

## Fighting a foregone conclusion

*Local interest groups, West Indian merchants, and St. Eustatius, 1780-1810*

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TSEG 12 (1): 79–100

DOI: 10.5117/TSEG2015.1.ROIT

### Abstract

After the island of St. Eustatius was sacked by the British during the Fourth Anglo Dutch War (1780-1784), there were fierce debates as to how to restore its prosperity. These debates illustrate the workings of locally-based (colonial) interest groups in the Dutch Atlantic. These local interest groups have been ignored by historians, who have fixated on whether there was a West Indian lobby similar to the one in Great Britain. This article shows that the suggestions merchants on St. Eustatius made as to how to rebuild the wealth of the once prosperous 'emporium to the world' were part of larger debates in the Dutch Republic about how best to govern its colonies in the rapidly changing 'post-mercantilist' world at the end of the eighteenth century.

[St. Eustatius] has no produce, no fortifications for its defence, nor martial spirit nor military regulations ... Its utility was its defence. The universality of its use, the neutrality of its nature was its security and its safeguard. Its proprietors had, in the spirit of commerce, made it an emporium for all the world. ... Its wealth was prodigious, arising from its industry and the nature of its commerce.<sup>1</sup>

This Dutch island so lauded by Edmund Burke also captured the imagination of other late-eighteenth century European political philosophers and travellers. The *philosophe* Guillaume Thomas François Raynal wrote that the tiny rock in the Caribbean prevailed over the odious yoke of monopoly which weighed heavily on the neighbouring islands.<sup>2</sup> Others, however,

1 Edmund Burke, *Speeches of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, Paul Langford (ed.) (Oxford 1981) vol. 2, 247.

2 Guillaume Th. F. Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique, des établissements & du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Amsterdam 1700) vol. 4, 246-48.

were less impressed by the commerce conducted on the island. A British Parliamentarian, outraged by the munitions the island supplied to the North American rebels during the American War of Independence (1775-1783), decried the island as an 'abominable nest of pirates.'<sup>3</sup> These services 'Statia' (as St. Eustatius is also known) rendered to the North Americans was among the reasons for the British declaration of war against the Dutch and the Fourth (and final) Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784). As part of these hostilities, British army and naval forces under General John Vaughan and Admiral George Rodney seized and sacked St. Eustatius in early 1781. The island was subsequently taken by Dutch-allied French forces later this same year, ending British control.

But the British occupation was hugely damaging. The island was thoroughly looted. A group of merchants residing on St. Eustatius after the end of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War came together in order to find ways to restore the prosperity of the island. This article will focus on this group of merchants on St. Eustatius and show how they formed a locally-based interest group for the promotion of their viewpoint within the Dutch Republic. We will argue that debates on how to restore St. Eustatius to its status as 'the golden rock' illustrate the workings of the heretofore largely ignored locally-based (colonial) interest groups in the Dutch Atlantic. The relative effectiveness of local interest groups has been overlooked by historians of the Dutch Atlantic, who have fixated instead on whether or not there was a West Indian lobby in the Dutch Republic as there was in the United Kingdom. As this article will go on to show, the suggestions these merchants offered as to how to rebuild the wealth of the once prosperous 'emporium to the world' were part of larger debates in the Dutch Republic about how best to govern its colonies in the rapidly changing 'post-mercantilist' world at the end of the eighteenth century.

3 *The Parliamentary register: or, history of the proceedings and debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, ... The second edition. Vol. I: Proceedings 1781-1782*, (Dublin 1784) 357. Victor Enthoven makes reference to this famous quote in the title of his article "That Abominable Nest of Pirates: St. Eustatius and the North Americans, 1680-1780", *Early American Studies* 10:2 (2012) 239-301.

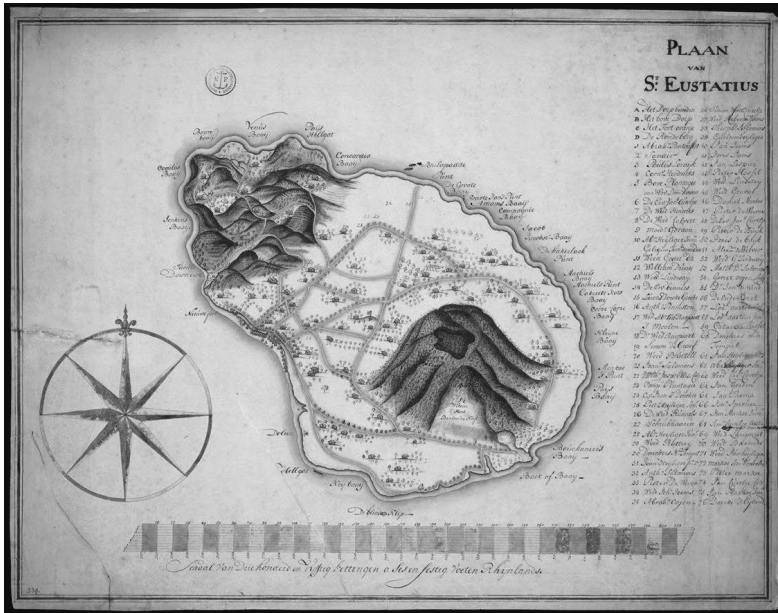


Illustration 1. 'Plaan van St. Eustatius', ca. 1750

Source: Dutch National Archive, The Hague, Kaarten en tekeningen van het ministerie van Koloniën 1814-1963, inventaris 4.MIKO, inv.no. 339

## 1 Emulating England? Dutch historiography and the question of a West Indian interest

The interest group composed of merchants on St. Eustatius and their actions were not particularly unique. The archives are full of examples of relatively small groups of locally-based interest groups that came together to promote their causes. Yet Dutch historiography has tended to hesitate in addressing the issue of the local promotion of interests in the Atlantic. This hesitation may stem from the fact that, for historians of the Dutch Republic, the benchmark for any study of West Indian interests has, either implicitly or explicitly, been Great Britain.<sup>4</sup> The British model of a West Indian interest was the British Society of West India Merchants, a unified group of planters and merchants with financial interests in the Caribbean colonies, who influenced the political process in Britain in various ways. By

4 Victor Enthoven, 'Dutch West Indian Interest and the Case of St. Eustatius, 1680-1780', Unpublished paper presented at the *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800* conference (KITLV), Leiden, Netherlands: 23-24 August 2012.

