European Monopoly Strategies

in the Early Modern

Indian Ocean Spice Trade

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In

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by

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San Francisco, California

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Certification of Approval

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This thesis is an analysis of the economic and cultural history of the Portuguese (mid-sixteenth century) and Dutch (mid-seventeenth century) attempts to monopolize the spice trade (pepper and cinnamon) to Europe, including the impact on and response by the established trading communities in Southern/Western India and Ceylon. It assesses the efficacy of both nations' strategies and tools to implement and enforce a trade monopoly, and the available mechanisms various actors inside and outside the trading structures established by the official local European entities (Portuguese Estado da Índia and Dutch East India Company) applied to violate and circumvent such monopolies. Additionally, it analyzes how these entities interacted with the existing native trading communities in a critical transition phase from mercantilism to early capitalism.

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In a country not furnished with mines, there are but two ways of growing rich, either conquest or commerce.¹

Introduction

These [people] are [like] Italians in their knowledge of and dealings in merchandise. ... They are men who understand merchandise; they are so properly steeped in the sound and harmony of it, that the Gujaratees say that any offence connected with merchandise is pardonable. ... They are diligent, quick men in trade. They do their accounts with figures like ours and with our very writing. ... Those of our people who want to be clerks and factors ought to go there and learn, because the business of trade is a science in itself which does not hinder any other noble exercise, but helps a great deal.²

Tomé Pires, a Portuguese merchant and government official in India, penned this surprisingly respectful description of native merchants in Cambay in India in the early sixteenth century. Similar observations were frequently documented throughout the sixteenth and also seventeenth century by government officials, merchants and other travelers from many European states who recognized and understood, but not always appreciated, the existing complex economic and trade structures in the Indian Ocean. These were the very structures the Portuguese and, later, Dutch (and others) were attempting to disrupt, destroy, and/or monopolize for their own economic state, as well as commercial company, and, frequently, private interests.

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¹ John Locke, *The Works of John Locke, in Nine Volumes, Volume the Fourth*, 12th ed. (London/UK: (London: Rivington, 1824), 9.

² Tomé Pires and Francisco Rodrigues, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires, An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512 – 1515, And, the Book of Francisco Rodrigues, Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical Rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East Before 1515 (Volume I)*, trans./ed. Armando Cortesão (Glasgow/UK: The University Press, 1944), 41-42.

The period from 1500 to 1700 introduced many new experiences, activities, and challenges in southern and western India and especially in Ceylon. The arrival of European powers, introducing new technologies, in particular maritime military capabilities and tactics, and a different, often aggressive and alien, way of viewing and conducting business and politics triggered disruptions in the native trading communities and trade patterns. It also brought new and expanded opportunities for profit and engagement. Centuries-old business practices and being part of well-established, interconnected, multi-ethnic and multi-religious trading communities, involved in the spice trades throughout the whole Indian Ocean for centuries, enabled native merchants with well-honed and specialized skills to be flexible and adapt to these newcomers. In addition, these aggressive newcomers could not implement their own ways of doing business and had to adjust, with a few exceptions, to the existing regional business practices and policies.

This economic history thesis analyzes the efficacy of and the reactions to the monopolistic strategies and tools of the European powers who arrived in the Indian Ocean in the early modern period. It contrasts and evaluates the native merchants' responses to the Portuguese in the pepper trade in the early to mid-1500s and their responses to the Dutch in the cinnamon trade in the mid- to late 1600s. The Portuguese Crown, through the Estado da Índia administration in Asia, attempted to monopolize the black pepper trade from Malabar (now Kerala in India) and the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or, VOC) tried the same with the cinnamon trade from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). In both cases, the attempt to implement a monopoly was part of an overall business strategy covering all fine spices (including clove, nutmeg, mace and cinnamon), and pepper, procured from select

production locations in Asia. Of special importance will be an analysis of the diverse forms of adaptation, collaboration and resistance to the Portuguese and Dutch, including the different mechanisms of “trade leakage,” focusing on the established trading communities in South and Western India and the spice trade to the West (Middle-East and Europe).

While the appearance of the Portuguese caused some disruptions to the flow of commerce with spices and pepper in the first three to five decades of the sixteenth century, the disruption of the spice supply through the traditional Middle Eastern routes was only partially due to the monopolistic attempts of the Portuguese to shut those trade routes and traditional traders down. It can also in part be attributed to the political upheaval in the region, e.g., the fighting between the Ottomans and the Mamluks, which disrupted the flow of commerce and coincided with the actions of the Portuguese. Some trade routes were under tighter Portuguese controls and select traders were inconvenienced by having to pay cartaz (a safe-conduct pass) fees and customs duties to the Estado, but the trading communities realized very soon that the Portuguese did not have the necessary resources in the region and, therefore, had insufficient control over the spice trade to effectively create a monopoly situation based on exclusively managing the physical commodity flows. It did not help that the business strategies between the Crown in Lisbon and the Estado in Goa very quickly diverged (enforcing a trade monopoly vs. revenue maximization for self-funding) and especially that Portuguese of all ranks and positions, inside and outside the control of the Estado, were highly motivated to trade on private accounts. These conditions were skillfully exploited by the local trading communities, mitigated the activities of the Portuguese, and allowed the traditional trading communities to mostly continue

in a “business as usual” framework. The Portuguese Estado was only capable of implementing a partial monopoly on the pepper trade and only for a short period.

The arrival of the Dutch about one hundred years later exposed the traditional trading communities to a more serious business threat. The VOC’s focus on profit and revenue maximization was supported by a strategy of complete control of the supply chain from local spice production to sales in Europe in addition to controlling the quantities and prices in the Asian spice markets. Through the application and enforcement of (European) treaties granting exclusive purchase or selling rights, the VOC gained geographical control over the key spice production and transshipment areas, including Ceylon and its production of cinnamon; these “rights” were vigorously defended with military force. While the VOC was able to monopolize the trade in cinnamon from Ceylon and also effectively shut down select trade routes for local traders in the region, native traders were able to continue to make money through the provisioning of an array of services the VOC depended on throughout the region and across many commodities. Leveraging any commercial or political advantage these traders could apply, in particular in the volume-driven, three-way intra-regional trade (in textiles and spices), augmented, if needed, by multiple forms of resistance, meant that the traditional trading communities continued to thrive and were even able to expand their commercial activities, primarily outside the physical trade in cinnamon.

In both the Portuguese and Dutch periods, local traders found and took advantage of numerous opportunities for collaborating with the Europeans. The very sophisticated, complex, and highly specialized business environment in India required the European powers to look for local business partners where they needed them to be successful or to survive. However, there

occurred also many situations which triggered local resistance. The arsenal of resistance options ranged from forms of manipulation and evasion to sabotage and armed resistance. These options were successfully used against both the Estado and VOC.

Argument

Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean in 1498, there had been no organized attempt by any political power to control the sea lanes and the long-distance trade of Asia. Select rulers had implemented a fee-based system to charge merchants for the use of the shipping lanes and ports within their control/sphere of influence and pirates were active in many coastal regions throughout the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese, and later their Northern European competitors, introduced a Mediterranean style of land and sea warfare into the region.³ The prevailing understanding of the economic history of this period and region argues that the European powers' arrival led to a significant disruption in the existing trading practices for Asian spices and that the business practices as well as military capabilities of, initially, the Portuguese and, later, the Dutch were superior and more advanced than those of the local states or of the individual merchant communities. Further analysis, however, indicates that not only did both the Portuguese and Dutch experience limitations to their monopolistic ambitions, but also that the well-established native trading communities, often in collaboration with local rulers and across multiple trading communities, were flexible enough and possessed the infrastructure to adapt to and mitigate the effects of those monopoly strategies. Additionally, the traditional merchant communities were capable of leveraging their frequently critical business and financial services, and political connections, in support of, or in opposition to, the Portuguese and Dutch ambitions.

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³ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14.

The Portuguese efforts also failed in part because of their limited resources for enforcement and in part due to the conflicting objectives for the region of the Portuguese crown (trade monopoly enforcement) vs. the Estado (revenue generation to be self-sufficient) in addition to the many opportunities to conduct private business, both by Estado officials and private traders. The Dutch, on the other hand, while being more ruthless and effective in implementing their fine spice monopolies, were more dependent on local merchants, and rulers, for not only their business and financial services due to the high, and critical, volume of three-way intra-Asian trade (e.g., buying and selling textiles and silk etc. for payment for spices, or in lieu of payment for spices), but also because of the sensitive relationships with important merchant communities and rulers across their region of operations that often required delicate balancing acts.

The period of the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth century was a period of transition for many regions of the world, including India.⁴ The traditional trade networks and merchants nevertheless continued to play a significant role in the spice trades. They were sufficiently resilient, adjusting to the demands of especially the Portuguese, and there was no single entrepôt controlling the spice trade.⁵ Even during the more effectively managed monopoly trade of the Dutch, the traditional native merchants continued to participate significantly in the trades, not necessarily in the trans-continental spice trades into Europe, but with other commodities or through the provisioning of key services, such as brokering, financing, insurance, currency

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⁴ M. N. Pearson, ed., *Spices in the Indian Ocean World* (Aldershot/UK: Variorum, 1996), 340.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 343.

exchange, as well as in- and intra-regional freighting for the spice trade which both the Portuguese and Dutch depended on. In addition, the well-established trade routes, overland, via coastal navigation, or ocean going, combined with the complex and highly interconnected trade relationships and the multitude of transport nodes, offered many opportunities for monopoly trade leakages from within and outside the Portuguese and Dutch administrative systems. Private trade, and private profiteering, could not be suppressed and anti-monopolistic activities by local traders ranged from manipulation of the implemented system to evasion, sabotage and even armed resistance.

The attempts by the European trading organizations, both the Portuguese Estado and Dutch VOC, to implement a monopoly on the trade of pepper and cinnamon were of limited efficacy, at least throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During this critical transition period from mercantilism to early capitalism, the existing trading networks operating in the Indian Ocean demonstrated a remarkable resilience and pragmatism in countering the European monopoly attempts. Only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in particular in the post-Napoleonic war period, did these traditional merchant networks lose their position and significance. This was due to the territorial colonization by the British and an accelerated modernization of trade and commerce that included innovations in transportation, in particular the steam engine, which eliminated the dependence on the existing, monsoon wind-based trade routes.

Historiography

The existing historiography over the past fifty years alternates between the advocacy of the superior and expanding capabilities of the European rivals or the position of an overall continued status quo for, and with overall only minimal disruptions to, the existing trading structures. While many authors focused some attention on the roles and activities of the existing, pre-Western contact trading communities, there exists only scant and random information about the actions and reactions of such communities to the intrusion of the European rivals; a structured analysis of the actions of these trade participants is presently missing which this thesis is attempting to remedy. The following historiographical summary is not intended to address the key arguments and hypotheses of each author and publication; it rather focuses specifically on the presentation and interpretation of key points related to the questions to be addressed in this thesis.

C. R. Boxer, in 1965, summarized succinctly the world of the VOC in *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600 - 1800*.⁶ Of particular interest for this research were his comments on the classification by the directors of the VOC of the three categories of trade they were engaged in, based on the control the VOC exercised over the respective territory and also its trading rights. Additionally, he emphasized the pervasiveness of the so-called “private trade” which took place parallel to the Company’s lawful business, as well as the multitude of opportunities for fraud and embezzlement, often in collaboration with or through the Manipulation of native merchants.⁷

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⁶ C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600 – 1800* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965).

⁷ Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600 – 1800*, 225-226.

Boxer also commented on the policy friction between the attempts to promote the trade of free Dutch burghers in the region and the VOC's own dependence on the cooperation and services of native merchants.

Niels Steensgaard, approaching the period and topic from a completely different perspective, focused on the structural changes in the trading processes in his 1973 publication *Carracks, Caravans and Companies*.⁸ With the appearance of the European trading entities, he asserted that the west-bound caravan trade was significantly impacted by the early 1600s and mainly replaced by an east-bound maritime trade; the (European) Companies emerged victoriously from the structural crisis in the Europe-Asia trade relationship due to their greater control of the market and the internalization of the protection costs. While the Companies were a new entrepreneurial form in Asia, they did not revolutionize the Asian market.⁹ Steensgaard viewed the Portuguese Estado as “one of the purest examples in history of constitutionally determined corruption” due to the short office tenure for higher offices and the expected commensurate rewards. Additionally, he called the Portuguese pepper monopoly not a business, but a customs house.¹⁰

Holden Furber, in his 1976 publication *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600 – 1800*,¹¹ highlighted the interplay of transcontinental and intra-regional activities of the European

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⁸ Niels Steensgaard, *Carracks, Caravans and Companies: The structural crisis in the European-Asian trade in the early 17th century* (Odense/Denmark: Studentlitteratur, 1973).

⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰ Ibid., 93, 100.

¹¹ Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600 – 1800: Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion (Vol. 2)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976).

trading companies and its staff, as well as the continuity of existing trade practices and the importance of the local and functionally specialized traders. Furber also emphasized the authority and power of the local rulers and that the weaker political structures in South India provided an opening for the European trading empires to gain their foothold. He also claimed that the Dutch did not achieve monopoly control over the complete cinnamon trade during the period covered since they could not control pricing, suppress smuggling, or control the many competitors. However, the VOC was effective in controlling the supply, and pricing, of the finer spices, including cinnamon, in Europe.

In 1977, Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius published *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415 – 1580*.¹² It provided an extensive chronological history of the development of the Portuguese empire and admired the vision and accomplishments of select monarchs who, according to the authors, succeeded in creating an empire which was more challenging, more complex, and extended across longer distances, but with fewer resources, than the Spanish Habsburgs. They also highlighted the inefficiencies of the implemented system which fostered corruption and encouraged private trade, contrary to the Crown's intentions. The authors also commented on the fact that, while Lisbon had a very clear commercial vision on how to make money, the individuals selected to be the leaders in Asia were overall military men who most often chose conflict and confrontation over diplomacy and collaboration. This set the tone for the belligerent relationships between the Portuguese and local leaders and merchants,

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¹² Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415 – 1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

especially when local trading communities were not willing to give up the trade privileges that they had acquired over a long time and which the Portuguese now claimed as theirs.

K. N. Chaudhuri, in his seminal 1985 oeuvre *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*,¹³ outlined in impressive details the structure, activities and dependencies of commerce in the broader Indian Ocean region, an area that covered the social and cultural diversity of four interconnected civilizations (Irano-Arabic, Hindu, Indonesian, and Chinese). These commercial interactions, via seaborne and caravan trade routes, created, in the author's opinion, a sense of unity. During the peak of the Lusitanian presence, from about 1515 to 1560, the Portuguese were able to enforce a semi-monopoly in the spice and pepper trade.¹⁴ Chaudhuri asserted that, with the rise of the "bureaucratic economic organizations", i.e., the Northern European joint stock companies and their different value systems and concepts of economic behavior, the volume of trade between Europe and Asia increased, triggering major structural discontinuities, in particular regarding trade routes. He also pointed out the economic and strategic reasons why the Dutch implemented a monopoly strategy and the success of the Dutch to establish monopoly pricing for the finer spices. His details regarding the different functional specializations of the native merchants and the profiles of the key ports and trade emporia provided the foundation for understanding the roles and importance of the native traders during the early modern period in India.

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¹³ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

Jonathan I. Israel stated in *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585 – 1750*, published in 1989,¹⁵ that the VOC did not receive sufficient funding in the first half of the seventeenth century neither from the Dutch Republic nor from Japanese silver to finance the new commercial initiatives or the ongoing military actions they were engaged in. They, therefore, had to aggressively participate in the local, inter-Asian trade, leveraging their advantages in the region which consisted of a reliance on a mixture of force and trade advantages and the provisioning of a broader portfolio of commodities compared to any actual or potential competitor.¹⁶ However, the author also asserted that the Gujarati merchants along the west coast of India remained a formidable competition because of the resilience in their overland trade to Persia and the seaborne trade to Persia and the Red Sea. These native merchants also displayed a resourcefulness and sophistication in forming partnerships and through their methods of credit/financing. Additionally, being under the jurisdiction of the Mughal authorities was a benefit because the Dutch had to be sensitive not to create political issues with the empire.¹⁷ As to the cinnamon trade, by the end of the 1650s, after having defeated the Portuguese in Ceylon in a military alliance with the Kandyans, the Dutch, according to the author, exercised an effective monopoly over the supply of cinnamon which had become an important export product not only to Europe, but also to northern India and even Spanish America. However, the occupation and control of the coastal areas of Ceylon came at a steep price: the cost of maintaining the presence on the Island worried the VOC directors in Europe and the local leadership in Batavia.

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¹⁵ Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1584 – 1740* (Oxford/UK: Clarendon Press, 1989).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 176, 180.

¹⁷ Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1584 – 1740*, 179.

