

The Amazon Connection: *Tupi* and *Tapuia* Exchanges in Dutch Atlantic Trade (1600-1641)¹

La conexión amazónica: intercambios tupí y tapuia en el comercio atlántico holandés (1600-1641)

A conexão amazônica: trocas tupi e tapuia no comércio atlântico holandês (1600-1641)

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Abstract

In the early 17th century, Dutch agents carried out commercial activities along the rivers of the Portuguese Amazon, which did not align with the geopolitical interests of the Spanish and Portuguese authorities in the region. In Portuguese documentation, the Dutch were portrayed as “pirates,” “smugglers,” and “heretics.” However, many of those who traveled to the farthest reaches of the rainforest were respected merchants in Europe who saw an opportunity for profit in the peripheral regions of the Hispanic Empire. The trading post system was not only used to bring Amazonian products to world markets but also connected the Indians of Maranhão and Grão-Pará with the financial circuits of Dutch cities. The objective of this text is to examine the exchanges between Amazon Indians and northern European commercial networks during the Iberian union, a period often referred to as “Dutch Brazil.”

Keywords: Amazon Indians, trade, the Netherlands, Amazonia, 17th century

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Resumen

A principios del siglo XVII, agentes holandeses llevaron a cabo actividades comerciales a lo largo de los ríos de la Amazonía portuguesa, actividades que no servían a los intereses geopolíticos de las autoridades españolas y portuguesas en la región. En la documentación portuguesa, los holandeses son descritos como “piratas”, “contrabandistas” y “herejes”. Sin embargo, muchos de los que viajaron a los confines más remotos de la selva eran comerciantes respetados en Europa que vieron una oportunidad de lucro en las regiones periféricas del Imperio hispánico. El sistema de puestos comerciales no se utilizó solo para exportar productos amazónicos a los mercados mundiales, sino que también conectó a los indígenas de Maranhão y Grão-Pará con los circuitos financieros de las ciudades holandesas. El objetivo de este texto es examinar los intercambios entre los nativos amazónicos y las redes comerciales del norte de Europa durante la unión ibérica, un periodo que a menudo se refiere en la historiografía brasileña como el “Brasil holandés”.

Palabras clave: indígenas amazónicos, comercio, Países Bajos, Amazonía; siglo XVII

Resumo

No início do século XVII, agentes holandeses realizavam atividades comerciais ao longo dos rios da Amazônia portuguesa que não serviam aos interesses geopolíticos das autoridades espanholas e portuguesas na região. Na documentação portuguesa, os holandeses são apresentados como “piratas”, “contrabandistas” e “hereges”. No entanto, muitos dos que viajaram para os confins da selva eram comerciantes respeitados na Europa que viam uma oportunidade de lucro nas regiões periféricas do Império espanhol. O sistema de entrepostos comerciais não foi usado apenas para levar produtos amazônicos aos mercados mundiais; também colocou os indígenas do Maranhão e do Grão-Pará em contato com os circuitos financeiros das cidades holandesas. O objetivo do texto é examinar as trocas entre os nativos da Amazônia e as redes comerciais do norte da Europa durante a União Ibérica, período frequentemente referido na historiografia brasileira como o do “Brasil holandês”.

Palavras-chave: indígenas amazônicos, comércio, Países Baixos, Amazônia, século XVII

Introduction: Sources about Amazonia and Dutch companies

During the early decades of the 17th century, a period when Portugal and its overseas territories were assimilated under the Spanish Monarchy (1580-1640), traffickers and traders from the Netherlands, especially from the province of Zeeland, targeted the Portuguese Amazon for a series of commercial ventures. These entrepreneurial agents navigated the region’s rivers, constructed fortresses, and established agreements with the native chiefs in what are now the Brazilian

states of Maranhão and Pará. They also engaged in what would today be recognized as international diplomacy with the indigenous peoples they encountered.

The authorities in Madrid, Valladolid, and Lisbon were not entirely ignorant of these activities; however, they initially underestimated their scope and dismissed them as mere piracy and looting. The Portuguese and Spanish archives suggest that their focus was primarily on preventing any foreign invasion of these frontier regions. For this reason, the documentation in Dutch archives, particularly the *Nationaal Archief* in The Hague, may offer a clearer insight into one of the most obscure ventures of the Dutch Kingdom on American soil.