the end of the American War of Independence, roughly contemporaneous with the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, these parties had organised themselves into a formalised entity called the West India Committee – a highly structured group that lobbied for a largely mercantilist policy (and, later, against the abolition of the slave trade).<sup>5</sup> Because there was nothing of the sort in the Dutch Republic, Piet Emmer argued that ‘The Dutch Republic did not have a “West Indian Interest” as in Britain.’<sup>6</sup>

Emmer’s dismissal of a Dutch West Indian interest is part of a longer historiography which has rejected a consideration how stakeholders in the Dutch West Indies promoted their concerns. Much of this discussion refers to the interests of the plantation colonies of the Dutch Guyanas, in particular Suriname. Jan van de Voort asserted that there was far too great a divergence between the interests of planters and merchants for any sort of effective collaboration. As he put it:

There was no question of a West Indian interest in the Republic. The interests of the staple market were incompatible with any sort of mercantilist monopoly on West Indian products in the Republic. Despite the Dutch West Indies’ increasing production of tropical products, they could not keep up with the ever-growing demand for these same products on the staple market.<sup>7</sup>

Van de Voort’s view seems to have been largely accepted by subsequent historians, though it ignores the fact that the interests of those who owned plantations and the interests of the ‘West India merchants’ were different in Britain, as well. Moreover, the interests of those with property in different British Caribbean colonies were not necessarily identical either. In addition, Van de Voort begs the question as to why planters and merchants did not form their own individual interest groups.

5 On the British West Indian interest, see Douglas Hall, *A Brief History of the West India Committee* (St. Lawrence, Barbados, 1971); Lillian M. Penson, ‘The London West India Interest in the Eighteenth Century,’ *The English Historical Review* 36:143 (1921) 373-392; Geraldine Meroney, ‘The London Entrepot Merchants and the Georgia Colony,’ *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25:2 (1968) 230-244; Alison G. Olson, ‘The Virginia Merchants of London: A Study in eighteenth-Century Interest-Group Politics,’ *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40:3 (1983) 363-388. Andrew O’Shaughnessy has painted a more nuanced picture of the British West Indian lobby. He questions how homogenous and formal it really was. See his ‘The Formation of a Commercial Lobby: The West Indian Interest, British Colonial Policy and the American Revolution,’ *The Historical Journal* 40:1 (1997) 71-95.

6 Piet Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580-1880* (Aldershot 1998) 9.

7 Jan van de Voort, *De Westindische plantages van 1720-1795: financiën en handel* (Eindhoven 1973) 25. This and all subsequent translations from the Dutch by Jessica Vance Roitman.

Van de Voort partially answers this last question by asserting that Surinamese planters resided in their colony and were not present in the Republic, at least not for long enough to influence political decision-making. And, in the latter part of the eighteenth-century when absenteeism was rampant, it was because the planters were bankrupted and had repatriated themselves, while their estates became the property of their creditors in the Dutch Republic. Therefore, they no longer had the financial wherewithal to, nor the interest in, lobbying for plantations' interests in the Republic.<sup>8</sup> Alex van Stipriaan offers another argument for why planters did not unite to advocate for their interests. He shows that the planters of Suriname, as well as the other plantation colonies of the Guyanas, were not part of the socio-economic elite within the Republic and, therefore, had little political clout with which to lobby for their interests.<sup>9</sup> Van Stipriaan was reacting to the assertions that had been made by G.W. van der Meiden who argued that Surinamese planters were actually quite influential. In any case, there is little doubt that planters did not unite in the same way that they did in Great Britain.<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, in comparison to the promotion of British West Indian interests, the merchants of the Dutch Republic were also not active lobbyists. Emmer argued that the deep-seated provincialism, especially between the provinces of Zeeland and Holland, dominated West Indian issues.<sup>11</sup> Henk den Heijer illustrates how divisive this provincial particularism was. His case studies show how these provinces fought long-running battles to preserve their own rights in various Atlantic colonies, and challenged the privileges of the other province in these same territories. For example, after years of discussion, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) monopoly on the slave trade was maintained, which helped the Zeelanders. In contrast, the issue of free trade to Brazil was settled in favour of the merchants of the province of Holland.<sup>12</sup>

Den Heijer shows how such provincialism dominated issues regarding the West Indies, but he believes that there was some promotion of West

8 Jan van de Voort, *De Westindische plantages van 1720-1795*, 203.

9 Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: rooibouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie 1750-1863* (Leiden 1993) 31.

10 Gerard Willem van der Meiden, *Betwist bestuur: een eeuw strijd om de macht in Suriname, 1651-1753* (Amsterdam 1987) 84.

11 Piet Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy*, 95.

12 Henk den Heijer, 'A public and private Dutch West India Interest', in: Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman (eds.), *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden 2014) 159-182.

Indian interests in the Republic. This was, however, a promotion predicated upon advocating for overarching provincial interests. As such, it was played out in the Dutch Republic itself, in the Provincial States and the States General. Victor Enthoven also names a few cases in which local merchants asked for government protection for their interests, usually against a foreign power. He goes on to state that the WIC had become a special interest organisation for private concerns in the West Indies. In this assertion he implicitly suggests that there was little call for a unified interest group of merchants, because stakeholders in the Dutch Atlantic trade were able to use their positions as shareholders in the WIC to influence government policy.<sup>13</sup> He believes that the proof of an effective Dutch West Indian interest lies in the fact that the States General maintained a neutrality that was highly beneficial to merchants for over 100 years.<sup>14</sup>

Den Heijer's research into West Indian interests takes the time-honoured approach of looking at the Republic first and analyses the role of merchants based in the Dutch metropolis – a role deeply influenced by the Zeeland-Holland divide. Enthoven's work approaches the topic through the lens of traditional political and diplomatic history. And both historians are certainly correct in asserting that there was a promotion of West Indian interests in the Dutch Republic through the eighteenth century. Yet we would argue that this picture needs to be drawn in more fully. Even if we take Enthoven's assertion that the close links between merchants and government officials or members or legislative bodies in the Netherlands produced the neutrality policies so beneficial for the Dutch West Indian interest in the case of St. Eustatius completely on board, we would still be left in the dark as to what happened when that neutrality was no longer in force, as was the case after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, in this article, we expand on their work by shifting from the European-centred approach and, instead, look at a group of merchants based on the island of St. Eustatius. These colonially-based merchants created their own informal group outside the WIC for the promotion of their interests. But what were the characteristics of this group, and how did they work to promote their own interests?