In *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 -1650*,¹⁸ published in 1990, Sanjay Subrahmanyam characterized this period as “one of contained conflict;” the European sea power was systematically counterposed, in several contexts, to the power of the existing Asian political structures. Regarding trade, the author analyzed the extensively studied long(er)-distance maritime trade in relationship to the other two complementary and interconnected networks of coastal and overland trade which came to play an increased role due to the incursion of the European trading entities, e.g., the Portuguese Estado, Dutch VOC, and English EIC, as well as the more stable and safer inland routes under the Mughals. The main reason for the failure of the Portuguese attempts of control was, according to Subrahmanyam, the diverging objectives and interests in the Indian Ocean of the Crown in Lisbon and the Estado in Goa. While the long-distance networks of seaborne trade that included Southern India underwent considerable changes until about the 1570s, the Portuguese were not successful in controlling all or even a majority of it. Even after the appearance of the Dutch and English trading companies, by 1650, most of the pepper trade occurred within the alternative, i.e., not as official European trades, distribution networks, including the involvement of private European traders, especially Portuguese.¹⁹

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¹⁸ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 248.

James Tracy, in *The Rise of the Merchant Empires* ²⁰ published in 1990, and in *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires* ²¹ from 1991, provided an extensive description of the structure, activities, and socio-political importance of the traditional trading networks. He highlighted not only the Portuguese failure to establish their spice trade monopoly, but also the realistic assessment by King João III (1521 - 1557) of the vulnerability of his Asian empire being held together (only) by fleet and fortresses; the king assumed that the more populous and more effectively governed local civilizations would not easily tolerate the incursion of foreigners (outside the existing standards of business conduct).²² Ultimately, according to Tracy, the Portuguese “protection racket” failed, and the traditional merchant communities prevailed because the strategy was too ambitious for a small and under-resourced state such as Portugal.²³ However, the Dutch were successful in establishing a cinnamon monopoly in Ceylon. Tracy provided some insights into the tactics used to evade and resist the European trade entities.

M. N. Pearson, in his 1996 publication *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*,²⁴ analyzed in depth the production and trading of pepper and the finer spices, clove, nutmeg, mace and cinnamon. In particular, he highlighted the response of the native growers to monopolistic strategies by moving or expanding production areas as well as the skills and determination of Asian traders to continue their trading practices by changing their base of operations. As a

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²⁰ James D. Tracy, ed. *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long-Distance Trade in the Early Modern World, 1350 – 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²¹ James D. Tracy, ed. *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires: State Power and World Trade, 1350 – 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

²² Tracy, ed. *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, 55.

²³ Tracy, ed. *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, 79.

²⁴ M. N. Pearson, ed. *Spices in the Indian Ocean World* (Aldershot/UK: Variorum, 1996).

consequence, Pearson asserted that the Portuguese only had partial control over the pepper and cinnamon trade and that the Dutch had better success by reducing the elements of market uncertainty through their control of production areas, the capability to process larger volumes, as well as through the provisioning of more adequate capital funding. By manipulating supply and demand through the withholding of supplies when the market demand was below their expectations the VOC was able to manipulate pricing in Europe.

In 1996, Sinnappah Arasaratnam revisited Ceylon under Dutch rule in his work *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*.²⁵ The author painted a very detailed picture of the structure and strategy of the VOC on the island. He also highlighted the challenges regarding their relationship with the last independent kingdom on the island, Kandy, as well as the very close and well-integrated commercial ties between the native population and South India. Because of the geographical proximity, vast coastline, and close ties, the Dutch were constantly challenged in controlling trade and monopolizing the cinnamon business until the middle of the eighteenth century. However, throughout the second half of the seventeenth century, the VOC was successful in expanding their territorial control and, by being the exclusive “buyer” of cinnamon (they were acquiring it almost free of charge), increasing their share of the cinnamon market. This led, according to the author, to a VOC cinnamon monopoly, in particular in regard to its availability and pricing in Europe. The Dutch realized that native traders could not be kept out of Ceylon, but they restricted and controlled access to the best of their ability. However, the author

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²⁵ S. Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800: Early Influences and Internal Change in Early Modern Sri Lanka* (Aldershot/UK: Variorum, 1996).

claimed that traditional trading patterns could not be eradicated due to Ceylon's geographic location and the particularities of the regional commercial economy. Arasaratnam also highlighted the deep concern of the VOC leadership in Amsterdam and Batavia about the corrosive effects of private trading and corruptive behavior of individuals in positions of some power in their employ.

Another key publication was Ashin Das Gupta's *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*,²⁶ from 2001. The author commented on the partial dislocation of India-based merchants from their trade in South East Asia and a redirection of their activities towards the Red Sea; this redirection occurred due to the incursions of the Portuguese as well as the establishments of the Ottoman empire in the West and the Mughal Empire in the North. The overall trade expansion in the Indian Ocean compensated for the regionalized and partial loss of the spice trade for the native merchants; especially after the appearance of the Dutch, many native merchants had to concentrate on alternative commodities. However, Das Gupta asserted that, overall, the trade in the Indian Ocean remained in the control of Indian ship-owning merchants and that it was mainly the Muslim trading communities which were subjected to violence and restrictions by the Europeans compared to the native Hindu trading communities. The author also provided valuable insights into how the native traders resisted the European attempts to monopolize certain commodities and routes.

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²⁶ Ashin Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800* (New Delhi/India: Oxford University Press, 2001).

In his 2009 publication *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*²⁷ A. R. Disney asserted that, during most of the sixteenth century, Portugal supplied seventy-five or more percent of the pepper imports into Europe and, therefore, dominated the trade. Most of the pepper being shipped via the traditional, pre-Cape routes were destined for the Middle East and North Africa and was supplied from Java and Sumatra where many Muslim spice traders had shifted their operations after the arrival of the Portuguese in India. While the Estado did not achieve full monopolistic control over the pepper trade in the European market, it held a dominant share for a long time, according to Disney.²⁸ Additionally, the author outlined the three mechanisms that the Portuguese state used in order to generate much needed revenue, due to the lack of viable trading goods from Europe, from the inter-port trade within Asia. All of the mechanisms, preying on inter-port trade, participating in it themselves, or imposing controls on that trade to siphon off part of the profits, had negative impacts on the trade and trade relations with the traditional trading communities in the region.²⁹ Disney also highlighted the pervasiveness and commonality of private traders and private trades, often in collaboration with native merchants, throughout the Estado, conflicting with the Crown's directives, but, ultimately, allowing for the survival of the Portuguese presence in Asia through a continuation of what has been called "Portugal's shadow empire."³⁰

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²⁷ A. R. Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

²⁹ Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*, 153-157.

³⁰ Sebastian R. Prange, "'Measuring by the Bushel': Reweighing the Indian Ocean Pepper Trade," *Historical Research*, Vol. 84, No. 224 (May 2011): 230.

While most authors provided insights into the challenges faced by the existing Asian trading communities, a clear and structured analysis of the applied adaption and mitigation strategies in response to those challenges does not exist at present. This thesis attempts to fill this gap in the historiography and shed some light on the surprising variety of actions and reactions to the militant and disruptive arrival of the Portuguese and Dutch by the local merchant communities engaged in the overseas trade in general and the trade in fine spices and pepper in particular.

The primary sources used for this paper include mainly travelogues of Portuguese, Italian, French and English merchants, travelers and residents in Asia, as well as memoirs, letters, and instructions of key Dutch administrators in Asia. While each source obviously displays a contemporary European bias, especially pertaining to Muslim traders, many of the documented observations and comments express a respect and even admiration of the skills, capabilities, and resources of the native traders as well as often an astute comprehension of social and cultural conditions of such trading communities. The review of the more critical comments also highlighted areas of concern to the Europeans, providing insights into where the native traders were seen as serious competitors or obstacles. The more limited available Asian and Middle Eastern sources focus more on the violence and aggressiveness of the Westerners, in particular against the Muslim populations, and do not seem to address economic or commercial considerations, apart from the consequences of the inflicted violence. Some of the travelogues of Westerners traveling in the region reference interactions with local rulers and courts, indicating an interest in the European technological and scientific innovations, as well as the occasional interactions between local merchants and royal courts.

Before moving into an overview of the characteristics of the pre-European contact trading system, it is appropriate to briefly describe the product and trade particularities of the two commodities in question: Indian pepper and Ceylonese cinnamon.

Pepper

Black Pepper is one form of the dried and processed berries, the others are green and white, of an evergreen climbing vine (*Piper Nigrum*) which originated in the indigenous forests on the southwest coast of India, especially in Malabar and Kanara (now Kerala).

Figure 1: Da Orta's Pimienta or Pepper

As one of the “plantation crops,” such as cardamom and ginger, pepper required fairly stringent physical conditions to grow successfully.³¹ It was depicted and described in detail in 1563 in a publication by the Portuguese Garcia Da Orta,³² considered one of the first ethnobotanists. Pepper was planted in many orchards on lands owned by secular rulers, Brahmins, or other members of the upper castes, and those orchards were operated by small tenant farmers. The berries were harvested once a year while they were still green and unripe and then fermented or blanched, after which they were sun-dried which is responsible for the wrinkly skin and change in color. Once ready for sale, they were transported to the coastal towns through a network of inland and coastal waterways, passing through the hands of several specialized traders.

Figure 2: Black Pepper

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³¹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 26.

³² Garcia Da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India*, ed. Conde De Ficalho, Francisco Manuel de Melo, trans. Sir Clements Markham (London/UK: Henry Sotheran & Co., 1913), 377.

Pepper was frequently used as a sellable ballast item on ocean going vessels in the Indian Ocean due to its ease of transportation and resale value. Its cultivation had spread to Sumatra and other South East Asian locations, such as what is now Thailand and the Sunda Islands, as early as the twelfth century. Pepper found many culinary and medicinal uses, and, during periods of shortages of coinage in the middle ages, as a form of payment. While pepper was a high- value and high-volume trade item, the European merchant companies did not consider it in the category of high-value and lower-volume “finer spices,” as it was the case for clove, nutmeg, mace, and cinnamon.

Cinnamon

Soft Stick Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum Zeylanicum* or *Cinnamomum Verum*) originated in Ceylon. It is the stripped and dried inner bark of a species of trees in the laurel (Lauraceae) family, also depicted ³³ and described by Da Orta.

Figure 3: Da Orta's Canela or Cinnamon

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³³ Da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India*, 137.

These trees grew wild, predominantly in the southwest of the island, initially in the lands of the Kingdom of Kotte, which were taken over by first the Portuguese and later by the Dutch, and, after its depletion there, mainly in the territory of the Kingdom of Kandy in the interior of the island.³⁴ Harvesting cinnamon, which took place twice a year, was the responsibility of a dedicated caste, the “chalia or Salāgama” caste, which remained under the local King’s authority. Access to cinnamon under the exclusive trade agreement/treaty, for export through the port of Colombo, was granted in exchange for assisting the Kandyans in ejecting the Portuguese from Ceylon, which required the Dutch to obtain the King’s approval annually. Cinnamon had to be carefully packaged and protected during ocean voyages as contact with water led to spoilage.

Figure 4: Cinnamon

The Sinhalese recognized ten different grades of cinnamon quality, based on smell and taste, whereas the Europeans used a three-tiered classification (fine, medium, coarse).³⁵

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³⁴ S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687* (Amsterdam/Netherlands: Djambatan, 1958), 183.

³⁵ Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 182.

Cinnamon was widely used as a culinary spice, in medicine, perfumes and as an incense. Wild cinnamon, an inferior but frequently acceptable substitute product, grew in Malabar, but could also be found in the regions now called Burma, Java, Mindanao, Tongking, and Southern China. According to Baldæus, it cost about one fifth of the price for cinnamon from Ceylon.³⁶ While these substitutes were mainly destined for South East Asian and East Asian markets, they also made their way to West Asia and Europe through the traditional Middle Eastern trade routes.³⁷

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³⁶ Philip Baldæus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, as also of the Isle of Ceylon* (London/UK: Arvnsham and Churchill, 1703), 824.

³⁷ Pearson, ed., *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*, 246.

The Pre-1500 Spice Trade

Spices, as exotic, even mythical, and very expensive luxury products, were traded to Europe through the Middle East since antiquity. Pepper and cinnamon were shipped from the production areas along the Malabar coast and in Ceylon to key coastal locations, such as Quilon, Cochin, or Colombo, and from there to the nearest regional emporia, such as Calicut in southwest and Masulipatnam in southeast India. From there, they were transported to inland state capitals on the Indian subcontinent or shipped to more remote entrepôts throughout the Arabian Sea (final destinations: Middle East and Africa), the Bay of Bengal (final destinations: Northern India, Southeast Asia, especially Pegu/Arakan (now Myanmar), and Ayudhya/Siam (now Thailand)), and further south to Sumatra and Java and the wider, now Indonesian archipelago (final destinations: China, Japan).

The well-traveled trade routes to Europe, taking advantage of the monsoon winds and existing caravan routes, had been in use at least since the tenth century and relied extensively on the shipping lanes from ports in western India to ports in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and, from there, overland through Muslim ruler-controlled territories by caravan dominated by Muslim merchants to entrepôt cities in the Levant and Egypt. From those locales, European traders, especially Venetian, Genoese, and Catalan, bought all the available spices, not just pepper and cinnamon, for further distribution and sale throughout Europe.

According to Barendse, most pepper exported from India to the Arabian Sea was destined for the Middle East itself. Only the excess which could not be absorbed in the Middle Eastern

markets was sold to Europe in the sixteenth century (and probably earlier as well).³⁸ Pearson estimated that approximately nine tenth of the spices distributed were consumed within Asia.³⁹ Braudel published that, before the arrival of the Portuguese in India, Europe consumed each year about ten thousand quintals ⁴⁰ (1,133,000 to 1,294,000 lbs.) of pepper and another ten thousand quintals of other spices, costing about sixty-five thousand kilos (143,300 lbs.) of silver; this was the equivalent of three hundred thousand tons of rye which was sufficient to feed one and a half million people. While these metrics look impressive, one needs to be reminded that the European consumption of spices represented only a minor portion of the overall trade in spices that the existing trading communities in and around the Indian Ocean were engaged in.

As to the cost and mark-ups on the price of pepper from purchase in India to the consumer in Europe prior to the Portuguese arrival in India, Braudel provided the following estimates: one kilogram (2.2046 lbs.) of pepper cost one to two grams (0.035 to 0.07 oz.) of silver at the point of production in the Indies, ten to fourteen grams in Alexandria, Egypt, fourteen to eighteen grams in Venice, and twenty to thirty grams (0.7 to 1.06 oz.) in the consumer countries in Europe. ⁴¹ However, considering the taxes paid and costs incurred at each step along the route the spices traveled, it is estimated that Venetian traders “only” made a profit

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³⁸ R. J. Barendse, “Trade and State in the Arabian Seas: A Survey from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of World History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall, 2000): 193.

³⁹ Michael Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* (London/UK: Routledge, 2003), 138.

⁴⁰ One Portuguese Quintal was about 51.4 kg (about 114 lbs.) (quintal light) or 58.7 kg (about 129 lbs.) (quintal heavy) (Source: Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*), 371.

⁴¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 405.

of forty percent.⁴² Correa provided the following sale prices for spices in Lisbon in 1498: one quintal of pepper: eighty cruzados,⁴³ nutmeg: one hundred, ginger: one hundred and twenty, cinnamon: one hundred and eighty, cloves: two hundred, and mace: three hundred cruzados.⁴⁴ (In comparison, the six-months campaign pay for a regular Portuguese soldier in India around 1600 was about thirty cruzados.)⁴⁵

The list of trading communities which were active in the vast trade networks in the Indian Ocean was truly amazing in its depth and breadth of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, the complexity of services provided, and their geographic reach, capabilities and structures which often were established centuries earlier. In Western, South and Southeast Asia, traders who participated in this long-distance trading chain included Arab, Jewish, Nestorian Christians, Persian, Armenian and Gujarati merchants who operated throughout this and also the wider trade region which extended from the east coast of Africa to China and Japan. Trade was conducted based on personal relationships and trust, neutral and reciprocal treatment of foreign merchants in all ports (law of reciprocity),⁴⁶ reasonable administrative and customs obligations vis à vis the

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⁴² Pearson, ed., *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*, xxiii.

⁴³ One (silver) cruzado, worth 360 Portuguese réis, was, until 1570, the equivalent of 1 to 1.25 Spanish “pieces of eight,” or “pesos del ocho, the universally accepted currency standard. See: Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise – The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond, 1540 – 1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 666. Also: Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 372.

⁴⁴ Gaspar Correa, *The Three Voyages of Vasco Da Gama and his Viceroyalty* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1869), 223.

⁴⁵ According to Pyard, the soldiers on the North and South armadas/fleets in India received an advance of two quarters’ pay of 36 pardaos when being activated for a military campaign, the equivalent of about 30 cruzados. See: Albert Gray, trans./ed., *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil (Vol. 2, Part 1)* (London/UK: The Hakluyt Society, 1888), 122.

⁴⁶ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 112.

local rulers, and free shipping lanes that were available to all and not controlled by any political entity, but nevertheless were subjected to routine piratic activities at many locations along the regional maritime routes. Merchant ships in the Indian Ocean, prior to the arrival of the Europeans, were not heavily armed, if at all.