This commercial activity was predominantly centered along the banks of significant rivers in the region, notably the Xingu and Amazon. Through these major riverways many Amazon rainforest products were shipped directly to European markets. The objectives and results of these ventures were quite different from the Dutch occupation in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, and bear more resemblance to Dutch activities in the Guianas and the Caribbean³.

Despite the parallels with Dutch Caribbean trade, the unique Amazonian setting of these exchanges warrants additional exploration. Beginning in 1621, the Portuguese Amazon was governed as a separate colonial entity from the State of Brazil, with the formal establishment of the State of Maranhão, whose capital was the city of São Luís, a former French stronghold seized by the Portuguese in 1615. This expansive region was bordered by the Spanish Indies to the west and north, and by the State of Brazil to the east and south⁴. As will be shown, the Amazon was not unknown to agents of the Netherlands during the 17th century. It is important to note that, despite Portugal's integration into the Spanish Monarchy, and its consequences for the populations, the two kingdoms preserved a certain administrative and bureaucratic independence, also maintaining their borders (Valladares, "El Brasil"; Valladares, *La rebelión*; Cardim; Elliott; Schaub; Gruzinski; Curto; Cardoso, *Amazônia*).

Regarding the Maranhão and Grão-Pará region, Dutch activities can be categorized into three distinct periods. From 1598 to 1636, the Dutch established a

3 Regarding the War of Brazil, which was primarily concentrated in the Captaincy of Pernambuco between 1630 and 1654, see, inter alia: E. Mello; J. Mello; Santos and Souza; Boxer, *Os holandeses*; Boxer, *The Dutch*; Wätjen.

4 The State of Maranhão was officially established in 1621 by Philip III of Castile (1598-1621) and became the second administrative division in Portuguese America. The territory of Maranhão encompassed what are today the Brazilian states within the so-called Legal Amazon, including: Pará, Amazonas, Acre, Amapá, Tocantins, Piauí, and Maranhão. For further reading on this topic, see Cardoso, *Amazônia*.

network of trading posts with a commercial function but a military structure. From 1637 to 1644, the Dutch army occupied the state of Maranhão under the command of Colonel Koin Anderson. Lastly, from 1645 to 1654, the Dutch surrendered their holdings and abandoned the country in a period that coincided with Portuguese revolt against the Spanish crown in the state of Brazil (Cardoso, “The Dutch”).

Between 1600 and 1641, trade between the Dutch and the Amazon Indians was intricately linked to the ability of European agents to forge trust-based relationships with the *Tapuias*, which was the name given to the indigenous people who lived deep in the continent’s supposedly wild and distant interior (the *sertão*) and who rebelled against the Portuguese. The trust-building process itself forms part of a larger debate over the dynamics of encounters between culturally different peoples in the context of the Atlantic (Meuwese). On the Dutch side, the men who have most often been portrayed in the historiography as adventurers, pirates or corsairs, were often important traders in the Old World. The indigenous chiefs, on the other hand, were far from passive spectators. The available records demonstrate their skill as negotiators and awareness of their strategic position and importance to the Dutch projects.

Furthermore, the long-distance trade between citizens of the Dutch Kingdom and Amazon Indians from Maranhão and Grão-Pará offers insights into the operational dynamics of the Atlantic economy and the involvement of non-Iberian Europeans in the region’s commercial activity. Granted, the context in which these commercial interactions took place was quite complex, coinciding as it did with significant international factors from 1621 to 1650, namely the Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648). The case of the Amazon generally illustrates the Dutch interest in border territories of the Spanish Monarchy, especially in the vicinity of the West Indies. Maranhão, due to 17th-century navigational standards, is perilously close to the Spanish Empire’s most prized commercial route: the silver-laden path from Peru, across the Caribbean, to Seville. While the Amazon was not a direct segment of this route, the navigational paths from Europe to the Portuguese Amazon cross through it. Indeed, the Amazon was not as peripheral a part of the South Atlantic as is often suggested in Brazilian historiography (Prado Junior; J. Mello, *Tempo*; Alencastro). On the contrary, Maranhão was well integrated into the oceanic circuit to northern Europe that might be best described as the equatorial Atlantic (Chambouleyron, “Escravos”; Cardoso, *Amazônia*).

