

The WIC, The Dutch West India Company¹

Gerard Koot, History department, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

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The Dutch West India Company was one of the great international trading companies of the early modern period. Never as successful and profitable as the larger Dutch East India Company, the VOC, has always had to live in the latter's historical shadow. While its military history is well-known in the Netherlands, its ultimate failure to build a large Dutch Empire in the Western Hemisphere, and especially its loss of New Amsterdam and all of New Netherland to the English, limited its historical profile in world history. Moreover, its official records did not survive as well as those of the VOC. The Dutch Republic's government, the States-General, encouraged the creation of the WIC as an instrument of war to secure its independence from Spain and Portugal (which from 1580 to 1640 had a common monarchy with Spain), known as the Eighty Year's War. The Dutch state encouraged commercial interests to use profits from war to build the infrastructure needed to expand the Republic's Atlantic trade. During its first decade, the WIC quickly created an empire that included forts on the West African coast, large areas of coastal Brazil and several islands in the Caribbean. The military costs of its imperial infrastructure in the Western Hemisphere, political opposition from other Dutch merchants, and its failure to establish a trade monopoly in the Atlantic resulted in the liquidation of the original Company after its loss of Dutch Brazil and New Netherland. In 1674 a new and second WIC was formed, whose major task was not war, but focused instead on safeguarding Dutch trade and shipping in the Atlantic, the administration of its slave and gold forts in West Africa, the plantations on the north coast of South America and in the Caribbean, and its Caribbean trade centers. While it also continued its trading activities, its mounting debts and political pressure from other Dutch merchants interests forced the Company to give up its last trading monopoly in 1734 and it existed thereafter only as the governor and protector of Dutch colonies and trade in the Atlantic world.

¹ This essay is largely based on Henk den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC: Opkomst, Bloei and Ondergang*, (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2003).

Shipping and trade in the Atlantic beyond Europe were originally in the hands of the Spanish and the Portuguese who explored the African and American coasts in the 15th and early 16th centuries. The Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 divided the non-European world with an imaginary line in the Atlantic, which crossed through Eastern Brazil, assigning a Spanish monopoly to the east of this line and a Portuguese monopoly to the west that included Africa. The Treaty of Zaragoza in 1529 also created a division between the two states in the Pacific Ocean. As the English and French pushed out into the North Atlantic, chiefly to exploit the rich fishing grounds off Newfoundland, the Spanish and Portuguese monopolies were no longer effective in the Atlantic by the mid 16th century. Northern Europeans also embarked on a fur trade with the Native Americans in the North, but soon ventured further south and attacked the lucrative gold and ivory trade in the Atlantic. When Phillip II of Spain acquired the Portuguese crown in 1580, he set out to consolidate an Iberian monopoly over European shipping and trade with the rest of the world. In order to undermine the growth of Spanish naval power, the English and French authorized privateers to attack the Spanish treasure fleets in the Atlantic and the Caribbean.

During the 15th century, merchants from Holland, Zeeland and West Friesland had made the Northern Netherlands into the dominant Western European importers of grain from the Baltic. They had also developed Europe's largest herring fishery in the North Sea. They exported surplus Baltic grain and herring to Iberia and the Mediterranean and made Amsterdam the lynch pin of the European bulk trades and provided the Northern Netherlands with a dominant position in European shipping. By the late 15th century, Northern Dutch merchants had accumulated enough capital from their trade with the Baltic and the Mediterranean to finance ventures in the lucrative world-trade in the rich goods from Asia, Africa and the Americas. During the 16th century, Antwerp had become the North Western European distribution center for the rich trades, such as spices, sugar and other tropical products as well as fine textiles and other luxury goods from Asia, the Mediterranean and the Americas. The rebellion against Spain, which would result in the division of the Low Countries into a Protestant dominated independent Republic in the North and a predominantly Catholic South, had begun in the wealthy towns of the South in the 1560s. Spain, however, was able to re-establish its authority in the South. When

Spanish troops took back Antwerp in 1585, they plundered the city and imposed Catholic religious orthodoxy. The result was massive emigration of Protestant merchants, skilled workers, artists and intellectuals to the North. The immigrants brought with them not only capital but also knowledge and contacts in the rich trades. Among the migrants was the Southern Netherlands Calvinist preacher, Petrus Plancius, who had an interest in geography and became an important provider of maps, globes, and nautical instruments in Amsterdam. His work was crucial in the launching of Dutch voyages of discovery and he was one of the chief advocates of the creation of the WIC.

Sugar was the first important colonial product brought from outside Europe by Northern ships. Most of the raw sugar delivered to Antwerp, where it was refined, came from Lisbon but there were also direct imports from the Canary Islands, Madeira, São Tomé and Brazil. As early as 1508 ships from Zeeland were chartered to bring sugar to Antwerp from the Canaries. When Antwerp fell to the Spanish in 1585, some of the city's prominent sugar merchants moved north to establish refineries and made the business an important industry in the Republic. In 1598 Philip II attempted to damage



Dutch ships loading salt at the Cabo Verde Islands, E. Sileman, circa 1650, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 15.

The economy of the Republic with punitive regulations that prohibited Northern merchants from trading with the Iberian Peninsula, but since Spain required grain from the Baltic it could not do without trading with the rebel Northern Provinces. It did, however, limit the export of salt that the Dutch needed for its large herring exports. As a result, the Dutch found alternative salt sources in the islands of Cape Verde and the Caribbean as well as in Venezuela. By 1600, over a hundred ships carried salt from Venezuela to Hoorn and Enkhuizen. In 1605, the Spanish sent a naval force to the Caribbean to end the Dutch salt trade, smuggling and privateering. They managed to capture a Dutch salt fleet and a privateering vessel from Zeeland. The Spanish hanged some of the sailors and took the rest to row in its Mediterranean galleys. During the Twelve Year Truce (1609-1621), the Dutch once again bought their salt in Iberia but turned to the Americas when the Truce ended.

During the 1590s the Dutch attempted to break into the lucrative African gold and ivory trade controlled by the Portuguese. In 1590 captain Eircksz from Medemblik in North Holland was captured by the Portuguese during his voyage to Brazil and taken to São Tomé. During his two years of imprisonment he learned a good deal about Portugal's lucrative African Gold Coast trade. Upon his return to Holland he convinced merchants from Enkhuizen to finance a trading voyage to the Gold Coast. He returned nine months later with a cargo of pepper, ivory and gold. While the first voyage did not produce a profit, his second voyage earned a 40% return. In order to limit competition and the risks inherent in trading beyond Europe, Northern merchants formed several trading companies before the founding of the WIC, but failed to establish a unified African trading company. Balthasar de Moucheron, an enterprising merchant from Middleburg, whose trading interests reached from Archangel (on the White Sea north of Russia) to Brazil and the South Atlantic, organized three expeditions to find a Northeastern sea route to China. After failing in this endeavor, he focused his resources on expanding his trade with Africa where he had already established several trading posts in Senegal. The biggest obstacle to expanding his African trade was the strong Portuguese fort São Jorge de Mina on the Gold Coast. In 1596 he sent two heavily armed ships to capture the trade castle. The failure of the assault, and the death of most of the Netherlanders, did not dissuade de Moucheron from his efforts. The successful voyage of a Dutch fleet to Asia

in 1695-96 demonstrated the need for a friendly fort on the African coast to resupply and safeguard the expansion of Dutch trade with Asia. The Republic's States-General provided de Moucheron's company with five ships and five hundred men, which were to be outfitted and paid by the his company, to capture the Portuguese island of Principe in the Bight of Guinea. The expedition captured the island in 1598, but an uprising by the local population slowed the construction of a fort and the arrival of a larger Portuguese fleet late in the year forced the abandonment of the scheme.



Title page of P. de Marees, *Description and History of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea*, Amsterdam, 1602, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 18. This is one of the earliest Dutch publications about West Africa

Dutch trade with North America originated with the VOC's hiring of Henry Hudson to find a northeastern sea route to Asia. When Hudson was confronted with drifting sea ice after passing the North Cape, he decided instead to look for a northwestern route. After crossing the Atlantic and arriving at Nova Scotia in 1609, he sailed south in search of a passage to the Pacific. His ship, the *Halve Maen* (the *Half*

Moon), sailed nearly a hundred miles up the Hudson River before he learned that it did not provide a way to Asia. While the VOC showed little interest in Hudson's American discoveries, several Amsterdam fur merchants sent ships to the region to buy fur from Native Americans. After several companies were created to exploit the North American trade, and fur prices declined as a result of keen competition, the States-General sanctioned the creation of a merger of the companies in 1614 into the *Compagnie van Nieuw-Nederland*, the New Netherland Company. The Company was granted a trade and shipping monopoly for the Hudson River region for a limited period. In 1618 the Company attempted to expand its trading monopoly to the Delaware River region, but the States-General refused to support this endeavor.

Willem Usselinx (1567-1647), an Antwerp merchant who settled in Holland after making his fortune in trading with the Azores and the Iberian Peninsula, was the most important voice in urging the creation of a united West India trading company. He shared an ardent Calvinism with Plancius and sought to use a proposed West India company in the Republic's war against Spain and envisioned that colonies in the New World would be of interest to both Dutch and other European Calvinist settlers. The great distances and risks associated with the Asian trade and the rapid decline of its profitability, which resulted from competing Dutch companies flooding the market with Asian spices, made the creation of the VOC in 1602 economically feasible. By contrast, distances and risks in the Atlantic trade were smaller and more varied so that economic reasons for creating a monopoly company in the region were less compelling. However, the Republic's war with Spain provided strong strategic arguments for combining the Republic's growing naval power in the Atlantic with economic projects. Phillip II's 1598 embargo on Dutch ships in Iberian ports resulted in the dispatch of an impressive fleet of 73 Dutch warships, augmented by merchant privateers, to the Spanish port of La Coruna to intercept Spanish fleets to and from America. Espionage foiled this plan and instead the fleet sailed south to threaten the Canaries and São Tomé. Part of the fleet sailed across the Atlantic to attack Havana. Although the results of these expeditions were disappointing both militarily and commercially, they demonstrated that in short order the Republic was able to dispatch a large fleet into the Atlantic to confront Spanish naval power. In 1600 Usselinx set down his ideas on paper for a West-Indian colonization and

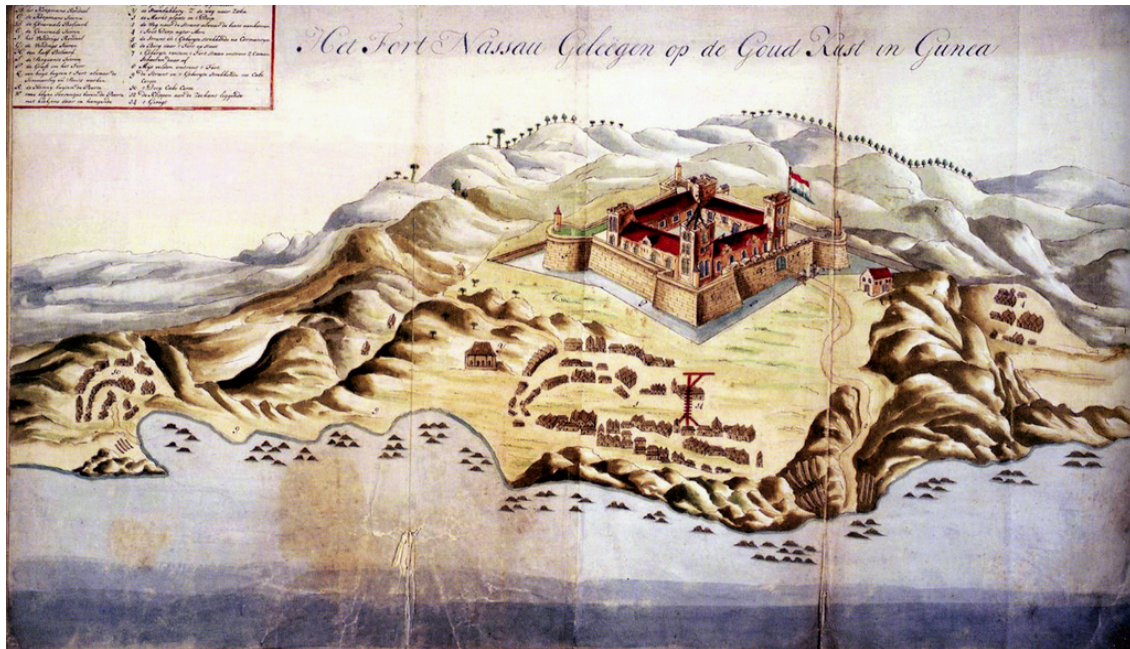
trading company. His ideas found favor with Holland and Zeeland, as well as with some investors, but the Republic's States-General replied that they would wait to see the result of Paulus van Caerden's expedition of six warships, which that had been sent to Brazil to build a Dutch fort. In 1605 van Caerden returned with sugar, gold and silver, but had failed to establish the first permanent Dutch trading post in the New World. Despite this disappointing result, Plancius and others convinced the States of Holland to establish a Commission in 1606 to investigate the feasibility of providing a patent for the establishment of a united West India Company. Holland's Commission



The Amsterdam fourmaster 'De Hollandse Tuyn' and other ships on their return from Brazil under command of Paulus van Caerden (1605), Cornelis Hendrickz Vroom, between 1605 and 1640, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

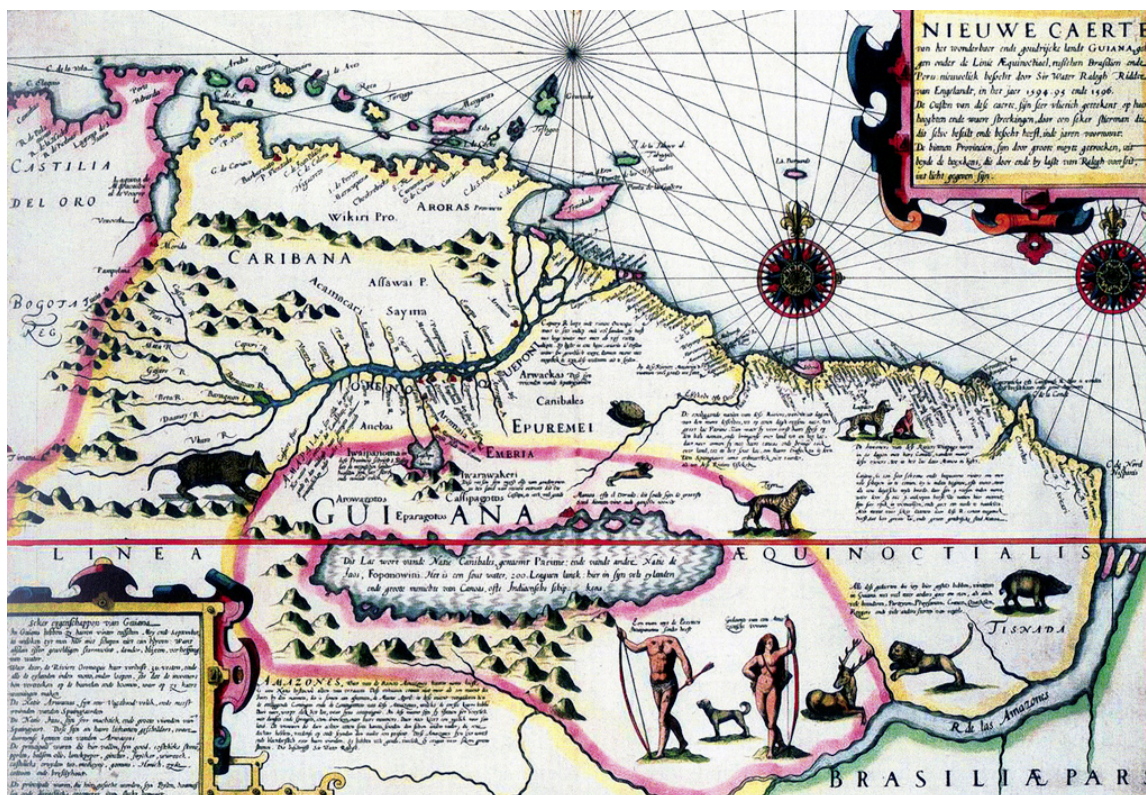
produced a plan for the Atlantic that looked much like that of the VOC in Asia. The proposed company would receive a trade monopoly for the West African coast from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape of Good Hope and in the Americas from Newfoundland to the Straits of Magellan. In addition, like the VOC, it would have judicial, governmental and military authority in these regions. The plan did not envision the establishment of settlement colonies as Usselincx and others had suggested. The 1606 proposal appeared to have widespread support despite some objections from merchants who wanted to exempt particular trades, but a bigger threat to its realization came from the peace negotiations then underway with Spain.

The cost of maintaining a large army in the Southern Netherlands was becoming increasingly problematic for the Spanish, while the growing power of the VOC threatened the lucrative Portuguese trade with Asia. Phillip II offered to recognize the sovereignty of the Republic, if the Dutch abandoned their expansion plans in the Atlantic and ended the VOC's war with the Portuguese in Asia. The Spanish peace offer produced a vigorous debate and pamphlet war in the Republic. There were many who worried about the cost of a seemingly endless war with Spain. Another concern was how long England and France would continue to provide subsidies for the Republic's war with Spain. Moreover, the Republic had dramatically increased its debts to pay for the war. Johan Oldenbarnevelt, the first minister of Holland, tried but failed to raise taxes to limit further debt increases and supported peace negotiations with Spain. Since the Spanish embargo had damaged trade with the Iberian Peninsula and the Mediterranean, he found support for his peace plans from many merchants. Strong Calvinists, Maurits--the Prince of Orange and hereditary Stadholder of the Republic--the States of Zeeland and those involved in the West African trade wished to continue the war with Spain. While a definitive peace was postponed due to the failure to reach agreement about the VOC's role in Asia, the Republic signed a Twelve Year Truce with Spain in 1609. In Europe they agreed to accept the existing military status quo and the Dutch promised not to create a unified and state supported trading company for the Atlantic similar to the VOC in Asia. They also agreed to a provision by which residents of the Republic would need to seek Spanish permission to trade with existing Portuguese and Spanish colonies. The Republic, however, was free to found colonies and trade in other areas of the Americas. The Truce produced an economic boom in the Republic. The Republic was able to cut its defense costs and by 1621 over 800 Dutch ships sailed to Iberian and Italian ports. Dutch shippers also became crucial in transporting raw sugar from Brazil to Europe. The Truce, however, did considerable damage to Dutch trade with the Gold Coast in Africa. When the Portuguese threatened Dutch trade with the Kingdom of Sabu, which was outside of Portugal's trading territory at the time of the Truce, the Republic sent a squadron of warships to West Africa and built Fort Nassau te Moree, which later became the center of the WIC's Gold Coast operations.



*Fort Nassau on the Gold Coast of Guinea, after Johannes Vingboons, Gerard van Keulen, early 18th century, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 24.*

Although disappointed, Usselincx did not give up his vision for more aggressive Dutch colonization and trading plans in the Atlantic. He argued that the Truce allowed the Republic to establish colonies outside of areas controlled by Spain and Portugal and interested a number of investors and Calvinist supporters in a settlement and trading proposal on the coast of Guyana, known as the ‘wild coast.’ Maurits, who sought to counter the power of the Regents led by Oldenbarnevelt, and had close ties to militant Calvinists who opposed Oldenbarnevelt’s ties to more liberal Calvinists, supported Usselincx’s plan. Maurits encouraged a growing public opposition to Oldenbarnevelt’s leadership. The latter was arrested by Maurits in 1618 and was subsequently tried and beheaded. The death of Oldenbarnevelt removed the most important obstacle to the creation of the WIC and signaled that the Truce with Spain might not be renewed in 1621. A few weeks after Oldenbarnevelt’s arrest, the States of Holland placed the question of the West India Company on its agenda. After negotiations with Usselincx failed to produce a plan to his liking, he left for Sweden to encourage its monarch to establish an Atlantic settlement and trading company. Negotiations with the towns of Hoorn and Enkhuizen about whether to include their salt trade with Punta de Araya in the WIC (this became irrelevant after the WIC was created since the Spanish excluded the Dutch from



The Wild Coast of Guyana, Jodocus Hondius, 1599, University Library, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 17. The lake pictured in the interior, which does not exist in reality, was believed to be where the mythical gold of Eldorado might be found, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 17.

the salt trade in America), and with Friesland and Groningen about their participation produced further delay, but on June 3, 1621, the States-General approved the formation of the WIC. The Company received a patent for 24 years that provided it with a shipping and trade monopoly with West Africa south of the Tropic of Cancer, and with the Americas between Meridians drawn through the Cape of Good Hope and the eastern region of New Guinea.