13 Enthoven, 'An Assessment of Dutch Transatlantic Commerce', 394, 397.

14 Enthoven, 'Dutch West Indian Interest and the Case of St. Eustatius', 29.

15 Ibid. 30.

## 2 The promotion of the local: interest groups in context

After the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, St. Eustatius was in ruins. In spite of this, many merchants tried to restart their businesses. But prosperity remained elusive. Hence, in 1786, an anonymous merchant who stated that he had lived on St. Eustatius between 1760 and 1784 wrote a critical assessment on Statian commerce and the factors which stood in the way of a revival of its pre-Rodney success. He focused on the policies of the WIC. He analysed the factors that he thought hindered the recovery of the island. He pleaded for a further reduction in both the duties levied on imports and exports and a scaling down in the number of public officials employed by the Company on the island. He also advocated for administrative reforms, including making judicial procedures less complicated. These reforms, he believed, would have positive effects, including lowering costs. Officials earned their incomes largely from emoluments, which, in turn, were paid for by additional charges for services levied on merchants and ships' captains.<sup>16</sup> Although the anonymous author does not mention corruption explicitly, it is clear that this system was vulnerable to abuse. For example, the Statian merchant Henry Haffey complained that:

A *f*110 fine is now paid to the Governor for a burghers brief exclusive of his fees of office and the whole cost is about *f*130. These sums are taken from masters of Vessels otherwise a pass won't be granted and if the vessel is worth only *f*500 there is no deduction and if the master quits the vessel the day after the papers are taken out, the like sum must be paid for a new set. ... These impositions bring the island into bad repute with those of other nations.<sup>17</sup>

Haffey and the anonymous merchant wrote their reports in the hopes of influencing WIC policy concerning St. Eustatius.

During its yearly meeting in the fall of 1786, however, the Board of Directors of the WIC made a decision that was diametrically opposed to the solutions suggested in this anonymous pamphlet. An 8 percent tariff was introduced on most articles from both Europe and the American colonies. At the same time, the traffic between Europe and St. Eustatius was

16 '1786. Mémoire sur l'isle de Saint-Eustache', published by J. de Hullu in, 'De handel van St. Eustatius in 1786', *West-Indische Gids* 3:1 (1922) 35-51. The original report is kept in: Netherlands National Archives The Hague (further NL-HaNA), 2.21.006.49, Collection G.K. van Hogendorp (further CVH), inv. no. 154g.

17 NL-HaNA 3.01.26, Raadpensionaris Van de Spiegel, inv. no. 160, file 11. Eighteenth century capitalisation and spelling are maintained in the quoted text.<sup>5</sup>

to be restricted only to ships equipped by the WIC.<sup>18</sup> This drastic reversal of the long-standing, and much-lauded, free trade policy on the island triggered vehement protests both in the Dutch Republic and on St. Eustatius – protests that illustrate the ways in which the merchants of St. Eustatius came together for the promotion of their interests.<sup>19</sup>

The term 'interest group' was not used in the early modern world.<sup>20</sup> It is only in retrospect that historians have given the promotion of group interests such a categorical label. The historian Alison Gilbert Olson proposes a definition for interest groups in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, defining them as 'A group of individuals, conscious of sharing a common concern, cooperating on the borders of power, and seeking to increase their own benefits through bargaining with a political system they accept and influence but do not attempt to control.'<sup>21</sup> Similarly, political scientist Gabriel Almond defines an interest group as 'a group of individuals who are linked by particular bonds of concern or advantage, and who have some awareness of these bonds.'<sup>22</sup> He distinguishes several different kinds of interest groups. The first is the institutional interest group. These are formal organisations. While they were not formed especially for promoting or defending interests, these organisations may articulate their interests or the interests of a group within the society. Although Victor Enthoven does not use a theoretical construct to frame his assertions, the WIC is clearly an institutional interest group in his model.<sup>23</sup>

A second category is the non-associational interest groups. These are groups who are linked by family ties, ethnicity, status, class, or, importantly for this article, region. They are not permanently organised and articulate their interests through influential individuals, family heads or representa-

18 NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv.no. 154, P.A. Godin to G.K. van Hogendorp, 8 March 1788.

19 Pieter Anthony Godin, who was appointed Governor of St. Eustatius in 1788, was shocked when he learned about this resolution in 1786. The effects, Godin predicted, would be that not a single barrel of sugar would be shipped to the island from its neighboring colonies, and the sugar trade was one of its principal branches of commerce. Godin tried in vain to prevent the resolution from being sent to the islands. Ibid.

20 This section is drawn from Jessica Vance Roitman, *The Same But Different? Inter-cultural Trade and the Sephardim, 1595-1640* (Leiden 2011) Chapter 6.

21 Alison Gilbert Olson, *Making the Empire Work: London and American Interest Groups, 1690-1790* (Cambridge, MA 1992) 2-3.

22 Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston 1966) 75.

23 Victor Enthoven, 'An Assessment of Dutch Transatlantic Commerce', 397. Alison Olson also describes early modern trading companies as institutional interest groups. See Alison Olson, 'The Virginia Merchants of London: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Interest-Group Politics', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40:3 (1983) 363-388, 365.



tives. Within the framework of this article, the merchants of St. Eustatius – a group of merchants who, as we will examine in more detail below, submitted petitions, requests, and reports together or in concert with one another, often naming representatives to voice their concerns – functioned as such an interest group. This kind of interest group is not permanently organised, does not have formal procedures for the articulation of its interests and does not have continuity in its internal structure. These sorts of interest groups had existed throughout the Dutch colonies almost from the beginning of colonisation, though some were manifest and some latent, some formally organised and some merely “a condition of like-mindedness and informal communication about issues.”<sup>24</sup>

For instance, in a 1716 pamphlet penned in Suriname, a group of twenty prominent planters led by the colony’s former bookkeeper, Jan van der Marsche, wrote to the Directors of the Suriname Company (who ran the colony) voicing their concerns about the state of the slave trade, military defense, and governance. They wanted leadership who understood the colony. One key aspect of this was the need for military defense. To this end, the authors suggested strengthening the colony’s defenses by using Amerindians and enslaved Africans in the military forces, as well as by building more forts. These forces would protect their investments in the colony and help ensure the prosperity of the colony – a prosperity, the planters argued, which would be helped by opening up trade with the colony. But Van der Marsche’s plantation owners, which included Portuguese Jewish and Dutch planters, did not stop there. They offered concrete advice for the improvement of the colony, such as attracting more Jews with knowledge of colonial products, as well moving away from monocultural sugar production. They proposed cultivating rice, cotton, cacao, grapes, saffron, flax, as well as focusing on trades such as pottery and shipbuilding.<sup>25</sup> There is no evidence that they were part of some sort of formal institution. Instead, the impression is that this group of twenty planters got together informally because of their mutual concerns for the future of their colony, where they all resided, and their shared ideas for its betterment. And there is no suggestion that they remained organised in any sort of formal way after the submission of their pamphlet.