The international milieu in the 17th century was conducive to the expansion of Dutch enterprises in the Amazon. At this time, a full-scale global conflict, often referred to as the world war between the United Provinces and the Spanish Monarchy,

was underway. The conflict was multi-faceted, as it combined religious, economic, political and military factors (Klooster; Emmer, “The Rise”). In certain regions, throughout the period, Dutch holdings were already well-established, with fixed routes and prices. It was during this period that the Dutch *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) aggressively pursued monopolies in goods from Asian markets. However, as is well known, the creation of the *West Indische Compagnie* (WIC) in 1621 allowed the Netherlands to expand its Atlantic interests. While both companies functioned as decentralized commercial entities, Ernst van Veen reminds us that their management was adapted to the war against the Spaniards, meaning that in addition to profiting, their objective was to undermine Spanish gains (Veen 41-68). Many historians have not sufficiently considered the Dutch companies’ commercial diversification in the region, where they invested in the production of many goods, experimenting with food spices, dyes, metals and slaves.



Figure 1. Maranhão cities and location of Dutch forts

Source: Prepared by the author.

The Dutch interest in the Amazon was thus consistent with their general objectives in areas near the Spanish Indies (Heijer, “The Dutch”; Heijer, *Geschiedenis*; Emmer and Klooster; Emmer, “Los holandeses” 17-23). Additionally, private actors in the region, groups that were not formally linked to the WIC or that had started operating in the region before 1621 intensified their efforts. It is worth remembering

that the *West Indische Compagnie* held a large monopoly on Dutch activities in the Atlantic, but private companies continued to operate on the coastal strip between the Portuguese Amazon and the Guianas. According to Hulsman, representatives of these smaller companies bought shares in the WIC, which afforded them some autonomy precisely because of the extreme decentralization of the Dutch system (Hulsman, “Las Guyanas”). One of the best-known examples of this diversity of actions is the *Guaiaansche Compagnie*, which engaged in the tobacco and dye trade, and over time, forged a strong military alliance with the Indians of the regions of Esequibo, Demerara and Belice (Hulsman, “Swaerooch”).

The map above illustrates the location of Dutch fortresses in relation to indigenous villages and the main cities within the captaincies of Maranhão and Pará. Indeed, the Dutch took advantage of the river routes and used, according to the map, the islands as part of their commercial and military strategy. The Dutch revolt against the Hapsburgs in Spain was not the sole impetus for non-Iberian trade in the Portuguese Amazon. Such traders, mainly British, Dutch and French, also reacted to the assimilation of Portugal into the Spanish Monarchy (1580-1640). The Iberian Union presented an opportunity for Portuguese traders to gain access to the riches of Spanish America. Only in recent years has Brazilian historiography credibly evaluated the systemic consequences of the Portuguese integration into the Spanish Monarchy⁵. Those works have focused on the inter-connected and integrated dimension of the political, economic and social consequences of the monarchic union (Megiani). In the case of the Portuguese Amazon, there has been a lack of systematic analysis of the impact of the Spanish presence in this border region (Cardoso, *Amazônia*). What was clear, on the other hand, is that the proximity of the Portuguese Amazon to Spanish territory provided great motivation for Dutch projects. In 1638, a Zeeland chronicler, Jacob Van den Keere, contended that the Netherlands ought to exploit the Amazon River’s closeness to the Indies to “get their hands” on the wealth of the King of Spain, a fight with such a great enemy that implies “small expenses” (*kleine onkosten*) (Keere).

Our knowledge of the specifics of trade between the Dutch and Amazonian Indians remains limited. Private companies, operating independently from the West Indische Compagnie (WIC), spearheaded these initiatives. Due to their autonomy and flexibility, documentation of their activities is sparse and challenging to uncover. Nonetheless, the trading system they employed is understood. Known as *retourvracht*, or return freight, this scheme was cheaper and attracted less

5 For further information, see Valladares, “El Brasil”; Cardim 117-156; Marques; Schaub.

attention from the Portuguese and Spanish (Lorimer 3-5; Edmundson 642-663; Hulsman, “Swaerooch”). Under this system, Dutch and English traders settled, for a few months at a time, on riverbanks in the region in forts they built in cooperation with local indigenous peoples. These fortresses were a combination of warehouse, docking station and business center. Through these facilities, a number of raw materials and value-added products were sent to Europe; mainly wood, tobacco, cotton, and spices. In exchange, the Dutch provided manufactured metal tools, weapons and other objects of interest to the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. The Dutch companies referred to such shipments as *indiaans cargasoen* (Hulsman, “Swaerooch”). The system enabled the indigenous people to make specific requests and the Dutch companies to meet native demand, which led to a degree of trust that strengthened the possibility of brokering military alliances between the traders and native leaders.