The governing structure of the WIC consisted of five *Kamers* (Chambers) located in Amsterdam, with 20 *bewindhebbers* (directors); 12 for Middleburg and 14 each for Rotterdam, Hoorn and Groningen. In addition, other towns and districts that invested at least 100,000 *gulden* were entitled to one *bewindhebber* in the *Kamer* in which they made the investment. The *bewindhebbers* were chosen from the chief investors by the local magistrate. In Amsterdam, for example, an investor had to venture at least 6,000 *gulden*



The Trading Region of the WIC, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 28.

to be eligible to be chosen a *bewindhebber*. The highest level of management of the WIC consisted of the *Heren XIX* (Lords or Gentlemen). Amsterdam was allocated eight, Zeeland four, the other *Kamers* two each, and one for the States-General. The *Heren XIX* met two or three times a year to set overall policy, allocated and regulated the sending out of fleets for the *Kamers*, determined the dividends to be paid to investors, and every six years were required to audit the books of the *Kamers* and provide an overall reckoning of Company accounts. The Dutch Republic was a decentralized federal state and the WIC followed this model. Each *Kamer* was responsible for its own administration, accounting, hiring of its personnel, the acquisition and outfitting of its ships, the construction and maintenance of its own wharves and warehouses, the buying and selling of its exports and imports, and the financing of its own trade in accordance with the general policies established by the *Heren XIX*. It took until 1623 before the WIC was able to attract

enough capital, about seven million *gulden*, so that it could begin to operate. It raised capital four times, so that by 1639 it operated with a capital of seventeen million *gulden*.



The Old West Indian House of the WIC's Amsterdam *Kamer*, used from 1623 to 1647, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 31

It has often been argued that the States-General encouraged the creation of the WIC in order to help with the Republic's war with Spain and Portugal. Thus, like the VOC, it had been given the duty of organizing trade convoys, protecting Dutch shipping, exercise legal jurisdiction on its ships and forts in the Atlantic territories of its charter, and had the right to establish colonies. The States-General also promised to provide it with military support if required. In spite of these governmental and military tasks assigned to it, it is important to remember, however, that the WIC's shareholders' primary goal was to profit from the growth of Atlantic trade. While many of the most important investors in the WIC were often directly involved in local, provincial and national government, they did not always agree with the Republic's potentially costly political and military plans. Although the WIC looked very similar to the VOC, the former faced a very different situation than the latter. The VOC was forced to make a place for itself into an established and vigorous Asian trading system that had existed for centuries and to adapt itself to work with powerful Asian states. Initially only Portugal stood in its way as a European competitor. In the Atlantic, however, there was no ocean

trade system before Spain and Portugal created one. By the time the WIC was launched, the Iberians had already dominated the trade, shipping and settlement in the Atlantic for more than a hundred years. Moreover, from its inception the WIC had to deal with existing competitors from England, France and other European countries. Few of the founders of the WIC recognized that trade in the Atlantic region would be very different from European endeavors in Asia during the early modern period.

THE WIC IN BRAZIL

When the WIC had acquired enough capital to begin operating there was a vigorous debate about its initial strategy. Some argued that it should support the Nassau fleet, which Prince Maurits had recently dispatched to circumnavigate the world. It sailed first to the Caribbean to establish a base and hoped to capture a Spanish treasure fleet. Others argued for an assault on Portuguese forts on the African Gold Coast. Willem Usselinx had warned against involving an Atlantic Company in costly military ventures and some supported this view. In the end, the Company decided on a 'Grand Design' to attack Brazil and capture the Atlantic sugar trade. Dutch shippers had become important in the sugar trade and the refining of sugar was a growing Dutch industry, which provided domestic profit and employment. It was argued that Brazil was lightly defended and that the Portuguese, who operated in both the Atlantic and Asia, were overextended. In addition, the Company directors reasoned that many of the Portuguese plantation owners in Brazil, among who were many *muranos*--Jews who had converted to Christianity in order to escape the Inquisition--were unhappy with Spanish rule over the Portuguese and might not put up much resistance to a Dutch takeover. In October of 1623 the WIC agreed on an ambitious plan that would begin with the capture of Bahia, the capital of the Portuguese in Brazil, and then a portion of the fleet would sail to Angola to take the Portuguese slave fort São Paula de Luanda. During the winter of 1623-24, twenty-seven ships from various Dutch ports sailed to Cape Verde and assembled to cross the Atlantic with 3,250 men, including 1,500 marines, and 489 cannon. When the fleet arrived off Bahia and bombarded the city, most of the population fled the city. When the Dutch landed, they found only the Portuguese Governor General with some *muranos* and slaves. The Dutch promised *muranos* who returned to the city freedom of

religion and security of their property, but their bishop convinced them to stay away and to organize a guerrilla campaign against the invaders. The Dutch admiral returned to the Republic in July and the vice-admiral, Piet Hein, who would soon become very famous by capturing a Spanish silver fleet, proceeded to Angola with a naval squadron. The Portuguese and Spanish, however, had learned about the planned invasion and dispatched a fleet of 52 ships to Brazil in late March. The Dutch garrison in Bahia only managed to hold out for a month against the Spanish fleet, but the Spanish admiral graciously allowed them to return home with their ships.

In 1629, with funds from a captured Spanish silver fleet, Admiral Hendrik Corlisz Loncq with a fleet of 67 ships and 7,000 men captured Recife in the sugar plantation region of Pernambuco in northeast Brazil. Although the Dutch promised freedom of



Brazil in 1629, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 38

religion to the *muranos*, who dominated the sugar industry in the region, they nonetheless burned their warehouses and ships before evacuating the city and retreated into the surrounding marshes. They mounted an effective guerilla campaign that tied down the Dutch. Both the Republic and the Spanish sent reinforcements from Europe. It was not until 1633 that the Dutch, with the help of Indian allies, were able to break out of the city and captured the coast south to Fort Reis Magos, which they renamed Fort Keulen, at the mouth of the Rio Grande. Along the north coast, the WIC extended its control as far as Cabo de Santo Agostinho. By 1635 the WIC controlled the most important sugar districts and had broken the Portuguese resistance in the Captaincies of Rio Grand, Paraiba, Itamaracá and Pernambuco. The Spanish and Portuguese, however, sent a fleet to Jaraguá in southern Brazil and continued to harass the Dutch with a guerilla campaign and adopted a scorched earth policy.



Fort Keulen at the mouth of the Rio Grande, Frans Post, 1638. Musée de Louvre, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 37.

After six years of war in Brazil, the financial position of the WIC did not look promising. In 1636 the Company had to borrow 18 million *gulden* to sustain itself. The Directors, after consultations with the States-General and the Stadholder, named Johan

Maurits, the earl of Nassau-Siegen and cousin of the Stadholder, Governor of Brazil. Maurits, who had been an effective military leader in the Republic's war with Spain, arrived in Brazil in early 1637 and within the year he had ended the guerilla wars in the northern half of Brazil down to Rio São Francisco. He was not, however, successful in the South. He recognized that ending the conflict required improving the economy of Brazil and he repeatedly asked the WIC to send emigrants and capital to rebuild the sugar industry, but there was little interest in the Republic to send more men and money as long as the security situation looked uncertain. He did secure a supply of slaves by dispatching four ships that captured the Portuguese slave fort São Jorge da Minda on the African Gold Coast. In order to entice the Portuguese *muranos* to return and revitalize the sugar industry, he reformed the legal system and guaranteed freedom of speech and religion. He recognized that another impediment to rebuilding the economy was the trade monopoly of the WIC and he supported a successful effort in the Republic that in 1638 resulted in free trade, with some exceptions such as slaves and munitions, and with the payment of modest fees paid to the Company for providing security. Meanwhile both the Republic and the Portuguese recognized that continued warfare was not only costly, but



Slave market in Recife, Zacharias Wagner, circa 1640, Kuperstich Kabinett, Dresden, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 41.

made the revival of the sugar industry unlikely for both sides. There was in fact a decline in guerilla activity. In 1640 a new political opportunity to settle the conflict appeared when the Portuguese revolted against the personal union with Spain and the Duke of Bragança became King of Portugal. Making peace with the Dutch Republic became important to Portugal's new government to buttress its independence from Spain. The shareholders of the WIC, however, were not enthusiastic about peace, since a ceasefire threatened their plans to strengthen their position in the South Atlantic. At first, the Portuguese demanded that ending the war could only be agreed to if the Dutch returned the territory they took from them in Africa and America, since the Dutch had captured it during their war with Spain. As the negotiations dragged on, and since the Portuguese no longer were as powerful as they had once been, the WIC directed Maurits to capture as much territory as possible before an agreement was reached. Within a short time, Maurits captured territory in Angola and the Captaincies of Sergipe and Maranhã in Brazil. In 1641 The WIC reached the greatest extent of its territorial control in the South Atlantic. Two years later Maurits, in alliance with an Indian tribe, sent an expedition of five ships with marines to Chile to capture Spanish silver mines. The expedition was an expensive failure. When it became clear that the Republic and Portugal would soon sign a peace treaty, the WIC Directors reduced the number of troops in Brazil to cut costs and planned to recall Maurits, whose expensive life style had in any case become a problem for the Company. Although the Republic and Portugal signed an armistice in June of 1641, the war in the Atlantic continued. In October 1642 the Portuguese *muranos* of Maranhão launched a massif revolt against the Dutch in Brazil. Within a year Maurits was forced to withdraw his troops. He left for Holland in 1644. By late 1645 the *muranos*, without help from Portugal, had taken control of most of northern Brazil with the exception of Recife.

By August 1645 the WIC Directors had become well aware of the dire situation in Brazil. They had expected that a good sugar harvest would finally produce a large profit and solve their financial difficulties. The revolt of the *muranos* ended that prospect. The Company secured enough financial subsidies from the State to send a relief fleet to Brazil the next year. Many in the Republic were convinced that the *muranos* were receiving military help from Portugal and lobbied to resume the war with Portugal in Europe. Others, however, especially merchants in Amsterdam whose trade with Portugal was

more important than their trade with Brazil, were opposed to both a war with Portugal and subsidies for the WIC. Buying sugar in Lisbon looked like a better proposition to many merchants than to rely upon an uncertain supply from WIC territory in Brazil. During the next few years, several more Dutch fleets were sent to Brazil in attempts to retake lost territory, but all these efforts failed. The WIC attempt to blockade Bahia also failed to halt sugar exports from Portuguese *muranos* in southern Brazil. While the Portuguese sent out fleets to protect its southern Brazilian territory, they were willing to negotiate a treaty that would allow the WIC to hold on to its territory in Brazil that still remained under its control. The WIC, however, refused to compromise. In 1653, when the Republic found itself at war with England, the Portuguese sent a large fleet to Recife that overwhelmed the Dutch, but allowed them to return to Holland.

The capitulation of Recife ended the WIC's ambitious 'Grand Design' to make the Republic predominant in the European sugar market by capturing and expanding Brazilian sugar production. The plan might have been feasible for a time during the first half of the 17th century, when Brazil dominated sugar production in the Americas, but by the 1660s the growth of French and English sugar plantations in the Caribbean would have made a sugar monopoly based on Brazil impossible. In any case, the WIC had failed in its plans to recruit German farmers to settle in Brazil to grow sugar and, despite Maurits' efforts to win over the Portuguese *muranos* with legal reforms and freedom of religion, he had been unable to convince them to accept Dutch sovereignty. On paper the WIC enjoyed a legal monopoly for Dutch trade in the South Atlantic, but in fact it was forced to accept Maurits' plea for free trade in the region. Between 1637 and 1644, the Company shipped sugar valued at 7.7 million *gulden* from Brazil, while private Dutch traders imported 20.3 million worth of sugar. Recent studies have shown that Dutch trade with Brazil was an important factor in the wellbeing of the Republic. In addition to the goods exported to Brazil from the Republic, sugar imports from Brazil between 1635 and 1645 were important to the merchants and sugar refineries and their workers in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Middleburg. A sugar monopoly might have provided greater profits for the WIC, but the cost of its military activities in Brazil to make the monopoly a reality were higher than the merchant elite in the Republic were willing to pay. In fact the very idea of a long-term sugar monopoly was unsustainable as other countries expanded

sugar production in the Caribbean from the 1660s. Finally, it can be argued that, if the Directors of the WIC had compromised with the Portuguese, they might have been able to hold on to some of their territory in Brazil. Instead, they wagered on an effort to conquer all of Brazil and lost.

THE WIC AND PRIVATEERING

While plans to capture the sugar industry in Brazil had seemed possible to the WIC for a time, since Dutch naval power and shipping resources were superior to those of Portugal and the plantations were strung out along the coast, a direct Dutch attack on Spanish America was not conceivable. Spanish wealth in the Western Hemisphere was not primarily on the coast or on plantations in the 17th century, but consisted largely in the silver mines in the interior of Mexico and Peru. The capture of these mines presented insurmountable military and financial obstacles for the Dutch. Breaking into the trade with Spanish America was also problematic since the Spanish had declared the Caribbean



The Caribbean, in Den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 55.

a *mare clausum* (a closed sea). Thus, one of the original goals for the WIC was to engage the Spanish through privateering—or what could be called Company and State sanctioned piracy--justified on the grounds that the Republic was at war with Spain. The English and the French had already demonstrated that privateering against the Spanish treasure fleets was both a profitable enterprise and a way to undermine Spanish power. During the first decade of the WIC, the Company sent many ships to plunder Caribbean ports and to attack Spanish merchant ships. They also dispatched privateers to attack the sugar ships from Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. As early as 1624, the Amsterdam *Kamer* of the WIC sent a squadron of seven ships to the Iberian Peninsula to seize Spanish merchant ships. During the same year, the Zeeland *Kamer* sent three ships that plundered poorly defended Spanish ports and shipping in the Caribbean. When Admiral Boudewijn Hendriksonz's fleet arrived too late to rescue the initial Dutch attack on Brazil, he decided to fulfill the second part of his orders and used his ships to attack Spanish ports and shipping in the Caribbean. After besieging San Juan, whose defenses proved too strong, he sailed west to Havana, looted a Cuban island and took some Spanish freighters as booty. The real prize, however, was the Spanish *Terra Firma* fleet, which assembled each year at Havana before sailing across the Atlantic. His ships, however, were no match for the eight large and heavily armed Spanish Galleons that guarded the Spanish treasure fleet. For a month he cruised around Cuba picking off Spanish freighters. When Hendriksonz died unexpectedly, the fleet returned to Holland without having won a large booty. The fleet did not know, however, that the WIC had sent out a reinforcement force of fourteen ships, commanded by Piet Hein, with orders for the combined forces to capture a Spanish return treasure fleet. While cruising to the west of Florida in the hope of picking off Spanish freighters, Hein saw the entire silver fleet of forty ships in the distance soon after it left Havana for Spain. Since the treasure ships were accompanied by large Spanish Galleons, his much smaller ships were unable to challenge the treasure fleet without reinforcements. Disappointed, he turned south to Brazil and captured several heavily laden Portuguese sugar ships. The WIC had now spent a good deal of money on sending out privateering voyages and, while they had some success, the bigger prize of taking a Spanish treasure fleet had thus far eluded them. One of the Company's most successful privateers was Cornelisz Jol, who with a *jacht*—a light and fast sailing

vessel that the Dutch had originally designed to chase pirates in the shallow coastal waters of Europe--captured more than a hundred ships for the WIC. Jol, known as *Houtebeen* (wooden leg) crossed the Atlantic ten times for the WIC as a privateer between 1626 and 1641. In the last year of his life he captured São Tomé for the Company.

The Dutch were well aware of the routes and sailing times of the Spanish trade and treasure fleets. Each year two merchant fleets left Spain for America. The *Tierra Firme* fleet left Spain in April for Cartagena and Portobello and loaded silver from the mines in Peru and Bolivia. The *Floto San Juan*, which left Spain a few months later, sailed to San Juan and the Honduras. Both fleets assembled in Havana and jointly returned to Spain in late August. This combined fleet was escorted by twelve Spanish Galleons, which each carried 250-300 soldiers and perhaps a hundred more in times of War. When the WIC took 55 Spanish cargo ships in 1627, the WIC Directors decided to make a major effort in 1628 to send a fleet of 85 ships to capture the *Tierra-Firme* fleet



The harbor of Havana where the Spanish treasure ships assembled for their convoy to Spain, Johannes Vingboons, (circa 1660), in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 57.

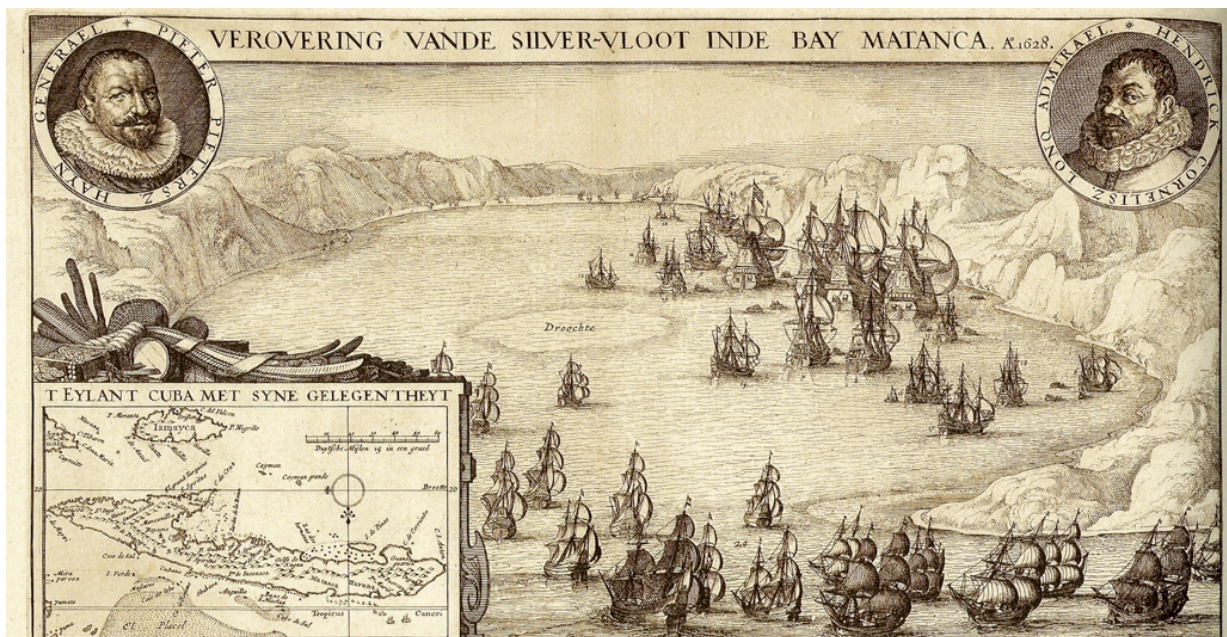
before arriving in Havana with its silver. The Company sought financial help from the State for this scheme since the Spanish used American silver to finance its war in Europe with the Republic. The States-General, however, refused to fund the project. Thus, the WIC outfitted two small fleets for its plan. The first fleet managed to plunder two Spanish treasure ships from the Honduras before it reached Havana. In order to avoid a direct confrontation with the *Tierra-Firma* fleet, this Dutch fleet hastened home with its booty. Thinking the danger had passed, the Spanish let down their guard. The second Dutch fleet, under the command of Piet Hein, had left Holland later. His fleet included



Piet Hein, (1577-1629, Paules, Moreelse (1629), Nederlandse Scheepvaartmuseum,
In den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 60.

ships that were unusually large by Dutch standards. It included ships of five hundred tons and his Admiralty ship, the *Amsterdam*, was over a thousand tons. The fleet carried 3800 men and 689 pieces of artillery. When he arrived off the Cuban coast the Spanish initially thought they were dealing with the much lighter ships of the first fleet. On September 8,

Piet Hein caught the unsuspecting *San Juan* fleet in the Florida Strait. Nine of its merchant ships were captured on the high seas, while the rest were taken to the Bay of Matanzas (where the US supported invasion of Cuba would take place in 1961). It took Piet Hein eight days to load the silver and hastily prepare for the return voyage, since he feared that the much larger *Tierra-Firma* fleet would soon arrive and recapture the treasure. After surviving heavy storms during the hurricane season, and the loss of three captured Spanish Galleons, Piet Hein returned home to a hero's welcome in January of 1629 with 177,00 Amsterdam pounds of silver, 66 pounds of gold, a thousand pearls, plus indigo and cochineal (dyestuff), silk, hides and other products. The booty was sold for 11.5 million *gulden*. Even today Dutch children are familiar with Piet Hein's exploits through a famous nursery rhyme.



