

Book Reviews

Wantje Fritschy, *Public Finance of the Dutch Republic in Comparative Perspective. The Viability of an Early Modern Federal State (1570s-1795)*. [Library of Economic History, Vol. 9.] (Leiden: Brill, 2017). 429 p. ISBN 9789004341272.

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The book is one of the most outstanding results of a long sequence of research that has seen the publication of important works and fundamental datasets on the Dutch public finance during the Ancien Regime. The subject has been particularly studied in recent years: Marjolein 't Hart has focused on the process of state building and recently offered a stimulating book on the war against the Habsburg monarchy; Oscar Gelderblom and Joost Jonker have examined some aspects of the financial market and highlighted innovations performed in Holland; Jaco Zuijderduijn has looked for the medieval roots of James Tracy's 'Financial revolution' in the second half of the sixteenth century; several other works have dealt with local finance. In short, Dutch public finance has become much less unexplored than it was only a few decades ago.

Fritschy's book does, however, not limit itself to provide a synthesis of such research, but offers new perspectives and interpretations by relying on a large quantitative dataset. The comparative approach highlights both specific features of the Dutch financial and fiscal system and differences with regard to other states.

Chapter one deals with the early phase of the war of independence. The protagonist of those years, prince William of Orange, funded the army by mortgaging his personal assets. At the same time, however, he was allowed by cities to exploit new fiscal resources at provincial level. The emergence of the effective provincial tax systems paved the way to build an efficient fiscal system that in turn triggered a 'financial revolution' by the early seventeenth century (chapter two). So, a tax revolution made of new taxes and forced loans, which significantly increased the burden on Dutch taxpayers, represented the premise for the formation of a lively financial market, based on long-term loans at moderate interest rates, which supported the war effort of the Netherlands. This process, however, turned out to be quite slow and hard, so

that the Spaniards and Dutch alike welcomed the truce of 1609 to their great relief.

Chapter three analyses the two centuries following the Truce. War expenditure characterized the seventeenth century, while the following century witnessed a significant decline in military needs. The gigantic effort of warfare was supported by both heavy taxation (possibly the highest one in seventeenth-century Europe) and financial capital raised through public debt. It is noteworthy that the decrease of the provincial interest burdens was mainly due to the huge capital supply from the cities. Furthermore, short-term loans (*obligatie*), which were bearer bonds issued by each province and could be more easily transferred than annuities, were transformed into long-term debts being frequently rolled over. This mechanism, based on the central role as tax gatherers of provinces (especially Holland) and cooperative cities was the key factor that contributed to the rise of the country as a great power in seventeenth-century Europe. The following century witnessed a change in the international theatre. England and France were able to exploit financial and military resources that the United Provinces could not match. The cooperative environment, furthermore, was deteriorating, for the heavy tax burden on the lower classes brought about increasingly discontent, so that the Patriots' Revolt was the outcome of long-lasting difficulties.

The second part of the book compares the Dutch case with those of the republic of Venice, the Ottoman Empire and Britain. As far as the Venetian state is concerned, Fritschy points out that the centralized capital-based structure prevented from reproducing the Dutch model, i.e. the formation of a relatively large public debt. The comparison with England shows that the absence of a dense urban network, as was instead the case in the United Provinces, limited the Crown in obtaining loans. It could be argued that London could have played the same role as Holland, as a dynamic element that also involved the rest of the country. The comparison with the Ottoman Empire appears more problematic, since the size and structure of this state itself are completely different. The prevailing agrarian economic base and the light financial system represent important differences with respect to the United Provinces. The crucial element, however, laid in the different urbanization trajectories. While in the West population growth led to an increase in urbanization and specialization, in the Ottoman territories there were few large centres in very large areas. Accordingly, the tax and financial resources at disposal of the Sultan were much more limited than in Western Europe. Truly, although this image is widely shared by scholars, it would nevertheless have been useful to consider the Ottoman state as a composite state, with its attached political and institutional constraints. Maybe a touch of politics, namely how vested interests influenced the fiscal choices of the various governments, would have made the book here reviewed even more fascinating (if I may use this term for financial history).

The book is a splendid example of the passion of a scholar who has spent

many years in researching and thinking. I'm sure Fritschy is putting the same passion into her recent field of interest, the Egyptian hieroglyphs. We look forward to reading her next work.

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Margriet Fokken, *Beyond Being Koelies and Kantráki. Constructing Hindostani Identities in Suriname in the Era of Indenture 1873-1921*. (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2018). 378 p. ISBN 9789087047214.

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Suriname is een creatie van het Nederlandse kolonialisme. Met uitzondering van de Inheemsen (voorheen Indianen genoemd) zijn alle groepen als tot slaaf gemaakten uit Afrika of contractarbeiders uit China, India en Java door Nederland naar Suriname gehaald voor arbeid op de plantages. *Beyond being koelies and kantráki* handelt over Hindostaanse contractarbeiders uit India. In 1873 kwamen de eerste Hindostaanse contractarbeiders in Suriname aan en in 1921 eindigde het arbeidscontract van de laatste groep die in 1916 arriveerde. Na afschaffing van de slavernij in Suriname in 1863 zijn circa 34.000 Hindostaanse contractarbeiders naar Suriname gehaald. Het koloniaal bestuur en de planters gingen ervan uit dat de ex-tot slaaf gemaakten niet bereid zouden zijn om tegen het door de plantage-eigenaren gewenste loon te werken. De contractarbeiders (kantráki) werden voor een periode van vijf jaar tewerkgesteld op de plantages. Hierna hadden zij de mogelijkheid het arbeidscontract met nog eens vijf jaar te verlengen. Deze contractarbeiders werden aangeduid met de term 'koelie'. Na 1895 was het koloniaal beleid gericht op een permanente vestiging van de ex-contractanten in Suriname met gratis gronduitgifte als een belangrijk instrument om dat te bereiken. Tweederde deel van de aangevoerde contractarbeiders koos voor permanente vestiging in Suriname als klein landbouwer.

De hoofdvraag in deze studie is tweeledig: hoe accepteerden, veranderden of verwierpen de contractarbeiders identiteiten die aan hen toegeschreven werden en wat waren de gevolgen voor hun handelen, en ten tweede hoe gaven zij zelf betekenis aan hun dagelijks leven in Suriname tussen 1873 en 1921? Methodologisch-theoretisch kiest de auteur voor een 'tegendraadse' of 'nieuwe lezing' van het koloniale archief (*reading sources along and against the grain*) en een intersectionele benadering (interactie tussen de factoren gender, kaste, klasse, religie, cultuur en leeftijd). Door deze benadering wil de auteur het perspectief van Hindostanen zelf centraal stellen en het koloniaal discours met zijn inherente koloniale beelden en betekenissen nuanceren of ontcrachten.