The Zeeland-Tapuia Military Alliance

In recent years, Brazilian historiography has increasingly acknowledged indigenous agency, here defined as deliberate, strategic collective action aimed at securing benefits and advantages against colonizers. As a result, contemporary scholarship offers a markedly different portrayal of indigenous peoples that the narratives prevalent thirty years ago (Monteiro; Melo; Farage; Carvalho Jr., *Índios*; Almeida; Cunha, *História*; Moreira; Pompa; Sampaio). It is essential to recognize that the Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, French, and English did not uniformly perceive Native Americans, with significant implications stemming from their disparate worldviews. For instance, in Portuguese and Spanish documents, the distinction originally made by the Tupi themselves between *Tupi* and *Tapuya* is paramount. *Tapuya* was the way the coastal Tupis referred to their enemies, the Amazon Indians who lived further inland. In the Amazon there was, in fact, a huge diversity of Tupi and non-Tupi peoples. The very way these groups are known today is from the names in Tupi, reinforcing their supposed exogenous characteristics (Pompa; Ibáñez). Spanish and Portuguese missionaries adopted these terms to differentiate the natives of Portuguese America by affinity, geography, and language (Monteiro). Contrary to this, Dutch records do not exhibit a clear categorical distinction between “Tupi Indians” (*tupi-indianen* or *brazilianen*) and “Tapuya Indians” (*tapuia-indianen*). Frequently, Tupi and Tapuya are simply referred to as indigenous peoples (*inheemse bevolking*), and the distinction made in the Portuguese

documentation between essentially rebellious *tapuias* and potential allied *Tupis* is absent (Hulsman, “Índios”).

Likewise, absent in the Dutch documentation is any clear distinction between coastal indigenous peoples, whose language is more accessible and customs closer to those of Europeans, and Amazon Indians from the strange and exotic *sertão*, the unforgiving, arid hinterlands that lie between the coast and the rainforest. In the Amazon, of course, any such distinctions were meaningless. In Dutch records, the Indians of the Amazon basin were, as a rule, either enemies of the Portuguese-Brazilians or enslaved by them. This perception explains the belief that the various native peoples of the region would be inclined in favor of the Dutch projects, or at least that was the narrative the Dutch chroniclers left behind.

The collaboration of these groups or ‘nations’ placed the Dutch in a favorable position to capitalize on the trade of local products. Ernst van den Boogart referred to the as “infernal allies,” specifically mentioning the *Tarairiú* Indians of the state of Brazil, who are also depicted in Eckhout’s paintings (Boogaart 519-538). Conversely, the term *brazilianen* was used by the Dutch to describe Amazon Indians enslaved by the Portuguese who could be more readily influenced by Dutch interests. The Portuguese called these rebel Amazon Indians who collaborated with the Dutch “confederated nations”, mainly the *Nheengaiba*, *Mapua*, *Perigua*, *Arigura*, *Jaconi*, *Aruã* nations (Cáceres). Gideon Morris, perhaps the most experienced Dutchman in Amazonian navigation during the first half of the 17th century, deemed the Amazonian Indians likely to align with the Dutch, driven by the harsh conditions of the Portuguese slavery system (Morris).

Indigenous participation in European conflicts was nothing new in Portuguese America, but it undeniably took on more expressive features in Portuguese Amazon. Despite the undeniable importance of indigenous peoples in the Brazilian War (1630-1654), some Portuguese and Spanish authorities did not consider the natives good soldiers, so always sought other solutions. For instance, in Pernambuco during the Iberian Union, Spanish commanders exhibit mistrust towards native forces, fearing defection (E. Mello 242). Contrastingly, in the Amazon, neither the Dutch nor the Portuguese could conceive of waging war without significant indigenous participation. In September 1644, at the end of the Dutch rule in Maranhão, the Dutchman Gijsbert Rudolphij contemplated the possibility of retaking the territory. In a letter sent to Heren XIX, the councilor argues that the Tapuyas normally resorted to violence in response to European aggression, such that the most sensible course of action would be treating the indigenous people in a more “courteous way” (*hoffelijke*) (Rudolphij).