Piet Hein's capture of a Spanish silver fleet in the Bay of Matanzas, Cuba, September 1628, Etching by Claes Jansz Visscher, circa 1630, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 60.

Piet Hein's success encouraged the WIC to send several other privateering squadrons to attack Spanish treasure fleets, but the Spanish learned from their mistakes and took measures to protect their ships. Without a base of operations in the Caribbean the WIC found it difficult to resupply its ships and the Company focused its resources on Brazil. In 1640 the WIC sent out its last privateering squadron under Admiral Jol with

orders to capture a silver fleet, but this most successful of all privateers failed in this mission.

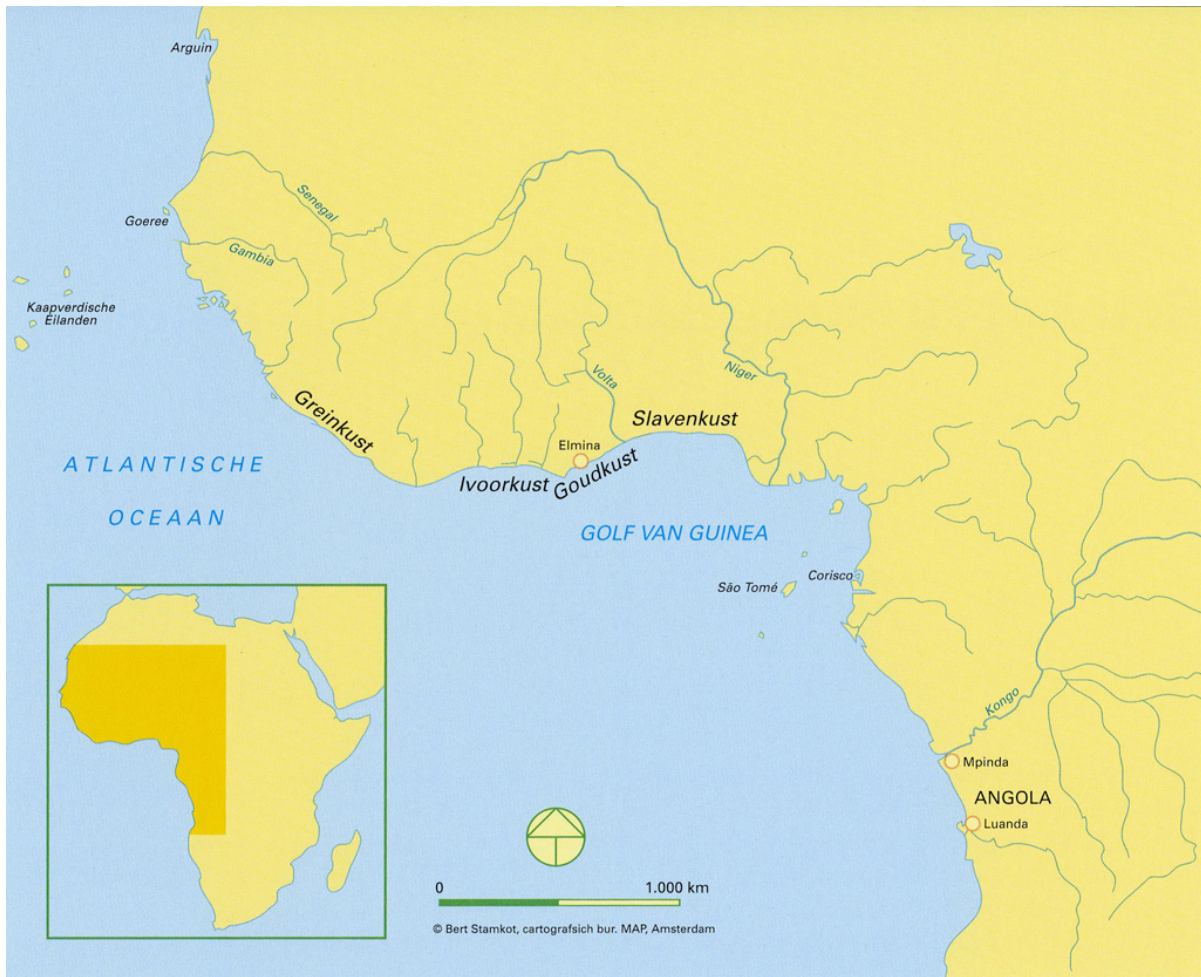
Johannes de Laet, who was a large shareholder of the WIC, suggested in the first history of the Company that ending support for large scale privateering fleets killed the goose that laid the golden egg. De Laet reckoned that between 1623 and 1637 the WIC took 609 enemy ships and this cost the enemy 118 million *gulden*. After deducting the costs, the captured goods and ships produced a return of 36 million *gulden*. Most of this ended up in the pockets of shareholders and stakeholders. A good example of this was the booty of 11.5 million *gulden* that Piet Hein brought home. Ten per cent went to Piet Hein and extra pay for the crews. Another ten per cent was given to the Stadholder of the Republic. The Directors received one per cent and about fifty percent was paid out in dividends to the shareholders. This left the Company with 1.5 million *gulden* to add to its capital. These costs, however, were not the main reason why the WIC ended large scale privateering. The real reason was the enormous costs of its Brazilian campaign. By 1636 the WIC deficit was 36 million, an amount that could not be made up through privateering. After two failures by Jol's privateering fleet, the Directors were not willing to continue to finance risky privateering expeditions. Despite the WIC's legal monopoly to trade and privateer in the Atlantic, the WIC was not able to keep private Dutch merchants and competing privateers from operating in the Atlantic and judicial authorities were not always willing to enforce its monopoly rights. Indeed, after the WIC captured Recife and Olinda in 1630, the Company did not have enough shipping to be able to provision these colonies and was forced to allow private trade with its new colonies.

After the armistice with Portugal in 1641, WIC privateering against the Portuguese sugar ships also effectively ended. When the Portuguese *muranos* in Dutch Brazil revolted in 1645, privateering in Brazil resumed, but this time it was organized by others. Middleburg in Zeeland had long been a port from which privateers had operated against the Flemish privateers of Dunkirk, who raided Dutch shipping in coastal waters. After the Republic defeated them in 1646, the Middleburg privateers switched their activities to raiding Portuguese sugar ships. They also attacked English, French, Hanseatic and even Dutch ships that the Portuguese chartered to ship its sugar. Zeeland

privateers formed a Brazil coordinating group and during the next two years they seized 220 Portuguese ships in the Brazilian trade. In order to protect its sugar trade, the Portuguese created a Company with a sugar trade monopoly, enticed merchants in Brazil to invest in shipping, guaranteed that the Inquisition would not pursue *murano* merchants in the sugar trade, and organized sugar ship convoys accompanied by Portuguese naval vessels. These measures reduced the profitability of privateering against sugar ships. While the WIC largely abandoned its own privateering activities after 1640, it had an interest in the continuation of privateering by the Zeelanders against the Portuguese. In the first place, it weakened the Portuguese with whom they were technically at peace, but continued to fight in Brazil. Secondly, Zeeland privateers operated with Commission Letters from the Republic, which were issued by the WIC for the Atlantic region, and entitled the Company to an 18% commission on the takings. The WIC allowed Individual privateers to operate in its monopoly area by paying a deposit of 12,000 *gulden*. By the 1660s profits from WIC's once lucrative privateering had become negligible.

THE WIC AND WEST AFRICA

According to the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1594, the Portuguese were awarded the trade to the African continent south of the Sahara. The most important trading forts were on the Gold Coast, which in addition to gold was important for ivory and dyestuff. During the second half of the sixteenth century, French, English and Dutch merchants increasingly undermined the Portuguese African trade monopoly in gold and ivory. Dutch trade stretched from Cabo Verde in the north to the mouth of the Congo in the south. By 1700 about 2,000 Amsterdam pounds of gold were shipped from two small Dutch African forts to the Republic. During the early 17th century, competition in the Republic for African gold had driven up the price and made the trade unprofitable. After the WIC took over the trade in 1624, it quickly became the most important Company in West African commerce, greatly diminishing the share of the French, English and Portuguese. Reduced competition lowered the price of African gold in Amsterdam. The Portuguese, however, remained the strongest European military power in Africa. The WIC Directors decided that the Portuguese fort of São Jorge de Mina was too large an obstacle for the moment and instead decided to begin with an attack on the Portuguese slave fort in



West Africa: Greinkust (Grain Coast), Ivoorkust (Ivory Coast), Goudkust (Gold Coast), Slavenkust (Slave Coast), den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 68.

Angola. This plan complemented their grand design in America since there was a growing demand for slaves by Brazilian sugar plantations and Spanish silver mines in Peru and Bolivia. The 1624 attack on Angola was a failure, but on the Gold Coast the WIC were successful through diplomacy and concluded favorable trading agreements with local leaders and military alliances. In 1625 a WIC fleet of sixteen ships and 1,200 men arrived to take Elmina, the Dutch name for São Jorge de Mina, on the Gold Coast with the help of 150 African soldiers. Unfortunately, the Portuguese Governor had also formed an alliance with an African leader and promised to pay sixty *gulden* in goods for each severed Dutch head. While Dutch troops rested on the beach in preparation for taking the fort, Portugal's African allies surprised them and cut off 441 of their heads.



São Jorge de Mina [Elmina] was established by the Portuguese in 1482 and became the strongest fortification in West Africa, G. Braun, F. Hogenberg and S. van den Neuvel, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, I, Antwerpen 1575, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 66.

Instead of sending more military expeditions to Africa between 1625 and 1637, the WIC sought to broaden its trade on the Gold Coast. Fort Nassau, which they strengthened and expanded, became their center of operations until 1637. Johannes de Laet reported that during this period the WIC exported 14 million *gulden* worth of goods, 12 million of which were gold, from West Africa. Their long-term goal, however, remained to replace the Portuguese as the main European power in Africa. In 1633, they took Fort Aguin, located on an island near Cabo Blanco, from the Portuguese. After the Company conquered several Portuguese sugar producing Captaincies in Brazil, it entered the slave trade, since the plantation colonies were useless without a dependable supply of slave labor. At first there was opposition in the Republic to entering the slave trade on

theological and moral grounds. Some argued that theological opinions to allow slavery and the slave trade were papist heresies, but after the WIC acquired colonial plantations, Calvinists soon began to argue that slavery could be justified because it would bring heathens into the Reformed Church. In 1637, Johan Maurits, the Governor of Dutch Brazil, sent a fleet of nine ships from Recife with 1200 marines and sailors to Africa to take Fort São Jorge de Mina. The expedition succeeded and the fort was renamed Elmina. The Dutch went on to take other Portuguese forts on the Gold Coast. While the WIC quickly expanded its participation in the slave trade, gold remained its most valuable commodity in the region. They soon learned that their new slave trade seriously impeded their gold trade because the latter required peace in the region, while the slave trade increased war and insecurity. As long as the gold trade remained more valuable,



View of Elmina in 1640, Gerard van Keulen, late 18th century, from an aquarelle by Vingboons, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p.73.

the WIC was cautious in their expansion of the slave trade in West Africa. They even attempted to limit the selling of firearms to reduce warfare among Africans, but this only encouraged the English to sell more guns in the region.

When the armistice with Portugal was being negotiated in 1641, the WIC attempted to complete its grand design in the South Atlantic before peace endangered their ambition to replace the Portuguese in Brazil. The Company took Angola and its

slave trade from the Portuguese and denied a supply of slaves to its sugar planters in the remaining Portuguese Captaincies. In March of 1641 Admiral Jol set out from Recife with 21 ships and 2100 men, including 240 Indian soldiers, and captured the sugar island of São Tomé and Luanda. With the seizure of Luanda, the WIC's imperial control reached its greatest extent. Maurits hoped to export 15,000 slaves from Angola annually and also anticipated a large copper, ivory, and dyestuff trade as well. However, Dutch trade from the region was much more modest than he expected during the WIC's control of Angola from 1641 to 1648. The WIC exported a total of 23,150 slaves to Brazil, of whom 18,650 arrived alive. The available evidence suggests that Luanda and São Tomé probably produced more losses than profits for the Company. In order to protect the colony, the WIC had to permanently station five to six hundred troops in the colony. Its slave trade stagnated after 1645 when the Portuguese *muranos* rose up against the Dutch in Brazil. Moreover, the WIC had sold slaves to the Portuguese on credit and the loans were never repaid after the revolt of 1645. The costs of war in Brazil and the mounting debt brought the WIC to the verge of bankruptcy. As a result, its garrisons in Africa became seriously undermanned and poorly maintained. In 1648 a large Portuguese fleet arrived off Luanda. The Dutch surrendered without a fight, evacuated São Tomé and soon gave up its other remaining stations in Angola.

By 1650 the Company had largely abandoned the African slave trade while private merchants from Amsterdam exported slaves mostly to Spanish colonies in America and to English and French islands in the Caribbean. The WIC established a slave market on Curaçao, an island close to the Venezuelan coast that developed into an important supplier of slaves to the growing sugar industry in the islands and the Spanish mainland. Between 1650 and 1674, the Dutch shipped about 100,000 slaves to the Caribbean, of whom about 82,000 survived the voyage. However, the WIC transported relatively few of these. In 1662 the Spanish sold their *asiento*, the right to deliver slaves to Spanish America, to Genoese merchants, who subcontracted most of the trade to the WIC. The growing demand for African slaves in the Caribbean led Charles II in 1660 to establish the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading in Africa to expand the English slave trade. The English located slaving stations near Dutch slave trading posts. In 1661-62 the WIC responded by capturing six English slave ships in the region and brought

them to Elmina. At first the English attempted to settle the slaving dispute through diplomacy, but increasing friction between England and the Republic led the English to seize the Dutch slave fort on the island of Goree, near Cabo Verde, as well as several WIC forts on the Gold Coast. Since the WIC did not have sufficient military resources to counter the English, the States-General of the Republic sent Admiral Michiel de Ruyter with his fleet from the Mediterranean to deal with the problem. He quickly retook all the WIC forts, as well as all the English forts in West Africa except Cabo Corso (Cape Coast). De Ruyter's expedition inflicted enough damage on the English Company in West Africa so that it went bankrupt in 1667 and was replaced by the Royal African Company, which would not become a threat to the WIC for some years. Although the



Michiel Adriaensz de Ruyter, Ferdinand Bol (1667), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 76. De Ruyter was also the Dutch Admiral who in 1667 sailed up the Thames and Medway, burnt naval ships at the Royal Dockyards at Chatham, and towed away two capital ships.

WIC remained the most important trading Company on the Gold Coast in the 17th century, it was not able to eliminate competition from Dutch, English, Swedish, and Danish smugglers (the last two were largely financed by Dutch merchants). From about 1640 the English especially began to threaten WIC trade by offering a greater variety of goods, including guns, at lower prices and prices. Competition also lowered profits. Between 1635 and 1674, the WIC exported about 17 million *gulden* worth of African gold to the Republic. Dutch smugglers and corrupt WIC officers exported another 25 to 30%.

DUTCH COLONIES IN AMERICA: NEW NETHERLAND

When Usselinx first began to promote the idea of a West Indies Company, he had in mind the creation of agricultural colonies in America. Since neither the Portuguese nor the Spanish had settlements in Guyana—a region on the north coast of South America between the Orinoco and the Amazon Rivers--he suggested that the Dutch settle this area to grow sugar, cotton and indigo. The priorities for the Staten of Holland—the government of the Province—for the newly created WIC were privateering against the Portuguese and Spanish and the conquest of Brazil from the Portuguese. Nonetheless, settlement colonies were not entirely forgotten. The discoveries of Henry Hudson in 1609 had led to the establishment of several trading posts that later became New Netherland. Even earlier, merchants from Friesland had explored the coast of Guyana on their salt buying trips to Punta de Araya, Venezuela. The first extant Dutch source on Guyana was a report from Adriaen Cabeliau to the Staten-General of the Republic in 1599 about his trade and exploration voyage to what the Dutch called the Wild Coast, where he had charted 24 rivers between the Orinoco and the Amazon. Merchants from Zeeland began trading and established stations on the Guyana coasts. Amsterdam merchants focused on a coastal area of North America that would become New Netherland. When the WIC received its charter in 1621, it was granted control over existing trading posts and fledgling colonies in the Americas. Since the WIC's early colonization experience proved to be quite expensive, it turned to granting *patroonships* to individuals--an exclusive right to settle an area that included judicial authority over the settlement.

The Amsterdam *Kamer* of the WIC formed a Commission to develop New Netherland colony out of the existing trading settlements, but it soon became apparent

that there was a fundamental disagreement between those who wanted to create a trade monopoly and those who envisioned a colony where trade and colonization would be open to individual competition. Until 1628 the WIC made a number of efforts to colonize the region using company resources. In 1624 it used a company ship, *Nieuw Nederlandt* (New Netherland) to bring thirty families, mostly Walloons from what is now Germany, to America. In 1625 six more ships arrived. The Company's aim was to settle and claim a wide area from the Connecticut to the Delaware rivers in order to prevent earlier English and French settlers from claiming the region. The Amsterdam *Kamer* told the



New Netherland, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 78.

colonists where to settle and what to grow. Settlers were required to stay on their allocated land for six years. They were free to engage in trade but were required to sell furs to the Company at fixed prices. The WIC appointed a Governor for New Netherland, who was required to consult with an appointed local Council. The costs of its grand design in the South Atlantic prevented the Company from being able to recruit enough settlers (few Dutch residents volunteered to emigrate) to meet its need to secure New Netherland's huge territory. The scattered settlements were small and in constant danger of Indian attacks. During 1625-26 the Company spent 100,000 *gulden* to transport and equip settlers, an amount that could not be covered by the fur trade, the most important export product of New Netherland. During 1627-28, New Netherland ships carried more settlers returning to Europe than going to America. The disappointing situation reignited the debate about whether to continue with Company settlements or to allow private initiatives to develop the region. The latter argument was advanced by one of the large Amsterdam *Kamer's* shareholders, Kiliaen van Rensselaer. The WIC decided to offer *patroonships* to private individuals. The Company provided a large tract of land to an individual who was able settle it with at least fifty colonists within three years. The *patroon* was given the right to govern the settlement, had legal jurisdiction within his land grant and the right to collect taxes. The colonists in turn had the right of appeal to the Governor and the Council of New Netherland. Six *patroonships* were awarded, but only van Rensselaer was able to assemble sufficient capital to take up the offer. From 1629 to his death in 1643, van Rensselaer, who remained in the Republic, managed his settlement of Rensselaerswijk on the Hudson River (across the river from what is now Albany)). His descendants became *patroons* after his death. By 1660 the settlement had a thousand inhabitants and about 120 houses.

While private ventures had some success in colonizing and developing trade in New Netherland, the WIC's financial problems and the incompetence of some of its Governors limited the colony's success. The Colony's Council sent one of the Governors, William Verhulst, back to Holland for his authoritarian rule in 1626. He was later found guilty of financial fraud. Peter Minuit, one of the more competent Governors, moved the government from Fort Orange (later Albany), which was threatened by Indians, to the



View of New Amsterdam, Johannes Vingboons, circa 1660,
National Archives, The Hague, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 82.

center of New Netherland. He built Fort Nieuw Amsterdam on the island of Manhattan in 1626. Under the next two Governors the colony struggled to survive. Governor Wouter van Twiller (1633-38) attempted to limit English trade along the Connecticut River by building a fortified trading post, Fort of Goede Hoop (which eventually became part of Hartford), but the English constructed a fort upstream and were followed by English settlers who undermined the Dutch position in the region. Van Twiller was recalled to Holland for his behavioral problems. He was replaced by Willem Kieft (1638-47), who nearly ruined the colony. The imposition of taxes on the Indians of Long Island led to a conflict in 1643-44 in which at least 120 Indians, including women and children, were massacred. The Indians responded by killing colonists and the war spread to a wider region. Many Indian villages were burnt and more than a thousand Indians and dozens of colonists lost their lives before peace was restored. The result of insecurity and mismanagement was a decline in the Dutch fur trade and a chronic shortage of settlers.

Meanwhile the English expanded their trade and settlements in the northeast of New Netherland.

In 1645 the Directors in the Republic recognized the seriousness of the problem and chose Petrus Stuyvesant, who since 1642 had been a successful Director at Curaçao, as the new Governor. Soon after his arrival in New Amsterdam, he broadened the colony's Council to include more colonists and local WIC officials. Despite his authoritarian reputation, Stuyvesant was able to secure city rights for New Amsterdam that were acceptable to the notables of the city, but he did not allow the development of a similar level of local self government that the English enjoyed in their colonies.



