

Ethnography and Encounter: The Dutch and English in Seventeenth-Century South Asia. Guido van Meersbergen.

European Expansion and Indigenous Response 35. Leiden: Brill, 2022. xviii + 316 pp. \$126.

Van Meersbergen's book on corporate ethnography in South Asia begins dramatically with a reference to Peter van Dam's *Beschryvigne* (1701), a guide to a century of Dutch trade in Asia written for the Dutch VOC's executive committee (Herren XVII). Commissioned in 1693, only directors could read the manuscript. Tellingly, no equivalent to this kind of corporate ethnography exists for London's East India Company. At the time, two competing English East India Companies existed because of 1694 and 1697 acts of Parliament, later merging in 1708. For Van Meersbergen, such institutional and historical differences matter little. He proposes understanding the EIC and VOC "within the same frame of analysis to demonstrate prominent similarities between the ethnographic discourses and approaches to cross-cultural encounter manifested by agents of two parallel organizations" (2). Adopting comparative sameness as a methodology leaves the author open to criticism at the level of difference. More significantly, the methodological use of discourse analysis (rooted in Said's *Orientalism*) results in an odd conservatism in relation to current scholarship. Translations and the writings of everyone not Dutch or English disappear. The subaltern cannot speak.

The first chapter examines categories of analysis in early voyages—notably civilization and barbarism, despotism, character and complexion, Moors and Gentiles—rooted in classical and Catholic sources. Other than their use as cultural clichés, it remains unclear what specificity categories like civilization and barbarism take on in a corporate context. The second chapter, analyzing actual corporate records, is stronger, confronting the problem that VOC "reporting culture . . . was both richer and more diverse than its English rival" (75). The VOC not only sponsored texts like that of Peter van Dam but also the rather amazing *Memoire Voor de Koopuyden En Andere Officieren* (1722–57), a detailed and rigorous guide to how to produce corporate ethnographies. The power of these VOC eighteenth-century sources, and the absence of EIC counterparts, leaves the framing story of parallel corporations with deep problems.

Part 2 (chapters 3 and 4) focuses on Gujarat and the language of trust. Van Meersbergen argues that "aggressive ethnographic discourses" led to violence, including deploying force against Gujarati merchant ships, building Portuguese-style fortifications to ensure undisturbed trade, and using a firm hand against inhabitants (139). These, however, do not seem to be common or sustained patterns, at least for the EIC in the East and Southeast rather than South Asia. One thinks of EIC factors cowering in Banten versus Dutch Batavia.

Part 3 contains studies in diplomacy, including beautiful color reproductions of miniatures of Thomas Roe's embassy to Jahangir (1615–19), Cornelius Van den Bogaerde in Hyderabad (1686–90), Johannes Bacherus in Delhi (1677), and Joan

Joshua Ketelaar in Mewar (ca. 1711). As forms of cultural appropriation, these seem underthought, as does the brief mention of the fact that the British from the 1760s began to formalize such diplomatic practice in terms of attaching residents to courts (196). Why the EIC chose expanding diplomacy while the VOC focused on securing territory in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) remains underexplored.

Part 4, on company settlements, compares EIC Madras on the mainland with VOC Ceylon. Van Meersbergen notes, “Even more actively than was the case in Madras, the VOC also implemented policies of spatial segregation in towns under its command” (218). That gap widens in chapter seven, as fears of “mestization” appear to be matters of concern for the highest levels of the VOC but largely ignored by the EIC until the nineteenth century (231–32). Here, the sameness thesis starts to obscure promising comparisons and contrasts, especially how gender relations and women’s labor might be brought into the question of historical discourse. Their voices are also missing.

In conclusion, Van Meersbergen claims, “A century after their first forays into the Indian Ocean world, the Dutch and English East Indian Companies had become firmly rooted in South Asia’s commercial and political structures” (254). Well, no. For better or worse, more aggressive and extensive Dutch ethnographic discourse did not create firm roots in South Asia. English is still an official language in India, and for Said, William Jones—rather than Peter van Dam—represented the basic problem of Orientalism. Differences matter.

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doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.613

Metropolis in the Making: A Planning History of Amsterdam in the Dutch Golden Age. Jaap Evert Abrahamse.

Architectural Crossroads: Studies in the History of Architecture 6. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019. 536 pp. €125.

The rapid transformation of Amsterdam’s urban center during the seventeenth century was a subject of fascination and wonder even to contemporary audiences; as author Jaap Evert Abrahamse remarks in the introduction, period histories of Amsterdam’s expansions essentially constitute the first texts in the genre of urban planning literature (23). While the results were widely admired, the complex administrative processes behind the city’s reshaping have remained understudied, an oversight now corrected by Abrahamse’s rigorous and meticulously organized study.

Nineteenth-century authors presented Amsterdam as a kind of “Gesamtkunstwerk” (27) filled with princely picturesque vistas, a Northern rival to Versailles, thought to have been shaped by the hand of a single genius—variously claimed to be city architect