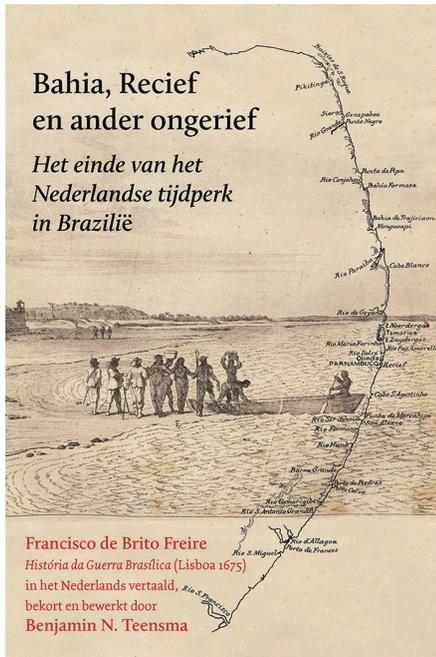


Note

Francisco de Brito Freire. *Bahia, Recief en ander ongerief. Het einde van het Nederlandse tijdperk in Brazilië*, transl. into Dutch and ed. by Benjamin N. Teensma, Leiden, Primavera Pers, 2018, 160 pp. ISBN 978-90-5997-254-4.



A lengthy prison sentence during the 1670s gave Admiral Francisco de Brito Freire – who had headed the fleet that forced the beleaguered Dutch at Recife into submission in 1654 – the occasion to put together this informative and thrilling account of the Dutch-Portuguese struggle over Pernambuco. Published first in 1675, *Nova Lusitânia. História da Guerra Brasílica* presented a decidedly Lusitanian perspective on this massive inter-imperial conflict. With Benjamin Teensma’s new Dutch translation, this relatively little-known chronicle is bound to reach a greater audience than ever before.

Teensma’s introduction briefly acquaints the reader with the outlines of the history of Dutch Brazil, the biography of Francisco de Brito Freire, and the publication context of *Nova Lusitânia*. Freire’s *História* in many ways drew upon and responded to previous narratives of the same events. By the time Freire went to work on his manuscript, fel-

low countrymen such as Manuel Calado do Salvador had long elevated the Portuguese fight for Pernambuco against the Dutch to a just and holy struggle for liberty and the true faith. More importantly for the making of the *História*, the Dutch intermezzo in Northeast Brazil had also been recounted and commented upon by a number of publications from the Low Countries. Freire’s work is particularly to be read as a riposte to Caspar Barlaeus’ laudatory account of Johan Maurits’ governorship of the WIC colony published in 1647. On the illustration that adorned the title page of the first edition of *Nova Lusitânia*, ‘qua non patet orbis’ is inscribed on the side of a galleon that sails away from a coastline strewn with toppled classical columns. Given that ‘qua patet orbis’ (as far as the world stretches)

was Johan Maurits' motto, this was an obvious jibe at both the lofty aspirations of the former governor-general and Barlaeus' humanistic panegyric. Teensma makes mention of these circumstances, and informs the reader that Freire did indeed have access to Barlaeus' work as well as to the writings of Johannes de Laet, among others, while composing his own chronicle. Yet more information on how genre conventions and Freire's adversary relation to these Dutch accounts shaped the text of *Nova Lusitânia* would have been helpful for those seeking to critically read and use this source.

Although the subtitle of this edition promises an account of 'the end of the Dutch period in Brazil', the text of *Nova Lusitânia* really covers only the early years of the WIC's Brazilian venture, between the first Dutch attack on Salvador de Bahia in 1624/1625 and the second attempt to take the city in 1638. Freire occasionally alludes to another part covering the outbreak of the Portuguese revolt in 1645 and the following nine years of war, yet, as Teensma explains, this account has never been found. Teensma has condensed the 460 pages of the original first print down to a brisk 130 pages, simplifying Freire's baroque prose in the process. To his great credit as translator and editor, the narrative retains its vigor and natural flow despite these alterations. Only in the later parts of the *História*, where events get increasingly tangled and hard to follow, short introductions and interjections from Teensma's hand appear more often to guide the reader through the text. To this end, a detailed map of Pernambuco to follow the protagonists of Freire's chronicle along their winded paths would have also been well-placed here. The diverse range of maps and illustrations that are contained in the book do succeed in giving a sense of place and time, even though the connection between image and surrounding text is sometimes not quite obvious.

Freire's account of the conflict generally stays close to the narratives found in Johannes de Laet's *Iaerlyck Verhael* (1644), Duarte de Albuquerque Coelho's *Memorias diarias de la Guerra del Brasil* (1654), and the early chapters of Barlaeus' *Rerum per Octennium* (1647). The WIC's failed attempt to take Salvador de Bahia in 1624/25 is followed by the takeover of Olinda and Recife in 1630, resulting in a drawn-out contest over the next eight years, in which the Dutch failed to score any significant victories before their capture of the Portuguese headquarters and main supply port in 1634 and 1635. For almost all of the many small and large altercations featured in his account, Freire gives ostensibly exact numbers of dead and wounded soldiers on both sides, with the Dutch continuously suffering much greater casualties than their opponents, but also receiving much larger reinforcements from the metropole. Interspersed among the many battle scenes of *Nova Lusitânia* are vivid descriptions of the plight this conflict inflicted on Pernambuco's civilian population. In this, as Teensma notes, the *História* reveals itself as not just a partisan account in regard to the Dutch-Portuguese contest, but closely reflects contemporary mentalities in whom it affords a measure of compassion. The misery of the large African slave population of Pernambuco, certainly much greater than that of European settlers, goes unmentioned. The indigenous Tapuias, as is common in Portuguese writings of this era, only feature as bloodthirsty, cannibalistic rapists and murderers.

Though this re-issue of *Nova Lusitânia* is unlikely to bring about major re-interpretations of this conflict, there is thus a lot to be found here for historians interested in Dutch Brazil and warfare in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world in general. Freire is

a stern judge of military strategy, who traces back success and failure in war mostly to the virtuousness of those fighting it. Several battles are lost in his narrative because of the negligence, self-indulgence, and stubbornness of commanders, and many victories are squandered by soldiers' greedy, undisciplined behavior. In recounting this particular conflict, the *História* thus also propagated a specific ideal of military behavior that favored self-restraint over all. It is hoped that the wider availability of this source will inspire many to approach the history of this momentous conflict and its aftermath in European politics and culture with fresh eyes.

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