Likewise, residents in the colonies of Essequibo and Demerara formed

24 Samuel Finer, ‘Interest Groups and the Political Process in Great Britain’, in: Henry W. Ehrmann (ed.) *Interest Groups on Four Continents* (Pittsburgh 1958), 117.

25 NL-HaNa, 1.05.03 Sociëteit van Suriname (further SvS), inv. no. 125. See also Karwan Fatah-Black, *Suriname and the Atlantic World, 1650-1800* (Unpublished PhD diss., University of Leiden 2013), 87.

similar constellations of locally-based, non-associational interest groups. These informal consortiums of like-minded individuals generally came together to discuss the recurring issues surrounding the shortage of enslaved Africans in these territories. There were many petitions submitted by planters with a shared interest in asking that foreign slavers be allowed to legally provide slaves to these colonies. Such requests came from not only the Governor, Storm van 's Gravesande, in 1757, but the English planters of Essequibo and Demerara in 1769 and other residents of the colonies in 1770.<sup>26</sup> Again, there is little evidence that these colonists felt any need to organise themselves further or to create a more formalised institution for the promotion of their interests. Instead, a group of individuals, sharing a common concern, cooperated on the borders of power, as would so many other locally-based interest groups in the Dutch Atlantic.<sup>27</sup> So in the late 1780s, the merchants of St. Eustatius were employing a fairly common method of advocating for their interests.

### 3 The merchants of St. Eustatius: plans and petitions

Around this time, St. Eustatius numbered about 2,300 white inhabitants, but this relatively low number belied its international composition.<sup>28</sup> The foreign merchant community during the second half of the 1780s was mainly composed of British, North American, and French merchants. British citizens originating from Bermuda formed the largest group of foreigners, with Richard Downing Jennings as their most prominent representative. Some of the foreign merchants also originated from European countries, cities, and areas that did not have direct colonial connections with

26 Eric Willem van der Oest, 'The Forgotten Colonies of Essequibo and Demerara, 1700-1814', in: Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven (eds.) *Riches from Atlantic Commerce* (Leiden, 2003), 323-361, 339; NL-HaNA, 1.05.06 Verspreide West-Indische Stukken (further VWIS), inv. no. 48; NL-HaNA 1.01.02 Staten-Generaal (SG), inv. no. 9424; NL-HaNA 1.05.01.02, Tweede of Nieuwe West-Indische Compagnie (further NWIC), inv. no. 915. We thank Bram Hoonhout for these citations.

27 There are too many cases to cite here. But see, for example, Hendrik van Dam, "Deductie, gedaan maken by ofte van wegen Hendrik van Dam, fiscaal [...] van de eylanden St. Eustatius ende Zaba [...] en [...] habitanten van de voorsz eylanden aan de [...] bewindhebber van de [...] West-Indische Compagnie," (1703), Pamphlet 15045, Royal Library of the Netherlands (KB), The Hague, and J.T. La Fargue, "Memorie consideratien en protestatie, ter zaake van't vrugtelooz reclameeren eener erffenisse [...] al in den jaare 1742 geremitteerd [...] aan directeuren van Suriname," ('s Gravenhage, M. Gaillard, 1754), Pamphlet 18457, KB.

28 In 1789 there were 787 men aged 16 years and older and 771 women. Boys and girls younger than 16 years numbered 374 and 409, respectively. NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1196, 628.

the Americas. Creole whites stemming from local families formed a minority.<sup>29</sup> In general, this population depended heavily on commerce. Governor Godin estimated in 1790 that about 1,000 men, women and children depended directly on commerce for their livelihood, while some 300 earned a living as mariners or fishermen.<sup>30</sup>

With trade as the lifeblood of St. Eustatius, it is not surprising that the news about the aforementioned resolution introducing an 8 percent tariff on most articles from both Europe and the American colonies and restricting trade only to ships equipped by the WIC caused an uproar. The Statian merchants, who heretofore had never had a formalised board to discuss or represent their interests with the local government or the WIC, filed a petition in which they asked acting Governor Johannes Runnels and his councillors to suspend the publication of this decision by the WIC and to order the government secretary to grant access to the documents regarding the new tariffs. The fifty-seven petitioners stated that they had commissioned eight fellow merchants residing on the island to study the planned tariffs and to draft a reaction. The council, however, did not immediately rule on this petition so a week later a second, more elaborate, petition was sent.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, it had become clear that the new tariffs had already been published on nearby St. Martin.<sup>32</sup> The close proximity of the islands and the well-established networks for the exchange of goods and information meant that it would only be a matter of time until this bad news reached the colonies with which St. Eustatius traded.

The second petition was signed by Daniel Hopker, Richard Downing Jennings, Martin Du Brois Godet, A.W. Vaucrosson, David Mendes, J. Schimmel H.Zn., Hendrik Pandt, Frederick Sugnin, and William Stevenson. This international group of locally-based merchants was chosen by 116 merchants and ships' captains to act as their representatives and formally commissioned to do whatever they could to stop the publication of the new tariffs on the island, and to convince the WIC to rethink its new policy.<sup>33</sup> The petitioners expressed their astonishment at such an abrupt about-face in the WIC's free trade policy – a policy that had been in effect

29 Han Jordaan and Victor Wilson, 'The Eighteenth-century Danish, Dutch, and Swedish Free Ports in the Northeastern Caribbean: Continuity and Change', in: Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman (eds.) *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680-1800*, 275-308.

30 De Hullu, 'St. Eustatius', 388.

31 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv.no. 1195, 423-425; 427-432. The first petition was filed on 14 March 1787, the second was dated 21 March 1787.

32 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv.no. 1195, 427.