Another possible explanation for the alliance between the Tapuyas and the Dutch might be found in the notion of “ethnic soldiering.” As suggested by Neil Whitehead, this phenomenon involves a form of ‘ethnogenesis’ arising from native collaboration in European wars, which enabled natives to preserve and negotiate certain degrees of autonomy during the process of conquest (Whitehead 357-385). In the case of the Amazon, the role of ‘principals,’ as native leaders who functioned as mediating agents were known, deserves much more attention in the historiography (Domingues; Carvalho Jr., *Índios*). Examples of the agency shown by these leaders in European conflicts are notorious. In the 1640s, for example, Antônio da Costa Marapirã, an Amazon Indian educated by missionaries of the Tabajara nation, wrote letters directly to the king, Dom João IV, complaining about the treatment of his native allies in the war against the Dutch. Marapirã called himself the principal of Maranhão, attributing to his person military authority superior not only to that of other Amazon Indians, but also to ordinary white Portuguese soldiers (Marapirã, “Carta do índio principal do Maranhão, António da Costa Marapirã, para o rei [D. João IV], sobre os ataques”).

Within the Dutch military strategy of conquest, which favored commerce over territorial control, the value of indigenous leadership at all levels was clearly recognized. Gedion Morris, who ruled Ceará in 1637, was one of the great enthusiasts of indigenous participation in the war against the Spaniards. As a “young man”, Morris had traveled to the Amazon delta from Zeeland as a navigator in 1629 and spent around eight years as a prisoner of the Portuguese. He accumulated much experience and knowledge about the region, and was the main advisor to Heren XIX for the military takeover of Maranhão in 1641. His “Brief description of Maranhão” (1637), written in the city of Middelburg, had considerable influence on the decision to occupy the city of São Luís from 1641 until 1644. In this text, Morris expresses his belief that the Amazon Indians would voluntarily trade with the Dutch, and perhaps even become military allies (Morris).

Morris’s chronicle emphasized the proportion of Amazon Indians to Portuguese in the total population. According to the author, the city of São Luís counted between 700 and 800 Portuguese and some 10,000 Amazon Indians from diverse nations, including both free individuals and enslaved persons. Similarly, Belém was reported to have about 500 Portuguese residents and, again, some 10,000 Amazon Indians who lived in nearby villages. The captaincy of Caeté allegedly had only 15 white residents against 1000 Amazon Indians (Morris). Morris calculated that the cities and towns of the State of Maranhão held at most 1,500 Portuguese in comparison to around 40,000 Amazon Indians, many of whom were slaves. Morris

argued that this large mass of Amazon Indians obeyed the Portuguese more out of “fear” than “love” (Morris).

The Amazon case should be viewed within the broader scope of the conflict between the Dutch and the Spaniards. Dutch commercial enterprises carried out between 1600 and 1640 paved the way for Heren XIX’s acquiescence to the plan to occupy on a permanent basis the Amazon territory. From 1641 to 1644, the Netherlands waged an invasion, taking over São Luís, the island city and capital of Maranhão, where they set up a short-lived government that enjoyed the support of several indigenous nations. Its short domain cannot be considered a natural expansion of the Batavian pretensions in the State of Brazil, but rather was similar to Dutch interests in the Caribbean. There is no doubt that the relative success of Dutch commercial activities along the rivers of the region between the years 1620 and 1640 convinced the authorities of the Kingdom to take the next step. In this context, the Amazon Indians, in addition to being warriors, would also be commercial partners.

Indigenous Trade

Between 1620 and 1640, Zeelanders imported an extensive array of indigenous products into Europe. Tobacco and a various natural dyes stood out among these commodities, yet numerous other items also made their way from the depths of the Amazon to European markets, specifically to the ports of Amsterdam and Vlissingen (“Lijst van in Maranhao geloste droge en natte vivres”). Some of these products were well known in Europe, such as tobacco, cotton and coloring spices. Other were almost totally unknown but seemed worthwhile, such as local oils, gums, amber, and tree bark, which were compared to Asian spices at the time (Cardoso, “Spices”). Some Zeelandic chroniclers estimated that the trade of some of these products reached values in excess of £40,000 a year in Dutch markets (Keere). According to Gedion Morris, again, a thousand Amazon Indians produced about 30,000 pounds of cotton a year. An impressive number, no doubt, according to the initial intentions of the merchants involved (Morris)⁶.