As the merchant communities were all living side by side in the many port cities and emporia and managed their own affairs, fairly independent from the dictates of the local rulers, these communities had a strong incentive to peacefully cohabitate in their own quarters, avoid violence, and cooperate on the seas. Local rulers also had to be sensitive to the needs of their merchant communities as these communities were quite mobile and could move elsewhere, depriving the rulers of much appreciated, often needed, customs duties for their coffers. Pre-1500 spice trading was characterized by the involvement of many specialized and often regionalized trading communities with trade being conducted in regional segments, according to the monsoon seasons and trading routes. The existing structural trade set-up was not conducive to any kind of monopolistic attempts due to its longevity and complexity as some of the trading locations and communities had been operating in India and across the Indian Ocean for centuries.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 107.

The Established Trading Communities

Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese officer in India and chronicler, provided in his (ca.) 1516 travel observations amazingly detailed insights into the different merchant communities in India, documenting several ethnic and religious groups as well as their functional activities and geographical reach in the Arabian Sea. In his travelogue Barbosa referenced the names of several native trading communities, such as Cheti, Mapulers and Pardesy.⁴⁸ He also already described incidents of smuggling and evasion of the Portuguese rules.⁴⁹ Usually developed along family relationships, these merchants traditionally were structured geographically based on established regional trading links, often by specialized merchandise/commodities, or religious or ethnic affiliations.

These affiliations included native Hindu (Banyan, Saraswat), Jain, or native Muslim (Mappila/Chulia/Marakkayars) trading communities, Arab Muslims originally from the Middle East (Pardesi), or Tamil Chetty or Labbai families from Coromandel, as well as Nestorian/Syrian Christians, Armenians and Jews.⁵⁰ According to Al-Malībārī, both Christian and Jewish traders and communities were established on the Malabar coast in the early ninth century prior to the

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⁴⁸ Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (London/UK: T. Richards, 1866), 144, 146.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 50-146.

⁵⁰ For example, a Jewish trading community, centered in Cochin in the 1600s, had existed on the Malabar coast since the eighth century. They acted as money lenders/exchangers and brokers. See: Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 25.

arrival of Muslim traders.⁵¹ The communities were organized according to their regional presence and relationships with local royal courts, such as Persian merchants at the court of Golconda or Gujarati traders of the Mughal empire.

Figure 5: Map of India, 1600 – 1800

⁵¹ Zayn al-Dīn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al-Maḥbārī, *Toḥfut-ul-Mujahideen, an Historical Work in the Arabic Language*, translated by Michael John Rowlandson (London/UK: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1833), 47, 55.

While it was a common and widely accepted practice to welcome new traders, in general, regardless of their origin, this acceptance was conditioned on participating in the existing trading systems. The existing long-standing trading arrangements, characterized by complexity and a high degree of functional specialization, provided significant obstacles for any, especially outsider, group to reshape the trading system in support of its own monopolistic goals. Communities were differentiated by service specialization, such as commodity brokers (Dallal, for specific or all available commodities), insurance brokers (both for cargo and ships), bankers/money changers (Shroff/Saraffs), as well as by commodity (spices/textiles/food stuff), or type of transportation offering (overland/coastal/ocean). What the communities were called changed from region to region. Many were involved across multiple activities and, when needed, collaborated across lines of affiliation. Most of the trading communities after the arrival of the Portuguese were characterized by a continuity in their operations, in part because of their emphasis on maintaining variety in their transactions.⁵² Traders overall, but especially Gujarati merchants, had honed the skills of flexibility and adaption for decades, if not for centuries, prior to the arrival of the Portuguese.⁵³

Contemporary European observers and visitors displayed a begrudging respect for the business and especially financial skills of the native traders they encountered. Subrahmanyam quoted the following complimentary observations about Muslim merchants in Goa by a

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⁵² Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Ramada Durto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400 – 1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101.

⁵³ M. N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat: The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 18.

Florentine merchant, Piero Strozzi, who travelled in Portuguese Asia in the early sixteenth century as:

We believe ourselves to be the most astute men one can encounter, and the people here surpass us in everything. And there are rich Moorish merchants worth 400,000 to 500,000 ducats. And they can do better calculations by memory than we can do with the pen. And they make fun of us, and it seems to me that they are superior to us in countless things, except with sword in hand, which they cannot resist.⁵⁴

Tomé Pires, a Portuguese merchant and government official, wrote the observations about the merchants of Cambay as “being like the Italians” in the early sixteenth century quoted in the thesis introduction. Also, in the early sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese writer and officer, described the Chetty merchants of Cholmenderm (Coromandel) somewhat complimentary:

Some of these are called Chetis, who are gentiles, natives of the province of Cholmenderm ... They are great clerks and accountants, and make out all their accounts on their fingers: they are great usurers, so much so that from one brother to another they do not lend a real without gain.⁵⁵

Jan Huygen Van Linschoten, in his late sixteenth century travelogue, commented as follows about the merchants of Cambay:

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⁵⁴ Piero Strozzi, “Lettera di Piero Strozzi, scritta dal Castello di Goa il 20 dicembre 1510 a Andrea sua padre in Firenze,” in “Piero di Andrea Strozzi: Viaggiatore Fiorentino del secolo dell scoperte,” in *Memorie della Società geografica italiana*, Vol. V, publ. Gustavo Uzielli (Rome, 1895), 110-148. Quoted in: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Um Bom Homem de Tratar”: Piero Strozzi, a Florentine in Portuguese Asia, 1510 – 1522,” *The Journal of European Economic History*, Vol. 16 (3) (1987): 517.

⁵⁵ Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, 144-145. (A “real” is a Portuguese unit of currency. “Gentiles” in this context are non-Christian, non-Muslim individuals, predominantly Hindus.)

The Gusarates and Banianes are of the country of Cambaia: ...They are most subtile and expert in casting accounts, and writing, so that they do not only surpass and goe beyond all Jewes [in original Dutch: all other Indians] and other nations thereabouts, but also the Portugales: and in this respect they have no [in original Dutch: much] advantage, for [that] they are very perfect in the trade of merchandise, and very ready to deceive men.⁵⁶

The French jewelry merchant Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, travelling extensively and repeatedly in India in the mid-seventeenth century, provided another comparative observation of the mercantile skills of the native money merchants:

All the Jews who occupy themselves with money and exchange in the empire of the Grand Seigneur pass for being very sharp; but in India they would scarcely be apprentices to these Chargers.⁵⁷

These comments by Tavernier highlighted a key commercial service feature in the Indian Ocean trade, the services of highly skilled currency exchange agents and coinage validators. The non-standardized and complex system of available coinage and related exchange rate calculations necessitated the continued cooperation and collaboration with local bankers and money changers. The complexity of the currency transactions, the variety of currencies in circulation and accepted for transactions throughout the region, under varying discounts, mainly depending on the percentage of silver, or gold, and the coins' purity, condition, age and weight, was the absolute realm of the Sarrafs, the money changers, who also collaborated with the local mints and authorities. This dependency on highly specialized skills was highlighted by both van

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⁵⁶ John Huyghen Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 1 of 2)* (Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005), 252-253.

⁵⁷ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume 1)*, ed. William Crooke, trans. Valentine Ball (1925) (New Delhi/India: Asian Educational Services, 2007), 24.

Linschoten⁵⁸ and Tavernier,⁵⁹ The most commonly used currencies in trade exchanges on the West coast were Persian laris (or lari),⁶⁰ Gujarati mahmudi, Mughal⁶¹ rupees,⁶² and, after the arrival of the Iberians in the region, Portuguese cruzados and Spanish reals (pieces of eight).

Figure 6: Persian Currency Larin, 17th Century

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⁵⁸ Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 1 of 2)*, 241-244.

⁵⁹ Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume 1)*, 19-26. Also: Najaf Haider, “Standardization and Empire: A Study of the Exchange Rates of Mughal Currencies,” in *Mind over Matter: Essays on Mentalities in Medieval India*, eds. Eugenia Vanina, Eugenia and D. N. Jha (New Delhi/India: Tulika Press, 2009), 42-43.

⁶⁰ Source: [Larin international trade coin of the Arabian seaboards – counterfeit detection | Coin Talk](https://coinweek.com/world-coins/coinage-of-the-mughals/).

⁶¹ Source: <https://coinweek.com/world-coins/coinage-of-the-mughals/>.

⁶² Najaf Haider, “The Network of Monetary Exchange in the Indian Ocean Trade, 1200 – 1700,” in *Cross Currents and Community Networks: The History of the Indian Ocean World*, eds. Himanshu Prabha Ray and Edward A. Alpers (New Delhi/India: Oxford University Press, 2007), 196.

Figure 7: Mughal Currency Rupee, 16th Century

By the time the Portuguese landed in India, the Muslim traders of varied origins enjoyed an almost monopolistic control over the maritime shipping trade from or to India, but those traders conducted business with anybody involved in the trades. Arab traders had come to India before their own conversion to Islam; the combination of trade and religion, in particular the equality of Muslim believers, appealed to many Indian natives, especially the lower castes, leading to the formation of the native Muslim Mappila communities through marriage and conversions.⁶³ The long-distance trade was predominantly conducted by Pardesi, i.e., foreign

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⁶³ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 78. Also: Correa, *The Three Voyages of Vasco Da Gama and his Viceroyalty*, 155-157.

Muslims, whose operations were characterized by extensive networks and substantial trading capital. It was the Pardesi community involved in the lucrative spice trade at Calicut which vehemently opposed Da Gama's arrival and attempts to establish a trading relationship with Calicut; these actions ultimately led to Portuguese long-term hostilities with Calicut and the rise of Cochin and other cities under Portuguese tutelage.⁶⁴

The Marakkar Muslims, natives of the Coromandel coast, also known as chulias,⁶⁵ managed most of the coastal trade between Coromandel and Malabar. And, at the lowest rank in this trader hierarchy, the local native Mappila Muslim traders of Malabar were mainly involved in the peddling trade, but these traders were ambitious and were looking for commercial partners to enable them to compete with the "Mecca merchants," the Pardesis, in order to gain social and economic upward mobility. The Mappila traders saw the Portuguese as such partners.⁶⁶ The Mappila's zone of operations covered an area from the west coast of Ceylon to the Malabar coast, as well as to the Maldives and the Laccadive Islands.⁶⁷ By the 1530s, the initially amicable relationship between the Mappilas and the Portuguese became acrimonious due to the more assertive Portuguese trading demands and the Mappilas offered frequently open resistance to the

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⁶⁴ Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*, 123-124, 127.

⁶⁵ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 96. (Hindu Marakkars were also known as klings)

⁶⁶ Pius Malekandathil, "From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs: The Response of the Muslim Merchants of Malabar to the Portuguese Commercial Expansion (1498 – 1600)," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 64 (2003): 467.

⁶⁷ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Of Imârat and Tijârat: Asian Merchants and State Power in the Western Indian Ocean, 1400 – 1750," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct., 1995): 769.

Portuguese along the Malabar coast and around Ceylon.⁶⁸ Early on, around 1507, the Portuguese recognized that the real commercial powerhouse on the Indian west coast resided not in the pepper growing regions in south India, but in Gujarat in northern India.⁶⁹ Gujarati merchants, Muslim and Hindu, controlled more trade and commodities, offered more services, and had a much wider commercial reach throughout the Indian Ocean and, therefore, were considered the key obstacles to the Portuguese pepper trade monopoly plans for the whole west coast of India.

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⁶⁸ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 118.

⁶⁹ Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*, 132.

Key Trade Characteristics

India, and the Indian ports, were overall divided into five main geographic regions, starting in the northwest with Gujarat, followed by Konkan to the south of it, then Malabar, with Coromandel at the southern tip and up the east coast of India, and, finally, Bengal in the east and northeast.⁷⁰ While each region had its own resident trading community, and regionally specialized commodities and trading patterns, traders from the other regions as well as from outside of India were represented well everywhere. A key characteristic of the Indian coastline was the shortage of good ports that provided protection for ships at anchor during the monsoon season.⁷¹ The rhythm of trading in the area of the Indian Ocean under discussion was determined by the monsoon seasons: the north-eastern monsoon season lasted from about October to March and the south-western monsoon season from May/June to September (figures 8 and 9 below).⁷² Any ship coming from the east needed to reach the Indian coast when the south-western monsoon was weakening, around September, or it could not get into the Indian ports. Similarly, going west, a vessel had to leave around the early new year to be able to round the Cape before the north-eastern monsoon weakened. This limited the trading season from Gujarat to Aden to September to May and from Aden to Malabar to October to February.⁷³

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⁷⁰ Anjana Singh, “Indian Ports and European Powers,” in *The Sea in History – The Early Modern World*, eds. Christian Buchet and Gérard Le Bouëdec (Woodbridge/UK: Boydell Press, 2017), 179.

⁷¹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 12.

⁷² Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 22, 24.

⁷³ Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 7.

Figure 8: Monsoon Winds - April to August

Only with the arrival of the Dutch and the establishment of a more direct sailing route, the “Brouwer” route, not following the African and Arabian coastline, was this monsoon dependency partially neutralized, at least for their main route to and from Europe.⁷⁴ The Dutch Hendrik Brouwer discovered this new route, named after him, in 1611 by going straight east across the ocean from the Cape of Good Hope between 35 and 45 degrees south, catching the western tail winds known as the “Roaring Forties” towards what would become known as New

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⁷⁴ Maxine Berg, “Asia-Europe Trade: The Demand for Asian Goods and Long-Distance Shipping from the Indian Ocean and South China Sea,” in *The Sea in History – The Early Modern World*, eds. Christian Buchet and Gérard Le Bouëdec (Woodbridge/UK: Boydell Press, 2017), 317.

Holland (now: Australia) and, after about one thousand miles, turning north-east and sailing through the Sunda Straits to Batavia (now: Djakarta), the VOC headquarters on Java (see figure 19 for more details). This route became the official VOC route by 1617.⁷⁵

Figure 9: Monsoon Winds - December to March

An important feature of all trading cities in the Indian Ocean was a competitive commercial environment. All Asian port cities on the defined trade routes were able to prosper not due to compulsive measures by the local rulers, but by enabling the multitude of merchant communities to freely trade, under low, generally equitable, customs duties, as well as stable law

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⁷⁵ Wendy Van Duivenvoorde, "Dutch Seaman Dirk Hartog (1583-1621) and his Ship Eendracht," in *The Great Circle*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Special Issue: Dirk Hartog (2016): 9. (Hartog was the first Dutchman who landed on Australia)

and order conditions. Traders were welcomed to establish themselves in each port city, with opportunities and fair treatment. If rulers were to become abusive or exploitative, merchants could, and would, retaliate, taking their trade revenues, and customs duties, elsewhere.

Traders, attempting to establish a presence anywhere throughout the Indian Ocean, assessed the individual port, and emporium, based on the availability of several commercial and legal services which were absolutely essential for the business viability of any wholesale merchant: 1. The provision of ships' cargo required the existence of "spot" or forward markets with clear price indicators and continuity of supply. 2. Equally important was the availability of local monetary institutions and the operations of bankers, who were expected to provide credit in case of need or to exchange the proceeds of local sales for foreign bills. 3. The ability to settle accounts between dealers and the process of recovering debts; these conditions also called for either a binding consensus among merchants themselves or recourse to impartial courts of law. 4. Finally, there was the matter of a market for shipping space or, as the contemporary ship-owners called it, the freight business. An additional complexity of doing import and/or export business in India was the dizzying variety of currencies in circulation, in particular silver specie from around the region and beyond, and the widely differing weights and measures, different not only by location, but also by commodity.⁷⁶

Many merchants with consignments of high-value goods preferred to spread the risk and ship them in many different vessels rather than all of the cargo in one of their own vessels. In

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⁷⁶ This was made abundantly clear when reviewing the glossaries and appendices of the major publications used for this project, incl. Pearson, Arasaratnam, and Borschberg/Mateliëff.

case the cargo was contraband, the freight business provided a measure of safety to merchants and considerable profits to the ship-owners. In general, the supply and ownership of capital employed in the long-distance trade of the Indian Ocean were firmly in the hands of professional and often very affluent merchants.⁷⁷ The majority of the higher-value trade items, in particular spices, destined for Europe were moved by sea from locations in India over, initially, two and, later, three trade routes: 1. From India to the Red Sea (via the ports of Aden or Mocha), then via Arabia or Egypt to Alexandria or the Levant. (This route was never controlled by the Europeans) 2. From India to the Persian Gulf (via the ports of Hormuz and Muscat, under long-time European control, initially Portuguese, later English, during the early modern period), then via Persia to the Levant. 3. From India via the Cape of Good Hope across the Atlantic to key trading cities in Europe (Lisbon, Antwerp, Amsterdam, only by the Europeans, after the Portuguese proved this route's feasibility).⁷⁸ While there also existed the overland caravan routes to the Middle East, these were not practical for high volume cargo, such as pepper, and were only used as an alternative when the other routes were not fully operational or available and when those caravan routes were relatively safe and stable.

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⁷⁷ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 197-212.

⁷⁸ Pearson, ed., *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*, xxix.