33 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, 1195, 435-438, copy of a document dated 15 March 1787.

for over a century. They also voiced their concern that such a policy, if enacted, would put an end to the economic recovery of the island. The petition also stressed that the merchant community was international and had settled on the island principally because of the freedom of trade.<sup>34</sup> They argued that in spite of the 'precarious state' of the island's government since the end of the British occupation, the governing council representing the WIC had not heeded their proposals to improve the economic situation; therefore they now addressed the WIC Directors directly. At the same time, the Statian merchants communicated extensively with their correspondents in the Dutch Republic, outlining the measures they thought necessary for the regeneration of the island's commerce. In this correspondence, they asserted that the WIC Directors were apparently not well-informed about the situation in the colony. The Directors' actions were neither in the interest of the Company, as the WIC mainly derived income from duties and taxes which fluctuated with the increase and decrease of the volume of trade and shipping, nor in the interest of the residents of the colony.<sup>35</sup> The island's council agreed to suspend the publication of the new tariffs on the condition that the petitioners would draw up a well-founded statement on how they thought the true interest of both the Company and the inhabitants could best be served. This was to be done within six weeks. This statement would then be submitted to the Directors of the WIC.<sup>36</sup>

Not one, but three, statements were presented. The representatives of the Dutch Statian merchant community, Jan Schimmel Hendriks, Hendrik Pandt, and David Mendes, sent in an elaborate statement, addressed to both the Directors of the WIC and the local council, in July 1787. This document contained concrete proposals to revive trade and shipping. In a separate but attached document thirty-three, mainly Dutch, merchants declared that they agreed with its contents.<sup>37</sup> Martin Dubrois Godet junior, scion of a creole white family, handed in a different statement, which he

34 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, 1195, 427-428. For a discussion of cross-cultural lobbying groups in the early modern period, see Jessica Vance Roitman, 'Inter-cultural networks as lobbying groups: A survival mechanism in the Early Modern Republic', *Leidschrift*, 23:2 (2008) 27-42.

35 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, 431-432. R.D. Jennings, for example, corresponded with the Amsterdam merchant house of John Hodshon & Son; see NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv.no. 154g, nos. 79-80, copy of a letter dated 15 May 1786.

36 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, copy of the decision of the council on the petition, 23 March 1787, 433.

37 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, 597-626, copy of a statement dated 17 July 1787; copy of a statement filed 18 July 1787.

addressed to the acting Governor and councillors, with a request to pass it on to the Company Directors. The contents of this document do not differ substantially from the first statement.<sup>38</sup> Finally, Richard Downing Jennings, A.W. Vaucrosson and William Stevensen, who represented fifty-two non-Dutch merchants, submitted a statement in English to the WIC Directors in which they also outlined the steps that needed to be taken to return the island to its former wealth – again, steps that were virtually the same as those advocated for by the Dutch merchants and Godet junior.<sup>39</sup> The close similarity of the documents hints at a coordination of interests from these merchants, all of whom were residing on the island and would seem to support the idea that these merchants were acting in concert with one another as a locally-based associational interest group.

The council sent all the documents to their superiors. The council was of the opinion that all the statements came down to one single point: because of the competition engendered by the new free ports, there was no other choice but to offer to foreign traders at least the same conditions as the other free ports offered, but preferably better ones.<sup>40</sup>



*Illustration 2. 'Afbeelding van den Berg en de Baai...'*, A. Nelson/Emans, 1774 (detail)

Source: Dutch National Archive, The Hague, Kaarten en tekeningen van het ministerie van Koloniën 1814-1963, inventaris 4.MIKO, inv.no. 313

38 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, 627-636, copy of a statement filed 20 July 1787.

39 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, 637-696, copy of Dutch translation of a statement dated 20 July 1787; a copy of the original English version of the document can be found in NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH inv. no. 154g, nos. 37-66v, NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, 628-629.

40 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 1195, 594-595, council to the Board of Directors of the WIC, 28 July 1787.

All the submitted documents mapped the competition. The British, French, and Spanish were all experimenting with a limited form of free trade in their Caribbean possessions, ironically at a time when the WIC seemed to want to move towards an outdated mercantilism. For instance, the British had made Dominica a free port. This interest group of merchants also expressed their worries about the competition from the neighbouring Swedish free port of St. Barthélemy.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the Spanish had opened the island of Trinidad to ships of all nations. Although duties were levied, it was expected that St. Eustatius (and Curaçao) would feel competition. The French had also declared St. Lucia a free port. And all nations were now permitted to bring slaves to Martinique and Guadeloupe. Thus, it was argued, the Dutch would lose out to other nations if taxes and duties were raised to 8 percent. In all statements it was also maintained that the slave trade could play a central role in restoring the island to its former prosperity. Slavers of all nations should be allowed to come to St. Eustatius. The neighbouring colonies would purchase slaves on St. Eustatius, which would be paid for in tropical products.

All these arguments seem to have stimulated a rethinking and, eventually, a revision of the new policy. The WIC's Board of Directors decided to ask for advice from the most prominent metropolitan merchants trading with Curaçao and St. Eustatius. The Company wanted to know whether a lowering of duties, both in the colonies and in the Republic itself, would increase the prosperity of these islands. The Directors also asked if allowing foreign traders and carriers more freedom in the shipping and trading of slaves and commodities, as the interest group on St. Eustatius wanted, would help revive commerce in the Dutch-controlled Caribbean.<sup>42</sup>

The opinion of these Republic-based merchants was far from unanimous. True to form, the Zeeland merchants were the most mercantilist. They feared a more liberal attitude towards trade and shipping would harm Dutch interests, despite the fact that such a policy had been in effect for over a century. They claimed that not only the slave and commodities trades would suffer, but also shipping companies and, thereby, all related industries like ship yards would feel the negative effects. Allowing only Dutch ships to ply the traffic between the Republic and the colonies had never been detrimental in the past, so they questioned why it should now be seen as problematic. The idea that foreign ships would, as a conse-

41 For more about St. Barthélemy, see Han Jordaan and Victor Wilson, 'The Eighteenth-century Danish, Dutch, and Swedish Free Ports in the Northeastern Caribbean'.