6 We will use here the Brazilian translation: Gedeon Morris, “Breve descrição apresentada aos Srs. Diretores da outorgada Companhia das Indias Occidentais, delegadas à Assembléia dos Dezenove sobre os lugares situados no Brasil septentrional denominados Maranhão, Ceará, Cametá, Grão-Pará, e outros rios comprehendidos na bacia do famoso rio do Amazonas, onde os portuguezes tem

This cargo was transported in ships called *Fluten*, or *Noordvaarders*, which were relatively small but agile cargo ships well adapted for the transition between river and sea and thus for the Amazonian navigation (Unger 115-130). These vessels represented a definitive advantage for the Dutch because their design maximized cargo space without sacrificing speed. Postma argues that this ship's particular specialization made it unsuitable for other purposes, for example, in the African trade (Postma 143). The Amazon's river channels, however, were often so narrow that only canoes could navigate them. The Dutch quickly learned from the earlier English and French ventures to pay heed to indigenous knowledge of the best routes and vessels for Amazonian navigation, which varied according to the time of year.

The Dutch traders clearly benefitted from their knowledge of the operations of other nations in the region, above all, as said earlier, British ones. From the beginning of the 17th century, the English, Irish and Dutch shared common interests in the Atlantic and Amazon trade. Between 1600 and 1617, many of these ventures set out from the province of Zeeland. Traders based in the city of Vlissingen entered into several agreements with the English, some of which included supplying their stations on the Guianas coast route (Hulsman, "Swaerooch" 181). In the Amazon, one of the best examples of this association was the construction in 1612 of the Irish-Dutch Fort Tauregue on the Amazon River, led in part by the Irishman Philip Purcell (Lorimer 45). The Spanish court was aware of the cooperation between the English and the Dutch, which generated fear of a formation of a "Junta General" of Protestants who planned to invade Portuguese America ("Le Roi a Iñigo de Cardenas"). Despite the exaggerations due to such fear, the Zeelanders undoubtedly benefitted from these early partnerships, gaining knowledge that aided and informed the projects they hatched when Portugal was assimilated under the Spanish crown.

A good example of the diversity of Dutch commercial interests in the Amazon is found in the logs of the *Fortuijn*, which in 1615 set sail for Sapno in Cabo do Norte, now part of the state of Amapá (Brazil). According to Hulsman, the voyage was financed by Pieter Swaerooch, a 41-year-old *haringcooper* (herring monger) from the Netherlands. The *Fortuijn* was a small 80-ton ship that carried 25 people. Around 3,650 guilders were raised to construct this vessel adapted to cross the river channels and sandbanks that were characteristic of Amazonian navigation. The ship made at least two voyages to the Northern Cape, the second of which was captained by Swaerooch's son Jan. The *Fortuijn* carried nearly 3000 guilders worth

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 assento, com toda a disposição e circunstancias respectivas, como deixei no ultimo de novembro de 1636." Middelbourg, 22 October 1637, in Hygino 237-250.

of goods to the Amazon: 200 axes, 200 flat irons, and 900 kilograms of machetes, mirrors, and other goods desired by the Amazon Indians. Among the latter, a box full of different colored glass beads produced in Amsterdam and valued at around 400 francs stands out. According to Hulsman, the *Fortuijn* was representative of the Dutch *retourvracht* trade. The practice was to set up shop on riverbanks for a few months in structures that basically comprised a fortified port and warehouse. When conditions were right for returning, the *Fortuijn* shipped tons of native goods to several Dutch ports. The *Fortuijn*'s end was, nonetheless, tragic. It was burned in 1616 following a river battle against the Portuguese led by Pedro Teixeira. The only survivor was a 15-year-old boy named Hendrick (Hulsman, "Swaerooch").

The Zeelanders adopted a system very similar to the one they used in the Guianas and Caribbean trade, where the Dutch were much more active than in the Southern Cone (Crespo). In fact, the Dutch reports treat the Caribbean, the Guianas and Maranhão as parts of one large territory. Zeelander traders looked to the Dutch experience in other parts of the world, but they were not ignorant of the trading system that had worked well for the English and the Irish. The system was simple and profitable. Zeelandic agents stayed in houses or fortresses near villages where valuable crops were cultivated, mainly tobacco, urucu (*Bixa Orellana*) and cotton. Large amounts of wood, dyes and furniture were also shipped to Europe. Vlissingen and Amsterdam took in many tons of goods on an annual basis. 10,000 pounds of *Amasoonse tabak* alone could yield up to 20,000 guilders in Dutch markets. The estimated prices for other products were even better (Hulsman, "Swaerooch").