Petrus Stuyvesant (1612-72), Governor of New Netherland 1645-1664. Artist unknown, New York Historical Society, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 84.

Stuyvesant worked out an agreement with the English in 1650 to establish definitive borders between New Netherland and the other colonies. Although the States-General of the Republic never ratified the treaty, its provisions, which recognized the Connecticut Valley and the eastern half of Long Island as English territory, were respected in America. He also settled the southern border of the colony. In 1638, Peter Minuit, the former

Governor, had established a colony on the Delaware for the Swedish East India Company (largely financed with Dutch money). The WIC claimed that the colony was in its territory. In 1655 Stuyvesant led a military expedition that took over the settlement. The WIC had borrowed money from the city of Amsterdam to finance the expedition. When they were unable to repay the loan, the WIC gave part of Delaware to Amsterdam, which promptly sent 167 colonists to the area.



Map of New Netherland with a view of New Amsterdam in the foreground, Nicholas Visscher circa 1650, Stichting Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 85.

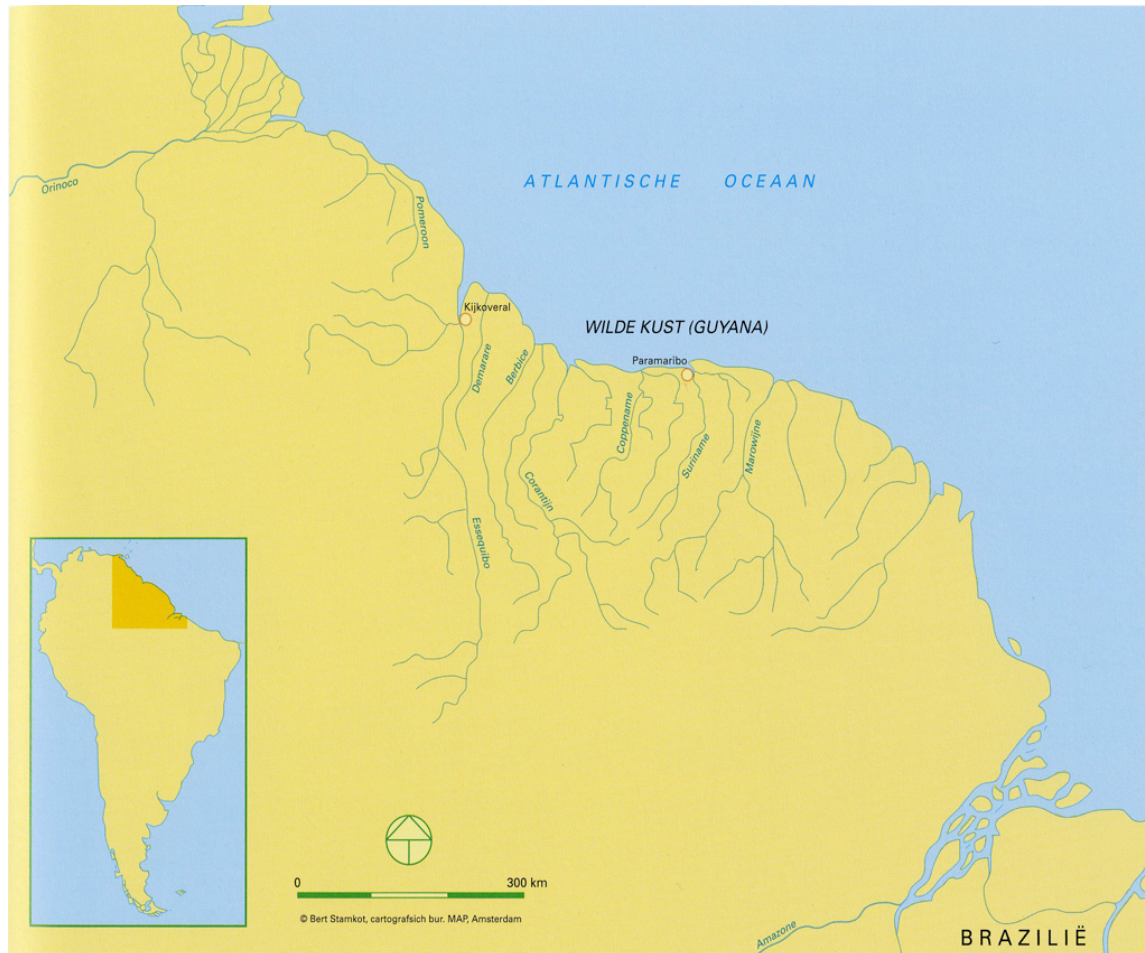
From 1655 to 1664, New Netherland prospered. By 1664 it contained about nine thousand colonists. When the WIC abandoned its monopoly trading rights in 1640, Amsterdam private merchants developed a profitable trade with the colony. Most of the WIC's New Netherland revenue was derived from tariffs it collected on imports and exports and from the fur trade. By 1664, New Netherland had become a promising Dutch colony when the English suddenly attacked even before the Second Anglo-Dutch War

had been formally declared. Since Stuyvesant did not have sufficient military resources to defend the city, he surrendered it without a fight. Within a week the rest of the colony also capitulated. In the Treaty of Breda of 1667, the Republic ceded New Netherland to England while England agreed to recognize the Republic's conquest of Surinam. The latter fit better in the Company's Atlantic grand design. Despite having given up New Netherland, the WIC continued to collect trading fees for many years from Amsterdam merchants that maintained a prosperous trade with New York.

DUTCH COLONIES IN AMERICA: THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS AND GUYANA UNDER THE OLD WIC

From the late sixteenth century Dutch merchants, especially those from Zeeland, established private trading forts on the Wild Coast of Guyana between the Amazon and Orinoco Rivers. They traded metal wares and textiles for tobacco, dyestuff, hides and other tropical products. The trading posts were often attacked by the Portuguese and the Indians and did not last long. During the 17th century there were at least fifteen Dutch attempts to establish colonies in the region. Fort Kijkoverall, established in 1616, was the first colony that survived. When the WIC acquired monopoly rights to trade and colonize in the Western Hemisphere in 1621, its grand design concentrated on Brazil, leaving few resources for Guyana. As early as 1623 the Company began to consider allowing private ventures to colonize the region for 'recognition' fees. In 1628 the Company issued regulations for settlement concessions. These required the receiver to establish a settlement with a certain number of colonists within three years, and conferred tax abatements and jurisdiction and governing rights in the settlement to the entrepreneurs. The WIC required that a local Council be established to advise the concession holder. Abraham van Pere, a merchant from Vlissingen and a shareholder in the *Zeeland Kamer*, made the first successful attempt at colonization. In 1627 he sent 60 colonists to built Fort Nassau near the mouth of the Berbice River. The settlement's chief exports were salt, tobacco and dyestuff. Despite the objections of the *Zeeland Kamer*, Amsterdam also established a short-lived trading post in 1635 on the Wild Coast. Colonization was slow and it was not until 1654, after the loss of Brazil, that another new colony was established

in Guyana. Many refugees, especially Jews from Brazil, settled in new colonies along the Pomeroon, Essequibo and Berbice rivers. In addition two colonies were established on the coast of Guyana. One of which was by Lord Willoughby of Parham who had left



The Wild Coast, Guyana, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 87.

Barbados with other English planters. While the Dutch colonies struggled, this group of experienced planters quickly developed prosperous plantations. By 1663, Surinam had four thousand inhabitants, including African slaves. In 1657 the Zeeland towns of Vlissingen and Veere granted tax incentives to Jewish refugees from Brazil in order to expand the sugar plantations on the Essequibo River and in 1662 the government of Zeeland provided a loan of a half million *gulden* interest free to establish new plantations. In 1666 Lord Willoughby conquered the Essequibo plantations for the English, but a year later the Dutch retook them. Meanwhile, the French captured the Dutch settlement at Cayenne. During the Second Anglo-Dutch War, the Admiralty of Zeeland sent a

squadron of seven ships under the command of Admiral Abraham Crijnsen to recover the Guyana colonies. Crijnsen arrived at Cayenne in 1667, but since the French were



The departure of Admiral Abraham Crijnsen from Zeeland to the West Indies where he took Tobago and Surinam from the English, 1667, *Lieve Verschuier*, circa 1667, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 88.

now allied with the Dutch, he retook those taken by the English instead. After his departure, an English expedition from Barbados quickly restored English control, but later that year the Peace of Breda restored the colonies to the Dutch. Much to the chagrin of the WIC, the States of Holland assigned the Guyana colonies to the States of Zeeland for fifteen years. Zeeland enjoyed little profit from this since many of the planters and their slaves left Guyana for Barbados. In 1682 Zeeland turned Suriname over to the WIC but it was not until later in the 18th century that the region prospered.

In contrast to the English and French, the Dutch showed little early interest in colonizing Caribbean islands. Instead, they were content with privateering and plundering. In 1630 the Amsterdam *Kamer* conquered the island of St. Martin for its rich saltpans and as a convenient entrepôt for voyages to Brazil, but in 1633 the Spanish retook the island. In 1648, after the Spanish and Dutch ended their Eighty Years War, the Dutch and

French occupied and shared the island. After the loss of St. Martin, the WIC set its sights on the Spanish island of Curaçao. It was right off the coast from Spanish colonies and



Curaçao, Claes Jansz Visser, circa 1640, Nederlandse Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 91.

possessed several defensible deep-water bays. In 1634 the Company sent Johannes van Walbeck with six ships and 225 men to conquer the island. Walbeck defeated the Spanish and Indians within three weeks and built a fort at the entrance to the Bay of St. Anna. At first the WIC used Curaçao as an ideal base for attacking Spanish shipping and its mainland colonies, but it soon developed into a crucial resupply and entrepôt for the Caribbean trade. Walbeck served as its first Governor. An advisory Council was established, consisting of important Company functionaries and three important local merchants. After the Dutch loss of Recife in 1654, the colony was greatly strengthened by the arrival of Jewish merchants and planters from Brazil who were granted freedom of worship on the island and built the oldest synagogue in the Western Hemisphere in continuous use.

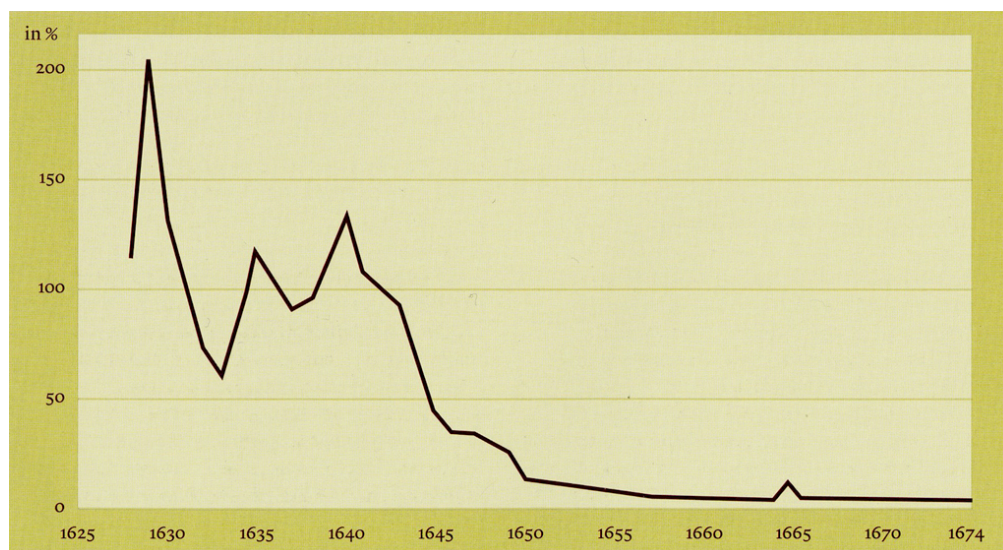
The Peace of Munster of 1648, which ended the Republic's Eighty Years War with Spain, was a mixed blessing for the WIC in the Caribbean, for it both put an end to the Company's profitable plundering of Spanish shipping and colonies, and the Spanish continued to protect its trade from Dutch competition in the Americas. Peace, however, did lead to the growth of private Dutch merchant trade with the French and English Caribbean islands. The Dutch especially bought raw sugar from the growth of French and English plantations. Private Dutch merchants had to pay a commission to the WIC but this revenue did not cover the Company's military costs of maintaining a strong presence in Curaçao. In 1642 Petrus Stuyvesant became Governor of Curaçao. When he was also named Governor of New Netherland in 1645, he attempted to tie the colonies more closely together by supplying food to the Caribbean islands in return for slaves, horses and salt for New Netherland. The Caribbean colonists, however, preferred to buy their food within their own region. Since the Dutch had slave forts in Africa, the Company developed a slave market in Curaçao. This developed rapidly after the Dutch lost Brazil and by the late 1650s Curaçao was selling many slaves to the French and English plantations. In 1662 the Spanish sold the *asiento* in 1662 to the Genoese, who in turn subcontracted the slave trade to private Amsterdam merchants. At first the WIC did not see much profit from this private Dutch slave trade, but after 1674 it played a larger role by selling slaves who had been brought to Curaçao by private merchants to the Spanish colonies. Curaçao developed into the largest slave market in the Caribbean. The WIC also granted *patroonships* in the Caribbean. A Zeeland *patroon* colonized Tobago in 1628 but the Spanish destroyed the settlement in 1637. In 1655 the Company gave out another *patroonship* for the island, but in 1666 the French took over the island and made its *patroon* a French Baron. In 1636 the WIC had also provided a *patroon* grant for St. Eustatius to Zeeland merchants, who established sugar and tobacco plantations on the island and in 1640 colonized the nearby island of Sabo. Between 1664 and 1681, first the English and then the French, controlled St. Eustatius and during the eighteenth century it briefly served as an important WIC Caribbean slave trade island.

WIC BANKRUPTCY AND THE FOUNDING OF THE SECOND COMPANY

When the States-General created the WIC in 1621 it received its charter for twenty-five years. The assumption was that if its finances were sound, the Company's



The Amsterdam Beurs (Stock market) where WIC and VOC shares were traded, Philip Vingboons, 1634, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 94.

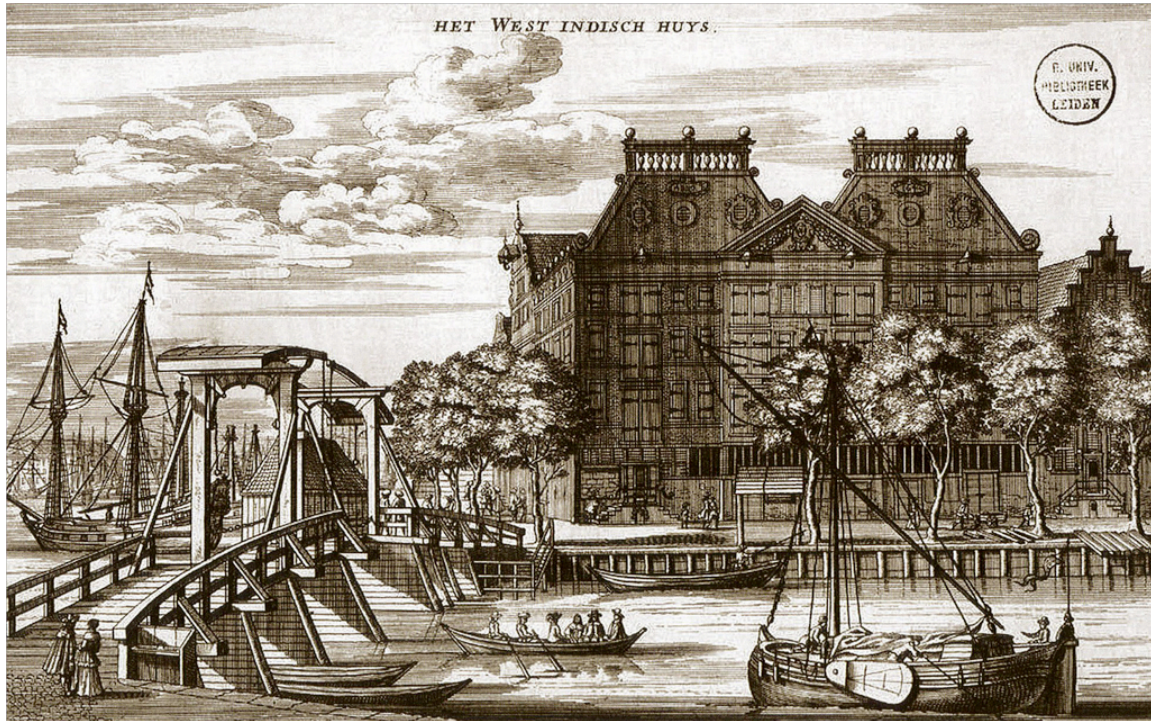


Value of WIC shares before its reorganization, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 96

patent would be renewed. Unfortunately, the military costs of the WIC's grand design in Brazil threatened it with bankruptcy and left inadequate resources for its colonization efforts elsewhere. This forced the WIC to give up its monopoly rights over the trade in New Netherland and the Caribbean to private merchants and in 1638 it was also forced to allow Amsterdam merchants to trade with Brazil. In 1644 the States of Holland formed a Commission to make recommendations about the WIC's future prospects. The Commission was quite pessimistic about the future viability of the Company and it received a temporary renewal of its patent, while a study was conducted about merging it with the much more successful VOC. The WIC Directors were very enthusiastic about this plan for the VOC's profits would protect their investments and spread their liabilities over a larger group. They argued that their military activity had cost the Portuguese and Spanish dearly and this had prevented the enemy from using more of its resources in Asia, which partly helped explain the VOC's success. They also prophesized that a merged worldwide Dutch Trading Company would sweep the Spanish and the Portuguese from the oceans and make the Dutch dominant in world trade. The VOC, on the other hand, object vigorously to the proposal. The merchants of Amsterdam were opposed to the scheme and found allies in Friesland and Zeeland. The merger plans were widely debated by the public. When it appeared that there was not enough support to approve the merger, WIC interests demanded that they would withdraw their proposal if the VOC provided the WIC with a subsidy of two million *gulden*. The States of Holland ultimately forced the VOC to give the Company 1.5 million *gulden*. In 1647 the charter of the WIC was renewed for twenty-five years. However, the VOC subsidy was not enough to solve the WIC's financial difficulties. In 1649 it had debts of 36 million *gulden* despite state subsidies of 6.5 million. This produced a storm of criticism from merchants in the Republic who demanded free trade in the Atlantic.

Although it had become clear to all concerned that the debts of the WIC were unsustainable after the loss of Brazil in 1654, there was no public effort made to solve the problem. In 1663 the Directors began preparations to again renew its charter. The States of Holland took no action until 1668, when it offered a plan to reduce the Company's debts by lowering its shares to 5% of their nominal value and its bonds to 30% of their face value. In addition the Company was to deposit one million *gulden* as capital to

safeguard the African trade. Holland also recommended reducing the number of *Kamers* and Directors to reduce costs. During the next few years, various other plans were proposed but no agreement was reached. Meanwhile, the WIC's charter was repeatedly



West India House on the Rapenburg in Amsterdam, T. van Domselaer, *Beschryvinge van Amsterdam* (1655), in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 99.

extended for short periods. In March of 1674, the States of Holland sought to break the impasse. The States-General approved the plan in September and a new WIC was launched. In order to provide the new Company with working capital, holders of old Company bonds and other debt obligations could convert these to new bonds and obligations at 15 to 30% of their nominal values by paying 4 to 8% of their old values to the new Company. At the same time the new charter reduced the influence of the old Directors by limiting them to choosing one-third of the new Directors, while the shareholders and obligation holders each chose a third. The number of *bewindhebbers* (directors) in the Provincial *Kamers* were reduced and the Company's Board of Directors, the *Heren Negentien* (19), were cut to the *Heren Tien* (10). The new charter required the *Heren Tien* to publicly report on the financial situation of the Company every three years. The result was the creation of a second WIC in 1674 with a substantial working capital of 4.5 million *gulden*.



Voetboogdoelen, the building on the Singel used by the Amsterdam *Kamer* of the WIC from 1674 to 1791, Gerrit Lamberts, *circa* 1800, Stadsarchief, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 112.

