



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### [Review of: Van Groesen, M. (2014), The Legacy of Dutch Brazil]

Baud, M.

**Publication date**

2017

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

New West Indian Guide

**License**

CC BY-NC

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Baud, M. (2017). [Review of: Van Groesen, M. (2014), The Legacy of Dutch Brazil]. *New West Indian Guide*, 91(3-4), 278-279.

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

**Michiel van Groesen (ed.)**

*The Legacy of Dutch Brazil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. x + 363 pp. (Cloth US\$129.00)

The short period of Dutch colonization of the region around Recife in today's North Eastern Brazil presents a curious footnote to Latin American colonial history. Between 1624 and 1654 the Dutch West India Company governed this small but lucrative tropical part of Latin America. Its importance for the Atlantic slave trade and the naval struggle with Spain made the region a pivotal part of the Dutch Caribbean, and "Dutch Brazil" continues to attract attention from Brazilian, Caribbean, and Atlantic historians. At the same time, among Brazilians it also became a symbol of what Brazil could have "become" had the Dutch not been expelled in 1644.

Dutch historian Michiel van Groesen's *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil* is the most recent example of the continuing interest among historians for this period. In 12 articles by well-known experts in the field, the book covers a wide range of topics. Four of the articles analyze the Atlantic dimension of Dutch colonization and show the complex struggle between the Dutch United Provinces and Spain, including a war in which Portugal changed sides several times. Wim Klooster elucidates the importance for Caribbean history of this episode. One of the reasons for the conquest of Brazil was its windward location, which provided the Dutch a base for carrying out attacks on the Spanish Caribbean islands. In this way, the Dutch conquest of its Brazilian colony became a Caribbean event. The Spanish authorities tried to bolster the protection of its treasure fleets and strengthened the defense works of cities such as Havana, Cartagena, and San Juan. Klooster concludes that in this way the Dutch presence in Brazil added to Spain's imperial overstretch and prevented a more prominent Spanish role in the Caribbean. Interestingly, the same can be said for the Dutch since the costs of their Brazilian adventure put a brake on further Dutch expansion in the Caribbean.

A number of the contributions reject outright the much heralded religious tolerance of the Dutch, showing that African slaves were never included in the so-called system of Dutch tolerance. Evan Haefli seems to suggest that the lack of missionary effort toward conversion of the slave population in the Dutch colonies should be considered a cornerstone for tolerance. Reading this book, I come to a different conclusion, which is that the Dutch did not "include" the slave population in their societal design and "tolerated" their religious autonomy because of what we could call racist neglect. Despite some of the unique humanistic features of the governance of Johan Maurits, Jonathan Israel's analysis of Dutch tolerance as an "essentially pragmatic matter tailored

to suit the harsh circumstances of an embattled colony” still seems the most adequate one.

Several of the essays discuss the cultural and religious significance of Dutch colonization. Johan Maurits, a keen collector of natural and ethnographic objects, stimulated Dutch scientists and artists to portray and analyze Brazilian reality. The paintings by Frans Post and Albert Eckhout became world famous and, as Mariana Françaço makes clear, played an important symbolic role in the gift-giving of European diplomacy. Neil Safier shows the long-lasting influence of the famous *Historia Naturalis Brasilia* (1648) by Georg Marcgraf and Willem Piso, which remained an essential point of reference for naturalists until late in the eighteenth century.

The book's final two chapters, by Rebecca Parker Brienen and Julie Berger Hochstrasser, nicely connect to Françaço's, focusing on the work of the painters Post and Eckhout and their continuing impact, first in European diplomatic circles, then in Brazil, and finally in the global art market. More than anything, these paintings, like the scientific studies done in service of the Dutch colonial project, explain why the legacy of Dutch Brazil has been so enduring. It should not be forgotten that they were explicitly ordered by Johan Maurits, who in this way not only increased Dutch local knowledge, but also guaranteed the long-lasting memory of this short-lived experiment. Joan Pau Rubiés pointedly observes that it also supported his own personal glorification.

This collection gives an excellent “Atlantic” view on the Dutch Brazilian colony and its legacy. Taken together, the articles nicely demonstrate why Dutch Brazil should be considered part of Caribbean history. Most of them can be read separately as examples of today's historical knowledge. The chapters by Françaço, Parker Brienen, and Hochstrasser, which are meaningfully connected (though, oddly enough, they are not presented together in the book), show how strongly our vision of Dutch Brazil has been determined by what Rubiés calls “the triumph of the visual legacy,” something that has been missing in other parts of the Dutch Caribbean.

*Michiel Baud*

Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA),

1018 WB Amsterdam, the Netherlands

*J.M.Baud@cedla.nl*