42 NL-HaNA, 1.05.06, VWIS, inv. no. 1383.

quence, prefer St. Thomas and St. Barthélemy over St. Eustatius was not based on facts, according to one Zeeland merchant, who accused the interest group on St. Eustatius of fear-mongering.<sup>43</sup> Pieter Anthony Godin, who was at that time already appointed Governor of the island, but was still in the Dutch Republic, commented on the statements submitted by the merchants. He dismissed the claims of these Zeeland merchants because, he said, they were merely defending their own interests.<sup>44</sup>

A majority of the Amsterdam merchants, again true to form, saw mainly positive effects in allowing foreigners more freedom in bringing slaves to Curaçao and St. Eustatius. They were positively inclined toward allowing other nations to ply the shipping between the Republic and the colonies, as long as this was well-regulated. But they were against permitting non-Dutch ships to supply the colonies with commodities from other European ports. The only commodities that should be allowed were provisions (mainly Irish), and this with the already existing 5 percent import duty. Dutch ships should be allowed to carry supplies from any European port free of duties, according to the advice of the Amsterdam merchants.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the Rotterdam merchants took their advice a step further. They asserted that St. Eustatius would be of no value to the Dutch Republic if foreigners were *not* allowed to participate in its trade. The colony should be turned into a marketplace for both commodities and slaves. By decreasing or increasing the tariffs to be paid in the colony and in the Republic, the Company had an instrument of regulation at its disposal. It could, therefore, protect Dutch interests vis-à-vis foreign competition.<sup>46</sup>

Not long before leaving for his post on St. Eustatius, Governor Godin had an interview with the Rotterdam pensionary (city attorney or legal counsellor), Gijsbrecht, Karel van Hogendorp, an influential man who represented Rotterdam in the governance chamber for the province of Holland, the States of Holland. Through his position Van Hogendorp could indirectly steer the policy of the States General with regard to the WIC. During this conversation it became clear that the interest group of merchants on St. Eustatius had been successful, despite the divided opinions of the provincially-focused merchants in the Dutch Republic. Van Hogendorp revealed that there was some willingness on the part of the Company to reduce the duties on imports and exports on St. Eustatius in order to

43 Ibid.

44 NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv. no. 154; no. 74.

45 NL-HaNA, 1.05.06, VWIS, inv. no. 1383.

46 Ibid.

increase the volume of trade.<sup>47</sup> Van Hogendorp had clearly been swayed by the arguments of the consortium of Statian merchants; a copy of the original English statement of the Statian merchants Jennings, Vaucrosson, and Stevenson can be found in his archive.<sup>48</sup> He authored a report presented to the States of Holland.<sup>49</sup> This report basically adopted all the suggestions made by the group of merchants on St. Eustatius.

The meeting and report were both part of a larger discussion around the expiration of the charter of the WIC and the need to reform the administration of the WIC. For instance, in the same year of 1787, Frans Smeer, who had been sent to Essequibo and Demerara by the WIC to counter smuggling, advised the WIC to open up the slave trade.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, also in 1787, the Van Wijn commission echoed the idea promoted by the locally-based interest groups of stimulating Dutch trade by opening it up.<sup>51</sup> Three years later, the Grovestins and Boeij commission advised Stadtholder William V to allow foreigners to participate in Dutch trade to the colonies.<sup>52</sup> This discussion about what to do with the WIC was, in turn, part of a larger conversation about what to do with both the WIC and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in a world in which, it was clear, chartered companies and the mercantilist system they represented, was fast coming to a close. Of course, there had already been discussions earlier in the century about reforming the companies, but by the early 1790s, the situation of St. Eustatius, as well the other Dutch Atlantic colonies, had made such conversations of vital importance.<sup>53</sup> According to Henk den Heijer, there had always been criticism of the policies of the two companies, but until well into the eighteenth century there were hardly any voices calling for the dissolution of the VOC and WIC. But this was rapidly changing. During the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, the financial situation of both companies was such that intervention was unavoidable. At the same time, in nearly all the Atlantic colonies, there was growing dissatisfaction with the WIC administration. In the Dutch Republic, it was particularly the so-called “patriots,” a reformist political faction who called for far-reaching change.<sup>54</sup> In 1791, an

47 NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv. no. 154g.

48 NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv.no. 154g, nos. 37-66v.

49 NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv. no. 154g, nos. 99-104.

50 NL-HaNA, 1.05.06, VWIS, inv. nr. 48.

51 NL-HANA, 1.01.02, SG, inv.nr. 9424.

52 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 915, 24-29.

53 For an early argument for reform of chartered companies, see “Requeste der burgeren en ingezetenen van Holland, aan [...] den [...] erf-stadhouder,” (1748), Pamphlet 18142, KB.

54 H.J. den Heijer, *De geotrooieerde compagnie: de VOC en de WIC als voorlopers van de naamloze vennootschap* (Deventer 2005) 195, 200-203.



anonymous group of authors made strong arguments in a thirty-two page long pamphlet for reforming the governance of the West and East Indian colonies, including largely dismantling the WIC and VOC and opening up trade completely. In the end, many of these discussions were moot, because political events, as described below, superseded any reform. Nevertheless, it is clear that this larger question about what to do with the companies and the colonies they governed formed the backdrop of the decision-making around St. Eustatius.

In a resolution dated the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1788, the States of Holland concluded that the only means to increase the trade of St. Eustatius (and St. Martin), was to keep these colonies open to the trade of all nations, though they added that there should be a few measures implemented for favouring Dutch shipping. The slave trade to the islands should also be opened to all nations and was to be made attractive through relatively low import duties.<sup>55</sup> In the end, these ideas which had been argued for so forcibly by the local Statian interest group would also be accepted by the States General.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4 Post-script: The limits of lobbying

For all intents and purposes, the merchants of St. Eustatius, both Dutch and foreign, had accomplished just what they had set out to do. In the face of a change in policy coming from the Republic that would very negatively impact their trading interests, they came together to advocate for their interests. They formed a commission, named representatives, and argued their points at the colonial, provincial, and national levels. They submitted petitions, reports, and wrote fellow merchants in the Republic. And they were effective, even in the face of the pervasive and stultifying provincial strife between Zeeland and Holland that stymied so much of Dutch Atlantic decision-making in the eighteenth century.

This non-associational interest group was successful in the States General, and initially seemed to bear fruit. Thus, the population of St. Eustatius recovered and even climbed to its highest ever in 1790, far exceeding its pre-Rodney numbers of whites, free people of colour, and slaves (Table 1). This precipitous growth in the population on the island across all cate-

<sup>55</sup> NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv. no. 155.