The founding of a new WIC was combined with the reorientation of the Company from waging war with the Portuguese and Spanish, and using privateering as a major source of its revenue, to one that was focused on profit from trade. One of the requirements stipulated in its new charter was that at least one-half of the Company's *bewindhebbers* must be merchants. Its new charter was to last twenty-five years and was renewable for another thirty after negotiations with the States-General. The new charter covered the same geographic area as that of the earlier Company, but it was divided into two classes. On the African coast, below the Tropic of Cancer and on the Guyana coast, the WIC had a monopoly of trade and shipping, while between the Cape of Good Hope and New Guinea, private Dutch merchants could trade by paying recognition fees to the Company. The plan offered by the States of Holland for the reorganization of the WIC in 1668 had envisioned strengthening the central authority of its Board of Directors by limiting the influence of the local *Kamers* and the towns to better reflect the amount of capital invested by Amsterdam, but the reorganized Company could not escape the

decentralized political structure of the Republic. From 1674, Amsterdam contributed 60% of the Company's capital but controlled only four out of the ten Directors. The Zeeland *Kamer* had two Directors and one each came from the *Kamers* of Maz (mouth of the Maas, chiefly Rotterdam), the Northern Quarter (West Friesland), and Stad en Land (Groningen and Friesland). The States-General named the tenth Director. In reality the influence of the Amsterdam *Kamer* in the governance of the Company was probably much greater than the formal organization suggests.

Since the Board of Directors of the WIC, the *Heren Tien*, only met twice a year for a few weeks until 1684, after which they only met yearly, a Presidential *Kamer*, chaired by Amsterdam for six consecutive years and then by Zeeland for two, oversaw the implementation of Company policy. An Advocate General carried out the orders of the Presidential *Kamer* and also served as an Advocate for the Amsterdam *Kamer*. The meetings of the *Heren Tien* decided overall trade policy, determined how many ships could partake in its monopoly trading ventures and divided the trade among the local *Kamers* in accordance to the agreed participation formula, 4/9th for Amsterdam, 2/9th for Zeeland, and 1/9th each for the other three *Kamers*. The Board also set the prices of imports and exports with Africa and they determined the percentage to be paid for the Company's trading facilities in Africa. The WIC did not keep central accounts of its trade. Instead, each *Kamer* did its own accounting. The key tasks of the Presidential *Kamer* were to receive the detailed accounts from each *Kamer*, prepare the Company's annual financial report for the *Heren Tien* and divide profits, losses and dividends between the *Kamers* in accordance with the agreed upon formula. Despite the fact that the Company did not always make a profit, it nonetheless generally paid out an annual dividend. Every three years the Presidential *Kamer* was also required to produce a General Reckoning for the period. Despite the decentralization of the Company, historians have concluded that the WIC had a surprisingly modern and sophisticated accounting system that included the depreciation of facilities, ships, equipment and goods.

The *Bewindhebbers* (Directors), of whom there were fifty under the new charter, were responsible for carrying out Company policy in the five *Kamers*. To serve as a *Bewindhebber* one had to invest at least 4,200 *gulden* in the WIC in the Amsterdam



Map of the Texel Roadstead where the Company's ships were loaded and unloaded. The *bewindhebbers* were responsible for supervising the process. Detail of a map of Holland, Maritime en Jutters Museum, Oudeschild, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 114.

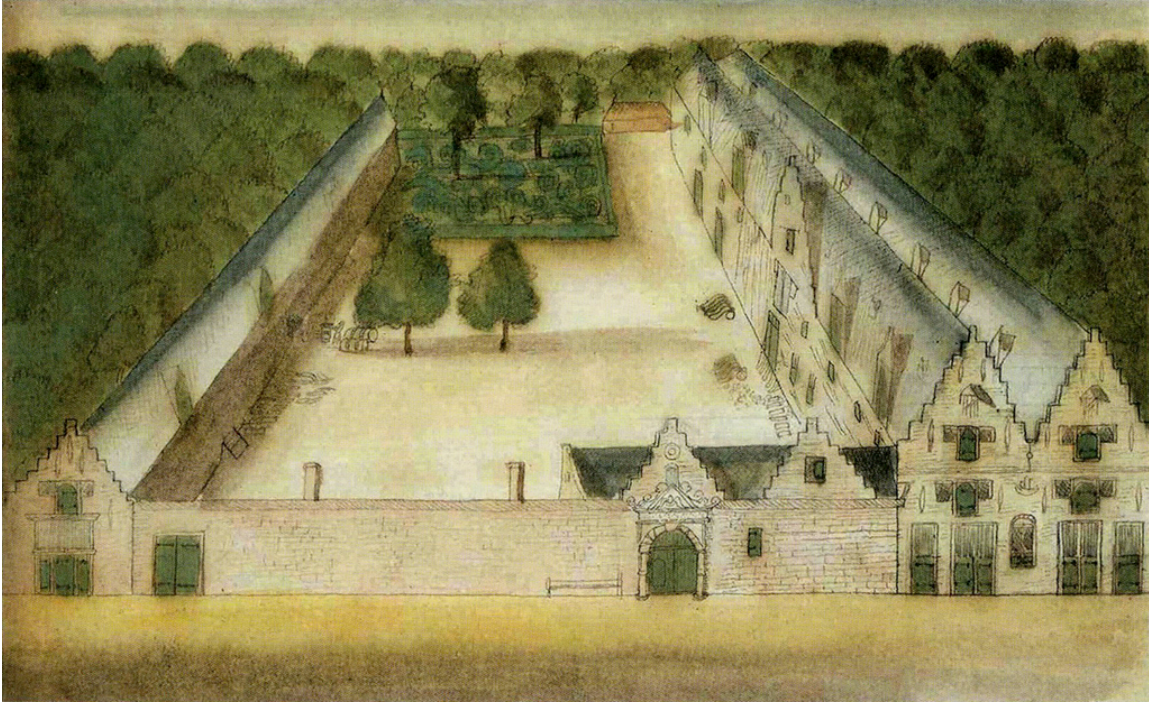
Kamer and 2,800 *gulden* in the others. A *bewindhebber* could also not hold a position in the Company. *Bewindhebbers* held their office for life. When a vacancy occurred, the *bewindhebbers* and the major investors in the Company met to select three candidates. The *Burgemeester* (mayor) of the city that had the right to name a new *bewindhebber* to a particular *Kamer* then chose one. *Bewindhebbers* received a salary of an additional 10% of declared dividends to a maximum of 60,000 *gulden*. While this was a substantial sum, dividends were not paid every year and rarely reached the maximum. The greater benefit of holding office was that inside knowledge of trade was often quite beneficial to one's private business and the social and political prestige the office provided. In the large Amsterdam and Zeeland *Kamers* the positions required a substantial workload of

meetings. The *bewindhebbers* were directly responsible for organizing the procuring of ships, supervising their provisions, hiring captains, acquiring trade goods, organizing the extensive paperwork and supervision that was necessary for trading voyages, conducting the correspondence with Company personnel in Africa and America, and dealing with financing and accounting.



Company Accountants at work, Petrus Serwouters, 1680, University Library, Leiden, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 116.

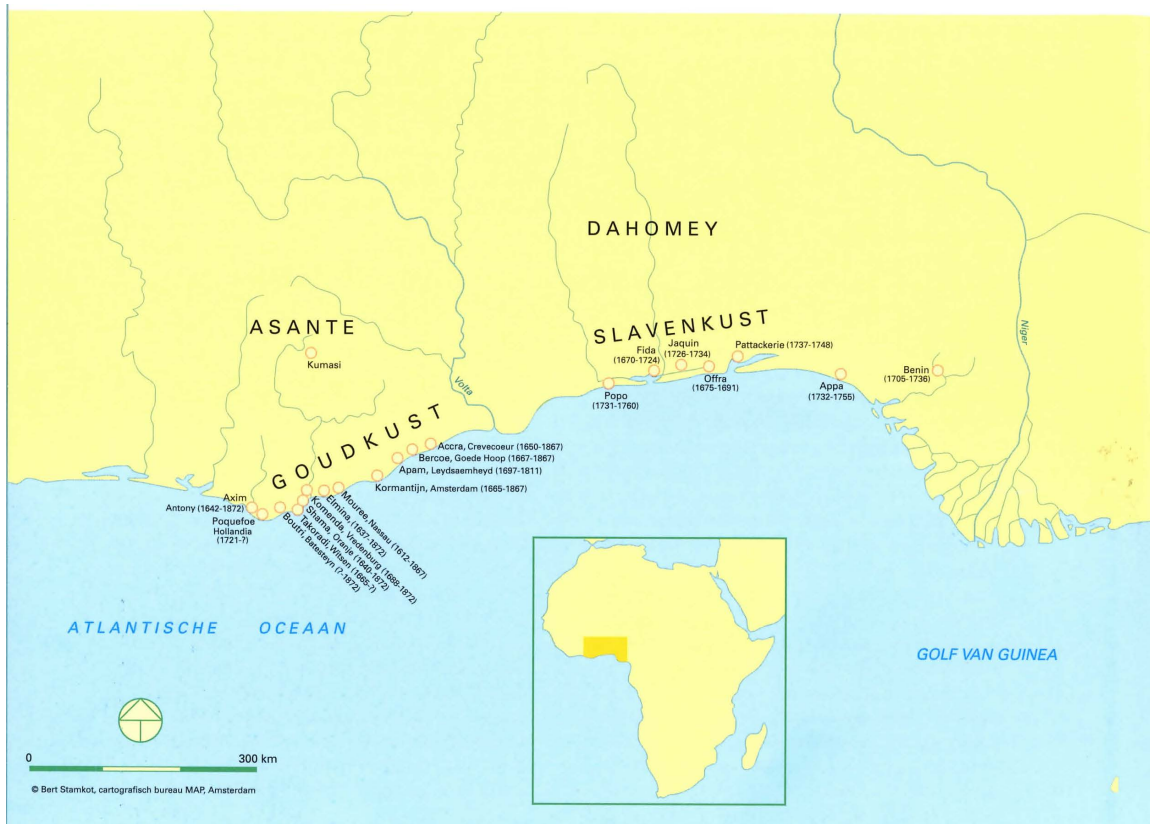
The WIC had far fewer regular employees than the VOC. In 1654, the Amsterdam *Kamer* sold its shipyard and from 1674 all the Company's ships were rented or bought. Under the new charter, the WIC only had about fifty regular employees in the Republic and they were all directly involved in administration, bookkeeping and the supervision of the provisioning of ships and trade goods. Company offices and lodgings for meetings were rented. Between 1674 and 1735 the WIC sent out an average of sixteen ships per year. These ships hired about 500 sailors annually and in the colonies and trading posts it had several hundred additional employees. The economic impact of the WIC was considerably larger than its number of employees suggests, since, like modern companies, it was heavily dependent upon outside contractors and suppliers.



Warehouses of the Zeeland *Kamer* in Middleburg, Gerrit Schoemaker, Cornelis Pronk and Abraham de Haen, *Schoemaker Atlas*, 1710-35, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 117.

THE AFRICAN TRADE

The West African trade was the most important region of operation for the second WIC. In contrast to the first Company, it studiously avoided conflicts with other European powers in the Americas and was forced to allow private traders to operate in the Caribbean. In Africa it sought to maintain its monopoly, which resulted in conflict with other European states and with Africans. It also worked hard to limit smuggling from the Republic. Originally, its trade with Africa had focused on gold and ivory but from the second half of the 17th century, the slave trade became its most important African business. Its forts and trading posts stretched from Senegambia to Angola. Although the Company had posts as far north as the island of Arguin, near Cabo Blanco, and as far south as Angola, the key area of its trade was a sixty sea mile stretch of the Gold Coast, in what is today Ghana. Here it had a dozen forts and trading posts. African rulers were stronger on the Slave Coast and there were fewer European trading posts. For many years Dutch slave traders operated from ships off the coast but as demand for



WIC forts and trading posts on the Gold and Slave Coasts with their dates of operation, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 120.

slaves increased in the second half of the 17th century, more European forts were built on the coast. The WIC appointed a Director-General in Elmina, the most heavily defended European fort in West Africa, to oversee its activities in the region. He carried on an extensive correspondence with the Company in the Republic and received detailed instructions on where and how many slaves to purchase but, given the realities of distance and time, he exercised a great deal of autonomy while in Africa. The second most important functionary was the Head Buyer who directly supervised the trade with the assistance of buyers stationed at other important trading forts. The Company also employed a number of what they called ‘refined blacks’ to help it maintain contacts with African chieftains and slave suppliers. The fiscal agent was another important Company official. He kept the books, which required tracking each *Kamer’s* trade, controlled the flow of goods and slaves, and punished smugglers. The latter was a mayor task since both Company employees and Portuguese interlopers were a significant problem and a constant concern of the Directors in the Republic. The Company also employed

Europeans in Africa to assist in administrative matters, and craftsmen and African slaves for labor. From half to three-quarters of the Company's employees in Africa were soldiers who garrisoned Elmina, maintained law and order in its other forts, and constituted the core of the Company's army. The European soldiers were supplemented by African troops in its conflicts with African rulers and European competitors. The

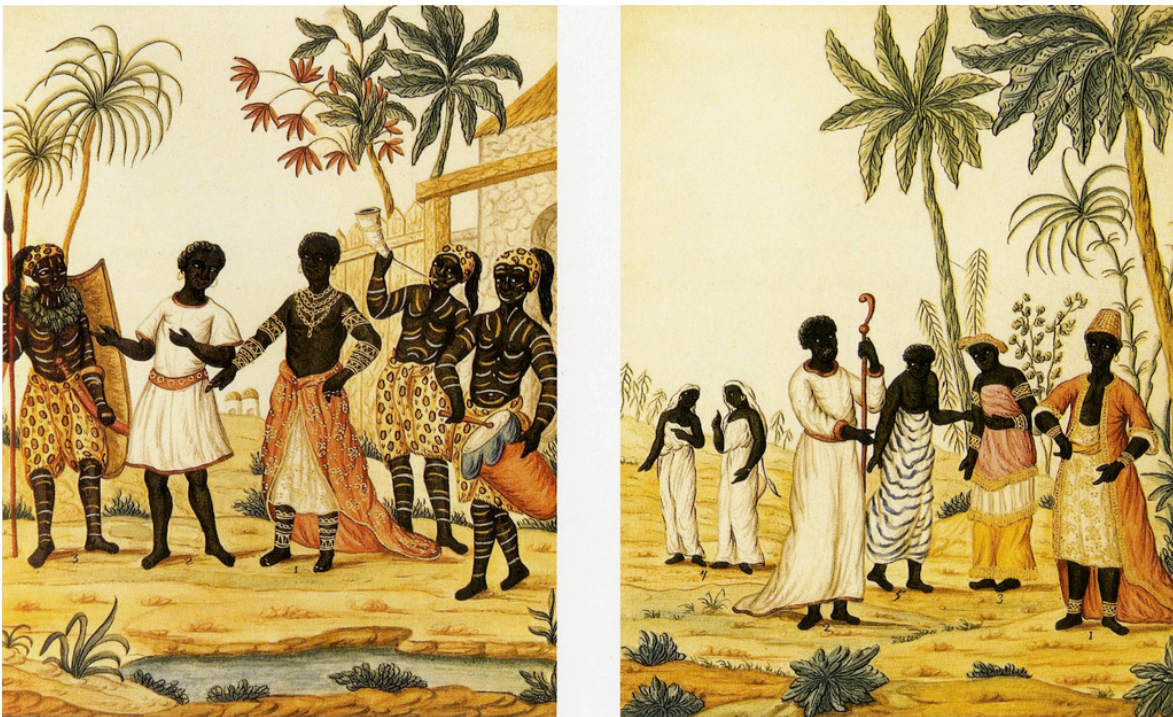


The frigate *Boreas* in front of the Castle of Elmina with its fort on the hill to the right, F. Jägerschjöld, circa 1780, Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 123.

number of the WIC's European employees in Africa fluctuated widely between 200 and 500 men depending on trade conditions and mortality. West Africa at the time was for Europeans one of the unhealthiest places in the world. This was due not only due to malaria, yellow fever, and other diseases, but also to the lifestyle of Europeans who did not adopt the fresh foods available in African diets, but insisted on eating salted European food and consumed a great deal of alcohol. Director-Generals constantly pleaded for more and better manpower from the Republic. Given the low life expectancy of Europeans in Africa, and the meager salaries of lower level employees, few Dutchmen

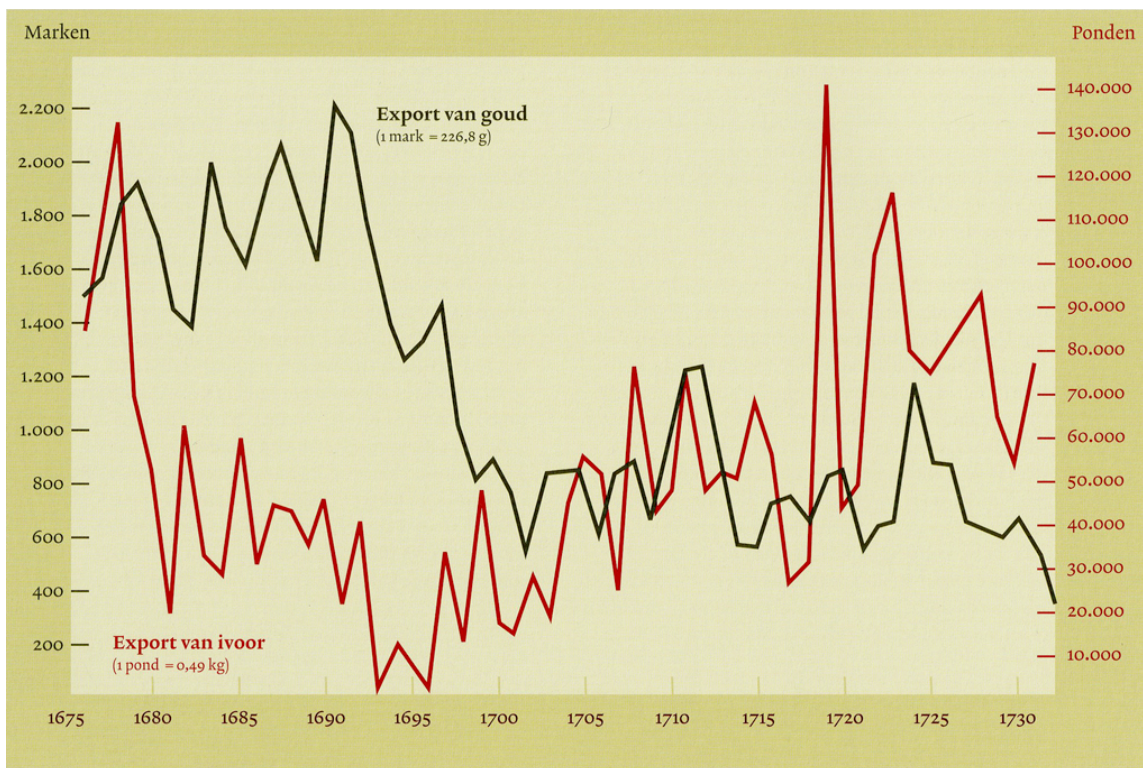
were interested in working in Africa and from 50 to 60% of the Company's employees in Africa were recruited from other European countries.

Until the end of the 17th century the Gold and Slave Coasts of Africa were controlled by numerous African states that constantly fought with each other. Warfare endangered trade and thus the Company sought to create alliances that provided local security, but none of these efforts were very effective. Before the 19th century European control in West Africa never extended much beyond the reach of its naval guns and coastal fortifications. In order to make its trade possible, the WIC negotiated with local leaders for exclusive trading rights and rented land for its forts and trading posts.



The King of Fetu, which was adjacent to Elmina, with his entourage, unknown artist, late 18th century, Amsterdam Historisch Museum, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 125.