The Arrival of the European Powers

European commercial expansion to Asia in the early modern period can be categorized into a pattern with four distinct stages for each country:⁷⁹

In the first stage, merchants conducted itinerant trade on the basis of equality with other merchants in the foreign locale, following the established rules of trade and conduct. This was usually done by individual traders not necessarily approved by or under the auspices of their home government, or during the initial periods of contact between European trading entities, such as the VOC in the early 1600s, and local rulers when such trading entities did not obtain a special status, i.e., granting preferential treatment, from the rulers or their local government representative.

The second stage saw the establishment of a factory, i.e., a trading post with accommodations and warehouse space, which was often fortified. This was the approach the Portuguese crown took with their first officially sanctioned fleets which arrived in India during the first decade in the 1500s, with Cochin becoming the first Portuguese factory already in 1503.

The third stage was characterized by the acquisition, or seizure, of a port, or port-city, and the construction of a fort or castle in it. European traders preferred reaching this stage as fast as possible for security reasons, but achieving this depended on not only their military might but also the good-will of the local ruler(s). The Portuguese accomplished this in Cochin in the 1510s

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⁷⁹ Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 16.

and the Dutch in Colombo when they occupied that port town, taken from the Portuguese, and did not hand it over to the King of Kandy in the late 1650s.

The fourth and final stage involved the acquisition of extensive land areas. The Dutch VOC moved very early after their arrival in Asia into the fourth stage by its territorial expansions on Java and, later on, in the 1650s, especially on Ceylon; this expansion fit into their monopolistic strategy at locations where local rulers did not adhere to the treaties of friendship and/or commerce they had signed, or had been forced to sign, with the VOC. While the Portuguese Estado never planned to acquire or actually acquired significant land holdings, as it was overall more an urban empire based on a foundation of trading posts/ports and naval power, it, as well as religious orders, such as the Jesuits, controlled limited hinterlands of their port-cities for food production or for-profit, commercial plantations.⁸⁰

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⁸⁰ Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise – The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond, 1540 – 1750*, 381-382.

Pepper and the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century

The Portuguese Crown intervened in and attempted to control the pepper trade for, to and in Europe through the provisioning of shipping (by means of the “Carreira da Índia”), the purchasing of pepper (through the “Estado da Índia”) and the selling of pepper in Europe to wholesalers (carried out through the “Casa da Índia”).⁸¹

Figure 10: Coat of Arms of the Estado da Índia

While Calicut was the main spice emporium before the arrival of the Portuguese, hostile relations between the local ruler (Zamorin), the Mappila merchants of Calicut, and the Portuguese prevented the Portuguese from using this port during the majority of the sixteenth

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⁸¹ Greg Barrett, “An Exploration of the Role of Portugal in the Economic Integration of Asia and Europe with a Focus on the Pepper Market” (paper, Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference 2012, ANU, Canberra, Australia, February 16-18, 2012): 1.

century. The Estado fostered amicable relations with Cannanore and Cochin, local competitor ports and states to Calicut,⁸² and most of the pepper for the Portuguese was loaded in Cochin and Quilon, in proximity of the growing regions in Malabar and Kanara.

Already in 1502, the Portuguese, under Da Gama, had signed commercial agreements for the purchase of pepper at Cochin, Cannanore, and Quilon; agreements that fixed rates for weight and price at, initially, two and a half cruzados per quintal, three quarters of it paid for in gold and one quarter in copper.⁸³ This set the precedent of payment in specie for any future purchase which became a tremendous strain on the Portuguese coffers and increased the need for local finance agreements later in the century. In later periods, pepper was transported to Goa, established as the dominant Portuguese administrative and trading center in 1511, before being loaded on Portuguese vessels of the “Carreira da Índia” destined for Europe. Pepper was loaded into small holds with lids that were constructed on top of wooden platforms which were installed above the ballast in the ships’ lower decks.⁸⁴

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⁸² John Keay, *The Spice Route: A History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 165.

⁸³ Donald Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume I: The Century of Discovery, Book I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 103. Also: Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415 – 1580*, 318.

⁸⁴ Greg Barrett, “An Exploration of the Role of Portugal in the Economic Integration of Asia and Europe with a Focus on the Pepper Market” (paper, Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference 2012, ANU, Canberra, Australia, February 16-18, 2012): 6.

Figure 11: Plan of Portuguese Goa, ca. 1650 (Merian)

Monopoly and Markets

In the first half century after their arrival, the Portuguese disrupted the relatively stable equilibrium in the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese economic strategy was dictated by a clear fiscal necessity; the Portuguese empire, characterized by limited resources, was only capable of sustaining itself through the proceeds and profits from its trading activities and trade taxation.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 21.

As such, the officially sanctioned Portuguese operations in support of their monopolistic ambitions followed along four distinct trajectories of engagement: 1. The trade from western India to Portugal in Portuguese ships, initially crown-owned and, subsequently, privately owned but under license of or contract with the Crown. 2. Intra-Asian voyages to specific locations, also, initially in royal ships and, later, under a Crown license by private entities. 3. Private, Portuguese intra-Asian trade; this became a significant portion of the overall Portuguese trade in the region, by officials, clerics, and private merchants, even if a high percentage of it was conducted illegally. 4. Trading activities by indigenous merchants, utilizing their own vessels, but operating with Portuguese cartazes, or safe-conduct passes.⁸⁶ In order to accomplish these goals and to enforce its monopoly strategy and trade restrictions, the Estado, at its peak, operated, at significant expense, a string of fifty forts and other fortifications and maintained a fleet of about one hundred vessels across the Indian Ocean.⁸⁷ However, unlike the VOC in the 1600s, Portugal did never consider a monopolistic control of the complete supply chain from production in Asia to sale in Europe; it was not part of the economic model which the Portuguese Crown had implemented starting with its earliest overseas explorations in the Atlantic and along the African coast before extending it into Asia. (In all practicality, Portugal did not have the financial and manpower resources to even consider such an approach before its different, agriculture and farming based colonization strategy in Brazil.)

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⁸⁶ Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 35-37.

⁸⁷ Sushil Chaudhury, *Trade, Politics and Society: The Indian Milieu in the Early Modern Era* (London/UK: Routledge, 2016), 7.

The Portuguese Estado da Índia, started at the beginning of the 1500s, operated under a royal charter that, in 1505, decreed a Crown monopoly for select commodities, including the finer spices (nutmeg, mace, and cloves), and, in particular, an emphasis on controlling the pepper trade to Europe.⁸⁸ The Portuguese Crown had a long history of being involved in commercial policies and project and making money through crown-controlled monopolies or granting royal charters to noblemen or merchants. Prices were fixed in both India (purchase) and Lisbon (sale): Pepper cost three ducats per hundredweight in India and sold for twenty-two ducats in Lisbon (a ratio of 3 to 22). A similar mark-up was recorded in London in 1503, where one kilogram (2.2046 lbs.) of pepper was sold for the equivalent of twenty-one grams of silver, compared to a purchase price in Malabar of less than one gram of silver per kilogram, a cost/price ratio of <1 to 21.⁸⁹ The equivalent ratios for the fine spices were for cinnamon 0.75 to 19, cloves 7.5 to 60-65, and nutmeg 4 to 300. These significant differences between purchase and sale prices were, for the most part, a consequence of limited supplies, in part due to monopolistic strategies, or procurement challenges, partially attributable to the long and dangerous transportation routes.

The royal monopoly charter also included the suppression of both the traditional Muslim trader-controlled spice trade routes and Muslim traders engaged in them through the Middle East. Additionally, the Estado was instructed to control all other maritime navigation by local merchants in the parts of the Indian Ocean claimed as Portuguese domain; this was based on the

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⁸⁸ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 71.

⁸⁹ Greg Barrett, "An Exploration of the Role of Portugal in the Economic Integration of Asia and Europe with a Focus on the Pepper Market" (paper, Asia-Pacific Economic and Business History Conference 2012, ANU, Canberra, Australia, February 16-18, 2012): 8.

principle that a “successful trading empire must control the routes and the ports of call that define it.”⁹⁰ Monopoly control was implemented through the creation of fortresses and naval patrols at strategic trade choke points as well as taxation (“monopoly rent”) through a system of custom houses, to collect import duties, and the introduction of a fee-based safe-conduct pass (cartaz) system. While the fees for cartazes were minimal, substantial revenue was raised by the Estado through the customs duties for imports and exports in their ports; the rates of duty differed from port to port and ranged from three and a half percent of the value to eight percent, which was higher than the merchants were used to pay to local rulers.⁹¹ Cartazes as a vehicle for monopoly control were first issued in 1502 and were very specific as to destination, the kind of merchandise to be excluded from any cargo, types of persons allowed to be carried, and ports to be visited. They were usually valid for one voyage or one year.⁹² Enforcing the cartaz system was expensive; it is estimated that as early as 1512, over fifty Portuguese vessels were already involved in it.⁹³

The foreign Muslim Pardesi traders (“Mouros da Meca”) moving pepper from the Malabar coast to the Middle East were especially targeted by the Estado as the Portuguese initially did not attack the native Muslim Mappilas.⁹⁴ The Muslim merchants’ pepper fleets from

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⁹⁰ Tracy, ed., *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, 49.

⁹¹ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415 – 1580*, 321.

⁹² Nazer Aziz Anjum, “Indian Shipping and Security on the Seas in the Days of the Mughal Empire,” *Studies in People’s History*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2015): 160. Also: Barrett, “An Exploration of the Role of Portugal,” 5.

⁹³ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 268.

⁹⁴ Geneviève Bouchon, “A Microcosm: Calicut in the Sixteenth Century.” In *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea*, eds. Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (New Delhi/India: Oxford University Press, 2000), 46.

Calicut,⁹⁵ Kollam, and Cannanore were systematically searched out and attacked by the Portuguese naval patrols, both in the navigational lanes off the Malabar coast as well as at the entrance to the Red Sea where the Portuguese had not been able to establish a port-based choke point to control the flow of trade and, therefore, had to rely on naval patrols.⁹⁶

Figure 12: Plan of Calicut and other cities, 1572 (Braun & Hogenberg)

⁹⁵ City map of Calicut, 1572, by Braun and Hogenberg, published in their town atlas *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*.

⁹⁶ Om Prakash, "The Impact of the Indian Local Fleets in the Development of Trade in the Indian Ocean," in *The Sea in History – The Early Modern World*, eds. Christian Buchet and Gérard Le Bouëdec (Woodbridge/UK: Boydell Press, 2017), 93.

The Estado also realized very soon after being established the importance of Gujarat for their success. The Gujarati merchants were dominant, or at least very influential, throughout the whole Indian Ocean trading region and key market places were located in Gujarat. In order to control the spice trade, cooperation with or control of the Gujarati merchants' traffic, by means of naval patrols of the Gulf of Cambay and monitoring the ports of Surat, Cambay, Gogha, and Broach, in addition to enforcing the cartaz system, was essential.

Figure 13: Portuguese Seaborne Empire, ca. 1580

The serious intentions of the Portuguese were made abundantly clear during demonstrations of military might several times between 1529 and 1548 which convinced the Gujarati merchants to collaborate with the Estado and pay the Portuguese duties and fees as

those expenses were seen as a minor nuisance, not a serious trading obstacle.⁹⁷ One estimate asserted that Gujarati merchants represented up to forty-five (!) percent of the Estado's total revenue in the late sixteenth century.⁹⁸

It is worth noting, however, that the Portuguese, not in control of the pepper production areas, had to rely on intermediaries and paid for the pepper they acquired preferably from Nestorian Christian traders, in Malabar and from any trader in Kanara and even paid custom duties to the local rajas of the territories the pepper came from. These payments were in addition to providing gifts, perquisites and pensions to various princes and officials in those pepper-producing and exporting regions of southern India to ensure smooth relationships.⁹⁹ Additionally, because of the limited availability of bullion to the Portuguese Crown, the Estado did not have sufficient funding to pay for the necessary and routine in India investments and contracts for future product deliveries. The operations in the Indies had to be self-supporting which brought the intent of a royal spice monopoly into conflict with the need to generate funds through customs duties, fees and intra-Asian trade transactions.¹⁰⁰ The need to sell last year's crops first forced the Estado to rely heavily on partnerships with local merchants and financiers in Asia for credit-based funding and survival.¹⁰¹

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⁹⁷ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 133-134.

⁹⁸ Diffie and Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415 – 1580*, 322.

⁹⁹ A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire: Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 36-45. Also: Bethencourt and Durto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400 – 1800*, 90.

¹⁰⁰ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (Volume 1)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 546.

¹⁰¹ Bethencourt and Durto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400 – 1800*, 10. Also: Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 66.

Impact

Even at the peak of Portuguese power in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the monopoly was not very solid; only about sixty percent of the known trade with restricted items was estimated to flow through the official Crown channels.¹⁰² Additionally, whereas, in 1515, the Estado was purchasing about thirty percent of the pepper production of Malabar, by 1600, its share had been reduced to about three to four percent, due to increased competition and dramatically expanded production.¹⁰³ The volume of contraband and smuggled products, through a variety of actors, is unknown, although estimates exist for the amount of spices reaching Europe again in the middle of the sixteenth century through the traditional Middle Eastern routes and by the traditional merchant communities outside of Portuguese control: By the 1560s, it surpassed the volume prior to the Portuguese arrival.¹⁰⁴ (Disney, as the lone dissenter, claimed that these assessments underreported the actual Portuguese trade volume and that they provided at least seventy-five percent of the pepper sold in Europe during most of the sixteenth century.)¹⁰⁵ By the 1560s, the Portuguese Crown was able to buy Malabar pepper at less than ten cruzados per quintal, including freight, interest, insurance and wastage, and offer it above the

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¹⁰² Cátia Antunes, “Free Agents and Formal Institutions in the Portuguese Empire: Towards a Framework of Analysis,” *Portuguese Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2012): 182.

¹⁰³ Barrett, “An Exploration of the Role of Portugal,” 7. Also: During the 16th century, Malabar pepper production grew at about 7 or 8 percent each year, in essence doubling every 10 years. (Source: Ronald Findlay and Kevin O’Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 200), 157.

¹⁰⁴ Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (Volume I)*, 550-551. Also: Frederic C. Lane, “The Mediterranean Spice Trade: Further Evidence of its Revival in the Sixteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Apr., 1940): 581.

¹⁰⁵ Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*, 151-152.

minimum, Crown-stipulated selling price of thirty-two cruzados in the European market, often above thirty-four cruzados.

It is easy to understand the importance of the pepper trade to and the desire for a spice trade monopoly for the notoriously cash-strapped Portuguese Crown when considering the impressive profit margins and overall trade volume in the trade with spices.¹⁰⁶ By around 1515, the spice trade provided the Portuguese Crown with a profit of one million cruzados, which was double the value of the trade in gold and silver.¹⁰⁷ In 1506, the proceeds of the sale of Asian spices overall, the majority of which was for pepper, represented about one quarter of Portugal's Crown's annual income; by 1518/19, it had grown to almost forty percent.¹⁰⁸

To provide an overall perspective, at a peak around 1600, the value of the merchandise from Asia, mainly spices, arriving in Portugal amounted to about five million cruzados; by comparison, the Venetian trade in the Levant reached about three million cruzados, and the value of Spain's silver fleets from the New World was estimated at between seven and ten million cruzados.¹⁰⁹ As early as 1622, the Portuguese were estimated to supply only twenty percent of the European pepper market, a market which grew to about seven million pounds per year during the seventeenth century,¹¹⁰ with the majority of the pepper trade, however, falling into the hands of the Dutch and English.¹¹¹ The Portuguese were able to minimize some and elevate other ports

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¹⁰⁶ Steensgaard, *Carracks, Caravans and Companies*, 97-98.

¹⁰⁷ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 128.

¹⁰⁸ Barrett, "An Exploration of the Role of Portugal," 9.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁰ Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 147. (by comparison, the four "fine spices" did not exceed one million pounds of annual consumption)

¹¹¹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 239.

in India based on their enforcement strategy, their abilities to take advantage of regional rivalries, and by working closely with established merchant communities who considered collaborating with them as financially and politically beneficial.

Figure 14: Map: Monsoon Trade in the Portuguese Era, ca. 1550

Of course, when the Portuguese power declined, such ports and merchant communities were also negatively impacted and suffered in comparison to the rulers, ports, and merchants which had aligned themselves with either the Dutch or the English.

Overall, the greatest impediment to fully implementing an effective system of monopoly control was the lack of adequate resources to maintain the naval patrols, enforce the cartaz system and collect the customs duty payments. This situation was made worse by the conflicting primary objectives between the Crown in Portugal (profits from a spice monopoly) and the local Estado administration (generate revenue and profits to sustain the underfunded operations in Asia), combined with strong incentives to generate private profits to the detriment of the Estado and Crown.¹¹²

Competitors

Portugal's commercial competitors were classified into three categories:

The first category included political and commercial actors which were in conflict with the primary Portuguese strategic objective of eliminating Muslim trade in spices to the Middle East. These included Gujarati and India-based Pardesi merchants as well as the Ottoman empire and its merchants which asserted their presence especially in the Red Sea and the wider Arabian Sea.

The second category included merchants, and affiliated rulers, targeted by the second Portuguese strategy to control the spice trade through the cartaz system. Key competitors in this group included the ruler (Zamorin) and merchants (Mappilas) of Calicut on the Malabar coast, and the Sultan and merchants of Gujarat.

