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H491 - History of World Trade

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Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography

**Broad Topic**

The area of the course that I am most interested in is the Dutch Republic. The Dutch Republic offers an excellent model for research because of the relatively short wavelength of its experience as a frontrunner in World Trade; but arguably the legacy of the Dutch Republic is that it created a blueprint for the British Empire to be modelled on.

**Specific Topic**

I want to focus on the two main areas of Dutch influence: Northern Europe, including the Baltic and their tensions with the British, and South-East Asian trade - the VOC, inter-Asian trade and the city-fortress of Batavia. Ideally I want to examine the Dutch Republic from 1640-1740, from the moment Britain emerged from it's civil war to begin to rival the Dutch (e.g. the 1651 Navigation Act) to the 'end' of Dutch primacy in World Trade as described by Jonathan Israel. While the Dutch Republic persisted beyond 1740, Israel's hypothesis that this was the end of an era for Dutch power offers both a suitable ending point and also an option to explore the facts to see whether he is correct or not.

**Rational**

Without compare, my favourite period of history is the age of sail, normal people with huge ambition sailing this gigantic world on tiny boats of wood. It's incredible. Furthermore, as someone who is British, I've grown up being taught about our Empire in history and it's always been an area of history that I've been more interested in. In my first year at Swansea I was able to write an essay for a World History class that explored the rise of the Dutch Republic as a maritime power, and now I can write a follow up paper that is able to delve into the fall of the Republic and the lessons that they taught the rest of the world: good and bad.

**Sources**

As I've already mentioned, Jonathan Israel is an important source for information on the Dutch Republic, especially if I go forward with my plan to explore his reasoning for 1740 being the 'cut off' point for Dutch primacy in World Trade. To follow up with my research on Israel I've found Jan De Vries' book about the Dutch rural economy at home in this period; as part of Israel's argument is that the success of the Dutch was partially down to a unique and innovative system of decentralized government. I also plan to use sources from journal stores such as JSTOR as well as books from the WSU libraries.

**Research Question**

My paper will need to briefly establish the reasons for the initial success of the Dutch Republic and then answer the questions of "Why did these factors fall apart and lead to the downfall of the Dutch Republic? Which factors became outdated, which survived and potentially, was there a most important factor?" If at all possible, I want to explore, at least concisely, the legacy of the Dutch Republic in terms of the making of the Early Modern World and the founding stones of the British Empire.

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There is no question that during the seventeenth century, the era of the Dutch Golden Age, that the Dutch Republic had a primacy in world trade which was virtually unmatched. The maritime power of the Dutch was such that they successfully repelled the British in three separate wars during the seventeenth century, and were able to hang onto their position as the premier trading nation in the world. In the course of my research it will be necessary to deeper explore the reasons for Dutch success, and it is here that region-linking becomes more apparent. The Dutch Republic was a maritime empire that spanned the world, but each region of their empire was crucial to the overall success. In Israel's book he argues persuasively that Dutch success was based on several factors: their position in the bulk trades (such as their complete control of the Herring fishing industry in the Baltic), their "rich trades" which were imported from South-East Asia to Europe (spices, for example), their capacity in the shipping industry, abundance of capital (VOC founding as the first Public Stock Company) and the decentralization of the Dutch state which was conducive to the expansion of Dutch trade abroad (such as the relative independence of the VOC; acting as almost a government unto itself) and the relatively highly skilled industries that were building at home.

Importantly Israel argues that the 1740's marked a turn in fortunes of the Dutch Republic and an absolute decline in their hegemony over world trade. This is where the critical analysis of my paper will focus; answering the question of whether after Israel is right in his conclusion or whether the more traditional historian view that the Republic's fortunes declined from here on in slowly and not absolutely.

After discussing the events that led to the fall - absolute or not - of the Republic then I can analyze the legacy of their empire and it's strong points and weaknesses; and whether or not these truly did provide a model for empire that would be adopted by the British after them.

**Annotated Bibliography**

Israel, Jonathan. Dutch primacy in world trade, 1585-1740. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Israel's text provides a crucial source material for discussion of the Dutch Republic. Published in 1989 Israel marked a change in the accepted school of thought for the factors behind the Dutch state; he offered a far more expansive outlook into the workings of the Dutch state than ever before.

De Vries, Jan. *The Dutch Rural Economy in the Golden Age, 1500-1700.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

De Vries' analysis examines the Dutch economy at home in the time period. His central argument is that the Dutch home economy succeeded because of two factors: first, that the average citizen of rural Holland was a more skilled worker than the rest of Europe along with more independence (in the form of the aforementioned decentralization) and that the Dutch agricultural world focused more on industrial crops than grain; due to the Dutch hegemony over Baltic trade and the vast quantities it was able to import very cheaply from the Baltic countries. This grain import also had the knock-on impact of allowing the Dutch population to grow to higher numbers than it could traditionally support due to the food surplus.

De Vries also argues that Dutch rural workers enjoyed relatively high wages; and this can potentially partially help explain the initial success of the VOC - if the average Dutchman had more disposable income than other European countries (Britain) then this can indicate why the VOC had so much start up capital from it's public stock.