Table 1. Estimated calculation of the annual yield of Amazonian products

Product	Amount	Valuation
Sugar	500 boxes	2,500 L
Tobacco	100,000 pounds	6,666,13 L
Cotton	60,000 pounds	5,500 L
Ginger	4,000 pounds	400 L
Rice	4,000 pounds	100 L
Amber	Not reported	2,500 L
Drugs and dyes	Not reported	2,000L
Total Amount:		42,166,13 L

Source: Keere.

Trade with the indigenous peoples of Maranhão and Pará therefore, despite indirectly serving the war against the Spaniards, had a pragmatic profitable dimension. Around 1615, a Dutch merchant called “Pedro Luís” by the Portuguese made efforts to inform the Amazon Indians of the region of the agreements they had struck for prices they would pay for local dyes, tobacco and spices. In the Hague, Pedro Luís reached out to powerful investors, such as Theodor Claessen from Leiden, exhorting support so they could compete with the French in Amazon trade. The argument held that the French were not real “businessmen;” they were disorganized and lacked logistical planning, so the Netherlands could do much better than they did in the region (“Avizos tocantes à la India Occidental”).

Undoubtedly, the Dutch who took over and governed Maranhão between 1641 and 1644 enjoyed knowledge of the region before starting the military operation. To begin with, they knew of the Guiana Company activities in the region that lasted until the 1620s. Second, they were relatively aware of the previous English, Irish, and French commercial and colonial ventures. That information was sent to Heren XIX in chronicles and reports produced between 1630 and 1640. In 1638, Councilor Pieter Du Gardin wrote that the French had been in the region for 26 years and mainly profited from three products: cotton, tobacco and dyes (*verwe*). Du Gardin, however, believed that the Dutch could better exploit many other products, such as local oils, types of wood, fruits and other coloring and medicinal products (NL-HaNA_1.05.01.01_23_16390203).

Knowledge of the sea and river routes was critical for the success of trade in the Amazon. In another chronicle, written in 1640 by the already cited Gedion Morris with Jean Maxwell, months before the Dutch takeover of the city of São Luís, that was sent to the Chamber of Zeeland, is a more accurate estimate of the goods already prepared for transport to Europe up to June 1640. Among the goods registered were 5000 rolls of tobacco, 100,000 cotton sticks, and large amounts of annatto and other woods used as condiments or coloring. Most important in the Morris and Maxwell report, however, is the suggestion that the Dutch could transport goods through the same route used by the Spanish for Peruvian silver. The Zeelandic chroniclers recall that the Portuguese themselves from Maranhão and Grão-Pará were already doing something similar, sending annual shipments of “large quantities of cotton cloths, with which they loaded entire caravels, and sent them to the West Indies” (Morris and Maxwell)⁷. The proposal to take advantage of Maranhão’s proximity to

7 We will use here the Brazilian translation: “Breve relatório acerca do Maranhão apresentado a 3 de fevereiro de 1640 por Gedeon Morris e Jean Maxwell”, in Hygino 256.

the Peru-Seville route for navigation and trade was not new. The Portuguese and Spaniards knew about the stations between Maranhão and the Caribbean, as well as the natural connections between the cities of Belém and São Luís with the Atlantic Islands, especially the Azores and the Canary Islands⁸.

Conclusion: The Amazon in Atlantic perspective

In a recent book, Wim Klooster argues that indigenous people represented ideal allies for some of the Dutch projects in America. However, unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, the relationship between the Dutch and indigenous peoples was not based on religious or military motives, but fundamentally on commercial networks based on mutual interests (Klooster 6). In the context of inter-imperial trade, the author adds, interaction between Amazon Indians and Dutch merchants should be compared with Dutch activities in the Guianas, or even those they maintained with the Mohawk Indians in North America (Klooster 146-8). In all these cases, the Dutch exchanged weapons and metal tools for local products, and such commerce gave rise to political and military agreements (Klooster 146-8). In the same sense, for Oostindie and Roitman, the so-called “Dutch Atlantic” is difficult to define territorially, and would be better characterized as “using approaches that privilege engagement, connections, and interaction” (Oostindie and Roitman 1-21). This peculiar form of conquest depended, more than other nations in Europe, on a degree of trust-building with the Amazon Indians which, for various reasons, was unlikely between the Portuguese and the Spaniards.

