

Hetzelfde gebeurde overigens ook met dat andere specifieke kenmerk van het Nederlandse sociale zekerheidsstelsel. We hebben het dan over het zogenaamde Talmamodel dat sinds begin twintigste eeuw een onderscheid maakt tussen het verzekeren van het inkomensverlies en de verzekering van de ziekenzorg. Door hun aanpak onderstrepen de auteurs en de redactie de uniciteit van het Nederlandse socialezekerheidsstelsel zonder te verhelten dat het geen perfect systeem is (vanwege of ondanks de inbreng van de private sector in de gezondheidszorg en de zorgverzekering?). Maar zoals gezegd had van daaruit de internationaal vergelijkende aanpak opnieuw geactiveerd moeten worden, al was het maar om na te gaan hoe de Nederlandse casus zich in de voorbije eeuw verhiel tegenover de historische evolutie van de sociale zekerheidsstelsels elders ter wereld én tegenover de wijze waarop de overheden in die landen op hun beurt naar oplossingen zochten en zoeken om hun sociale (basis) bescherming, al dan niet noodgedwongen, te versterken of aan te vullen met initiatieven uit private hoek. Grof geredeneerd kan men de Nederlandse casus op deze manier net zo goed situeren 'op het snijvlak' van het Duitse Bismarckmodel eind negentiende eeuw en het Amerikaanse anno 2009, met andere woorden tussen een alomtegenwoordige en een weinig zichtbare, zeg maar weifelende, overheid als het op de sociale bescherming van de eigen onderdanen aankomt. Alleen al die vaststelling had, met een voortgezette vergelijkende aanpak, aan het boek, naast een onmiskenbare en – ik kan het niet genoeg benadrukken – zeer geapprecieerde historische waarde evengoed een leerrijke actuele waarde mee kunnen geven.

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A.M.G. Rutten, *Blue Ships: Dutch Ocean Crossing with Multifunctional Drugs and Spices in the Eighteenth Century* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Publishing, 2008)
155 p. ISBN 90-5235-199-6

The importance of spices such as pepper, nutmeg, and cloves, as well as of products such as sugar, gold, and indigo, for European overseas expansion is well-known. The Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, English, and French, to name the major players, spent centuries warring over these valuable products and much has been written about the subject. However, A.M.G. Rutten presents a new angle on this much-studied subject. He makes the important and almost entirely overlooked point that many of the spices the European nations sought were valued for their medicinal properties, and not only for their qualities of food preservation and the addition of taste to foods. It was not just spices that were ascribed curative powers, though. Commodities such as gold, ivory, and precious stones were also listed in the pharmacopeias of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Rutten coins a term – Multifunctional Drugs (MFDs) – to describe the versatile utilization of these spices and other products for more than one function, usually culinary and medicinal (p. 11). One of the best and most informative examples of a multifunctional drug is indigo. Indigo is known today as a plant that, when its leaves are processed, produces a vivid blue dye. Indigo was particularly valued before chemical dyeing techniques were developed in the late nineteenth century. But, as Rutten points out, indigo was also used to treat such panoply of problems as psychiatric dis-

orders, epilepsy, and liver and skin diseases. In fact, the title of the book is homage to the importance of indigo, since it was the dust from this multifunctional drug which colored the sides of ships in which it was transported blue. Other intriguing examples include mustard seed (p. 48), used as both a spice and for ailments like scorpion stings, flatulence, coughs, and asthma; and nutmeg, prized not only for its taste, but also for its hallucinogenic properties.

Although the focus of the book is the eighteenth century, Rutten often moves through time in telling of the importance of these multifunctional drugs. In the six chapters of the book, the reader is as likely to be taken back to ancient Greece to learn what multifunctional drugs the Greeks used, to Medieval Iberia where the ideas of Moses Maimonides are detailed, as s/he is to the eighteenth century. And therein lies one of the faults in the book. It suffers from the lack of a strong editorial hand to structure the book, smooth out the language, and to foreground the clear scholarly potential of the material.

The book reads far more like six separate articles than as a unified whole, and a conclusion to tie the multiple strands of medical, economic, and historical information together is sorely missed. More sorely missed, though, is consistency and structure. Chapter 1 is an interesting discussion of the Dutch West India Company (wIC) and its activities regarding multifunctional drugs. The reader learns how the wIC tried to cultivate these drugs, to varying degrees of success, in both the West Indies and on the West Coast of Africa. This is one of the more informative parts of the book, and is based partially on the author's primary source research in the Dutch National archives. Inexplicably, however, the wIC pops up again in Chapter 11 with its own sub-heading (but only two sentences devoted to it), sandwiched between rambling discussions of both the Dutch East India Company (vOC) and the lesser-known Ostend East Company. These sorts of problems with repetition and thematic consistency occur numerous times in the book.

These issues with structure make it difficult for the reader to follow Rutten's points. The readers' task is made no easier by the awkward translation from the Dutch into English. The unwieldy subtitle – 'Dutch Ocean Crossing with Multifunctional Drugs and Spices in the Eighteenth Century' exemplifies this. *Blue Ships* needed an experienced native speaker to smooth over the competent translation of J. Wormer. As frustrating as these structural and linguistic problems are, the failure to bring out the full scholarly potential of the subject matter is perhaps the most exasperating issue.

That so many sought after products of the era of European expansion were multifunctional drugs is little known to contemporary historians, and *Blue Ships* is an original contribution to an otherwise neglected area of medical, cultural, and economic history. Rutten brings to our attention that the quest for, trade in and dissemination of multifunctional drugs was a part of global history. The tables in the book provide a handy reference to the medicinal uses of the multifunctional drugs, and will be of interest to historians of medicine and botany. In addition, the book is simply lovely. It is richly illustrated, often in color, and the reproduced eighteenth-century color drawings of the various multifunctional drugs are a particular highlight. Unfortunately, though, it fails as a scholarly work.

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