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Gelderblom, Oscar. *The political economy of the Dutch Republic*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

Gelderblom's advantage is that he is the most recent historian to explore the Dutch Republic. Writing in 2009, Gelderblom's work compares both that of Jan De Vries and Jonathan Israel and provides an analysis which is able to highlight the areas that both historians may have overlooked or ignored. To him, the success of the Dutch state is down to high tax revenues due to the thriving commercial agriculture (as De Vries argues), export-orientated manufacturing, and international trade. Further pillars of success were the range of public goods (such as "military protection, a flexible legal system, patent laws, water management, education and a social welfare system that helped sustain a large urban reserve of skilled and unskilled labor.")

Gelderblom argues that the fall of the Dutch Republic was a result of interaction between political and economic developments - combining the arguments of De Vries and Israel - and talks in particular about the turning point as being the War of Spanish Succession, as having too large of an economic drain on the Dutch state, and certainly if this is the case, it would back up Israel's argument that the Dutch Republic's economic had *absolutely* disintegrated by 1740, nearly 30 years after the War of Spanish Succession ended.

Parthesius, Robert. *Dutch ships in tropical waters the development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) shipping network in Asia 1595-1660*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010.

Thus far the texts I have cited have actually paid relatively little attention to the activities of the VOC, but to me without the success of the Dutch in South-east Asia there is little success at all; I want to be able to critique the Dutch Republic viewed through the lenses of its influence onto the British Empire, so the VOC and it's successes - and failures - is crucial to this analysis. Furthermore, the research that Parthesius has done evidences the actually significant impact Dutch trading in the South-east Asian region had on the Dutch economy; he cites the value of Inter-Asian trade, recording over 1000 active ships as early as 1660,

Ultimately, Parthesius' work focuses more on the actual functioning of the VOC than the wider impact they had; but this leaves room for my analysis to guide my paper. Parthesius *does* argue of the importance that the culture of decentralization both in reality at home in the Netherlands and in the area of VOC operations had on the VOC's success. His most important analysis relates to the so far unmentioned *"Hollandse Handelsgeest* (Dutch spirit of Commerce)", which he describes as a mythical explanation for Dutch success. In reality, Parthesius argues, Dutch commercial success was built on information networks, and the extensive reach of the VOC in South-East Asia had more efficient information gathering and communications than any other nation at the time.

This idea of the VOC as more than just a trade network, but as a source of information, opens up the analysis available to me deeply. With Parthesius' convincing analysis of the VOC, it means that when examining the work of Gelderblom, the reality of the Dutch Republic as an international entity becomes more clear; in particular the effect that trade in the region of South-east Asia had on the economy of Europe.

Nierstrasz, Chris. *In the Shadow of the Company The Dutch East India Company and Its Servants in the Period of Its Decline (1740-1796)*. Leiden: BRILL, 2012.Bottom of Form

Nierstrasz's analysis continues in the same vein as Parthesius but with a much more critical tone towards examining what effect the VOC had - and crucially, Nierstrasz's work follows the same goal as my own; as he explores how the torch was passed from the VOC to the East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch Empire as a whole to the British. Israel's influence - or analysis - is clear in Nierstrasz's work, as he pinpoints 1740 again as the turning point of Dutch success, arguing that it was around this year that the VOC lost both the motivation to continue its policy of inter-Asian trade and as a result, it's monopoly, allowing the British EIC to swoop in and pick up - with more success - the Dutch systems and networks already in place.

Nierstrasz also argues that the second reason for the fall of the VOC is that with the fall of importance of inter-Asian trade, the Dutch culture of decentralization became even more prevalent - with Company "servants" embarking on private trade as opposed to working as a unit once more. Considering that much of the literature that explains Dutch success places importance on the Dutch economic systems inter-linking through a spread out government influence, it follows that this private trade contributed to the downfall of the VOC and therefore the Dutch Republic as a whole.

This analysis of the VOC becomes more and more apparent as time comes on; especially when we consider that the VOC was virtually **the** authority of the Dutch Government in South-east Asia: The high level of autonomy of the Heeren XVII and the fact that the VOC had it's own military army and was ran in the form of a state itself show how crucial the VOC was to Dutch world primacy.

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Prak, Maarten Roy. *The Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century: the golden age*. Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Already we have talked about the importance of unity amongst the Dutch state; despite the apparent hypocrisy of such a statement considering the heavy decentralization of government - Prak calls the Dutch Republic a "political freak." Yet he also offers a picture of the cultural origins of the Dutch state; describing how their formation as 'United Provinces' affected their government and political system, and discusses the balance between "unity and discord."

If we refer to our earlier historians Gelderblom and Israel; we know that the Dutch political system was a critical factor in explaining their rise and fall, so Prak's analysis is a vital tool in understanding its origins and the factors that transformed it throughout the seventeenth century.

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Lunsford, Virginia West. *Piracy and privateering in the golden age Netherlands*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.Bottom of Form

Once more we return to the sea in our exploration of the Dutch Republic. Lunsford's book explores the role of the 'sea beggar' in forming Dutch identity and pushing Dutch maritime power forward at the onset of the seventeenth century. Lunsford argues that research into Dutch privateering has been "almost completely and inexplicably neglected" but that in fact the Dutch freebooter held a complex place as a creator of the mentality of the Dutch Republic; a nation she argues that was built on it's relationship with the sea.

Lunsford also points out how much research has gone into English privateers such as Sir Francis Drake; and once again I am drawn to my desire to map out the Dutch as founders of the maritime empire. Bottom of Form