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Henriette de Bruyn Kops, *A Spirited Exchange: The Wine and Brandy Trade Between France and the Dutch Republic in its Atlantic Framework, 1600-1650*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2007. xiii + 371 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$139.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 90-04-16074-4.

Review by Thomas Brennan, U.S. Naval Academy.

The Dutch played a celebrated role in the early modern French wine trade. Based on a long-standing commercial presence along the French Atlantic coast, Dutch merchants gradually extended their involvement in the region's viticulture through the sixteenth and seventeenth century, from simply buying and shipping wines to increasingly controlling their production. Knowing the particular tastes of their northern customers, Dutch merchants began to demand certain kinds of wines and to alter the quality of the wines they did buy. Inferior wines could be sweetened and fortified in various ways or simply turned into spirits, if one had access to the right equipment. By the early seventeenth century, the Dutch were importing stills into France in order to increase the production of spirits. Their demand for high-yield (but low-quality) white wines that could be profitably distilled shaped the viticulture of western France for centuries, just as they contributed to the rise of a brandy industry in Cognac and elsewhere.

This story, which is well known and often retold in the standard histories of French wine, serves as both the context and the starting point of Professor Henriette de Bruyn Kops' monograph. The story neatly illustrates underlying forces that have shaped the history of wine making: the market has shaped viticulture, and those with access to the market enjoy considerable leverage, not only over prices but also over production. The producer must scramble to find markets and must bend to the will of the merchants who are willing to buy. Already in the seventeenth century the town of Nantes, on the French Atlantic coast, lamented the vulnerability of its vine growers to the commercial power of the Dutch, whom they accused of a range of fraudulent and nefarious practices, and the charge was picked up by one of the better known commercial treatises of the century, *Le commerce honorable*, by Jean Eon. The enterprise of the Dutch also helps to explain the emergence of a brandy industry in France at a time when little brandy was consumed by the French.

Yet there is much that we still do not know about the wine and brandy trade in the seventeenth century, particularly along the lower Loire, where Professor de Bruyn Kops has chosen to anchor one half of her study. The commercial records for this region and this era are fragmentary at best, so there is no study to rival those of the cognac industry or of the wines of Bordeaux in the eighteenth century. And beyond serving as an outlet and inspiration for this alcohol, our understanding of the Dutch commercial role remains one-dimensional and caricatured. So a study of the Dutch trade in French alcohol is a welcome addition. Yet that turns out to be far too narrow a description of this book.

Thus the first half of a book that presents itself as a study of the alcohol trade barely mentions brandy and discusses wine only intermittently. Instead we are plunged into the personal details of the merchant communities of Nantes and of Rotterdam. First, there is the Dutch community in Nantes—a

dozen or more merchants at any one time who spent long years learning the details of the local trade. The town's official complaint about the behavior of the Dutch merchants, and the elaboration of this complaint in the famous treatise from the middle of the century, vilified these men for gaining a virtual monopoly over the local wine trade and using it to manipulate prices and quality in order to achieve scandalous profits. Professor de Bruyn Kops defends them from some of the accusations, such as fraudulent bankruptcies but mostly accepts the charges and places them in an international context. By dominating access to foreign markets and by introducing the fabrication of distilled alcohol, the Dutch not only gave shape to local wine production, they were able to control its outlets. Yet the author has little to say about either production or commerce. Rather she is interested in the merchants who were responsible. Thanks to her extensive work in both French and Dutch archives, we learn about the lives and fortunes of many of these merchants, including their marriages and bastards. Notarial archives in particular provide much of this information and, although necessarily incomplete, she is able to stitch them together into a fairly coherent account of these individuals. The picture is much enhanced by having information from both ends of these foreigners' lives, as it were, drawing on notarial archives in both Nantes and in Rotterdam, where some of them originated and still had families.

The discussion of the merchant community in Rotterdam provides a powerful pendant to the description of Nantes due to the wealth of its notarial archives, but it also opens the scope of the book considerably. As Professor de Bruyn Kops explains, "The men who imported French wines and brandy into the Dutch Republic in the first half of the seventeenth century did not limit themselves to only one type of commodity, but spread their investments over as many potential profitable ventures as possible" (p. 96). This makes the chapter on Rotterdam rather more confusing. The material is fascinating, with discussions about debt, marriage, children, and immigration, but as the focus broadens from the wine trade to the merchants' participation with other partners in other activities it is easy to forget why we are learning this and how it adds to our understanding of the wine trade.

