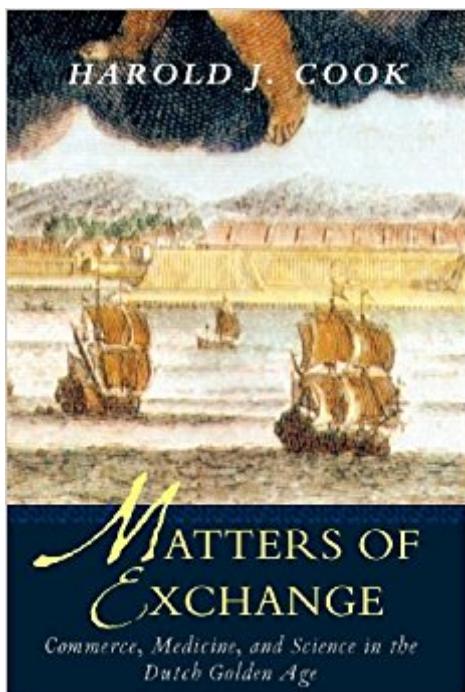


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Matters Of Exchange: Commerce, Medicine, And Science In The Dutch Golden Age



Synopsis

In this wide-ranging and stimulating book, a leading authority on the history of medicine and science presents convincing evidence that Dutch commerce—not religion—inspired the rise of science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Harold J. Cook scrutinizes a wealth of historical documents relating to the study of medicine and natural history in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, Brazil, South Africa, and Asia during this era, and his conclusions are fresh and exciting. He uncovers direct links between the rise of trade and commerce in the Dutch Empire and the flourishing of scientific investigation. Cook argues that engaging in commerce changed the thinking of Dutch citizens, leading to a new emphasis on such values as objectivity, accumulation, and description. The preference for accurate information that accompanied the rise of commerce also laid the groundwork for the rise of science globally, wherever the Dutch engaged in trade. Medicine and natural history were fundamental aspects of this new science, as reflected in the development of gardens for both pleasure and botanical study, anatomical theaters, curiosity cabinets, and richly illustrated books about nature. Sweeping in scope and original in its insights, this book revises previous understandings of the history of science and ideas.

Book Information

Paperback: 576 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press; 2008 edition (September 23, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300143214

ISBN-13: 978-0300143218

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.1 out of 5 stars 3 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #887,715 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #139 in Books > History > Europe > Netherlands #906 in Books > History > World > Expeditions & Discoveries #1199 in Books > Medical Books > History

Customer Reviews

"A considerable scholarly achievement." Steven Shapin, London Review of Books 'Drawing on nearly twenty years of research, *Matters of Exchange* is a dense, scholarly, fascinating book, packed with information and full of marvellous stories about cultural exchange between different cultures, and containing at its heart an important but complicated argument about the roots of

scientific objectivity and the rise of the global trade. It is a huge, if slightly daunting achievement, but it will undoubtedly become a standard work for anyone interested in the Dutch Golden Age.' Jerry Brotton, BBC History Magazine"

In this pathbreaking book, a leading historian of science and medicine presents convincing evidence that Dutch commerce—not religion—inspired the rise of science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Harold J. Cook taps vast archival evidence to show how commerce in the Dutch Golden Age changed citizens' values and triggered the Scientific Revolution.

I've long admired the Dutch Golden Age, but Harold Cook's work made many new connections for me, showing strong connections between developments in science, art, philosophy, commerce, and politics. It is unfortunate that so many of the key works of the era are still available only in Dutch or Latin, and Cook's work opened this English-speaking reader's eyes to many significant authors. Much appreciated.

The book gets a second star for the undoubted wealth of factual information contained within, useful for purposes of reference. However, as a work either of historical scholarship or of popular history, "Matters of Exchange" falls badly short. In academic terms, the book is a compendium of raw data but the author's main arguments seldom shine through - one is left wading through anecdote after anecdote relating to one or another obscure historical personages. Only at the very end, in an abbreviated epilogue, is there any attempt to synthesise together the mass - or more accurately, morass - of data into a coherent thesis. As a piece of popular history, it is simply too long and too dense to make for entertaining reading. I would recommend Lisa Jardine's "Going Dutch" as a superior alternative that covers much of the same ground but in a more lucid and compelling fashion.

This book was 20 years in development. Therefore, it includes a detailed description about the Dutch Golden Age. Good chapters are above all the fifth and the sixth. So far so good. However, this book has a huge blind spot. The part dedicated to explain the reasons of the "Scientific Revolution" is trivial. Cook describes only single focal points at regional and global level, but not at societal structural level. There is not evidence that merchant values and increasing of social complexity can be integrated as this book does. The arguments linking scientific revolution and commerce are unprecise. Moreover, they lack of systematic theorizing. A sentence of the preface's

book summarizes my views on the book:"And I hope that even those who disagree with the arguments of the book will find some of the descriptive material on which it is based to be of interest". Preface. p.xii.

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