Gold was the most important WIC export from West Africa and constituted about 75% of the trade value between 1675 and 1731, followed by slaves at 13%, ivory at 8%, and the remaining 3% was chiefly pepper, gum, and dyewood. The Company bought African products from specialized African brokers named by African chiefs, known as *caboceers*, who in turn acquired them from complex trade routes that often reached deep into the interior. The WIC worked with particular *caboceers*, who settled near their trade forts and were formally sworn in at Elmina, but often also traded with the



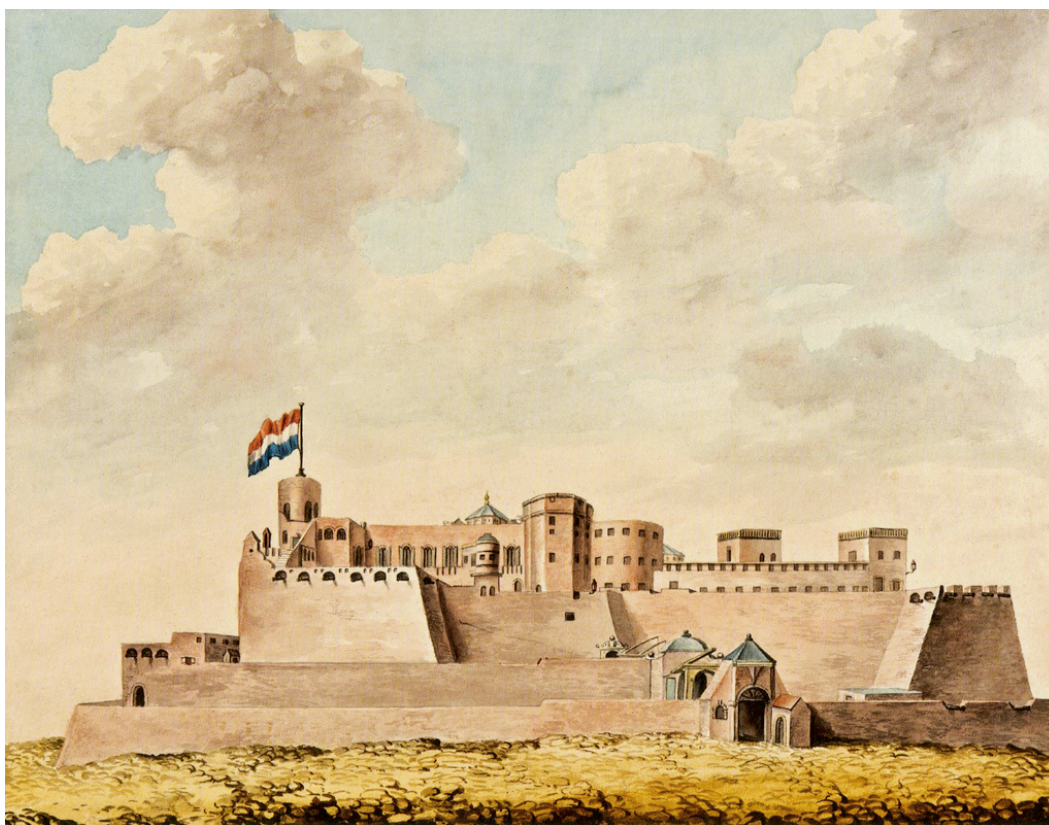
The export of gold and ivory by the WIC from West Africa, 1676-1731, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 126.

Company's European competitors. One of the most successful African merchants was Jan Konny, who was initially in the service of the Brandenburg African Company at fort Gross Friedrichsburg. His extensive trade contacts severely damaged Dutch trade at several of its trading posts. When Konny's efforts to control the trade resulted in warfare, Brandenburg decided to close its three forts in Africa. After the Brandenburg Director left Gross Friedrichsburg in 1716, Konny managed to take over the trading post. In 1718 Brandenburg decided to sell its African forts to the Dutch for the curious price of 6000 ducats and twelve young African men, six of which were to wear gold chains. Konny, however, refused to hand over the fort and threatened WIC's business by trading with Portuguese smugglers. In 1718 the WIC attacked the fort but failed and lost 38 men in the process. It was not until 1724 that the Company succeeded in taking Gross Friedrichsburg.

In addition to problems with African *caboceers* and European smugglers, the Company was also faced with African political unrest in the region, such as the Kommenda wars of 1695-98 on the Western Gold Coast, which for a time ended the gold trade at Vredeborg. During the early 18th century, the Ashanti, who controlled the gold

trade in the interior, expanded toward the coast. Although the Company dispatched representatives to the Ashanti and signed agreements with them to continue the gold trade, the wars between the Ashanti and the coastal African states often blocked the trade routes and caused the commodity trades to stagnate. By contrast, the wars produced a growing supply of war captives that expanded the supply of slaves for the Europeans during the period 1720-40. At the same time the growing plantation economies in the Caribbean increased demand for slaves, making the slave trade more important to European merchants.

Increased European competition ended the WIC's position as the dominant trading company in West Africa during the early 18th century. When England's



View of the trading castle of Elmina, the headquarters of the WIC in Africa, anonymous artist circa 1800, Stichting Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 131.

Parliament revoked the monopoly rights of the Royal African Company to the slave trade, more English ships entered the trade. By 1700 Portuguese slave exports from Angola had become insufficient to satisfy the growing demand for slaves in Brazil. This brought merchants from Brazil to the West African coast to purchase slaves with gold dust,

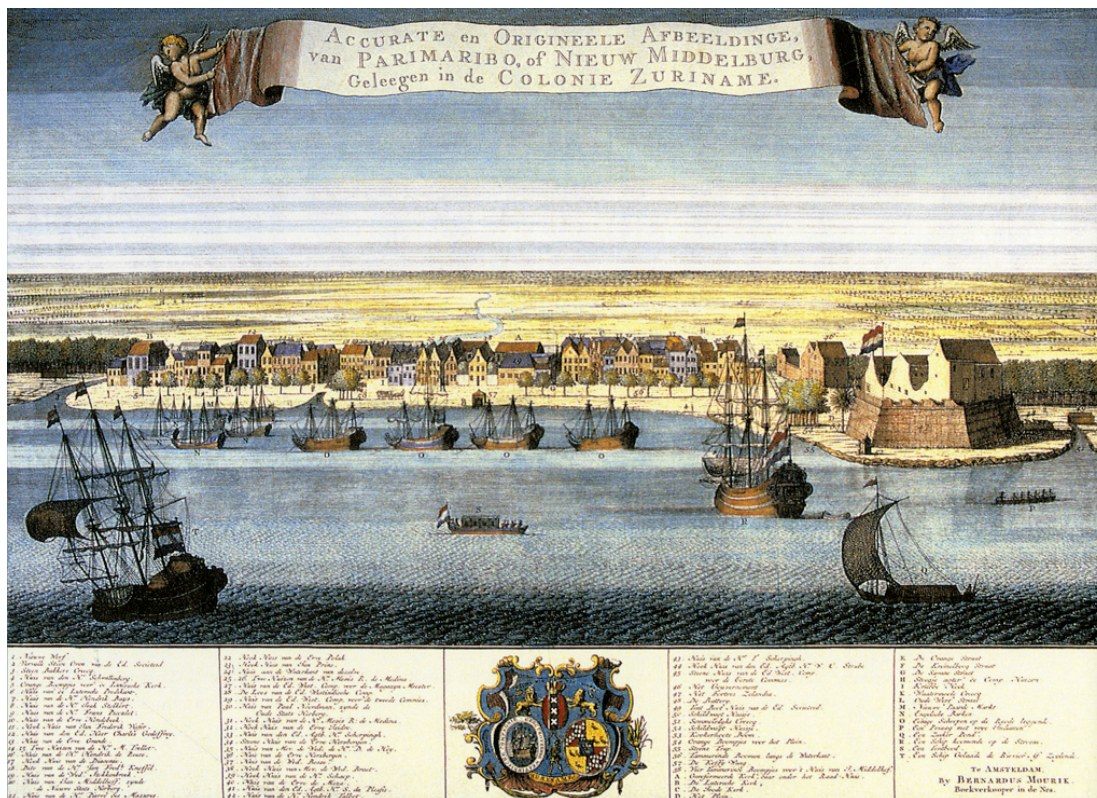
molasses and sweetened tobacco. The latter was much in demand by African slave dealers and the gold was a welcome supplement to the declining gold supplies from the interior. The Dutch allowed Brazilian ships to buy slaves on the coast provided they paid 10% of their trade goods as a toll at Elmina. By the early 18th century the Dutch were not able to supply more than about 3,000 slaves to their own colonies in the Caribbean and to the Spanish under the *asiento*. In 1702 the Dutch lost the *asiento* to the French and in 1713 it went to the English. While the French were not a threat to the Dutch on the Gold Coast, they played a substantial role on the Slave Coast and exported many slaves to the Caribbean from their trading post, Frida. In addition, the French inflicted considerable damage to the WIC during its wars with the Republic of 1672-78 and 1688-1697, taking 22 Company ships and their cargoes.

Another major problem for the WIC was an increase in smuggling. Although trade interlopers were primarily interested in the gold and ivory trades, one historian estimated that between 1675 and 1730, they also exported about 60,000 slaves from West Africa. Since they did not have to bear the expense of maintaining West African and Caribbean forts, they could supply slaves at lower costs. Much of the smuggling was organized from Zeeland. They used small fast ships that were able to sail close to the coast and into river deltas. Although the WIC stationed armed ships along the coast and captured 80 smuggler vessels during the period, it was unable to eradicate the problem. Moreover, English, Danish and Brandenburg competitors often protected and traded with the smugglers. It is difficult to determine the exact volume of smuggling, but William Bosman, a buyer for the WIC, estimated in the early 18th century that smugglers conducted at least 50% of the Dutch gold trade. According to den Heijer, smuggling was one of the major factors that undermined the success of the WIC and Zeeland played a major role in opposing the extension of the WIC trading monopoly in Africa in 1730.

THE WEST INDIAN COLONIES: SURINAM AND THE CARIBBEAN ISLANDS UNDER THE NEW WIC

Under the reorganized WIC, the Company directly governed the West African forts and trading posts, but in the Caribbean its control was more circumscribed. The

colonies of Surinam and Berbice were governed through specially created organizations called *Sociëteiten* in which the Company was a participant. The Company governed Essequibo and the Dutch Caribbean islands directly, but for major decisions the Governors had to consult with Colonial Councils. During the second Anglo-Dutch War, Abraham Crijnsen captured Surinam in 1667 from England with a squadron of ships from the Zeeland Admiralty. Despite the objections of the WIC, the Staten of Zeeland governed the colony for fifteen years. In 1679, the Governor reported that the number of English planters in Surinam had declined from 2,000 to 500. In 1682 the Republic's Staten-General charged the WIC with the task of defending and developing the economic well being of the colony. In return the Company was allowed to impose head taxes on both slaves and the white population and 2.5% duty on exports. The Company did not



Panorama of the city of Paramaribo and Fort Zeelandia, Surinam, 18th century, *Stichting Atlas van Stolk*, Rotterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 132.

receive a trade monopoly and was not even allowed to trade between Surinam and the Republic. It did however receive a monopoly for its slave trade and was required to supply the colony with as many slaves as needed, but had to sell them publicly at auction.

In 1683 the influence of Zeeland in the colony was reduced further by the creation of the *Sociëteit van Suriname*, in which the city of Amsterdam and the Governor of Surinam, Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck, each enjoyed one-third control. Between 1683 and 1713, the number of plantations grew from 50 to over 200 and sugar exports increased from three to six million Amsterdam pounds. During the Nine Year War with France (1688-97), the Company was able to defeat French invasion efforts, but in 1712 Jacques Cassard, a French privateer, attacked and plundered the colony with heavily armed ships and over a thousand soldiers. Many of the planters were already deeply in debt to the Company for their slave purchases and the damage done to plantations by Cassard's raids further reduced their ability to maintain Surinam's plantations. The Company, contrary to its charter, took the opportunity to limit the importation of slaves and set a minimum price of 250 *gulden* per adult and required that the invoice be



Jonas Witsen's plantation on the Surinam River, Dirk Valkenburg, 1707-09, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 136. Witsen was one of many Amsterdam merchants who owned plantations in Surinam. He, like many other plantation owners, never visited their plantations.

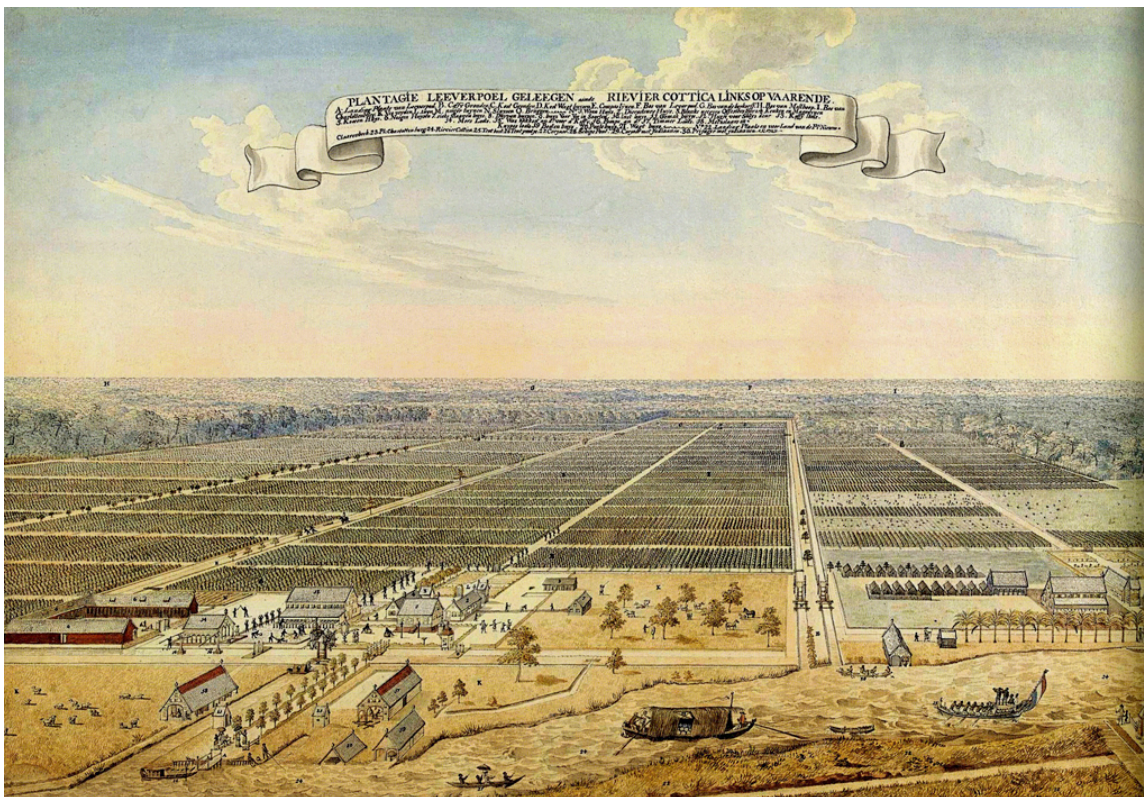
paid within a month. Complaints by the planters and the Amsterdam merchants succeeded in inserting a provision into the renewal of the Company's charter in 1730 that required the WIC to supply 2,500 slaves annually to Surinam. If it was not able to do so,

the *Sociëteit van Suriname* was allowed to use private merchants to ship slaves to the colony.

By 1734 the WIC had lost all its monopoly trading rights in West Africa and now only retained the right to deliver slaves to the West Indies. The Director at Elmina was instructed to concentrate on the slave trade and in 1735, the Company managed to send nearly 3,000 Africans to Surinam. Unfortunately, epidemics on board two of its largest slaves ships meant that only 2,000 arrived in Surinam, During the next year the WIC exported 3,212 slaves of which 2,838 arrived in Paramaribo. The expansion of free trade resulted in a rapid decline of slave prices in Surinam from 240 *gulden* per adult slave to 135 *gulden* in 1638. The purchase price of a slave in Africa was between 100 and 120 *gulden*. Given the overhead costs and the rate of mortality in the slave trade, there was little doubt that the Atlantic slave trade had become a loss making business for the Company. Moreover, in 1733, the Company had four million *gulden* of unpaid invoices on its books for slaves it had delivered. Planters usually paid for slaves with sugar. This had not been a problem before 1730, but during the next decade there was a steep decline in the price of sugar so that many planters lost their ability to buy slaves. By the mid-1730s the Company's Directors were faced with a decision whether to abandon the slave trade altogether or to hold on until the market improved. In 1737 the WIC slave-ship *Leusden* with 670 slaves on board entered the Maroni instead of the Surinam river to seek shelter in a storm. It was caught on a sandbank and when the ship began to sink, the captain ordered his crew to nail the hatches closed. Almost all the slaves drowned. Faced with serious losses, the WIC decided in 1738 to suspend its participation in the Surinam slave trade. Although it maintained its slave trading facility in Paramaribo for a time in the hope of better times, it never used it again.

The English briefly captured Essequibo, another Dutch plantation colony in Guyana, in 1666. In 1670 it was taken over by a group of investors from Zeeland, but came under the control of the second WIC in 1674. It was the only Dutch colony in the West Indies that was under exclusive control of the new Company. The colony consisted of only about 25 Company employees. By the early 18th century there were three Company and fourteen private plantations, a white population of six to seven hundred and about five hundred slaves. Although the colony was plundered on several occasions

by French privateers during the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-14), by 1735 it had 35 plantations and a population of 3,000. The chief revenue for the WIC from the colony



Leeverpoel Plonation on the Cottica River in Surinam, anonymous painter, circa 1780, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 140.

came from its collection of head taxes, export duties and fees from land concessions to private planters. During the Governorship of Laurens Storm van 's-Gravesande, 1742-77, the colony expanded by setting up a new colony at Demerara, which with 140 plantations was larger than the mother colony by the 1770s. During the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84), the English took over the colony, along with Berbice, but both were returned to the Dutch after the war. Berbice, which had been founded in 1627, was owned and governed by the Pere family from Zeeland under a *patroon* charter from the States-General. The new WIC attempted to take it over in 1674 but failed. The Company had the exclusive right to deliver slaves to the Colony, but was unable to do so on a regular basis. It was not until the 1820s that the colony could count on a regular supply of slaves. Berbice was faced with more than its share of war and unrest. In 1687 an Indian uprising destroyed many plantations. During the War of the Spanish Successions, French privateers plundered it and demanded 300,000 gulden as a protection payment. Unable to

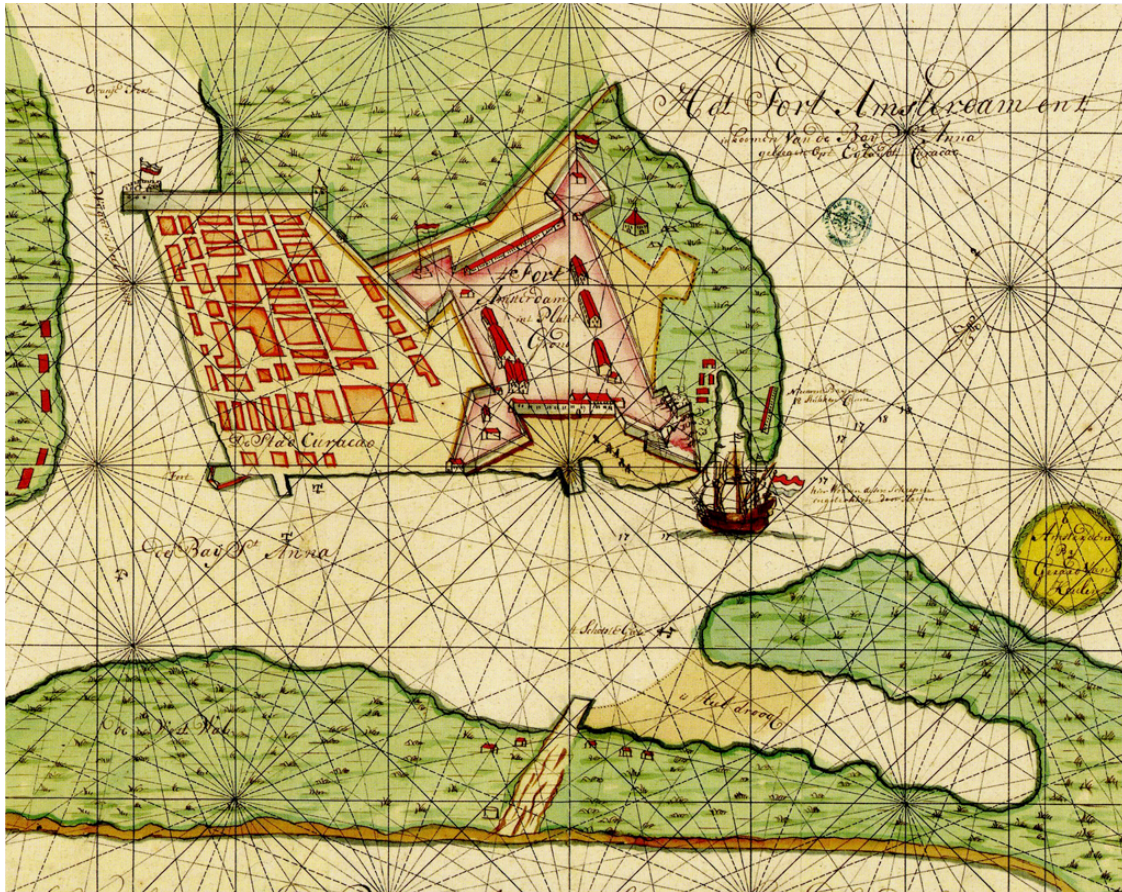
pay, the Pere family sold the colony to Amsterdam investors. In 1720, a *Sociëteit van Berbice* was formed, which resulted in the injection of capital for new sugar and coffee plantations. By 1763 there were 95 plantations, 4,200 slaves and 350 Europeans in Berbice. In February of that year there was a large slave revolt that reduced the African population to about 2,500 and nearly all the Europeans fled the colony. A small expeditionary force arrived in the Fall to restore order and in January 1764 it was joined by 600 marines from the Republic. It took many years for the colony to recover. The WIC was also the legal owner of the island of Tobago, which had been granted to the brothers Adriaen and Cornelis Lampsins under a *patroon* charter. The French conquered the island in 1666. Ten years later the Lampsins sold their rights to the Admiralty of Amsterdam for 36,000 *gulden*, which promptly sent a squadron of seven ships



Fighting between Dutch and French troops on the island of Tobago in 1677, Romeyn de Hooghe, 1677, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 146.

to conquer the island and do as much damage as possible to the French in the Caribbean. Two years later the French retook the island.