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¹¹² Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 141.

The third category covered actors which violated the Crown's monopoly in other ways. This included rogue Portuguese traders, settled in territories outside the Estado's control and reach, and the Sultan of Aceh who provided an alternative source for pepper from Sumatra with his own vessels servicing the Middle East. Aceh was one of the few regional states able to successfully compete with the Portuguese in naval power.¹¹³

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, more serious competitors, this time from northern Europe, appeared on the scene: The English and, initially, especially the Dutch who arrived with their own, more aggressive monopolistic ambitions for the spice trade.

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¹¹³ James D. Tracy, "Dutch and English trade to the East: the Indian Ocean and the Levant, to 1700," in *The Construction of a Global World, 1400 – 1800 CE (Volume 6), Part 2: Patterns of Change*, eds. Jerry H. Bentley, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Cambridge/UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 256.

Cinnamon and the Dutch in the Seventeenth Century

The Dutch East India Company (VOC), a private, joint-stock company formed in 1602, operated under a government charter with broad authorities for all operations and transactions east of the Cape of Good Hope in Africa. Driven by purely commercial profit maximization the VOC focused on controlling the production and sale (through treaties, contracts, territorial occupation, etc.) of the finer spices, including cinnamon, as well as pepper. The Dutch, once they had succeeded in implementing many elements of their monopolistic plan, manipulated the annual European spice supply; they also became strongly involved in the intra-Asian trade and restricted the native merchants' participation in trading activities for exclusively Dutch-controlled commodities on select intra-Asian trade routes.

Figure 15: First Flag of the VOC

The Dutch had collaborated with the Portuguese in many aspects of the spice trade in the 1500s prior to openly competing with them in the following century. Spanish-controlled Antwerp was the trade center used by the Portuguese to sell their spices from Asia in Europe and many Dutch had worked for the Portuguese Crown and other Portuguese institutions and gained

valuable insights. Of particular importance was Jan (in English: John) Huygen van Linschoten, a Dutch Catholic who had sailed to Goa as an employee of the Trading House of Fugger¹¹⁴ and then worked for six years for the archbishop and the archdiocese in Goa and who published his “how-to” manual “Itinerario” in Holland in 1595, three years after he had returned from Asia.

Figure 16: Map of the Arabian Sea, ca. 1595 (Van Linschoten)

¹¹⁴ Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic, Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477 – 1806* (Oxford/UK: Clarendon Press), 319-320.

The “Itinerario” provided detailed, previously secret information about Portuguese trade routes to the Indies as well as specific insights into Portuguese settlements, commerce and trade, including pricing, in the region.¹¹⁵

After Portugal entered the political union with Spain in 1580 and the United Provinces (the future Dutch Republic) started their fight for independence from Spain in 1581, the Spanish king, Philip II (1527 – 1598), blocked Dutch access to Portuguese ports as punishment.¹¹⁶ The Dutch took advantage of the situation and decided to compete in this lucrative business directly. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) was successful in displacing the Portuguese as the dominant power in the Indian Ocean within a few decades, in part due to its better-funded structure and clear commercial charter, having incorporated the lessons learned from the Portuguese experience in Asia, and in part also due to a ruthless application of military power, whenever deemed necessary. As a consequence of the Dutch success, the spice emporium in Europe transitioned from Antwerp to Amsterdam during the last two decades of the sixteenth century and Amsterdam became also the leading financial and commercial city on the North Sea.¹¹⁷

The first Dutch vessels, outfitted by individual regional, pre-VOC, Dutch trading companies, arrived in the region in the late 1590s and tried to take advantage of an overstretched and weakened Portuguese empire; however, they also competed against each other which

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¹¹⁵ Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 1 of 2)*. Also: Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 2 of 2)*. Also: Keay, *The Spice Route: A History*, 223.

¹¹⁶ M. O. Koshy, “The Dutch Conquest of Kerala – Compulsion and Considerations,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 57 (1996): 239.

¹¹⁷ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 81.

The VOC charter provided for several state granted privileges. First and foremost was the privilege of a territorial trade monopoly stated as

no person regardless of constitution or capacity save those of the aforementioned Company as constituted within these United Provinces shall be permitted to sail east of the Cape of Good Hope or beyond the Straits of Magellan for the next twenty-one years.... Infringement thereof shall be punishable by confiscation of ships and goods.... Officials of the aforementioned Company shall be permitted to enter into commitments and draw up contracts with the rulers .... in the name of the State General of the United Netherlands.¹¹⁹

Additionally, the VOC was given sovereign powers within the territory it was granted a monopoly for as well as receiving a commitment that its assets could not be expropriated through government taxation or conscription.

Having learned from the Portuguese experience, in particular that it was very expensive to control the movement of spices, compared to controlling the production locations,¹²⁰ the better capitalized, exclusively commerce-and profit-focused VOC took over most of the Portuguese dominated entrepôt locations and aggressively sought to gain control over the spice production sites in order to eliminate European and indigenous competitors. What initially started out as a trading empire extended within a forty-year period to also become a territory-holding colonial empire, initially in the Moluccas and Banda Islands, later also in Java, Tainan (also known as Formosa, now Taiwan), and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), among other places.

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¹¹⁹ Ron Harris, *Going the Distance: Eurasian Trade and the Rise of the Business Corporation, 1400 – 1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 280-281.

¹²⁰ Keay, *The Spice Route: A History*, 233.

Figure 18: The Dutch Empire in Asia at its Peak, ca. 1688

Additionally, the VOC aggressively entered the intra-region (three-way) trade as a means to finance their commodity purchases for export to Europe and to minimize the need for bullion and specie for such purchases, especially silver, which was always in short supply with any of the European trading entities in Asia.¹²¹ As the trade in India was characterized by a trade surplus for the Indian merchants and states, they sold more to the Europeans than they bought. Bullion and specie were required for the transactions and bullion from Europe averaged about two-thirds of the exports to Asia which, in the seventeenth century, was mainly Spanish silver from Peru.¹²² By the middle of the seventeenth century, the VOC in Asia had grown to about ten

¹²¹ Antunes and Polónia, eds., *Beyond Empires*, 190-191.

¹²² Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 151.

thousand in personnel, including many Danish, Norwegian, and Northern German sailors,¹²³ and approximately one hundred and sixty vessels.

The VOC was operating, on average, five Asia fleets each year: three outbound to Asia: one in April/May, one in September, and one in December/January, and two return fleets: one in January/February, and the other in November/December.¹²⁴ In the last decade of the 1600s, the VOC employed almost twenty-two thousand employees, including about eight-thousand five hundred sailors, at its locations in Asia as well as on the Europe-Asia fleets and intra-Asian trading vessels. The number of VOC ships sailing from Europe to Asia reached two hundred and thirty-five in the decade of the 1690s, with more than one hundred forty vessels making the return voyage to Europe the prior decade.¹²⁵

Monopoly and Markets

The VOC, similar to its English counterpart, the EIC (English East India Company), participated in an international economic system which considered the application of monopoly control of resources and the use of military force, both on land and at sea, as indispensable.¹²⁶ Trade and competition were seen as a “zero-sum game.” The VOC implemented their monopolistic strategies very early, starting with Pieter Both, its first Governor-General appointed

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¹²³ Israel, *The Dutch Republic, Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477 – 1806*, 623.

¹²⁴ Edmund Reimers, trans. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens, Governor of Ceylon, Delivered to his Successors Jacob Hustaart on December 26, 1663, and Ryckloff Van Goens the Younger on April, 12, 1675* (Colombo/Sri Lanka: Ceylon Government Press, 1932), vii.

¹²⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic, Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477 – 1806*, 942-943.

¹²⁶ K. N. Chaudhuri, “The World-System East of Longitude 20°: The European Role in Asia 1500 – 1750,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1981): 238.

in 1610, in recognition of the potential for maximizing profits and controlling supply as well as the need to cover their increasing infrastructure and military expenses in the region.¹²⁷ Since its beginning, the VOC focused on gaining control over most of the entrepôts for the spice trade and taking over the production territory for spices directly, by force, or by coercing local rulers into preferential, mostly monopolistic, contracts with them, enforced by the threat and occasional use of force, as was the case with the cinnamon trade in Ceylon. The VOC was more successful in controlling the spice trade due to their stronger naval presence in the region and especially the control of production areas, either directly or through vigorously enforced preferential trade treaties.

The use of violence, even against European competitors the Dutch were not in a declared state of war with, was in integral part of the VOC's strategy, starting as early as the second decade of the seventeenth century. According to Subrahmanyam, "the barriers of entry by which these partial or complete monopolies were operated, once created, were backed by live ammunition."¹²⁸ In addition, the Dutch continued with a system of cartazes, but shifted its focus from collecting customs duties to eliminating non-European competitors from desired ports and shipping routes in the region.¹²⁹

However, the VOC was not capable of dictating the terms and conditions for their commercial operations everywhere. In Gujarat, which had become part of the Mughal Empire by

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¹²⁷ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 88.

¹²⁸ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 282.

¹²⁹ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 268.

the time the Dutch arrived, the VOC required a farman, a royal decree, from the emperor before they could establish trading posts/factories in the region. This was granted in 1618, after several years of petitioning and negotiating.¹³⁰

Figure 19: Map of Dutch Trade in the 17th Century: VOC Routes in the East Indies

¹³⁰ Jawaid Akhtar, "Gujarati Merchants and the VOC: Conflict and Collaboration in South-East Asia During the Seventeenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 56 (1995): 413.

In Ceylon, the VOC signed in 1638 a military and commercial treaty with the King of Kandy, Rajasingha II (1608 – 1687), committing to military assistance in ejecting the Portuguese from the island in exchange for exclusivity in the trade for cinnamon.¹³¹ In 1656, after an almost twenty-year long struggle, the VOC and the Kandyans successfully ejected the Portuguese from Ceylon. However, the Dutch reneged on the treaty and did not return Portuguese-occupied territory, including the key port-city of Colombo, to the Kandyan king, claiming the need to recoup their overly inflated military expenses first, which the king was never expected to be able to repay.¹³²

The Dutch began to slowly control the cinnamon trade of the island through their, frequently acrimonious, relationship with the principal producer kingdom of Kandy and, ultimately, after a horrific war in the mid-eighteenth century, total control of the island's coastline and ports. Controlling the coastline was seen as necessary in suppressing privateering and smuggling as well as forcing the Kandyan king into submission and full political and commercial dependence on the VOC. In order to control the total market in cinnamon, the Dutch allocated five sixths of their cinnamon inventory to Europe and only one sixth to the Asian market to prevent other Europeans from purchasing “Dutch” cinnamon in India for competing resale in Europe and to generate cash needed for the Dutch intra-Asian trades. In 1670, under

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¹³¹ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, II-107. The Dutch version of the treaty, supposedly missing a key clause in favor of the Kandyans, is published in: Baldæus, *A True and Exact Description of the Most Celebrated East-India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel, as also of the Isle of Ceylon*, 713-714.

¹³² C. R. Boxer, “War and Trade in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, 1600 – 1650,” *The Great Circle*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (October 1979): 14. Also: Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 5.

Governor van Goens, a “monopoly hawk”, the Dutch implemented a monopoly on all the major Ceylonese import and export commodities, including cinnamon. This action was taken in response to the increasing popularity of Indian traders with the native population which reduced the overall trade volume the Dutch were attempting to control, which was seen as necessary to cover the increased operational expenses of their operations in Ceylon, beyond the cinnamon trade. This policy had a devastating effect on the population.¹³³

Impact

The VOC implemented and operated under a three-pronged monopoly strategy: 1. A monopoly of the transport between the Dutch Republic and Asia (this was outlined in their foundational charter). 2. A monopoly of all Dutch intra-Asian trade (also part of its original charter). 3. Targeted monopolies in the spice trade, initially from the Moluccas and, later, also from Ceylon, based the conquest of key production areas and treaties negotiated with, or forced upon, local rulers.¹³⁴ The more comprehensive and capitalistic approach of the VOC to the control of all aspects of the spice trades, from production, to purchase, shipment, and, ultimately, distribution and wholesale trade, had a more significant and longer lasting impact on the existing trade and networks. This was the case especially for the finer spices (cloves, nutmeg, mace and, later, cinnamon) since the VOC relied much less on the traditional trade infrastructure in the

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¹³³ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, XII-109. Also: Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 162-164.

¹³⁴ Arthur Weststeijn, “The VOC as a Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion,” *Itinerario*, Vol. 38, Issue 1 (2014):15.

region. By controlling the production sites of the finer spices and becoming the exclusive buyer of the spices through treaties with the local rulers (implementing a monopsony, i.e., a monopolistic buying arrangement as the sole purchaser), and through the take-over of the key entrepôt sites where non-Dutch spice trading still took place, the VOC was much more effective in enforcing their trade controls and was therefore able to charge significantly elevated prices in Europe as the monopoly seller.

The VOC, however, was not successful in replicating their approach for the trade in pepper. Even in the cinnamon trade, leakage and private trading did occur and a slightly inferior but acceptable substitute product, cassia lignea, grown in South India, limited the VOC's monopolistic capabilities¹³⁵ until the Dutch, in the early 1660s, started to expel the Portuguese from the Malabar coast, culminating in the conquest of Cochin in 1663. Following the VOC "recipe book", they also signed exclusive trade agreements with the local rulers on the southern India coast, limiting access to wild cinnamon and giving the Dutch the rights to also patrol those coastal waters for compliance.¹³⁶ These treaties and patrol activities, however, did not eliminate the diversion of spice shipments overland by native rulers and merchants. The VOC, nevertheless, was able to charge significantly higher prices for cinnamon for a period in Europe, in effect, more than tripling it after they started to control its harvest and export, as most of the leakage in the cinnamon trade was not destined for Europe. In the 1660s, analyzing both prices

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¹³⁵ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 235.

¹³⁶ Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 190.

and quantities, the VOC had been able to quadruple the value of their cinnamon trade within one decade.¹³⁷

It is worth noting that even early on, starting in the 1610s, VOC-internal discussions occurred regarding trade privatization and questioning the need for a monopoly. Key VOC officials, such as Admiral Matelieff De Jonge,¹³⁸ the commander of the second VOC fleet to Asia, and J. P. Coens, the fourth (and also sixth) Governor-General of the VOC, advocated for the legalization of private trading especially for some of the intra-Asian transactions, primarily for private Dutch merchants and burghers as an incentive to settle in Asia.¹³⁹

Additionally, during the last quarter of the seventeenth into the early eighteenth century, after periods of friction and even war between the VOC and the Kandyans and low or no profits for the Dutch, the Supreme Dutch government in Batavia issued several decrees to restore parts of the Kandyan's sovereignty and trading privileges to improve relations and increase trade overall. While the Kandyans had demonstrated their destructive powers and, in the process, exhausted their resources, the Dutch came to the realization that, according to Arasaratnam, "the fruits of monopoly could not be enjoyed without peace in the land and the co-operation of the Kandyans."¹⁴⁰ However, the local Dutch government in Ceylon overall opposed loosening such restrictions and, ultimately, the VOC directors in Amsterdam, mainly for geo-political

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¹³⁷ 1657: 228,000 lbs. – 1667: 1,362,000 lbs. See: Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1584 – 1740* (Oxford/UK: Clarendon Press, 1989), 252.

¹³⁸ Peter Borschberg, ed., *Journal, Memorials and Letter of Cornelis Matelieff De Jonge: Security, Diplomacy and Commerce in 17th-century Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 201), 137.

¹³⁹ Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia, eds., *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500 – 1800* (Leiden/NL: Koninklijke Brill, 2016), 200.

¹⁴⁰ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, III-118.

considerations (a fear of letting other European powers gain a foothold in Ceylon if the Kandyan could trade autonomously at some of their ports), and fixated on a rigidly monopolistic trading structure in order to maximize profits, overruled Batavia's instructions on several occasions, keeping the distrust and animosities alive.¹⁴¹ Several officials also began to question the effectiveness of the monopolistic system altogether, arguing for a higher trade volume, and higher profits overall, if monopolies were abolished. Those efforts remained unsuccessful until the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁴² Changes were only implemented after an increase in European competition, especially by the English, starting in the 1660s; competition which led the VOC to become unprofitable by the 1730s.¹⁴³

Ultimately, the high expenditures in managing the occupied territories in Ceylon, especially the expenses for the military force and fortifications, contributed significantly to the offsetting of the high profit margins on the Dutch cinnamon trade.¹⁴⁴ These expenses were seen as necessary in order to be prepared for the periodic outbreak of warfare with the kingdom of Kandy as well as act as a deterrent against other European nations, in particular the English and French, encroaching on this highly strategic location controlling the sailing routes between the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Bengal and providing safe ports during monsoon periods. The high

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¹⁴¹ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, III-121-122.

¹⁴² S. Arasaratnam, "Monopoly and Free Trade in Dutch-Asian Commercial Policy: Debate and Controversy within the VOC," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Mar., 1973): 6-9.

¹⁴³ Stoyan V. Sgourev and Wim van Lent, "Balancing Permission and Prohibition: Private Trade and Adaptation at the VOC," *Social Forces*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (March 2015): 936.

