-1770

David Ormrod

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The Rise of Commercial Empires

*England and the Netherlands in the Age of
Mercantilism, 1650–1770*

In early modern Europe, and particularly in the Netherlands, commercial empires were held together as much by cities as by unified nation states. David Ormrod here takes a regional economy as his preferred unit of analysis: the North Sea economy, an interlocking network of trades shaped by public and private interests, and the matrix within which Anglo-Dutch competition, borrowing and collaboration took shape. He shows how England's increasingly coherent mercantilist objectives undermined Dutch commercial hegemony, in ways which contributed to the restructuring of the North Sea staplemarket system. The commercial revolution has rightly been identified with product diversification and the expansion of long-distance trading, but the reorganisation of England's nearby European trades was equally important, providing the foundation for eighteenth-century commercial growth and facilitating the expansion of the Atlantic economy. With the Anglo-Scottish union of 1707, the last piece of a *national* British entrepôt system was put into place.

DAVID ORMROD is senior Lecturer in Economic and Social History at the University of Kent at Canterbury, and a leading authority on British and Dutch commercial history in the early modern period.

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University of Kent at Canterbury



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Preface and acknowledgements

The British industrial revolution can no longer be regarded as the critical moment of transition in European economic history. Its transformative aspects are not in doubt, but to paraphrase de Vries and van der Woude, the industrial revolution contributed to a larger process of modernisation within a European zone larger than England. That zone is best described as the North Sea economy, within which the Dutch republic established a short-lived but striking position of dominance between the truce of 1609 and the outbreak of the first Anglo-Dutch War of 1652: a *pax Neerlandica*. But in what sense did the Dutch golden age mark the starting point of European modernity, and how does the subsequent history of Dutch decline and British growth fit into revisionist perspectives of this sort? De Vries and van der Woude have described European modernisation in terms of two cycles of growth, crisis and stagnation: the first pioneered by the Netherlands from some point in the sixteenth century to 1850, and a second beginning between 1780 and 1850 which ‘affected the whole of the western world’.

In some respects, this is a useful way of scaling down and recontextualising the British commercial and industrial revolutions, but it rests on an assumption more appropriate to the nineteenth than to the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries: that of the ‘national cycle’ of growth and decline set out most clearly by Kindleberger. In early modern Europe, and particularly in the Netherlands, commercial empires were held together as much by cities as by unified nation states. The prior existence of integrated national economies cannot be assumed, and their emergence surely deserves an important place in narratives of growth. This study takes a regional economy as its preferred unit of analysis: the North Sea economy, an interlocking network of trades shaped by public and private interests, and the matrix within which Anglo-Dutch competition, borrowing and collaboration took shape. It attempts to show how England’s increasingly coherent mercantilist objectives succeeded in undermining Dutch commercial hegemony, in ways which contributed to the restructuring of the North Sea staplemarket system. The commercial revolution

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It was the late Jack Fisher who initially suggested this topic as a focus for postgraduate research. From LSE, I went off to Cambridge to pursue it under the kindly supervision of Charles Wilson and, for a brief period, David Joslin, in the congenial surroundings of Christ's College. The encouragement and unflinching generosity of all three compounded a debt which I can never repay. My doctoral dissertation was presented in 1973, the year of Britain's entry into the European Community, and these circumstances meant that I was soon combining university teaching with museum work, gathering together objects and writing the scenario for a major exhibition at the Museum of London on 'The Dutch in London, 1550-1800', as part of the government's 'Fanfare for Europe'. In the following year, I first encountered Immanuel Wallerstein at a memorable symposium in Montreal, along with a small group of younger American scholars which included Jan de Vries, Robert Brenner and Franklin Mendels. The issues raised in Montreal and the possibility of developing an interest in histories of material culture persuaded me to shelve the dissertation, and to undertake further research on the international grain trade and the neglected history of re-exports. The former was central to both Wallerstein's world systems analysis and to the so-called 'Brenner debate' about the origins of agrarian capitalism which were unfolding during the 1970s. My involvement with museums and cultural history had to wait until the 1990s, but, in 1985, I published a monograph on English grain exports and agrarian capitalism which engaged with questions raised by Wallerstein and Brenner, parts of which appear in modified form in chapter 7 of the present volume. The results of work on the re-export trade appeared in the *festschrift* presented to Charles Wilson in 1984, *Enterprise and History*, and likewise form the core of one of the following chapters. The present study, however, is a substantially revised and extended treatment of my previously published and unpublished work, and attempts to trace a path, at times eccentric, through the proliferating literature on British and Dutch commercial history of the past thirty years.

