

Signalement

Roger Downing and Gijs Rommelse. *A Fearful Gentleman. Sir George Downing in The Hague, 1658-1672*. Hilversum, Verloren, 2011. 248 pp. ISBN 978-90-8704-251-6. € 31,00.

This monograph by Roger Downing and Gijs Rommelse provides a well-researched insight into the life of the diplomat and financial expert Sir George Downing (1623-1684) and the time he spent in the Dutch Republic. In six chapters, the authors describe his career in The Hague, first as a diplomat for the Cromwellian regime, and then, after 1660, as ambassador for the restored Stuart monarchy. It provides a useful overview, which especially students new to the subject of mid-seventeenth century Anglo-Dutch relations will find insightful. It is a well-researched narrative, which addresses both Downing's own activities and the wider context of the fractious Anglo-Dutch relationship, against the background of the three Anglo-Dutch Wars. It is nicely written, with an easy-to-follow chronology and handles the source material well.

Specialists, however, will find less merit in this volume. Although Rommelse is a recognized authority in the field, *A Fearful Gentleman*, does little by way of renewing insights or pushing the discussion forward. Seventeenth-century Anglo-Dutch relations have received a great deal of attention recently, both in a global context as well as in a narrower setting. Their cultural, political-economic and commercial aspects, to name but a few examples, have all benefitted from work by historians as diverse as Marika Koblussek, Nadine

Akkerman, Steve Pincus and Christian Koot. Rommelse's own work on the Anglo-Dutch wars and his disagreement with Pincus on the origins and nature of the Anglo-Dutch Wars, is an essential part of this field. For this reason, it is a shame that the authors fail to engage with the recent historiography on mercantilism, which was given a new lease of life in the *William and Mary Quarterly* last year. This is a real missed opportunity, given Downing's own reputation as a specialist in the Dutch economy and finance. By concentrating on the narrative, the reader feels (s)he misses out on some potentially fascinating analysis of Downing's ideas and of those around him. It may be that this is not what the authors had in mind, but the fact remains that Downing is portrayed rather flatly, even if his diplomatic activities receive more attention than his intellectual contributions. What is really missing is a methodological framework, which would have raised this volume to another level and could have instantly elevated its status to that of a classic in the field of mercantilism and political economy. It certainly shows how much work there is left to be done and invites further studies on Downing and his contemporaries. Downing and Rommelse have written a tantalizing insight into a world of which we still know relatively little. Neither their introduction, nor their conclusion, suggest they were aiming for much more than a worthy biography, but the reader is left convinced that both Sir George Downing and his world would have deserved a great deal much more.

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