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Nederlands Amazonia : handel met indianen tussen 1580 en 1680

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Summary

Dutch Amazonia

Indian trade 1580-1680

The Amazon region has fascinated many people and the destruction of its forests has recently become a public issue. The history of the South-American Tropical Lowlands, however, still remains largely unknown. Amazonia was in 1580 an undiscovered land, inhabited by Indians; in 1680 it was nominally divided between the European powers, Spain, Portugal, France and the Netherlands. The Dutch started trading with the Indians on the Wild Coast, between the Orinoco and Amazon rivers, which led to the foundation of the Dutch colonies in Essequibo, Berbice and Surinam. This study considers the Dutch-Indian trade relations and the impact of Dutch settlement on these relations in the period 1580-1680.

The contemporary Indian societies left no written sources, which limits the historical research to European sources. This study was focused primarily on Dutch Archives. The development of Dutch colonial settlements was represented as an economic-geographic process in the chronological framework provided by the *Mercantile Model* of James Vance. The analysis of this development was seen as a means to gather information from European sources about the contemporary Indian societies.

The first Dutch settled mostly in or near existing Indian settlements around the turn of the century and they adopted local habits. The Indians provided food like cassava and taught the Europeans how to cultivate tropical crops like tobacco, cotton and annatto. Dutch settlement concentrated between 1600 and 1620 on the western bank of the Amazon delta and in Surinam. The development of larger settlements on the coast of Guiana did not materialize in the period 1620-1650, partly because of Portuguese attacks and the resistance of the local Indian population. The Dutch settlements in Essequibo and Berbice in western Guiana remained.

The Indian demand for European manufactured goods such as tools and beads made it impossible for the Indian societies to end contact with the Europeans, and small settlements continued further east along the coast. The Caribbean islands became the focus of European colonial enterprises and the coast of Guiana became an economic hinterland of the rapidly expanding settlements, especially Barbados.

The successful settlement of Surinam in 1650 heralded the beginning of a new colonial model. The production of cane sugar by African slaves became the most important economic activity on the Wild Coast in the 18th century. The study shows that the situation before 1680

differed in several aspects from that in the 18th century. The scale of the plantations was smaller. Indian services and food supplies were still crucial for the survival of the colony in Surinam, which became Dutch in 1668. The economy of Essequibo and Berbice still depended on annatto produced by Indians.

Indian participation in the colonial economy was still important in 1680 in all of the Dutch colonies, but the situation began to change with the arrival of large numbers of Africans who were sold as slaves. Weapons, rum and slaves gradually became the dominant trading goods, as Europeans and Africans started producing tobacco, cotton, hammocks and cassava. The development of the colonial settlements in Surinam and western Guiana was marked by a movement from the interior to the coast. The original 'points of attachment', or trading entrepôts, lost their economic functions as the plantations moved to the lowlands behind the coast. These first European settlements provide information about the Indian habitants of Guiana, as they were located near Indian settlements.

The sources suggest that the Dutch traded with all the Indians along the coast but had a preference for the Arawak. The partnership of the Arawak and the Dutch in Berbice led to a stable colony. The Arikare, who lived on the Atlantic coast of Amapá, were long-time partners of the Dutch. They traded sea cows and even named one of their chiefs 'Jan van der Goes'. Zeeland played an important role in the relations with Guiana. The Dutch activities in the western Amazon delta have been largely conducted from this province. The unfortunate loss of most of the contemporary local archives leaves many questions unanswered. The Notarial Archives from Amsterdam show that the relations with Guiana started early. The *Guiaansche Compagnie* from Amsterdam founded a number of trading posts from the Amazon to the Courantyne rivers in the first twenty years of the 17th century. Annatto remained an important export from western Guiana till the 18th century. It gave the cheese from Leiden its typical colour. The consumption of annatto by the Dutch is one of the enduring results of the trade relations of the Netherlands with the Indians of Guiana.