The territorial definition played an important role in these projects. The vast size of the state of Maranhão and Grão-Pará qualified it, among Dutch agents of the period, as the “Wild Coast,” which included Suriname, Essequibo, Berbice, and Demerara (Goslinga). Maranhão, after all, is naturally connected to the Caribbean. This becomes evident in the careful account written by Captain Gelein van Stapels of his voyage along the northern coast of South America and the Caribbean between 1629 and 1630 (“The Voyage of Gelein”). It is also reflected in the reports by Gedion Morris or Du Gardin, which maintain that comparisons between the Amazon economy and the sugar economy of the state of Brazil should be avoided. This territorial distinction that likens the Portuguese Amazon to the routes and economic practices of the Caribbean, although epochal and quite well documented,

8 See Cardoso, *Amazônia*; Rodrigues and Madeira 247-263.

has found little traction among Brazilian historians. In general, Brazilian historiography lacks systematic work on the different economic models adopted in each region of Portuguese America (Santos and Souza). Similarly, Spanish and Dutch documentation on Amazonian trade and the policy of the Dutch has been neglected in Brazil (Miranda).

Pieter Emmer pointed out, in discussing the classic work of Jan de Vries, that the Dutch Atlantic should be understood more in terms of its own understanding of the region and less in terms of the territorial experiences of the English, Spanish and Portuguese. Accordingly, understanding the Dutch initiatives should pay more attention to the challenges they encountered in other parts of the world (Emmer, *The Dutch*; Vries). The economic initiatives of the Dutch were clearly not uniform across the world, despite the rigid monopolies and regulations they established (Emmer, “The Rise”). In this sense, commercial experiments in America differ markedly from other places in the world, but they also demonstrate great internal heterogeneity (Silva 7-32; Antunes 173-185). Without overstating this argument, the example of the Zeeland trade in the Amazon seems to illustrate the flexibility of the Dutch approach to each specific place.

From the Dutch perspective, the choice of Maranhão and Grão-Pará was convenient for good reasons. The sea routes that connected it to Northern Europe were reasonably secure. Amazonian products fetched good prices in the European market. The Dutch were able to reach profitable and reliable agreements with both the *Tupi* and *Tapyia* and were well aware of the previous French, English, and Irish ventures in the region. Finally, no major commercial risks existed in the region between Brazil and the West Indies. The Zeelanders were therefore seeking to take advantage of an area they considered a power vacuum. The economy of the Amazon was much more diverse than what much of Brazilian historiography suggests. In many ways, it did not follow the economic model of the state of Brazil. Between the 17th and 18th centuries, economic activity there was not primarily extractive, nor was it exclusively based on indigenous labor. It was not even a peripheral economy in relation to the plantation model of the South Atlantic.

Caio Prado Junior is responsible for creating, between the years 1940-50, an historiography of an economic model for Brazil based on monoculture and work of African origin. Studies of the “peripheries” of this system were considered improvised, incomplete or inadequate models, according to a certain view of capitalist evolution. The Amazon’s extractive economy based on indigenous labor would be the reverse of this “Brazilian evolution” (Prado Júnior 74). In fact a certain notion of “Formation of Brazil” is present in the historiography that opposes the *sertão* and

the coastal zones; the African and indigenous labor; monoculture and extractive industries – a persistent trend whose influence can even be found in otherwise outstanding works (Alencastro 141; Cardoso, *Economia*, 97).

Finally, the commercial interactions between Amazon Indians and Zeelanders help us to better understand certain processes in the Amazon economy. The first major aspect is the fluvial nature of the region; that is, the dependence on river routes for the transportation of people and goods⁹. The Zeelanders were accustomed to this feature. They knowingly placed their strongholds at junctures between navigable rivers and outlets to the ocean. Second, despite occasional references to sugar in the sources, it was clear that the Zeelanders had no interest in reproducing in the Amazon rainforest the plantation system that proved so profitable in northeastern Brazil. The incentive to collect culinary spices and dyes was as clear as it was in other regions of the Wild Coast. Nonetheless, a significant incentive to produce certain crops was evident, especially cotton and tobacco. The non-Iberian experiments in the Amazon are not just exotic anecdotes in the history of the Atlantic trade. On the contrary, they demonstrate that this region and its native inhabitants were connected to the trends and contradictions of the world economy. They demonstrate that the *Tupi* and *Tapuya* were not passive actors. They often imposed their demands and priorities by taking advantage of the fissures and conflicts between the European powers of the period.

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9 See Chambouleyron, “Rivers” 107-131; Cardoso, *Amazonia*.

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