¹⁴⁴ In 1685, the Dutch garrison in Ceylon (about 1,700) was the second highest in the region after Batavia/Java, augmented by an additional force of 400 nearby in Malabar. See: Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1584 – 1740*, 335.

profit margins were principally due to the fact that, once the VOC had significant territorial control over most of the coastal areas as well as access to the non-Kandyan owned cinnamon forests, it allowed them to procure cinnamon almost free of charges. They applied an annual, and changing, quota for cinnamon to be collected by the caste of cinnamon peelers, a prorated quota (one hundred percent quota for able-bodied adult men, and lower quotas for younger and older workers) for any male over the age of twelve years, instead of a poll tax, provided only for provisions and necessities during harvests, and paid a minimum additional cash incentive of about three and a half guilders per bahar (480 lbs.) for yields above the quota.¹⁴⁵

The VOC also experimented to find the best shipping method for transporting cinnamon on the ocean; they settled on rolling the peel into quills, well dried and packed in leather, as this not only saved freight and lading costs, but also increased the selling price in Europe.¹⁴⁶ By the late 1600s, a Dutch pound (494 grams) of cinnamon was sold in Amsterdam for at least three guilders, going up to six guilders when availability was limited (for comparison, a master carpenter in the Dutch Republic earned about twenty-five guilders per month and regular craftsmen and artisans in the employ of the VOC in Asia earned about twelve to sixteen guilders per month).¹⁴⁷ The selling price in Asia was fixed at two and a half guilders per pound, intentionally making it too expensive for other European traders to buy and resell profitably in

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¹⁴⁵ Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 186. (According to the author, the cinnamon peeling quota under the Dutch was 3-4 times higher than under the Portuguese.) Also: Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, XV-229.

¹⁴⁶ Reimers, trans. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens*, 29-30.

¹⁴⁷ Anne Goldgar, *Tulipmania: Money, Honor, and Knowledge In the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 225. <https://hdl-handle-net.jp11net.sfsu.edu/2027/heb.07818.EPUB>. Also: Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600 – 1800*, 338.

Europe.¹⁴⁸ By contrast, at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, the purchase price of cinnamon in Ceylon was the equivalent of one cruzado, or about 2.5 Dutch Guilders,¹⁴⁹ for three quintals and thirty arrates (between 370 lbs. and 420 lbs.), according to Pires.¹⁵⁰

Competitors

In his strategic memorials regarding the organization of the VOC in the Indies, Admiral Matelieff, in the early 1600s identified three types of opponents: Firstly, the Portuguese and Spanish, resulting in armed conflict; secondly, the English and French who took advantage of the Dutch fight with the Iberians and conducted their business in peace and at little cost, and, (only) thirdly,

Indians, who thanks to our protection feel liberated from the Portuguese and [with] two kinds of merchants (Dutch and English?) on their market, look for the biggest profit without acknowledging that we are the ones who liberated them. They go after the best price for their goods, as is the nature of such wild tribes. As long as this is not remedied, the expenses will fall on us and the benefits to them.¹⁵¹

While Matelieff ostensibly addressed strategic concerns in South East Asia, his comments ultimately also applied to India and Ceylon. It is worth noting that profit maximization by native

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¹⁴⁸ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, XV-229.

¹⁴⁹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 377. (One Portuguese cruzado was the equivalent to a Spanish piastre or “piece of eight,” or 2.5 Dutch Florins/Guilders)

¹⁵⁰ Tomé Pires and Francisco Rodrigues, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires, An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512 – 1515*, 86.

¹⁵¹ Peter Borschberg, ed., *Journal, Memorials and Letter of Cornelis Matelieff De Jonge: Security, Diplomacy and Commerce in 17th-century Southeast Asia* (Singapore: NUS Press, 201), 255.

local merchants was condemned as unthankful whereas profit and revenue maximization was the strategy, and righteous prerogative, of the VOC.¹⁵²

In Ceylon, the main competitors in the cinnamon trade were the King of Kandy and his court's strong relationships with traders and rulers especially in Travancore and Malabar in South India. Selling cinnamon, a royal asset, mostly to Arab traders who resided in or sailed to Colombo and other ports, such as Kalpitiya, from Madura and the Tanjore coast was one of the few options for the king to generate cash income or to use for barter (other options included selling areca nuts, Ceylon's main export item, elephants, and precious stones, in addition to collecting trade/customs tolls). Also, Chetty merchants from southern India had close links with the royal family of Kandy and were exporters of the kingdom's produce as well as suppliers of imports to its ruling elite.¹⁵³ Most of Ceylon's port cities had a vibrant community of both Muslim and Hindu traders from all around southern India, trading profitably both through importing and exporting, with Hindu traders also having settled and opened businesses inland.

According to Governor Van Goens, it was in the District of Negombo, and in particular in the Seven Corles (or Corales, north/northwest of Colombo) "where the best cinnamon on the face of the globe grows, and in very great abundance."¹⁵⁴

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¹⁵² Douglas A. Irwin, "Mercantilism as Strategic Trade Policy: The Anglo-Dutch Rivalry for the East India Trade," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 99, No. 6 (Dec., 1991): 1308.

¹⁵³ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, XV-227.

¹⁵⁴ Edmund Reimers, trans. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens, Governor of Ceylon, Delivered to his Successors Jacob Hustaart on December 26, 1663, and Ryckloff Van Goens the Younger on April, 12, 1675* (Colombo/Sri Lanka: Ceylon Government Press, 1932), 8.

Figure 20: Map of Ceylon in the 17th and 18th Century

While the Dutch over time increased the pressure on the king to honor the exclusive contract on cinnamon with them, they also tightened the controls in the waters around Ceylon. As long as they did not control the whole coastline of Ceylon, which only happened after a devastating war in the mid-eighteenth century, the bi-directional, short-distance trade, and smuggling, between Ceylon and South India, especially Madura, flourished.

The VOC also increased the taxation and the restrictions on the residency requirements, professions and movement of especially the Muslim merchants to limit their involvement in trades seen as profitable to and reserved for the VOC or Dutch burghers who resided in Dutch occupied territory.¹⁵⁵ These policies were explained by van Goens as follows:

Our experience shows in how great a degree the Moors in the Island are in every respect a source of daily hindrance to us, being verily no other than a canker in the Honourable Company's profits, and the chief perverters of the morals both of our own people and the natives. They are also the people who, outside the Island, most betray our interests and place the greatest obstacles in our way. ... but all those whose profession is to trade, scour the country, sail overseas with their goods, etc.: all these are in the highest degree harmful to us ...¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, the governing council in Ceylon issued a resolution to regulate the burghers and trade guilds, instituting preferential treatment for free burghers and Christian natives who practiced the religion; additionally, it was decreed that no Moorish vessel could undertake any voyages [from Ceylon] unless Netherlander burghers participated.¹⁵⁷

These policies severely limited the options the King of Kandy had for trade and barter, as well as which ports were still available for commercial contacts with India-based traders. Around 1670, two thirds of the Dutch exports from Ceylon came from Kandyan lands and went through

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¹⁵⁵ P. E. Pieris, *Ceylon and the Hollanders, 1658 – 1796* (Colombo/Sri Lanka: The Colombo Apothecaries' Co., Ltd., 1930), 4. Also: Edmund Reimers, trans., *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens, Governor of Ceylon, Delivered to his Successors Jacob Hustaart on December 26, 1663, and Ryckloff Van Goens the Younger on April, 12, 1675* (Colombo/Sri Lanka: Ceylon Government Press, 1932), 17.

¹⁵⁶ Edmund Reimers, trans. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens, Governor of Ceylon, Delivered to his Successors Jacob Hustaart on December 26, 1663, and Ryckloff Van Goens the Younger on April, 12, 1675* (Colombo/Sri Lanka: Ceylon Government Press, 1932), 35.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51, 54.

former Kandyan ports.¹⁵⁸ As was the case with the Portuguese Estado, individual trading and smuggling in concert with local/indigenous traders became issues within the VOC despite a more centralized management approach of the organization. The VOC, as the Portuguese Estado before, had to come to the realization that enforcing their monopolistic ambitions was not only more difficult than anticipated but also more expensive as expected, especially against many well-established and well-connected native trading communities which had honed their commercial and political skills over centuries. The reactions to the European policies and plans were as varied as the number of communities and the diversity of this vast region.

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¹⁵⁸ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, III-116.

Local Reaction to European Policies

The local traders' reaction to the monopolistic ambitions of both Western organizations ranged from cooperation with "just another foreign community of traders" and acceptance of the imposed trade restrictions and expense items on one side, and, on the opposite side, to manipulation and evasion, sabotage, and even open armed resistance. The intentions and perceptions of the "Franks," or "Ferangis"¹⁵⁹ as all Europeans, but mainly the Portuguese, were initially called, were made clear in contemporary Persian and Arab chronicles; they were seen "as a violent lot, who are also given to devious acts and chicanery in order to advance their interests," according to Subrahmanyam.¹⁶⁰ The responses by the different trading communities and regions varied based on commercial and political needs and pressures and the intensity of the monopoly enforcement mechanisms at any given time. While there were numerous attempts of especially Muslim rulers and traders on the western Indian coast to resist the Portuguese incursion and controls, many of these attempts failed. This was either due to the Estado's naval strength, and indiscriminate military violence, or the resistance of the Asian merchants to subject themselves to long-term disruptions of their business.¹⁶¹ For many merchants, business

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¹⁵⁹ Neelima Joshi, "Sea Piracy during the Mughal Period (1556-1707): Major Players, Disposition and Motives," *National Maritime Foundation of India*, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://maritimeindia.org/sea-piracy-during-the-mughal-period-1556-1707-major-players-disposition-and-motives/>.

¹⁶⁰ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Taking stock of the Franks: South Asian views of Europeans and Europe, 1500 – 1800," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (2005): 73, referencing Al-Malībārī, *Tohfut-Ul-Mujahideen, an Historical Work in the Arabic Language*, 103-110.

¹⁶¹ K. N. Chaudhuri, "The World-System East of Longitude 20°: The European Role in Asia 1500 – 1750," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall, 1981): 235.

predictability at slightly higher costs and accompanied by some inconvenience was an acceptable trade-off.

Additionally, the spice trade to Europe represented only a minor portion of the overall spice trade, accounting for, at most, twenty-five percent of the total transcontinental and intra-Asian trade volume; this meant that the impact on the established trading communities was often only marginal and easily compensated for by trading at different locations or with different commodities. The more effective trade restrictions imposed by the VOC led, in the seventeenth century, to a reduction in the native India to South East Asia trade, but also to an increase in the India to the Middle East trade.¹⁶² It is worth noting that, in many instances, Portuguese and Dutch officials and other European individuals affiliated with these trade regimes violated their organizations' policies themselves, often in collusion with native traders and local government officials, for mutual private profits. Overall, while the Europeans were able to act differently at sea, their impact on land was more restricted; until the beginning of the eighteenth century, they were much more dependent on their capabilities to access and connect to the established country-internal commercial networks, just like any other foreign merchant community before them.¹⁶³

An additional macro-economic factor to consider when assessing the impact of and reaction to the "disruption" in the trading networks caused by the appearance of the European powers was the fact that, overall, the trade volume expanded by the increased demand for export

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¹⁶² Sushil Chaudhury, *Trade, Politics and Society: The Indian Milieu in the Early Modern Era* (London/UK: Routledge, 2016), 24-26.

¹⁶³ David Washbrook, "Merchants, Markets, and Commerce in Early Modern South India," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 53, No. 1/2 (2010): 276.

products in Europe and the growth in intra-Asian trade.¹⁶⁴ This was in part driven by the flow of Spanish-American silver into Asia¹⁶⁵ and the limited appeal of European products in India, leading to a trade deficit for the Europeans which had to be compensated for by the use of bullion and specie for their purchases. This more than offset the negative aspects of the mercantile, “zero-sum game” approaches of the Estado and, in particular, the VOC. According to Das Gupta, the trade in the Indian Ocean continued to be predominantly controlled by Indian ship-owning merchants, with the occasional interruptions caused by the actions of the Europeans in the region.

Several operational factors seemed to have helped to ensure the vitality and survival of Indian shipping: 1. The Europeans charged higher freight rates for use of their ships. 2. Many Indian merchants preferred to conduct business with members of their own business community, because of their familiarity with customs and a common language, thus reducing the potential for risks. 3. Indian freighters, or shippers, preferred to divide their cargo across several vessels to mitigate the risk for potential accidents and acts of piracy.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, other survival strategies were available to native merchants: 1. Catering (more) to the needs of the regional economies and local rulers. 2. Expanding their trading world through linking themselves with different, mainly international trade networks. 3. Emphasizing common religious beliefs to

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¹⁶⁴ Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*, 44.

¹⁶⁵ It is estimated that one third of the silver production in the Americas reached Asia during the 1600s and 1700s. See: Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 231.

¹⁶⁶ Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*, 67.

cement relationships and strengthen their networks.¹⁶⁷ These survival strategies could be applied independently of their existing or desired relationships with the European traders.

Cooperation

Many local trading communities, both local Muslim and especially non-Muslim traders, collaborated with the Portuguese and the Dutch for a variety of reasons. These reasons included the opportunity to generate additional commercial profits, the benefits of allying with a new political and military power, the desire to advance over their local competition and ascend the local political and social ladder, and the development of new revenue streams as suppliers and service providers, both for imports and exports, favored by the new European powers in the region. They introduced the Europeans to supply sources, acted as transactional brokers and sub-contractors, and became business partners by offering freight, insurance, or financial/credit services, among others. Other indigenous merchants and brokers, including Baniyas who were more focused on India-interior commerce, assisted in buying and distributing European imports in India.

While the native Muslim Mappila merchants of the Malabar coast saw the Portuguese as potential commercial partners to compete against especially the foreign Muslim Pardesi merchants, Gujarati merchants were recorded to be using space on, and even buying, European ships and hiring European crews, mainly captains and navigators, for safety reasons, and European traders put their cargo on Indian ships, mostly, but not exclusively, for their private

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¹⁶⁷ Malekandathil, “Winds of Change and Links of Continuity,” 269.

commerce and in support of mutual business interests.¹⁶⁸ One example was the hiring of Gujarati merchants and their ships by the VOC to transport to and sell Dutch goods as Gujarati goods in Manila after the Spanish/Dutch peace treaty of 1648 prohibited Dutch vessels from entering any Spanish port.¹⁶⁹

The Portuguese in Goa were heavily dependent on the financial and local market capabilities of the Saraswat Hindu or Jain merchants as well as Gujarati non-Muslim Banyan merchants as their brokers and agents throughout the region, especially for their private business transactions. In general, when such native merchants presented complaints to the Portuguese administration, they were listened to and actions were taken.¹⁷⁰ Both the Portuguese and Dutch traders relied on local traders for access to credit to compensate for a chronic shortage of funds, as well as the services of such local traders to assist in the sale of European imports and the purchase of export good for Europe and elsewhere in a timely manner in consideration of the required sailing schedules.¹⁷¹ Additionally, several Hindu Banyan merchant families in Surat served as brokers for the VOC for decades, sometimes for multiple generations. For example, Mohandas Naan, a leading Bania merchant and shipowner at Surat, served as the broker for the VOC for many years in the first half of the seventeenth century. Even longer, the Kishanda

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¹⁶⁸ Ruby Maloni, "Experience and Environment: The Dutch in 17th Century Gujarat," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 67 (2006-2007): 84-85, 89.

¹⁶⁹ Jawaid Akhtar, "Gujarati Merchants and the VOC: Conflict and Collaboration in South-East Asia During the Seventeenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 56 (1995): 416.

¹⁷⁰ M. N. Pearson, "Wealth and Power: Indian Groups in the Portuguese Indian Economy," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1973): 40-42.

¹⁷¹ Nadri, "The English and Dutch East India Companies and Indian Merchants in Surat," 141.

family were the VOC's principal brokers in Surat for almost one hundred and fifty years, owning ships and managing their own international trading enterprise, until the VOC was dissolved in 1795, indicating a mutually profitable, trusted, and interdependent business relationship.¹⁷² This longevity is especially astounding as the business networks were predominantly structured around family and the fact that both Muslim and Hindu inheritance laws in Gujarat were based on a division of property and wealth at succession, only to be overcome by the institution of joint family/joint ownership enterprises.¹⁷³

However, this cooperation was based on need and expediency on the European side and was often terminated when it was no longer needed after the Portuguese or Dutch developed their own capabilities, with the exception regarding the access to local loans and financing. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both the Portuguese and Dutch trading organizations suffered from a chronic shortage of bullion and specie for their investment needs in Asia and had to continuously rely on local credit financing options, most often from native merchants and bankers.¹⁷⁴ This situation was exacerbated by the monsoon winds which dictated the sailing arrival and departure schedule. The Portuguese ships of the *Carreira* left Lisbon every

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¹⁷² Ghulam A. Nadri, "The English and Dutch East India Companies and Indian Merchants in Surat in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Interdependence, Competition and Contestation," in *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia*, eds. Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (Amsterdam/NL: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 137. Also: Ghulam A. Nadri, "The Maritime Merchants of Surat: A Long-Term Perspective," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007): 241-243.