I have benefited enormously from the stimulus and criticism of many friends, mediated particularly through seminars at the Institute of Historical Research. Patrick O'Brien's advice and constant support have been invaluable, and I owe special debts of gratitude to Jan de Vries and Derek

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Keene. Members of the Preindustrial England seminar have contributed in a variety of ways to improving the book, especially Negley Harte, Nuala Zahedieh, Larry Epstein, Vanessa Harding, Peter Earle and David Mitchell. I am grateful to several scholars for giving me the opportunity to benefit from their unpublished work, including Norris Nash, Margaret Spufford, Michael Berlin, Regina Grafe, Karen Newman, Jake Knoppers and Hugh Dunthorne. Various friends in the Netherlands have helped me over the years, none more than the late Simon Hart, who placed his intimate knowledge of the Amsterdam city archives at my disposal. Alice Carter was as helpful with Dutch sources as she was in procuring supplies of *Bokma* for the LSE bar. Joop Faber, Johan de Vries, Leo Noordegraaf, Marjolein't Hart, Clé Lesger, Pieter Jansen and Jan Willem Veluwenkamp have all supplied me with essential information, for which I am most grateful.

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Abbreviations

<i>AAG Bijdragen</i>	<i>Bijdragen, Afdeling Agrarische Geschiedenis, Wageningen Universiteit</i>
Add Mss	Additional manuscripts, British Library
<i>AHN</i>	<i>Acta Historiae Neerlandicae</i>
<i>BIHR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</i>
BL	British Library
<i>BMGN</i>	<i>Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden</i>
<i>BMHG</i>	<i>Bijdragen en mededelingen van het historisch genootschap gevestigd te Utrecht</i>
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
Brants	Archief Brants, Gemeente Archief, Amsterdam
C	Chancery records, Public Record Office
CO	Colonial Office records, Public Record Office
<i>CSPC</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series</i>
<i>CTBP</i>	<i>Calendar of Treasury Books and Papers</i>
Cust. 3	Ledgers of the Inspector General, Public Record Office
Cust. 50–101	Outport records, Public Record Office
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>ECHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>EHJ</i>	<i>Economisch-Historisch Jaarboek</i>
EIC	(English) East India Company
<i>ESHJ</i>	<i>Economisch- en Sociaal-Historisch Jaarboek</i>
<i>ESHN</i>	<i>Economic and Social History in the Netherlands</i>
GAA	Gemeente Archief, Amsterdam
GAR	Gemeente Archief, Rotterdam
Hanson	L. W. Hanson, <i>Contemporary Printed Sources for British Irish and Economic History, 1701–1750</i> , Cambridge, 1963
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
<i>JCTP</i>	<i>Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations</i>

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<i>JEEH</i>	<i>Journal of European Economic History</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Economic History</i>
<i>JHC</i>	<i>Journals of the House of Commons</i>
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Modern History</i>
MADBR	Maatschappij van Assurantie, Discontering en Beleening, Rotterdam
NEHA	Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief
NA	Notarial Archives
NRO	Northumberland Record Office, Melton Park
NRON	Norfolk Record Office, Norwich
<i>PP</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
PRO	Public Record Office, London
<i>RHC</i>	<i>Reports from Committees of the House of Commons</i>
SP84	State Papers, Holland, Public Record Office
T	Treasury Papers, Public Record Office
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>TvG</i>	<i>Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis</i>
VOC	Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie)
WIC	West India Company (West-Indische Compagnie)