In 1675 the States-General decided to open the harbor of Curaçao to all Dutch and foreign ships. Its status as a freeport made Curaçao one of the most important trade centers in the Caribbean. The WIC derived income from import and export recognition fees, head taxes on both slaves and European settlers, and from the slave trade. The last



Fort Amsterdam at the entrance to St. Ann Bay, Curaçao, Gerard van Keulen, circa 1715, National Archive, Den Haag, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 145.

was the most important source of revenue for the Company. As holders of the *asiento* the WIC provided facilities for housing and an open market in which the Company sold more than a thousand slaves annually to the Spanish colonies. In order to keep down the costs of feeding the slaves, the WIC operated its own plantations to grow food on which the Company employed over a hundred slaves. The prosperity of the island dates from the Peace of Nijmegen in 1678 that ended the Republic's war with France. Curaçao's defenses were sufficient to keep most privateers and other European states from attacking the island. Only once, in 1713, did a privateer fleet, under the command of Jacques Cassard seriously threaten the island. The Governor paid 400,000 *gulden* worth of goods

and slaves as a ransom to prevent damage to the harbor and its plantations. Although this was a substantial sum, it did not endanger the prosperity of the colony. During the Seven Years War between the English and French (1756-1763), Curaçao benefitted from its neutral position and handled most of the French Caribbean trade. Dutch neutrality during the American War of Independence (1775-1783) also favored St. Eustatius for a period when American and French merchants used its harbors for refuge.

Curaçao governed the nearby islands of Aruba and Bonaire. Aruba had little economic importance for the Company except to produce food for Curaçao's slave market, while Bonaire had saltpans. The Windward Islands of Saba and St. Eustatius were under French control between 1664 and 1681, but were returned to the WIC in 1682. In 1689 the French again captured St. Eustatius and a year later the English took it and returned it to the WIC in 1690. St. Eustatius did not contribute much to the Company's well being. In 1709 it was plundered by French privateers and in 1713 another French privateer, Jacques Cassard, appeared before it with a fleet, but was bought off with a ransom of 10,000 *gulden*. In 1720 the island began to develop as a slave market for French and English planters on neighbouring islands, but by 1730 the French and English were able to supply their own slaves from Africa for their growing plantations. During the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence, the island once again saw a period of prosperity. Part of St. Eustatius' economic success depended on selling weapons to the rebels during the American Revolution. The English viewed this as a violation of neutrality and sent Admiral Rodney to capture the Windward Islands. Although they were returned to the Dutch at the peace conference the same year, their period of prosperity had ended. The French captured St Martin, the third Dutch Windward Island, in 1676. A commander from St. Eustatius retook it for the WIC in 1703 and in a 1717 agreement it was divided between the Dutch and the French. The complex political and economic history of the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean during the early modern period illustrates that, while great fortunes were made by European planters and merchants in the region during the early modern period, the risk of failure was great and the costs of war and privateering made it difficult for monopoly trading companies such as the WIC to make a profit in the long run.

THE WIC AND THE AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

Dutch participation in the Atlantic slave trade was modest compared to that of the Portuguese, English and French, amounting to about seven per cent of the total number of slaves transported. Recent estimates suggest that the Dutch shipped 600,500 African slaves across the Atlantic. THE WIC conducted about half of the Dutch slave trade. The Dutch did not enter the trade until the 17th century and for many years its participation consisted of transporting and selling slaves that had been captured on Portuguese ships. During the WIC's occupation of Northeast Brazil from 1636 and 1648, the Company became a significant slave exporter to Brazil and the Caribbean. Between 1650 and 1675, when the WIC was for practical purposes bankrupt, Amsterdam merchants dominated the Dutch slave trade and exported about 100,000 slaves from Africa. After the WIC was reorganized in 1674, the slave trade became one of its most important activities until the mid 1730s. During the last decade of the 17th century, when the WIC held the Spanish *asiento*—the right to sell slaves to the Spanish colonies, Curaçao became the center of the Caribbean slave trade. It has often been argued that the reorganized WIC existed because

Period	Total Ships	Slaves shipped	Slaves landed in America
1626-1650	116	31.570	25.938
1651-1675	50	18.831	15.846
1676-1700	173	81.326	70.790
1701-1725	125	60.742	51.918
1726-1750	73	39.717	32.605
1751-1775	2	584	340
1776-1800	5	1.083	938
Totaal	544	233.853	198.375

The slave trade of the WIC, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, www.slavevoyages.org, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 150.

of its role in the slave trade. Den Heijer argues that, while it is true that this was a major activity of the Company between 1675 and the mid-1730s, and it was certainly the most dramatic, from an economic point of view the slave trade only constituted only 13% of its West African trade from 1675 to 1731, while the gold trade amounted to 75%. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans transported about 8.5 million African slaves across the



A group of slaves being taken to the slave market at Curaçao, William Blake, J. G. Stedman, *Reize naar Surinam*, Amsterdam, 1800, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 160.

Atlantic. The slave trade was essential to the entire Atlantic trade system during this period and crucial to the economic development of the Western Hemisphere. Given the enormous importance of slavery during the period, it is often assumed that the slave trade was very profitable. The Atlantic trade system was quite complex, but the evidence suggests that the slave trade was for the WIC one of the leading causes of its financial losses. After the Company withdrew from the slave trade in the mid 1730s, its losses declined dramatically.

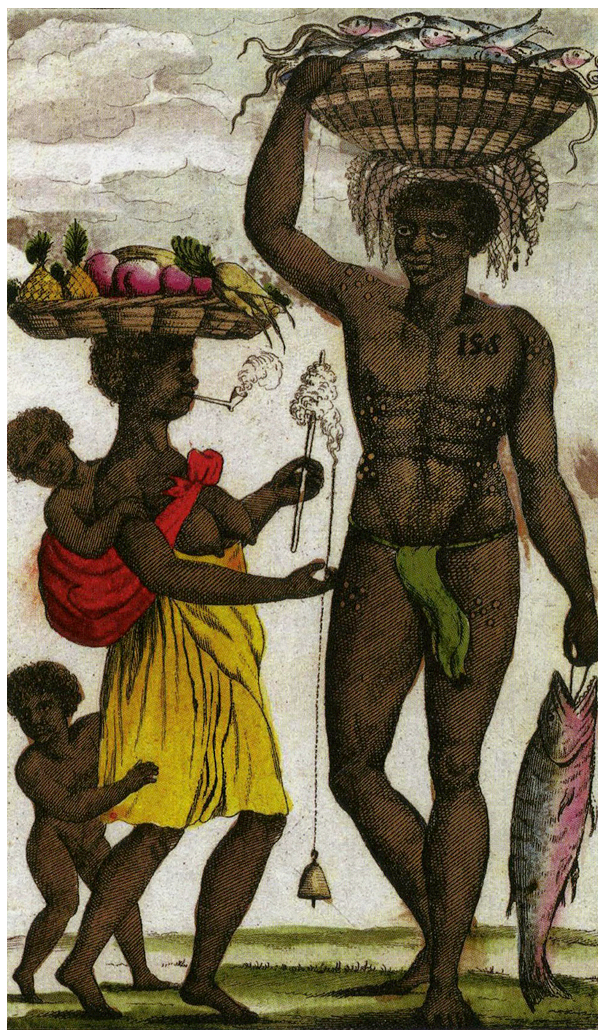
The management of the WIC slave trade was a major item on the agenda of the autumn meetings of the Company Directors. They decided how many ships to use for the slave trade, allocated them to the five *Kamers*, which were responsible for provisioning their own ships, determined when ships were to begin their voyages, the value of the trade cargoes to be loaded in the Republic, and the number of the slaves to be bought in Africa. The actual organization of the trade was left to the *bewindhebbers* (directors) of each of the *Kamers*, who were personally responsible for certifying the loading and provisioning of ships. Until the end of the 17th century most slave ships were rented by the Company at a cost of an average of 870 *gulden* per month in peacetime and 1,265 *gulden* in wartime. In the 18th century, the Company had most of its ships purpose built. A slave ship that carried four or five hundred slaves, which was common for the Company, required a crew of 40 to 50 men. The captain and officers were Dutch, but the ordinary sailors were primarily other Europeans. Although slave mortality on the ships was a serious problem, the mortality rate among the crew was generally higher than for the slaves, since the crew spent much more time aboard the ships. For a captain, a slave voyage was a profitable undertaking, since he had a right to conduct a private trade in goods and received a bonus for every slave delivered in America. Each of the *Kamers* bought their own trade goods for Africa. Records show that trade goods were quite varied and that most came from the Republic. The most common exports to Africa were textiles (about half the cargoes), firearms and gunpowder, alcoholic beverages, metal goods, and beads and cowrie shells. The last named came from the Maldives and were used as a medium of exchange in West Africa. The textiles came mostly from Haarlem and Leiden, but some also came from Asia and were bought from the VOC. In addition to trade goods, the ships also carried food, medicine, and building material for WIC personnel in Africa.

Food brought from Europe for the slaves consisted mostly of peas, beans and dried fish. The rest of the food for the slave voyage was bought in Africa, primarily millet. Once the ship was loaded it was ready for the first part of its triangular trade voyage. Except in wartime, when ships joined a convoy south of Portugal, the slave ships generally traveled by themselves. In order to avoid pirates, they did not use the English Channel but sailed around Scotland. The voyage to Africa generally took about three months.

Most WIC slave ships from the Republic were sent directly to Elmina. There they loaded firewood and water and then proceeded to several forts and factories to load slaves. Often there were not enough slaves available and it has been estimated that slave ships spent an average of one hundred days along the coast before crossing the ocean. Ships bound for Arguin, Goeree, the Bight of Benin, Corisco or Loango-Angola did not stop at Elmina and sailed directly to their destination. At an average of 81 days the crossing to America was the shortest portion of their trading voyage. If ships were stuck in the doldrums, which occurred along the equator, a voyage could take a very long time and caused substantial slave losses due to shortages of food and water. The longest recorded voyage was 284 days and the shortest was 23. Long voyages also increased the likelihood of a ship encountering hurricanes. Once the ship arrived on the coast of Guyana, Curaçao or St. Eustatius, the slaves were delivered to Company slave quarters for sale to planters and other buyers. After delivering the slaves, the captain had to arrange for a return cargo. Since many of the slaves were traded for sugar, the slave ships often returned to the Republic with sugar but also carried other commodities and private trade goods. The return trip to Europe took two to three months. Once the ship arrived home and the return goods were offloaded, the captain and crew were paid and dismissed.

The most important slave destination for the Dutch slave trade was Curaçao. From the mid-17th century until 1675, Amsterdam merchants dominated this trade but after 1675 the WIC became the most important but not exclusive supplier of slaves to the Dutch Caribbean. The Company had the best infrastructure for a large scale slave trade in both West Africa and in Curaçao. In addition to supplying slaves to various Caribbean islands, the Company carried out a large and often technically illegal slave trade with mainland Spanish colonies. In 1662 Philip IV of Spain sold the *asiento* to merchants, called *asentistas*, who in turn sublet the supply of slaves from Africa. From 1675 to the

early 18th century, the WIC was the major supplier of slaves to the *asentistas* through Curaçao. At times the WIC won multiyear contracts to deliver slaves and at other times they sold slaves to smugglers who sold them directly to Spanish colonists. Between 1685 and 1688 the Spanish *asiento* was held by Balthasar Coymans, an Amsterdam merchant who had a business in Cadiz and contracted with the WIC to deliver slaves directly to the Spanish colonial harbors of Veracruz, Portobello and Cartagena. In 1701 the WIC lost the *asiento* to the French and later it went to the English. However, neither was able to supply sufficient slaves to the Spanish colonies and until the mid 1730s the WIC did a lucrative ‘illegal’ business supplying slaves to the Spanish colonies. Between 1674 and 1734, the Company sent more than 200 hundred slave ships from the Republic to Curaçao and Spanish colonial harbors, plus 26 slave ships taken from smugglers, for a



Slave family from the Loango-Angola coast in Surinam, William Blake, J. G. Stedman, *Reize naar Surinam*, Amsterdam, 1800, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 161

total of 62,500 slaves delivered to the Caribbean. Between 1719 and 1729, the WIC also sent 25 ships, which brought a total of 10,200 African slaves to St. Eustatius. The latter trade did not bring much profit to the Company, since the price of slaves was unusually low during this period. For the rest of the 18th century, except during the Seven Years War and the War of American Independence, the Company did not directly participate in the Caribbean slave trade.

Unlike in the Caribbean islands, where the Company was faced with private and foreign competition and the constantly changing *asiento* contracts, it enjoyed a monopoly and a legal duty to supply slaves to the colonies in Dutch Guyana until the late 1730s. Indeed, the demand for slaves generally exceeded the supply than the Company was able to deliver. Before 1730 the WIC had the best infrastructure in the slave trade of all the European companies in the Guyanas. It had more trading facilities in West Africa, had ready access to ships, and possessed excellent slave facilities for keeping and selling slaves in Paramaribo. The States-General in 1682 demanded that the Company sell the slaves at public auctions. This required the Company to take good care of the slaves so that they looked healthy for the auction. The result was that slaves were sold at lower prices than the Company Directors had hoped. At the end of the 17th century, planters could buy a slave in Surinam for 180 to 200 *gulden*. The growing number of plantations in the early 18th century increased the demand for slaves. Moreover, a planter estimated in 1706 that slave mortality, and those who escaped into the wilderness, amounted to a yearly loss of 10% of the slaves in Surinam annually. During the late 17th and early 18th century the Company was barely able to provide enough slaves for Guyana. Tension between the Company and the planters increased to the point where the planters asked Amsterdam to demand that the WIC supply more slaves since only with additional slaves could planters produce more sugar. Sugar refining was a major industry in the Holland. The Company, however, refused to provide more slaves unless it could charge higher prices to cover the cost of its expensive infrastructure. Despite the requirement to sell slaves at auction in Surinam, the Company did sell some slaves for a set price of 250 *gulden* during the early 18th century. The WIC received permission from the State to allow it to take the property of planters who had not paid for the slaves delivered, but it had trouble selling seized plantations because of declining of sugar prices in the 1720s. In


1737 the Company decided to end its direct involvement in the slave trade since the trade was responsible for a large portion of its financial losses.

THE END OF THE WIC TRADE MONOPOLY

When the charter of the VOC came up for renewal again in 1730, the economic and political prospects of the Company looked quite unpromising. It had lost the *asiento* and its slave trade was bleeding large amounts of money. Its trade on the West African coast also faced much greater European competition. Ship losses and economic uncertainty during the Wars of the Spanish succession further added to its problems. Between 1713 and 1722 the Company experienced its greatest financial losses as four million *gulden* were added to its debts. It also faced a serious threat from Zeeland's campaign to open all its trade to Dutch competitors. Zeeland merchants had long seen the

A^o. 1715.

WEST-INDISCHE COMPAGNIE.



E Bewindhebberen van de Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie ter Kamer Amsterdam / sullen by openbare Opbevinge aan de meen daar voorbiedende Verkoop / Een Extraordinair Welbekent FREGAT SCHIP, van 't Hout gemaakt / genaamt A.P.A.M., lang ober Steben 88; voet / wpt by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt binnen 't Hout 24; voet / Hol in 't Kuyt by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt op 't Houtwatering 11; voet 7; duym / t Wier by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt / Hoog aan Boord 4; voet en 6; duym; de Balk 7; aan Boord 5; voet: een open Schans / Hoog 5; voet en 10; duym.

Een Welbekent Hoeker, genaamt Acra, lang ober Steben 75; voet / wpt by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt binnen 't Hout 20; voet: duym / Hol in 't Kuyt by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt op 't Houtwatering 11; voet 5; duym.

Een Welbekent Fregat Scheepje, genaamt de Guineese Broeders, lang ober Steben 76; voet / wpt by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt binnen 't Hout 17; voet 4; duym / Hol in 't Kuyt by de eerste Balk voer t grote Luyt op 't Houtwatering 8; voet 9; duym / de Balk Hoog aan Boord 4; voet 4; duym / en treet achter voer de Kajuit neer 4; voet / alle Amsterdammer boeten / met alle 't Hout / Dytende en Lopende Want / als het tegenwoordig aan Boord van de Schepen te sien is. De Schepen leggen in de Waal voer t Oude West-Indisch Huys.

De Verkooping sal geschieden op Maandag, den 5 Augusty, 1715. ten Huyle van de Wed. *an Neder*, Castelyn in 't Nieuwe Heeren Logement, 's Avonds ten 6 uuren precys.

De Indentarien sullen te bekomen sijn by den Commis Hendrik Cramer, woont in t Oude West-Indische Huys op Rapenburg. Seg 't voort.

Amsterdam, door ordre van d'E. Heeren Bewindhebberen, by d'Erfg. van Paulus Manlyft. gedrukt.

Announcement of the sale at auction in Amsterdam of a Zeeland smuggling ship captured by the WIC, 1715, National Archives, Den Haag, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 162.

Atlantic as their trade territory and did a good deal of smuggling in the Caribbean and West Africa. Between 1714 and 1725 Zeelanders lost 27 smuggling ships and their goods to the WIC, for a total loss of 1.7 million *gulden*. When the WIC began proceedings to renew its charter in 1727, the Zeeland merchants mounted a counter campaign. They noted that the monopoly rights and the financial losses of the WIC were due to increased foreign competition in West Africa and threatened the well being of the Republic. They pointed to the example of England's Parliament, which had eliminated the monopoly of the Royal African Company in 1698 and allowed English merchants to freely trade on the African coast by paying a 10% duty on exported goods. The result, they argued was that over 200 English ships now traded in Africa. Zeelanders suggested that the WIC give up its Dutch slave trade monopoly in Africa in return for payment of a recognition fee and a head tax on slaves purchased. They estimated that this would produce an income of one-quarter million *gulden* for the Company and result in at least fifty private Dutch ships trading in Africa. Merchants from Vlissingen and Middleburg convinced the



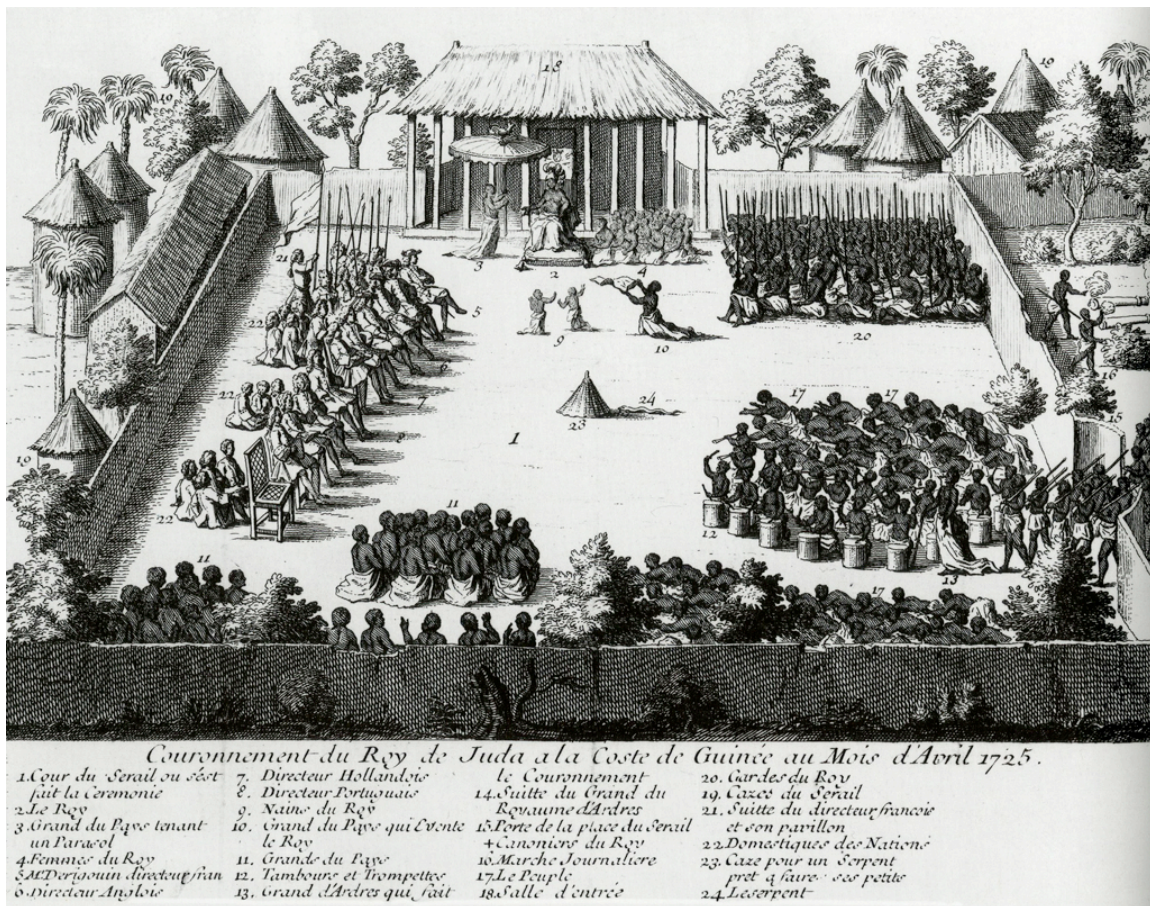
Merchant frigates used in the trade between the Republic and the West Indies, Pieter Artsz Blauw, circa 1765, Maritime Museum, Rotterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 165.

