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Dissertation

**JOHAN MAURITS'S BRAZILIAN COLLECTION:
THE ROLE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC GIFTS IN COLONIAL DISCOURSE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the acquisition and dissemination of the famous Brazilian collection of Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen (1604-1679), the governor-general of Dutch Brazil from 1637 to 1644. Maurits amassed an extraordinary collection of ethnographic images and objects while governing the Dutch colony, which he then distributed as a series of diplomatic gifts to the Elector of Brandenburg Frederik Wilhelm I, Danish King Frederik III, and French King Louis XIV. I argue that Maurits's Brazilian gifts—which traveled from Brazil to The Hague, Berlin, Copenhagen, Cleves, Paris, Malta, and St. Petersburg—acted as temporal registers of alterity, responding to and initiating nuanced narrative shifts when they changed hands.

It is a fundamental argument of this dissertation that the cross-cultural circulation of people, objects, and ideologies in the early modern period yielded dynamic shifts in meaning resulting from disparate geographic and temporal trajectories. My approach, therefore, situates Maurits's gifts within a broad spectrum of exchange that extends from

Brazil to Western Europe. First, I examine the significance of Maurits's role as governor-general, arguing that he carefully constructed an identity as a colonial ruler based on his experiences and education in both Europe and Brazil, which provided the foundation for his participation in an exchange culture in both contexts. Then, I examine the practice of exchange in The Netherlands and Brazil, demonstrating that gift-giving became a vehicle for articulating fluctuating narratives of social order that could neutralize political tensions or amplify the appearance of authority. I also contend that visual representations of exchange encounters, which were underwritten by European notions of imperialism and dominance, played an essential role in imagining complex systems of social negotiation. Finally, I closely examine Maurits's gifts to Frederik Wilhelm, Frederik III and Louis XIV, arguing that these presentations initiated alternate modes of display and reception, which underscores the importance of geographic and temporal distance as meaningful factors in exchange.