

NOTES AND COMMENT

LETTERS ON THE DUTCH IN THE CARIBBEAN

October 16, 1948

The Editor

THE HISPANIC AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW

Dear Sir:

After reading Dr. Sluiter's most informative article on "Dutch-Spanish Rivalry in the Caribbean Area 1594-1609" (this REVIEW, No. 2, May, 1948), I would like to offer an additional fact which seems to have escaped Dr. Sluiter's attention, and which appears to constitute the first attempt made by the Dutch to gain a permanent foothold in the Caribbean.

During the forced evacuation of the towns of the north shore of Hispaniola (1605-06) ordered to cut illicit trading, the Dutch, whose flourishing commerce with the Spanish settlers had made them regular guests in those waters, tried to take advantage of local opposition to the highly unpopular measures of the Spanish Government. On January 30, 1605,¹ there appeared two barges in the port of La Yaguana to deliver a proclamation of Count Moritz, signed five days before aboard the ship *Mauritius* by order of the General Paul Barlandingen and in the name of the prince, who figures as governor general of the Confederate Provinces and as conqueror of several East Indian territories, as well as of the "Kingdom of Chile and its trade through Magalhaesstreet in Peru" (*sic!*). The proclamation, after pointing out the affinity between the situation of Santo Domingo and the Spanish rule in the General States, Portugal, and other provinces, guarantees the liberty of the people of La Yaguana and those who are willing to follow them, and offers to protect them against the Spaniards as well as to furnish them abundantly with Dutch commodities if they should be willing to declare themselves subjects of this prince.² The whole move was well planned, as shown by the acts of a process that mentions a Dutch fleet approaching the north coast of Hispaniola and carrying

¹ The date results from the testimonial of the scribe of La Yaguana (cf. Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, ed., *Relaciones históricas de Santo Domingo* [2 vols., Ciudad Trujillo, 1945], II, 233).

² "Patente y bando que el general de la armada de los herejes, en nombre del Conde Mauricio, echó en la Yaguana," in *ibid.*, pp. 236 ff.

not only soldiers but also bricks, lime, and other materials needed for fortification.³ Though nothing was achieved, thanks to the intervention of the Spanish authorities, the design of the Dutch precedes by almost a generation the establishment of the buccaneers at Tortuga Island and the foundation of the French colony in the western half of Hispaniola.

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Lisbon, Portugal
November 20, 1948

Dr. James F. King
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Dear Dr. King:

Upon my arrival here from Spain, your letter, enclosing a copy of Dr. Erwin Walter Palm's interesting comment on my recent article in the *HISPANIC*, was waiting for me. At your invitation I herewith briefly reply to it.

I have already written to Dr. Palm expressing my appreciation for his calling attention to the existence of a copy of the *bando*, or proclamation, issued late in January, 1605, before La Yaguana aboard the ship *Mauritius* by the Dutch "General Paul Barlandingen" [*sic!*] in the name of his chief, Count Maurice of Nassau. This document is a valuable bit of additional evidence on Dutch activity in the Caribbean, for it establishes the fact that Admiral Paulus van Caerden (flagship *Mauritius*), whose privateering squadron was on its way back from Brazil and only fortuitously present off western Española at this critical time (see sources cited in footnote 70 of my article), actively encouraged the revolt of the colonials on northwest Española against the Spanish government's famous evacuation decree.

More than that, however, we should not read into it or deduce from it, even after taking into consideration the allegations in the *proceso* referred to by Dr. Palm. Contemporary Dutch sources (again see footnote 70) also make reference to "bricks, lime, and other materials needed for fortification" aboard Van Caerden's ships, but if these *were* aboard, and this is not entirely certain, it is far more likely that

* *Ibid.*, p. 224.

they were intended for use at Bahía, the expedition's main objective, than on Española. Moreover, I found no evidence in the mass of documentation, both Dutch and Spanish, from which my article was written, that in addition to Van Caerden's, a second Dutch fleet, particularly of a punitive or colonizing character, was present at this juncture off Española. Nor have I found such evidence in the scores of *legajos* on the area and period which I have examined during the last few months in Sevilla, Simancas, and Madrid.

In other words, nothing I have so far seen warrants the assertion that in the years up to and including 1605 the Dutch had a well formulated design, or attempted to carry out a plan, to obtain a "permanent foothold" in the Caribbean. They came to extract wealth, either through direct appropriation (salt) or illicit trade, and to embarrass and to prey upon the national enemy.

With thanks for the opportunity to make this statement, I remain,

Cordially yours,

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