¹⁷³ Nadri, "The Maritime Merchants of Surat," 250-252.

¹⁷⁴ Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient* 316. Also: Maloni, "Experience and Environment," 77-78.

year in March, spent about three months in Asia, usually from September/October to about December/January, for a total roundtrip voyage time of sixteen to eighteen months.¹⁷⁵ In the case of the VOC, usually two fleets sailed from Europe to India, one around Christmas and one around Easter.¹⁷⁶ The return voyages had to reach the North Sea by the end of summer, at the latest by September, before encountering the autumn gales and before the date of the auctions of Asian goods in the Dutch Republic.¹⁷⁷ This necessitated, in essence, that purchase contracts by European traders exporting pepper to Europe had to be signed, and payments made, up to twelve or even eighteen months in advance of the annual harvest.¹⁷⁸

Additionally, as mentioned before, due to the non-standardized and complex system of available coinage, the validation and valuation of such coinage, and the related exchange rate calculations, the European traders had to rely on the continued cooperation and collaboration with local bankers and money changers. This area of service specialization was the absolute realm of the Sarrafs, the money changers, who also collaborated with the local mints, which periodically melted old and used coins and minted new coins in the currency and format of the then current ruler, and the government authorities, which were highly interested in obtaining the imported specie and bullions as India was deficient in local mining sources for precious metals.

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¹⁷⁵ Barrett, "An Exploration of the Role of Portugal," 6. Also: Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*, 157.

¹⁷⁶ According to the memoirs of Governor van Goens, there may be have up to three annual fleets leaving the Dutch Republic, but it is not clear whether it was a regular event. See: Edmund Reimers, trans. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens*, vii.

¹⁷⁷ Berg, "Asia-Europe Trade: The Demand for Asian Goods and Long-Distance Shipping," 317.

¹⁷⁸ Vitorino Magalhães-Godinho, *L'Économie de L'Empire Portugais Aux XV^e Et XVI^e Siècles* (Paris/France : S. E. V. P. E. N., 1969), 647. Also: Blair B. Kling, and M. N. Pearson, eds., *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia Before Dominion* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 28.

Compared to Europe, the exchange ratio between gold and silver was also different, but in favor of European traders who were able to bring silver bullion or coins from Europe and receive more gold in Asia.¹⁷⁹ This dependence on local financing and insurance services, through a sophisticated and extensive network for providing mercantile credits, bills of exchange, insurance for both ships and cargo, and transferring money, of the so called “portfolio capitalists,”¹⁸⁰ was one of the most effective and long-lasting leverage techniques local money merchants (Sarrafis) and commodity brokers applied with the European traders who very much resented their dependence on them and were suspicious of being taken advantage of.¹⁸¹

Both the Estado and the VOC had to collaborate, for pragmatic reasons, with and depended on native traders; the Estado never had the resources in manpower (fewer than ten thousand European and Eurasian soldiers and sailors) and ships (never more than one hundred) to control and administer this vast region.¹⁸² The VOC’s reasons were primarily the large scale and wide range of their commercial enterprise, relying on the major production or exchange center in the interior of India for the intra-Asian trade, which could not be accessed without the services of native merchants, bankers and brokers.¹⁸³ Reciprocally, Muslim traders in the

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¹⁷⁹ According to Furber, the gold/silver exchange rate was about 1:15 in Europe; in Asia it was never higher than 1:9 or 1:12 (see: Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*, 232).

¹⁸⁰ A term defined by Sanjay Subrahmanyam. See: Bethencourt and Durto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400 – 1800*, 89. Also: Haider, “The Network of Monetary Exchange,” 199.

¹⁸¹ Tracy, ed., *The Rise of Merchant Empires*, 392-395. Also: Maloni, “Experience and Environment,” 78-79.

¹⁸² Pearson, “Wealth and Power,” 44.

¹⁸³ Nadri, “The English and Dutch East India Companies and Indian Merchants in Surat,” 128-129.

sixteenth century also frequently preferred having profitable commercial relationships with the Portuguese compared to unpredictable and more perilous confrontations.¹⁸⁴

As only a minority of traders and trading communities were able to benefit from collaborating actively with the Portuguese and Dutch, and often only for short periods of time, attempts to circumvent and resist the restrictive commercial system became more prominent.

Resistance

The resistance to the Portuguese and Dutch monopolies took many forms, from a manipulation of the new system, evasion of its conditions, and undermining it through sabotage to indirect and direct armed resistance. These actions reflected the long-term experience and capabilities of the local trading communities to adapt to unforeseen events and demonstrated an inherent flexibility in reacting to adversity. This flexibility was also based on the presence of a widely distributed network of related traders and a high degree of operational mobility and access to resources in a fairly sophisticated, even complex, business environment. The role and impact of the local political structure varied from a laissez-faire attitude regarding maritime trade to open support of the anti-European initiatives by the native merchants.

The focus of this section of the thesis is on the actions of resistance, regardless whether it was perpetrated against the Portuguese or Dutch. Each category of anti-European/anti-monopoly actions included several distinct activities the application of which depended on a variety of factors which included the perceived strength of the European power targeted, in particular its

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¹⁸⁴ Prange, “‘Measuring by the Bushel’,” 229.

monopoly enforcement capabilities, the resources and solidarity of the trading community contemplating those actions, the level of disruption to the traditional business, the available political support, as well as the capabilities to execute such actions of resistance.

Manipulation

Manipulating the imposed new system of monopoly could take the form of a) taking advantage of loop holes and disagreements, or local variations, in the implementation and interpretation of the monopoly strategy, b) leveraging any available local patronage and political power conditions, or c) “criminal” activities.

Local traders took advantage of loop holes and disagreements, or local variations, in the implementation and interpretation of the monopoly strategy. Examples here include “playing” the Portuguese Estado’s needs for local tax revenues, needed for operational self-sufficiency, against the Crown’s policies of monopoly enforcement for the financial benefit of the Crown back home, or partnering with legally operating Portuguese *casados*, usually ex-military, now private and married settlers, most often locally married and residing within the Portuguese controlled areas,¹⁸⁵ to claim the lower tax rate accorded to *casados* for native trade goods.¹⁸⁶

Leveraging any available patronage and political power conditions took the form of taking advantage of the protection and patronage of local rulers the Portuguese, and Dutch,

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¹⁸⁵ Bethencourt and Durto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400 – 1800*, 101. Also: Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 374.

¹⁸⁶ Pius Malekandathil, “Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study of the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of their Trade, 1000 – 1800,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 50, No. 2/3, Spatial and Temporal Continuities of Merchant Networks in South Asia and the Indian Ocean (2007): 276.

needed to maintain amicable relationships with, such as the Mughal ruler, or getting concessions based on the Europeans' dependence on the local traders' financial, supply, and language capabilities. In some instances, political power stipulated how the Europeans had to transact business. For example, European traders could not do business in any city in the Mughal empire without a local broker accredited at the local court.¹⁸⁷ A southern Indian example of patronage was the protective arrangement between the king of Cochin, a Portuguese ally, and the Jewish trading community, which included expelled Castilian Jews, in exchange for a share of the commercial profits.¹⁸⁸ The native merchants were often able to maintain a competitive advantage by being thriftier and able to operate with lower profit margins, by having a better understanding of the local market places where they bought and sold, and being able to work out "little arrangements" at the local customs houses and courts which were not available to foreigners.¹⁸⁹ Another example, providing merchants even more leverage, was the port city of Cannanore, the main possession of the Arakkal kingdom under the leadership of the Ali Rajas. This royal family, by marriage linked to the Rajas of Kolathiri, had its origins as Mappila Muslim traders and its leader was known as the "Merchant Prince." This principality, considered a "House by the Sea," was fully dependent on trading and shipping and owned many vessels.¹⁹⁰ Due to their proximity to the pepper growing regions, they were intimately involved in the pepper trade. Their trading

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¹⁸⁷ Maloni, "Experience and Environment," 91.

¹⁸⁸ Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity," 273.

¹⁸⁹ Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*, 80.

¹⁹⁰ V. D. Anish, "Antiquity of Legends Through the Eyes of Arakkal Royal Family in Cannanore," *International Journal of Management and Social Science Research Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 46 (April 2018): 59.

income, in combination with their shipping capacities, control over the Laccadive Islands, and especially the political/state power in this merchant-state, ruled by a merchant-prince, gave them a special status in the region and created a different set of dynamics vis à vis the European trading entities which, while encroaching on their trade domain, could not control them.

The Portuguese attempted to persuade, without success, the local rulers in the pepper growing areas of Malabar and Kanara, especially the Rajas of Vadakkumkur and Tekkumkur, to agree to have pepper delivered to the Portuguese factories on the coast. As a consequence, throughout the sixteenth century, the Estado continued to be dependent on local merchants and their routes to market and was also not able to control the pepper cultivators.¹⁹¹

The political dynamics between the Portuguese and Dutch on one side and the native rulers and states on the other depended in part also on the commercial and military might of the local rulers and their potential to confiscate Portuguese and Dutch properties, or even arrest and imprison Estado or VOC staff; this dynamic was more pronounced in northern India, especially with the Mughal Empire.¹⁹²

When Gujarat became part of the Mughal Empire under Emperor Akbar (1542 - 1605) in 1573, the commercial dynamics in Gujarat shifted. The merchants could now put their high-value merchandise on the imperial vessel to the Red Sea which operated under a free Portuguese

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¹⁹¹ Jan Kieniewicz, "Asian Merchants and European Expansion: Malabar Pepper Trade Routes in the Indian Ocean World-System in the Sixteenth Century," in *Asian Trade Routes (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Studies on Asian Topics No 13)*, ed. Karl Reinhold Haellquist (London/UK: Curzon Press, 1991), 81.

¹⁹² Anjum, "Indian Shipping and Security on the Seas," 167.

cartaz as the Portuguese realized the power of the Mughals and took a political bargain, sacrificing customs duties for mutually beneficial relations.¹⁹³

Figure 21: Map of the Mughal Empire, 1654 (N. Sanson)

Similarly, Pyrard de Laval wrote about other local rulers in India at peace with the Estado who also received free cartazes from the Portuguese authorities, or were authorized to sail without one, and who moved pepper and other spices to Arabia.¹⁹⁴ The integration and political stability also opened up safe overland routes to Persia and the Middle East and secured more

¹⁹³ Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*, 275.

¹⁹⁴ Albert Gray, trans./ed., *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil (Vol. 2, Part 1)*, 206-207.

reliable sea-borne access to the Red Sea.¹⁹⁵ The power of the Mughal Empire was also made clear to the European trading companies, Dutch, English, and French, by the fact that the Mughal authorities held them accountable for acts of piracy by European pirates; they were made to either recapture the loot themselves or repay its value, under the threat of fines, confiscation of merchandise, and even imprisonment of company officials.¹⁹⁶

Overall, none of the European trading communities could control the Mughal-controlled province of Gujarat and they had to adapt to the existing commercial structures. The local administrations were very frequently collaborating with the local, native trading communities and saw the foreign traders as a valuable source for customs/tax revenue and for the import of bullion. Additionally, the competition amongst the European trading communities made each of them less influential and more prone to being played against each other.¹⁹⁷ One of the most astute native traders in leveraging the European powers against each other was Mir Muhammad Sayyid Ardestani, a wealthy Persian trader and ship owner who operated in the late 1630s to the late 1650s out of Masulipatnam in the Bay of Bengal. In order to maintain his lucrative business to the Middle East and Pegu, he not only utilized his formidable political connections at the Golconda court, but also “wheedled, threatened, and blackmailed the Dutch,” played the Portuguese card when needed, and even was not about using physical force against local Dutch

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¹⁹⁵ Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1584 – 1740*, 179.

¹⁹⁶ Maloni, “Experience and Environment: The Dutch in 17th Century Gujarat,” 282.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 82, 86. Also: Nadri, “The English and Dutch East India Companies and Indian Merchants in Surat,” 129.

employees. Perfecting his approach through experimentation Muhammad Sayyid successfully protected his trading business and a fleet of ten ocean-going vessels.¹⁹⁸

Other strategies included taking advantage of the needs of the European merchants for three-way intra-regional trade merchandise, such as the need to purchase textiles in Gujarat for sale in the Indonesian archipelago, the proceeds of which would be used to purchase spices in India and Ceylon.¹⁹⁹ If there was friction in one part of, for example, the Gujarati trading network, traders in this network could leverage its strength at a different location.²⁰⁰ When, for example, the Gujarati merchants lost access to Malacca and the archipelago after the conquest of Malacca by the Dutch and the signing of monopolistic treaties with local rulers, a group of merchants stormed and plundered the VOC factory at Surat.²⁰¹ Related to this situation was the Dutch concern about reciprocal reactions in Indian states by merchants and rulers against their factories if they restricted the native merchants' access to trade in Ceylon, or elsewhere.²⁰² This category of resistance also included continued sales/exports by local rulers, despite these transactions violating existing contracts and treaties.

Neither the Estado nor the VOC were successful in getting access to or controlling the Red Sea shipping routes or sea ports, especially Aden, due to the strong resistance of the merchants of Surat and the reluctance of political rulers in and around the Red Sea to allow non-

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¹⁹⁸ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 217.

¹⁹⁹ Jawaid Akhtar, "Gujarati Merchants and the VOC: Conflict and Collaboration in South-East Asia During the Seventeenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 56 (1995): 413.

²⁰⁰ Ashin Das Gupta, "Indian Merchants and the Western Indian Ocean: The Early Seventeenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1985): 494.

²⁰¹ Maloni, "Experience and Environment," 283.

²⁰² Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 160.

Muslim ships to come that close to Jedda and Mecca, their holy sites.²⁰³ Due to the limited patrolling capabilities of the VOC and especially the Estado, this kept a major trade route relatively open for the native traders. Additionally, both European nations were sensitive to not aggravate the major patrons, in particular the Mughal Emperor, of the traditional pilgrims' and key mercantile traffic route from Surat to Mecca.²⁰⁴

Examples of, in the eyes of the Estado or VOC, "criminal" activities included payments (bribery) to and collusion with local Portuguese and Dutch officials and individuals, especially in remote locations, at a distance from regular institutional oversight. The fear of legal private trading mutating into financial corruption permeated many policies and was, with justification, a major concern for both organizations (VOC and Estado da Índia), explaining the consistent and long-time policy, ultimately ineffective, of restricting private trade.

Payments to local VOC and Estado officials, as well as collusion with them, were the dominant anti-monopoly activities apart from native smuggling. The compensation of the Portuguese officials was low; higher level positions of the Estado, such as captaincies controlling port cities, were auctioned to the highest bidder, and Portuguese officials arriving in Asia fully expected to make significant, additional profits through private activities during their average three year tenure in a position to compensate for the initial expenses.²⁰⁵ While a certain level of private enrichment was accepted and tolerated by the authorities, operating in the grey zone of

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²⁰³ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 92.

²⁰⁴ Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume I)*, 27.

²⁰⁵ Steensgaard described it as "one of the purest examples in history of constitutionally determined corruption." See: Niels Steensgaard, *Carracks, Caravans and Companies*, 93.

Also: Kling and Pearson, eds., *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia Before Dominion*, 19.

“too much” enrichment caused discomfort for the top leaders and administrators, especially when such activities encroached on the perceived monopolies and entitlements of the institutions (Estado/Crown, as well as VOC). In addition, Portuguese officials, once the cartaz fees and import/export duties were paid, often turned a blind eye to the pepper trade with the Bay of Bengal and the Coromandel coast as it was not ostensibly intended for the Middle East or Europe.²⁰⁶

Competition and a weakening of the crown’s monopoly also occurred from within the Estado at large, with many officials, and members of religious orders, especially the Jesuits,²⁰⁷ taking advantage of long communication delays between Asia and Europe (up to two years for a return vessel), the financial dependency on in-country and intra-region trades, based on a network of factories (trading stations), allowing for private trading, and the privileges to ship their personal merchandise back to Europe through “liberty chests” and other means. According to records, virtually all officials, and clerics, traded on their own behalf²⁰⁸ and it was estimated that up to one quarter of the Portuguese ships’ holds were reserved for private trade.²⁰⁹ Pyrard de Laval commented on the prevalence of private trading even by regular soldiers:

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²⁰⁶ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 108.

²⁰⁷ Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise – The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond, 1540 – 1750*, 529.

²⁰⁸ Bethencourt and Durto, eds., *Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400 – 1800*, 101.

²⁰⁹ An estimate by Magalhães-Godinho, referenced in: Charles H. H. Wake, “The Changing Pattern of Europe’s Pepper and Spice Imports, ca. 1400 – 1700,” *Journal of European Economic History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Fall, 1979): 379.

Most of the soldiers even, such as have the wherewithal, omit not the trade on their own account, while making voyages in the king's service. This is permitted to them, nay it is even necessary on account of the scantiness of their booty and pay.²¹⁰

While the compensation of VOC employees, wages and rations, was supposed to be sufficient to mitigate the desire to supplement income through unauthorized means, this was also not the case for the majority of its employees.²¹¹ Even higher-ranking officials were not disinclined to partake in illegal, private trading opportunities, as mentioned by Tavernier who assisted in it himself.²¹² In particular at remote posts the combination of authority and power vested in Dutch officials and the many temptations to take advantage of the available commercial opportunities, such as smuggling or even managing their own, local monopolistic enterprise, became too great to ignore.²¹³

Evasion

Evading the conditions of the monopoly system was another coping mechanism and included a) geographic evasion, b) cartaz or tax evasion, or c) evasive collusion between different trading communities, including European members and officials.