<sup>56</sup> See for an extensive dossier containing memorandums, reports, etc. regarding this discussion on the slave trade: NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH, inv. no. 154f. See also inv. no. 155.

gories indicates growth in the economy. This supposition is bolstered by the number of ships arriving at the island. In 1792, an average of nearly 300 ships a month called at St. Eustatius, a number comparable to the pre-war situation.<sup>57</sup>

**Table 1** Population of St. Eustatius, 1665-1790

Year	Whites	Free people of color	Slaves	Total
1665	330	?	840	1,170
1715	524	?	750	1,274
1723*	426	?	871	1,297
1729	431	?	944	1,375
1732	532	?	911	1,443
1738	627	?	1,191	1,818
1741	539	?	1,239	1,778
1747	1,002	?	1,513	2,515
1758	868	?	1,479	2,347
1762	778	?	1,339	2,117
1768	872	?	1,226	2,098
1779	1,574	?	1,631	3,205
1784	872	113	2,962	3,947
1790	2,375	511	4,944	7,830

\*Seventy-five Christian and five Jewish households, all European

Source: Victor Enthoven, 'That Abominable Nest of Pirates', 10

It was also in this same year that the highest post-war volume of trade was reached, when twenty-eight ships laden with tropical produce sailed to the Dutch Republic.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, in the end, despite the merchants' best efforts, St. Eustatius became an economic backwater. Exports to the Dutch Republic, although initially recovering after the implementation of the changes the interest group of merchants on the island had called for, did not reach the same levels as during the 1770s. Worse, after the first half of 1793, the number of ships anchoring in the Statian roadstead each month suddenly halved.<sup>59</sup> A register of duties collected from the ships makes St. Eustatius' demise as an Atlantic

57 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 633, 111-286; inv. no. 635, 131-283; 1.05.02, SG inv. no. 90, monthly registers of incoming and outgoing ships, January 1792-December 1793.

58 Ibid.

59 NL-HaNA, 1.05.01.02, NWIC, inv. no. 633, 111-286; inv. no. 635, 131-283; 1.05.02, Raad van Colo-niën inv. no. 90, monthly registers of incoming and outgoing ships, January 1792-December 1793.

trading hub visible: the average amount collected monthly fell from 433 pesos (f 1,049) in the summer of 1793 to only 20 pesos (f 48) in 1797.<sup>60</sup>

This fall coincides with the decrease in exports from Statia to the Dutch Republic: after 1792 the number of shipments declined, with only one ship sailing to the Republic in 1795. The effective implementation of the measures lobbied for by the interest group of merchants was nullified by internal political unrest in the Dutch Republic and particularly, some years later, by the wars in the wake of the French Revolution.<sup>61</sup> During the turbulent two decades following the outbreak of the French Revolution, the Dutch were almost continually involved as one of the belligerents. Between 1793 and 1795 the Dutch were at war with France. After French troops invaded the Republic, the Dutch sided with France against Great Britain. In 1795, St. Eustatius was put under the 'protection' of the French, a de facto occupation lasting until 1801, when the British conquered the three Dutch Leeward Islands. St. Eustatius, St. Martin, and Saba were returned to the Dutch after the Peace of Amiens in 1802. By that time, though, the Dutch Leeward colonies had become insignificant economically. A year later, war resumed. In 1810, the islands were again occupied by the British. When Statia came under Dutch rule again in 1816, its population had declined to a mere 2,591.<sup>62</sup> The Atlantic world had changed and there was no longer need for a free trade zone in a mercantilist space. St. Eustatius had lost its function and would not flourish again. The population was 3,643 in 2011, less than half of what it was in 1790.<sup>63</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The analysis of the 1780s policy-making regarding St. Eustatius has indicated that local interest groups on the island succeeded in articulating their interests successfully in the Dutch Republic. However, the promotion

60 Han Jordaán and Victor Wilson, 'The Eighteenth-century Danish, Dutch, and Swedish Free Ports in the Northeastern Caribbean'.

61 NL-HaNA, 2.21.006.49, CVH inv. no. 154.

62 Cornelius Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Surinam, 1791/5-1942* (Assen 1990) 146-154. For the repercussions of the Quasi War for the Dutch in the Caribbean see, Han Jordaán, 'Patriots, privateers and international politics: the myth of the conspiracy of Jean Baptiste Tierce Cadet', in: Wim Klooster and Gert Oostindie (eds.) *Curaçao in the Age of Revolutions, 1795-1800* (Leiden 2011) 141-169.

63 <http://www.cbs.nl/en-GB/menu/themas/bevolking/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2012/2012-bevolking-cn-uitgesplitst-art.htm>

of these interests was not based on the British model of a unified group of planters and merchants organised into a formalised and long-lasting group such as the West India Committee – a highly structured group that lobbied for a largely mercantilist policy.<sup>64</sup> Instead, the organisation of groups for the promotion of Dutch West Indian interests was far more diffuse and informal than was the case in the British empire, mirroring the decentralised and often divided state of the Dutch Republic itself. Nevertheless merchants who were based in the colonies could and did come together to advocate for their collective advantage. The merchants of St. Eustatius, no matter what their nationality, language or religion, were a group of individuals driven collectively by a common concern – the revocation of crippling tariffs and protectionist measures and, more broadly, the renewal of their once flourishing trade. They sought to increase their own benefits through influencing a political system over which they had some persuasive power, but which they did not control.

Non-associational interest groups are linked by family ties, ethnicity, status, class, or, as we have shown, their regional base, as was the case in Suriname, Essequibo and Demerara that we have also mentioned. Neither the group of Statian merchants nor those in the Guyanas were permanently organised, they did not seem to have formal procedures and ceased to function once they had made their points. They articulated their interests through influential individuals such as representatives Jan Schimmel Hendriks, Hendrik Pandt, Sephardic Jew David Mendes, the white creole Martin Dubrois Godet jr., and non-Dutch merchants Richard Downing Jennings, A.W. Vaucrosson and William Stevensen. This lack of permanent organisation, formal procedures, and continuity of internal structure does not mean that the promotion of interests in the Dutch Atlantic was not effective. The locally-based, non-associational Statian interest group was remarkably effective. The merchants made their interests known via petitions at a local level but also directly to the governing board of the WIC itself. Moreover, they capitalised on their long-established commercial communication networks with their correspondents in the Dutch Republic to put pressure on the WIC.