When the book finally turns to the wine trade itself, in the third chapter, it becomes clearer why the author has chosen to organize her study in this way. The surviving documents allow only a very partial reconstruction of this trade. A full year of port records here and there, a price list from Amsterdam, and the notarial archives make for a fragmented picture. In fact much of the material in this book has the quality of a mosaic, with little gems of information quarried from the archives, particularly notarial archives, and arranged in patterns that suggest a bigger picture. The bigger picture is valuable and very interesting. The Dutch were buying wine from the French, Spanish, and Germans and shipping it in turn to the Germans, the Baltic states and, above all, consuming it. They bought only a seventh of the wines shipped down the Loire, but they controlled nearly a third of the local Nantais wines and virtually all of the brandy that was produced. And since the brandy also came from local wines, the Dutch were actually buying half of the wines that the lower Loire exported in one form or another. Here was considerable economic leverage. The Dutch were also buying more than six times that amount from Bordeaux, though there is no information about their relative control of this market.

Much of this alcohol was aimed at a hard-drinking Republic. Although Professor de Bruyn Kops offers no consumption quantities, either total or per capita, for Rotterdam, she estimates the consumption of French wine in Amsterdam at eighty-five liters per annum. This is lower than urban rates in much of Europe, but to this she adds an astonishing forty-five liters of brandy per capita and reminds us that beer was still the favorite Dutch drink. The brewers of Rotterdam were producing some sixteen times more beer than the amount of alcohol the city imported. Even if some of this alcohol went to sea with ship crews, it makes for an impressive amount of drinking. But these estimates are also very speculative and based on very incomplete evidence. The author exercises considerable ingenuity to fill in the gaps but this part of the study remains quite impressionistic. It also seems like an afterthought in light of the subsequent chapters. Here she expands the scope of the study to the whole of the Dutch Atlantic trade, and much of the archival work used earlier in the book pays even greater dividends, for a whole other thesis, indeed almost another book, lurks beneath the study of the wine trade.

It turns out that Dutch merchants were involved in something far more complex than the wine trade. “The international merchants who purchased the alcohol in France and shipped it to the Republic did so as part of the vast network of traders, financiers, and entrepreneurs that made Europe’s early modern maritime sector such an essential part of the greater Atlantic economy” (p. 242). Thus Professor de Bruyn Kops gently reminds us of the real limits suffered by any study of a single commodity. On the basis of the extensive work done on the Dutch merchant communities that is discussed at the beginning of the book, she is able to unravel a complex and, if not clandestine then certainly obscure, network of “new Christian” merchants. Sephardic Jews, who had converted to Christianity under Spanish pressure, had spread out across the Atlantic coast in a remarkable diaspora. With their apparent willingness to adapt their nominal religious identities to the requirements of Protestant or Catholic rulers, these merchants helped to create a commercial network that tied together countries at war. Her discoveries amend Jonathan Israel’s description of this diaspora by emphasizing both the role of Nantes and the flexibility of Sephardic identities and communities. She also argues for a more vibrant and continuous Sephardic community in Rotterdam than previously suspected; Rotterdam and Nantes each appear to have been an important node in the Atlantic Sephardic network. She also shows that Hamburg was closely connected to this Dutch network. This allowed the flow of goods, and particularly of silver, to evade various embargoes. Nantes became a vital link in this chain and its alcohol “an important and valuable added attraction, but definitely not the sole reason for the Dutch interest in the Loire delta” (p. 265).

The author suggests and, indeed, goes far to prove that the wine trade was caught up in a larger and more important flow of goods along the Atlantic coast. “It is possible that the primary reason for the Dutch interest in Nantes was Spanish silver coming into France as the result of its positive trade balance with Spain rather than the wines and brandies of the Nantes region” (p. 276) but the silver trade is never more than a “hypothesis” given the lack of firm evidence. Nevertheless, she emphasizes “the extent to which trade with Spain and Portugal influenced commercial life along the whole Atlantic coast of Europe, including the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg and Nantes” (p. 289).

In the last chapter she returns to the single commodity of alcohol that began the book and tries to place it in the larger framework of the Dutch coastal and overseas trade. The author uses considerable ingenuity to arrive at figures for the trade in alcohol between Nantes and Rotterdam and its relative role in the larger world of Dutch coastal and seaborne trade. Thus the trade along the Atlantic coast brought in some 40 percent of the value of total Dutch imports in 1634, of which a third was probably from France, but little more than a third of that was French alcohol. It seems a stretch, then, to suggest that the alcohol trade with France was a “pillar of the economy” (p. 313). But so much of this last chapter is based on fragmentary evidence that the numbers do not tell the whole story.

In the end, this is an ambitious study of the commercial world of the eastern Atlantic. The book’s scope quickly spills out beyond the relatively simple issue of wine and brandy and grows to include much of the Dutch merchant enterprise along the whole Atlantic coast, from Spain to the Baltic. Professor de Bruyn Kops makes a convincing case that the Dutch had created a vast and intricate network tying together the trade of the whole seaboard and she has probably found as much evidence for it as anyone will. I do wish she had made it clearer at the beginning that the wine trade would serve as a gateway to so many other issues, particularly because they make for a much richer book. As it is, the reader is given a workout in following the argument and trying to find the big picture.

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