States of Zeeland to take their case to the States-General of the Republic.

The Amsterdam *Kamer*, supported by the *Kamers* of the Northern Quarter and of Stad and Land, objected to ending the WIC's monopoly rights on the grounds of the Company's responsibilities to its shareholders who had invested eight million *gulden* in the enterprise. They also asked, who would maintain the forts and trading posts in West Africa that were essential to the slave trade, and pointed out that a dependable supply of slaves were fundamental to the well being of the West Indian colonies. In response the Zeeland merchants offered a compromise in which they suggested increasing the recognition fees paid by private slave merchants in West Africa and allowing the WIC to maintain its slave trade monopoly with Surinam. The latter suggestion became problematic when the planters in Surinam petitioned the Staten-General to end the WIC slave monopoly since the Company had not supplied them with enough slaves. To complicate matters further, the *Sociëteit van Surinam*, the body with the greatest interest in the Dutch plantations in Guyana, and whose governing body included the WIC, demanded that the Company be required to provide a minimum number of slaves to the region. In October of 1730 the States-General reached a decision and the WIC charter was renewed for thirty years. In America the Company only retained a monopoly in the slave trade in Guyana and had to supply 2,500 slaves annually. On the Gold Coast the Company only retained a sixty-mile trade monopoly. The rest of the African coast was to be opened to private trade with the payment of recognition fees to the Company. The Zeeland merchants were unhappy with this compromise and refused to pay their overdue subsidies for maintaining the Company's trade facilities in Africa until the Company reimbursed them for what they considered its illegal seizure in 1715 of a Zeeland slave ship, the *Vlissing Welvaren* and its cargo. After a year of negotiations, the States-General ruled that the WIC seizure of the ship had been legal. Zeeland paid its back debts to the Company and the WIC lost its entire trade monopoly in Africa, retaining only its slave trade monopoly in Guyana.

Having lost its trade monopoly in West Africa, and seeing its gold and ivory trade decline, the Company decided in 1732 to intensify its slave trade investment despite the fact that it would have to overcome serious difficulties to make the trade profitable. Its position on the Slave Coast was much weaker than on the Gold Coast due to competition

from the English, French and private Dutch merchants. In addition the security situation on the Slave Coast had deteriorated during the early 18th century. Dahomey, a small state in the interior, led by a dynamic new monarch, Agaja, since 1708, had expanded its territory to the coast and its control over the slave trade by the late 1720s. This produced insecurity in the region at the very time that the Company was planning to reinvigorate its slave trade. Due to the political unrest, the WIC moved its long-standing trading post, Fida, further east to Jaquin and built a new factory headed by Hendrik Hertogh. The Company Directors in Amsterdam were much impressed by Hertogh's expansion of the trade and ordered its slave ships to bypass Elmina and go directly to Jaquin.



European slave merchants at a ceremony at Fida, J. B. La Bat, *Voyage du Chevalier des Marchais en Guinée...1725, 1726 et 1727*, Amsterdam 1731, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 170.

Hertogh, however, became involved in local politics and joined a coalition of African states to check Dahomey's expansion. Agaja became aware of the planned attack and forced Hertogh to flee and take his trading post to the island of Appa. In 1734 the Company decided to send its slave ships directly to Appa and instructed Hertogh to buy

as many slaves as he could. He was quite successful for three years and even attracted other European slave merchants to buy his excess slaves. Unfortunately, the Directors in Holland discovered that the profits from the expanded trade had declined. Hertogh was paying far more for slaves than those bought on the Gold Coast and thus they again send their ships to Elmina. When the prices paid for slaves fell suddenly in 1736, and the Portuguese crown forbade the buying of slaves with gold dust, the Company came to the conclusion that its expansion of the African slave trade could not be sustained.

Meanwhile, when Agaja of Dahomey again threatened Hertogh, he evacuated from Appa and set up a new factory at Pattackeri. While the WIC declined Hertogh's request for building materials, it did send one more ship to the new trading station in 1738, but before the ship arrived four Africans had murdered Hertogh.

From 1735 to 1737 the Company made a profit of 89,048 *gulden* in its Atlantic trade from the Slave Coast, but by 1740 this had turned to a loss of 15,760 *gulden*. In 1740 the WIC gave its merchants on the African coast permission to sell slaves to private ships on the payment of 20 *gulden* per slave to the Company. Until 1760 the Company retained several small trading posts on the Slave Coast but did very little of its own trade in the region. After 1740 the Middleburgsche Commercie Compagnie became the biggest Dutch company in the slave trade and between 1732 and 1807 it transported 31,095 slaves across the Atlantic.

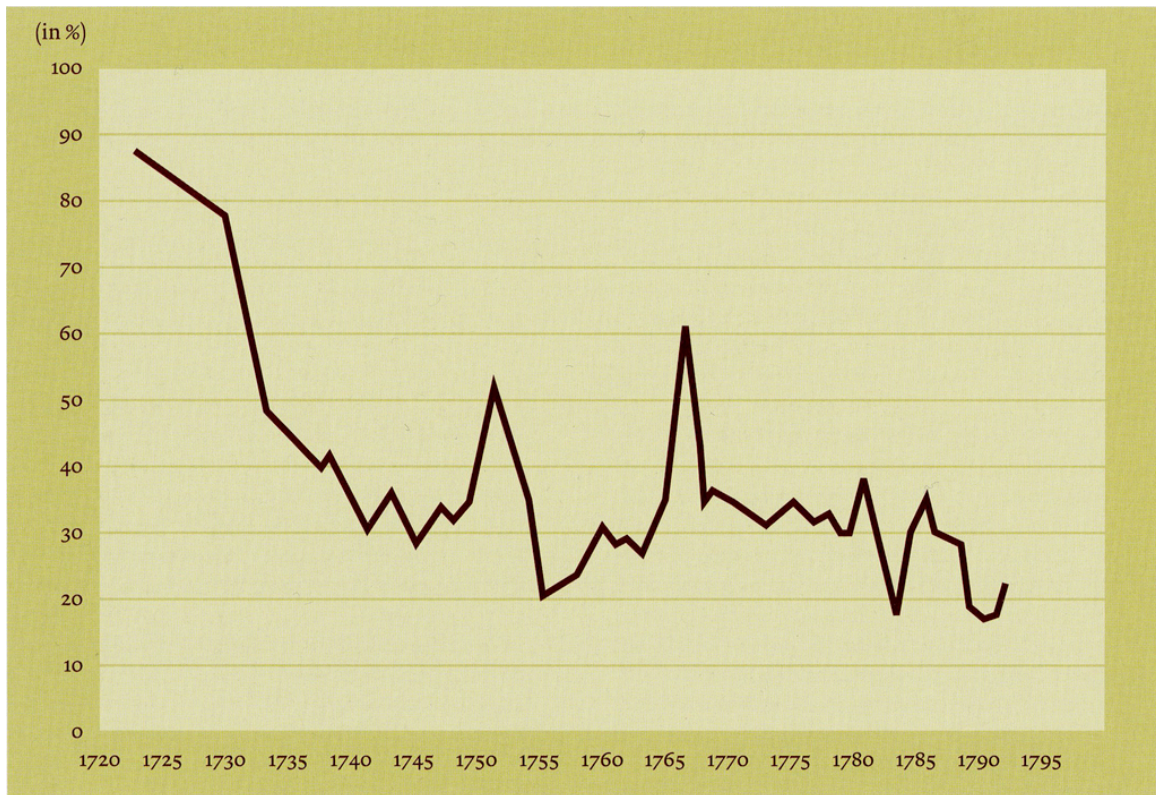


Slave ships of the Middleburgsche Commercie Compagnie, Engel Hoogherheyden, circa 1770, Zeuwse Archive, Stadhuis Collection, Middleburgh.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE WIC

When the old WIC was reorganized into a new WIC in 1674, the latter's capital was provided by the old Company's creditors, who had agreed to provide new funds in return for allowing them to preserve a percentage of the bonds from the old Company. The result was that the new Company inherited little from the old Company except debt and its working capital was insufficient to cover the fixed costs of ships and forts in West Africa and also finance an expansion of trade. Nonetheless, between 1674 and 1680, the new Company showed a profit of 470,000 *gulden*. Soon, however, the Company's losses increased so that by the beginning of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1704, these amounted to three million *gulden*. When the Dutch and the Portuguese concluded a peace treaty in 1669, the Portuguese had agreed to pay the WIC three million *gulden* in compensation for its investments while they occupied Brazil. However, before the treaty was ratified, the VOC had captured two Portuguese trading posts in India and the Portuguese never paid the WIC the compensation for its Brazil losses. In 1704, the WIC asked the States-General to require the VOC to pay the WIC the three million as compensation. The courts rejected the WIC's request. Between the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714 and 1722, the WIC lost a record four million *gulden* due to its loss of the *asiento* for colonial Spanish America and increased competition from the British and French in West Africa. The WIC suggested that merging with the VOC could solve its financial problems, but neither the VOC nor the States-General supported this idea. Instead, the Company resorted to secret short-term borrowing. During the early 1720s, when a speculative investment fever raged in Europe, the Company was able to raise 3,765,000 *gulden* by selling additional shares, but this opportunity ended with the collapse of the famous South Sea Bubble in England. In 1722 the Company reorganized its debt through an accounting change. It moved 3.8 million of debt from the old Company and raised the value of its trade goods by 2.5 million. Although on paper its books now showed a small positive balance, the economic health of the Company had not improved.

With the loss of most of its trade monopoly in 1730, the increased competition from private merchant ships from the Republic made it impossible for the WIC to remain



The market value of WIC shares reached its height during the speculative European financial bubble of 1719-20, den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 176.

an active trading company. Its employees in West Africa complained that the quantity and quality of trade goods sent from the Republic were no longer competitive. As its trade declined, the WIC no longer invested in maintenance of its forts and trading posts in Africa and for almost a decade stopped buying new ships. From the 1730s the WIC ceased to be primarily a trading company and concentrated on governing its colonies in the Caribbean and Guyana. The Company retained most of its trading posts in Africa and these remained important for its direct and indirect trade in gold and ivory. Indirectly it provided facilities for private merchant ventures from the Republic in the slave trade by collecting a tax of 20 *gulden* per slave exported from Africa. The result of the Company's retreat from trade was that it reduced its direct personnel from about 300 in 1729 to an average of 200 in later years. In Africa it replaced many of its European soldiers with Afro-Europeans and Africans.

During the 1730s the Company also voluntarily relinquished its slave trade monopoly in Guyana. With the ending of its role in the slave trade, its slave market

facilities in America became redundant. In America its income was now dependent on taxation and profits from its own plantations. In Guyana taxes were levied on land, although the WIC did not collect this from new colonists for ten years in order to encourage immigration. It also collected a 2.5% tariff on all imports and exports and a head tax on slaves. The Company collected similar taxes on the Caribbean islands. On Curacao and St. Eustatius head taxes on slaves sold in their slave markets brought in a good deal of revenue. It also derived income from its own plantations, which produced such tropical products as sugar and cacao and food for slaves. In addition, the Company rented land to planters.

After the 1730s, there were two periods when the Company was profitable. The first was during the Seven Years War (1754-63) between the English and the French, when Dutch neutrality made Curacao and St. Eustatius the most important trade centers in the Caribbean for surrounding islands. This situation was repeated during the early phase of the American Revolution (1776-1780). These successes allowed the Company to reduce its debts by a half million *gulden*. One of the sources of prosperity during the American Revolution was the role St. Eustatius played in supplying the American rebels



The conquest of St. Eustatius by the British Admiral George Rodney during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, unknown artist circa 1785, Stichting Atlas van Stolk, Rotterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 185

with arms. During the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-84), the English attacked both the WIC in the Caribbean and the VOC in the East. Admiral Rodney quickly captured the Dutch Windward Islands in a surprise attack. The English followed this up with the conquest of Berbice and Demerara in Guyana and all the Dutch forts in Africa except Elmina. The French retook the West Indian colonies for the Dutch in 1782. While the Treaty of Paris returned all the colonies taken by Britain during the war, the substantial losses during the conflict was the beginning of the end of the WIC. Directly after the war the WIC tried to sell its share of the *Sociëteit van Suriname* to the city of Amsterdam for 800,000 *gulden*, but Zeeland vetoed this since it would have resulted in Amsterdam's control of the entire Guyana trade. In 1786 the States-General ordered an official inquiry to consider how to improve the governance of the West Indian colonies. The resulting report made recommendations, but the government refused to provide funds for reforms under WIC auspices and instead decided not to renew the Company's charter. In late 1791, the States-General liquidated the WIC by taking over its shares at 30% of their nominal value, which was more than the 22% of nominal value they were worth on the Amsterdam Exchange. The States-General also took over direct governing responsibilities of the WIC colonies that had been governed for 171 years by the two West Indian Companies.



The demolition of the West Indian House on the Singel in Amsterdam, Gerrit Lamberts, 1817, Collection Van Seghen, Stadsarchief, Amsterdam, in den Heijer, *Geschiedenis van de WIC*, p. 186.

CONCLUSION

Nineteenth century liberals argued that the monopolies of the early modern European trading companies were detrimental to the development of world trade. Proponents of free trade, such as the Dutch Republic's Pieter de la Court had already argued this in the 17th century in his *Interest van Holland* (1662), and British liberals made the argument famous in the 18th century. After the experience of war and depression in the first half of the 20th century, historians returned to the earlier 17th century view and argued that the great trading companies were essential to the development of world trade during the early modern period. This was especially so for the two most important Companies that traded in Asia, the Dutch (VOC) and the English (EIC) East India Companies. Since private merchants or small companies could not individually provide the capital, trading forts, and military power required for them to break into existing Asian trade networks and provide security on distant seas and trading posts. To succeed in Asia, Europeans had to first make long-term capital investments to build up an intra-Asian trade network and its infrastructure to make intercontinental trade possible, a cost that would not see a return for many years. The Dutch Republic's VOC became a successful model that was followed by other European states to develop their overseas trade networks. The situation in the Atlantic was quite different, since there was neither an existing Atlantic-wide trade system that Europeans had to compete with nor states that could threaten European maritime power. As a result, they did not have to first invest large sums to build trading posts and forts in a competitive environment. Instead, smaller trade organizations and private merchants were able to succeed in the Atlantic. The WIC and its trade monopoly was founded not only to develop the Republic's Atlantic trade on the model of the VOC, but also as an instrument of war against the Spanish and the Portuguese and to conquer some of their colonies where possible. Only then, reasoned the Dutch, could they hope to add a commanding position in Atlantic commerce with Africa and the Americas to their pre-eminence in European commerce and its strong position in Asian sea borne trade.

The WIC's 'Grand Design' was to conquer Brazil from the Portuguese and to dominate the Atlantic sugar and slave trades. The Dutch planned to capture Spanish silver fleets and mount a sustained campaign of government piracy, which they called

privateering, against the Portuguese and Spanish to provide revenue for their ambitious plan. While Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen's early military successes in Brazil looked promising, the grand design ultimately proved to be unattainable. Moreover, even in the Republic, political opposition from Amsterdam and Zeeland merchants to the WIC's monopoly prevented the States-General from providing sufficient financial subsidies to pay for a larger and sustained military effort, which in any case would probably not have been effective given the circumstances in the Atlantic and in Europe. The WIC, in fact, was never able to create a monopoly in the Dutch Atlantic trade. In the Caribbean and on the coasts of Guyana and North America private merchant ships competed with the Company, while its control of the Brazilian trade only lasted for a short period. After the Peace of Munster in 1648 officially ended the Dutch Eighty Years war with Spain, hostilities with Portugal continued for two more decades. Henk den Heijer, a leading historian of the WIC, argues that the Directors of the WIC held on too long to their dream of a grand design in Brazil and that the military costs of its conflict with the Portuguese prevented it from making the investments required to sustain its profitable African trade. When the shareholders and the creditors of the Company refused to provide additional capital to maintain the Republic's African trade in the early 1670s, the States-General forced the reorganization of the Company in 1674 so that it could continue to provide facilities and security for the Dutch Atlantic trade. Despite the reduced monopoly rights of the Company after 1674, demands for free trade in the Atlantic increased. When its charter was renewed in 1730, the WIC lost almost all its monopoly rights and became primarily the governing authority and security provider for the Republic's colonies and trading posts in the Atlantic supported by colonial taxes and some Company trade.

What is perhaps surprising is that the WIC as a trading company lasted much longer than the other European Atlantic Companies, such as the Royal African Company and the French *Compagnie des Indes*. Nonetheless, it ended for the same basic reasons as the other companies. Its structurally weak financial position made it impossible to remain competitive and to effectively contain smuggling. From the early 18th century, the expenses of maintaining forts and trading posts, its large personnel costs, and the burden of providing security on the African coast brought the Company more costs than profits. While the Company increased its investment in the slave trade, its more profitable trade

in gold and ivory declined and ended up in the hands of Zeeland merchant smugglers. The end of the War of the Spanish succession resulted in the loss of the Spanish *asiento* to the English. By 1734 the Company also lost its control over the open slave markets of Curaçao and St. Eustatius and in 1738 it gave up its slave trade monopoly in Guyana.

Given the strong opposition from Amsterdam and Zeeland merchants to its monopoly rights, how did the WIC survive for 171 years? According to den Heijer, while there were certainly commercial motivations for the creation of the WIC, it had become apparent by 1620 that the various private companies created in the Republic to conduct trade with North America and Africa would not succeed in developing a prosperous and sustainable trade system in the Atlantic without some state support and monopoly rights. Although the grand design of the conquest of Brazil and the dream of dominating the sugar and slave trade failed, the WIC made it possible to strengthen the Dutch position in Guyana and to create some successful colonies in the Caribbean. By the second half of the 17th century, Curaçao had become one of the chief trading centers of the Caribbean. The WIC was the strongest and most successful European trading Company in West Africa until the early 18th century. From the 1730s, the WIC must be seen as an arm of the Republic's decentralized government. Until the Fourth Anglo-Dutch war in 1780, the Company was able to sustain itself with modest state subsidies. War losses increased its state subsidy to 3.4 million *gulden* by 1785. The Republic's decision to dissolve the WIC should be seen not just as a financial decision, but also in the wider context of the end of a European form of a decentralized and relatively representative government of which the Republic had been for a time the most successful example. Within a few years, the much more successful VOC, and even the Republic itself, were also liquidated and the state took direct control over all of their colonies. A comparable process of the nationalization of colonies and the end of competing national trading companies took place in other European states.

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