Ultimately, the Directors of the WIC enacted policies that were almost precisely what the interest group of Statian merchants had advocated for. Unlike the interest groups located in the Republic studied by Den Heijer, this was a group on the ground, so to speak, with thorough local knowledge. And the significance of the traditional Zeeland-Holland divide so

64 Andrew O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby'.

well-described by Emmer and Den Heijer, was ultimately negligible, as the Zeeland resistance was largely ignored. Moreover, unlike the picture painted by Enthoven, in this case, initially the WIC did not advocate for merchants' interests, but only belatedly shifted its position at the behest of a group of merchants located in the colonies. It was, rather, an organ against which the merchants needed to lobby!

This simply means that the assertions of Emmer, Enthoven, and Den Heijer regarding the absence or lack of significance of a Dutch West Indian interest needs more nuance. The case of St. Eustatius demonstrates that the colonies produced their own interest groups locally, and these local interest groups, in turn, found ways to connect to metropolitan actors interested in influencing the WIC as well as the States General itself. This holds true for St. Eustatius, but was also the case in Suriname, Essequibo, and Demerara. Further research will no doubt deepen our understanding of the functioning of wider Dutch Atlantic interest groups.<sup>65</sup> All of which means that historians of the Dutch Atlantic should step beyond the confining model of the British West Indian interest when looking at how Atlantic interests were promoted in the Dutch Republic. We also suggest that historians should not just centre their approach on the Republic, its institutions, and its rivalries, but also take a colonially and locally-centred perspective – a perspective that acknowledges the effectiveness of an overseas merchant group that was often loosely-organised, informally-established, and was characterised by a shifting, and often multi-religious, ethnic, and national membership.

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<sup>65</sup> See Fatah-Black, *Suriname*, Chapter 2.

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## Recensies

Tom van den Berge, *H.J. van Mook 1894-1965. Een vrij en gelukkig Indonesië*. (Bussum: Thoth, 2014) 416 p. ISBN 978-90-68686-265

This biography has been long overdue. In the introduction to his book on H.J. van Mook the author rightfully points out that other key figures in Indonesian history have long since found their biographers. Given the importance of the period 1945-1950 for Dutch and Indonesian history he argues that Van Mook – *Luitenant-Gouverneur-Generaal* during the Indonesian struggle for independence – should be among people like Soekarno, Hatta, Drees and Spoor. There is no arguing here, even though two publications on Van Mook appeared as early as 1982.<sup>1</sup> These books however focused mainly on the last stage of Van Mook's colonial civil service career. Other aspects of his professional and personal life escaped the attention. Not in the least because the personal archive of Van Mook was not accessible at the time. After receiving permission of the descendants Tom van den Berge was able to research this treasure trove containing over 2,500 letters, a large number of photos and other unique documents (p. 10).<sup>2</sup>

The author arranges his abundant source material chronologically into nine chapters. The titles of these chapters basically reflect the development of Van Mook's professional career except of course for those on his youth and retirement. Van den Berge's attention is divided evenly between the chapters with the exception of Van Mook's years as the last Dutch governor-general in Indonesia from 1944 till 1948 (Chapter 6). Unsurprisingly, this tumultuous episode in the life of the main character is dealt with in a substantially larger chapter.

At first sight the book's storyline appears quite conventional. The reader

1 Yong Mun Cheong, *H.J. van Mook and Indonesian independence. A study of his role in Dutch-Indonesian relations, 1945-48* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982).

J.C. Bijkerk, *DE laatste landvoogd. Van Mook en het einde van de Nederlandse invloed in Indië* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff, 1982).

2 According to the author Van Mook's personal archive has now been transferred to the national archives in The Hague. It remains unclear whether this material is already to be used for research purposes. The national archives website (<http://www.nationaalarchief.nl/>) mentions only one Van Mook archive with an inventory composed in 1974. This archive consists mainly of official documents and correspondence from the years 1942-1948 (National Archives, Inventory nr. 2.21.123, *Inventaris van het archief van dr. H.J. van Mook [levensjaren 1894-1965], 1917-1964*).

watches Van Mook growing up on the island of Java while receiving his primary and secondary education. In the Netherlands he obtains a degree at Leiden university that qualifies him for the Dutch colonial civil service. Subsequently he returns to the Netherlands Indies, starts a family and commences on a blossoming career that carries him from the lowest administrative level to the highest possible position of *Luitenant-Gouverneur-Generaal*. After stepping down – mainly due to political bickering in the Netherlands and the colony – he moves to the United States as a university professor. In addition he acquires a solid director's position at the United Nations. Ultimately he retires to France where he lives a quiet, secluded life in the Provence until his death in 1965.

However, there is much more to the story than first meets the eye. Each chapter consists of several subparagraphs – most of them with a thematic focus – providing detailed and unique insights in specific aspects of Van Mook's professional and personal life. Well written examples are the vivid description of student life in Leiden as experienced by Van Mook, his love of hiking, or his acting performance on the amateur stage. Less frivolous activities are dealt with expertly as well. One example is Van Mook's active involvement in the short-lived 'Stuwgroep' of which he was co-founder (Chapter 3). Another example is the excellent treatment of Van Mook's years within the Directorate of Economic Affairs in Batavia, first as a staff member and ultimately as Director (1937-1942). Here, Van den Berge adds to the picture of a Netherlands Indies government trying to resist the belligerent Japanese demands for economic access to the colony and ultimately preparing for war. Van Mook indeed played an important part in this respect (Chapter 4).

In all, Van den Berge manages to reach a wider public while adhering to sound academic standards. No small achievement indeed, although some critical remarks need to be made. For instance, the author's explanation for writing a biography in the first place is rather meagre. Van den Berge states in the most general of terms that the book deals with a discomfiting past and aims to bridge differences of opinion concerning this past: "and the biography appears to be a suitable method for this." (p. 10). A less than convincing explanation I would argue.

At several points the storyline also suffers from a lack of contextualization. Much is said about Van Mook's frequent contacts with freemasons (including his father) and his active membership of the Surabaya lodge (e.g. pp. 14-15, 28, 35-36, 61-65), but very little is said about freemasonry in general and what it stood for in the Netherlands Indies. In addition, the question whether or how this seemingly important aspect of Van Mook's life might have influenced his ideas and/or decisions does not come up. Another example is the virtually absent treatment of Van Mook's relationship with his military 'counterpart' general Spoor which is clearly