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²¹⁰ Albert Gray, trans./ed., *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil (Vol. 2, Part 1)*, 118.

²¹¹ Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600 – 1800*, 225. Also: Earl J. Hamilton, “The Role of Monopoly in the Overseas Expansion and Colonial Trade of Europe Before 1800,” *The American Economic Review*, Vol 38, No 2 (May, 1948): 45.

²¹² Tavernier stated he assisted in the illegal, private diamond trade with VOC officials. See: Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume 1)*, 248.

²¹³ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, XII-118, XII-125.

The concept of a safe-conduct pass, or cartaz, a word of Arabic origin, existed in Asia as a more localized revenue-generating tool for rulers at port cities or restricted shipping lanes since at least the twelfth century. The Portuguese expanded its concept and application to accommodate multiple control purposes over a wider geographic area: 1. Strategic, enforcing a spice embargo to the Middle East and Europe. 2. Political, excluding enemies of the Estado from trading. 3. Fiscal, protecting royal monopolies and implementing forcible taxation. 4. Social, restricting the activities of private Portuguese merchants and providing a disincentive for Portuguese soldiers to becoming traders. Unfortunately, extortion, speculation and piracy were created as by-products of this system.²¹⁴

A primary form of evasion was the relocation of traders as well as whole trading communities to locations outside the control of the Estado or the VOC and to reengage in their traditional business activities from there. Examples here include the relocation of the Kunjali Marakkars from Portuguese controlled Cochin to Calicut or the move of Muslim traders from Dutch controlled Colombo to then still independent or Kandyan controlled ports on the east coast of Ceylon. A parallel strategy was to limit the dependency on specific production locations by expanding the pepper and spice production in other regions which were less impacted by the European trading entities and outside their reach. While some of these projects occurred decades before the arrival of the European powers, the expansion of pepper growing regions north of Malabar and in the Indonesian archipelago accelerated as a response to monopolistic pressures.

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²¹⁴ Ruby Maloni, "Control of the Seas: The Historical Exegesis of the Portuguese "Cartaz"," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 72, Part-1 (2011): 480.

This approach was not as successful with cinnamon during the covered period as the best and most desired, and therefore, highest priced cinnamon continued to be cinnamon from Ceylon. A related tactic was to stop trading completely with the regions under Dutch control. For example, when the VOC attempted to exclude all Muslim traders from the lucrative business on Ceylon, such traders completely stopped coming to the island, depriving the island of the crucial imports of every-day merchandise and putting the VOC into an awkward position, having to provide some of those products themselves, at additional expenses, or potentially causing social unrest in the native population.²¹⁵ These actions demonstrated also how flexible the native trading communities were.

Other forms of geographic evasion included smuggling and privateering activities, often using smaller, more nimble river vessels that could better evade in particular Portuguese naval patrols by moving up-river, or selecting alternate trade routes, such as moving commodities, on transport oxen or ox carts, through the Ghat mountain range to the east coast of India. From there, commodities were further trans-shipped to the originally intended final destinations around the Arabian Sea, or moved by sail from the east coast to the Red Sea via the Maldives outside the shipping lanes controlled by European ships.²¹⁶

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²¹⁵ Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 159.

²¹⁶ Malekandathil, “Winds of Change and Links of Continuity,” 277.

Figure 22: Map of South India in the Early 17th Century

For example, in the second decade of the sixteenth century, it was estimated that about forty percent of the Malabar pepper production was obtained by the Portuguese; nineteen percent was transported over the mountains on the ghat routes to the Coromandel Coast, and twenty-five percent was traded in other Asian markets, including to Hormuz and Red Sea ports. The rest, about sixteen percent, was consumed in India.²¹⁷

Prange referenced the well-used overland route through the Ghat mountains from Calicut to the east coast ports of Nagapattinam and Masulipatnam, or the Gulf of Bengal in general. In addition, there was a caravan route going north to supply the Deccani sultanates and the empire of Vijayanagar (called Narsinga in European sources).²¹⁸ In the early 1600s, Barbosa wrote about the inland city of Bijanaguer (Vijayanagar) in the kingdom of Narsinga where pepper was consumed in great quantities, brought there from Malabar by oxen and asses.²¹⁹

Evasive schemes also included the sending of merchandise to ports not controlled by the Europeans, or timing the sailing schedule before the anticipated arrival of the European patrol vessels, a tactic frequently used by Gujarati Muslim merchants.²²⁰

Additionally, collaboration between different trading communities increased in order to avoid the Portuguese controls; a frequent example was the use of Gujarati ports for pepper

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²¹⁷ Pius Malekandathil, *The Mughals, the Portuguese and the Indian Ocean: Changing Imaginaries of maritime India* (New Delhi/India: Primus, 2014), 93.

²¹⁸ Prange, “‘Measuring by the Bushel’,” 231.

²¹⁹ Barbosa, *A Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century*, 86.

²²⁰ Pearson, ed., *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*, 202.

shipments brought there by Malabari merchants as well as the supplying of pepper to Gujarati vessels on the Bengali coast.²²¹

Figure 23: Southern India: Physical Features and Ports

²²¹ Prange, “‘Measuring by the Bushel’,” 233. Also: Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 98.

Tavernier stated that, during the Portuguese occupation of Hormuz, merchants were not allowed to travel to India from there by sea and were forced to take the caravan route via Kandahar.²²² Van Linschoten, in his description of Malabar and its pepper, highlighted the permeability of the Portuguese policies:

And although it be expresslie forbidden by the Portingales, & great care taken, and for the same cause coast and sea[s along the shore] are watched, [that it not be shipper or sent out without their licence,] yet is there great quantities carried forth, and some times with the Salvo-conducto, or passport from the Portingals [themselves.]²²³

The particular conditions of Ceylon, a very long coastline with many ports and coves allowing for clandestine landing, combined with its proximity to south India, with interconnected merchant communities on both sides, facilitated smuggling activities with and by many trading communities, both Hindu and Muslim, from a variety of southern Indian states. There was evidence of cinnamon being peeled in the west, under the king's orders, and then moved to the east of the island for shipment to India.²²⁴ This was especially the case before the Dutch took control of the whole coast and intensified naval patrolling.²²⁵ While wild cinnamon which commonly grew in select areas in South India, such as in the forests of Konkan and Travancore, was considered inferior to the cinnamon from Ceylon, but it became an acceptable substitute for the merchants of Cochin when the Dutch raised their prices for Ceylonese cinnamon for sale in India. The Cochin merchants transported it to Gombroon in the Persian Gulf and sold it there to

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²²² Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume I)*, 155.

²²³ Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 2 of 2)*, 73.

²²⁴ Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 – 1687*, 183.

²²⁵ Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, XII-113-114.

merchants who supplied the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the Black Sea/Caucasus regions.²²⁶ When the Dutch became aware of this substitution, they attempted to suppress it by destroying the sources of this “bastard cinnamon,”²²⁷ similar to the tactics the VOC applied in the Moluccas.

The forms of evading taxes or cartazes included the smuggling of contraband in the vessels of prominent merchants or local rulers, taking advantage of their relationship or status with the European powers, including potentially (mis-) using their blanket cartazes (known as the “free cartaz” ploy) which were given out for political reasons to select rulers. One example was the issuance of one annual Portuguese cartaz for the Mughal Emperor Akbar’s personal ship to the Red Sea, for trade and pilgrimage to Mecca. The Gujarati merchants took this opportunity to load their most valuable items onto this ship, bypassing Portuguese customs duties at least on the return voyage from Jiddah.²²⁸

Other means included the avoidance of Portuguese customs houses and ports, not getting a cartaz for select voyages, or frequenting ports managed by local rulers offering lower customs rates under agreements with the European powers. Not getting a cartaz, or deviating from the original intent of the issued cartaz, became more frequent already starting in the 1520s, with the first wave of decentralization of the Portuguese power structure due to the insecurity of its financial situation and a divergence between the objectives of the local versus Lisbon-based

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²²⁶ Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume 1)*, 187.

²²⁷ Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume 2)*, 14.

²²⁸ M. N. Pearson, “Portuguese India and the Mughals,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 59 (1998): 413.

authorities. By the 1530s, even ports on the Kanara coast, centered around the port city of Bhatkal, a key port for the export of Kanara pepper, saw many voyages violating the cartaz policy.²²⁹ Overall, financial impact of the “cartaz plus customs duty” system, on average a five percent fee, was experienced as a minor irritant by the Indian merchants, but contributed, in select ports such as Diu, the majority of the Estado’s revenue. However, its implementation by the Dutch to restrict select commodities and specific routes triggered some structural changes for a limited number of merchants involved in such commodities or routes, usually for a limited time.²³⁰

Evasive collusion covered incidents of intentional collaboration with other competing European merchants and vessels in conflict with the monopoly holding nation by either shipping contraband on their vessels or relying on naval protection by such vessels. Additionally, native merchants collaborated with Portuguese *casados* who, by having married local Muslim wives, had access to the native trading networks and offered their capabilities and privileges to them, leading to illegal private deals. Considering the compensation and reputation of the Portuguese military non-navy personnel and the opportunities to make money outside the Estado it was not surprising that many Portuguese officers and soldiers, as early as the second decade of the sixteenth century, deserted their public service and attempted to make a living as traders or mercenaries outside the confines of the Estado. This happened very frequently in collaboration

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²²⁹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500 – 1650*, 127-128.

²³⁰ Prakash, “The Impact of the Indian Local Fleets,” 93-94. Also: Om Prakash, “The Indian Maritime Merchant, 1500 – 1800,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 47, No. 3, *Between the Flux and Facts of Indian History: Papers in Honor of Dirk Kolff* (2004): 453.

with native traders and rulers, often in actions directly against the Estado's decrees.²³¹

Collaborating with competing merchants from other ethnic groups, or with complementary resources, in support against a "common enemy" was another evasive action.

Sabotage

Getting to the more confrontational, but still non-military responses to monopolies, these included a) access restrictions to production areas or transportation restrictions in native controlled areas, b) product embargoes, such as not selling anything to the targeted European traders, c) delaying access to supplies, potentially forcing the targeted traders to miss the sailing windows, and d) cheating on weights, or substituting and mixing in inferior grade products.

Many of those tactics were frequently used by the Kandyans against the Dutch as they could not compete successfully militarily. Cutting off communication with and access to Kandy not only limited Dutch access to many of the commodities they depended on for export revenue but also restricted the access to foodstuff needed by the population in the Dutch controlled lowlands in Ceylon. This put pressure on the Dutch to make concessions.²³² At the beginning of their confrontational relationship, when the VOC was not relinquishing control over Colombo after the joint defeat of the Portuguese, the Kandyan king resorted to depopulating the native residents from the districts of Colombo, Caliture, and Negombo, the location of the best

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²³¹ Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, "Portuguese Control over the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal: A Comparative Study," in *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500 – 1800*, eds. Om Prakash and Denys Lombard (New Delhi, India: Ajay Kumar Jain for Manohar Publishers, 1999), 138-139.

²³² Arasaratnam, *Ceylon and the Dutch, 1600 – 1800*, III-116.

cinnamon, and moved them into the Kandyan-controlled territory.²³³ The most commonly used tactics of resistance were the refusal of granting access permits to Kandyan lands both for harvesting cinnamon and transporting elephants,²³⁴ instructing the cinnamon peelers to not work, or to burn crops destined for the VOC. The king could also use his influence over the chalias, the cinnamon peeling caste, to have them leave the Dutch controlled territories, leaving the Dutch without the required labor to harvest the expected cinnamon quota, or to intimidate and even attack the peelers during harvest, forcing the Dutch to incur additional costs by having to protect them while working in the forest and transporting cinnamon back to the warehouses.

During the most active years of Dutch-Kandyan confrontations, the Kandyan king often resorted to forms of passive sabotage, such as closing the border passes into his realm, depriving the Dutch from accessing the cinnamon forests on his land.²³⁵ As to tampering with the product, van Linschoten commented on the selling, or blending in, of the inferior wild cinnamon from Malabar and presenting it as high-quality cinnamon from Ceylon (during the Portuguese period).²³⁶ Regarding the sabotaging of pepper transactions, records document attempts to sell dirty or wet pepper, especially by Muslim traders to the Portuguese²³⁷ as well as attempting to bundle inferior grade cinnamon in bundles marked as first grade during the Dutch period.

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²³³ Reimers, trans. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens*, 29.

²³⁴ Kanapathypillai, "Dutch Rule in Maritime Ceylon," Ph. D. diss. (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1969), 55.

²³⁵ Vamadeva Kanapathypillai, "Dutch Rule in Maritime Ceylon," Ph. D. diss. (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1969), 55.

²³⁶ Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 1 of 2)*, 70.

Also: Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 2 of 2)*, 77.

²³⁷ Pearson, "Wealth and Power: Indian Groups," 40.

Figure 24: The Manner of Peeling Cinnamon, 1703 (Baldæus)

Armed Resistance

Despite the overall superior military capabilities of the European naval vessels, military confrontations were not unusual as a response to the oppressive commercial regimes. Violent responses included a) those by local merchants, and rulers, who armed their vessels for protection and self-defense, often, and very early after the Europeans' arrival in India, by adopting European military technology and vessel construction techniques with armament on par with European naval vessels,²³⁸ b) through maritime piracy and corsair activities, either as a direct response by merchants, or, as it was in the case of the Malabar pirates, the Kunjali Marakkars, frequently with the tacit approval, and support, of the ruler of Calicut, c) by means of guerilla warfare on land and at sea, and, d) through the collaboration with powerful local naval powers.

Due to the uneven balance of power, native traders resorted to guerilla warfare against the European organizations, and ultimately, against all European vessels and powers during the period. An early precedent, in the 1510s to the early 1520s, was the formidable governor of Diu in Gujarat, Malik Ayaz, who was able to withstand the Portuguese attacks through the combination of military power, predominantly his navy and city fortifications, and his influence at the Gujarati court.²³⁹ It is worth noting that the Portuguese could have been completely kept out of Gujarat due to the formidable power of the Gujarati state, prior to its take-over by the

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²³⁸ First reports of the adoption of Western shipbuilding techniques in Gujarat appeared in 1507 and 1509. See: Pearson, ed., *Spices in the Indian Ocean World*, 281.

²³⁹ Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 67-69.

Mughal Empire, if the political elite had acted against them out of a threat against their own interests; this did not occur. Control of the sea trade was less important to the court, compared to control over land, mainly because it was under-taxed²⁴⁰ and affairs of trade were considered unsuitable for the nobility.²⁴¹ This, of course, did not prevent most of the rulers and noble families to engage in lucrative transactions through the assistance of intermediaries.²⁴²

The long-term piratic activities by several groups forced both the Portuguese and Dutch to take costly defensive actions. However, the collaboration with local naval powers which could stand up to the European vessels, especially the navies of the Sultan of Aceh or the Omani Ya'rubi dynasty, caused the most disruptive impact on the European powers' monopolistic ambitions. These collaborations opened up new shipping lanes, such as the Aceh – Maldives – Red Sea route for pepper, used by Gujarati merchants in collaboration with Bengali merchants, assisted by the Mappilas from Cannanore,²⁴³ or kept select existing ones open for the native traders.²⁴⁴ While there were contacts with the Ottomans regarding military support, the support provided was not significant after the initial military encounters between the Ottoman and Portuguese navies which demonstrated decisively the superiority of the Portuguese. The Ottomans, for a variety of reasons, including a focus on warfare and territorial expansion in

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²⁴⁰ Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat*, 86-88.

²⁴¹ "Wars by sea are merchants' affairs and are of no concern to the prestige of princes", a quote attributed to a Sultan of Gujarat, quoted in Boxer, "War and Trade in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea," 11.

²⁴² Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 101.

²⁴³ Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*, 228.

²⁴⁴ Bentley, Subrahmanyam, and Wiesner-Hanks, eds., *The Construction of a Global World, 1400 – 1800 CE (Volume 6), Part 2*, 256.

Europe and the logistical challenges, in particular the lack of wood in Ottoman territories on the Arabian Sea, in creating a navy in the Indian Ocean, did not recover from the defeat.

The Mappilas in Malabar and on Ceylon declared a jihad against the Portuguese in the 1530s which led to frequent warfare which lasted into the seventeenth century and expanded over time to warfare against all European powers in the region. The Portuguese were attacked at least two times by armed Gujarati vessels and their allies in the Maldives, but naval skirmishes between the Portuguese and the Malabari “pirates”, under the leadership of the Kunjali Marakkar family, frequently occurred closer to the Indian coast.²⁴⁵ The Kunjali Marakkar fleet consisted of many small and nimble galleys, propelled by sail and oars, known as “garbs,”²⁴⁶ which attacked in groups and were each equipped with three to four pieces of artillery and about one hundred archers or arquebusiers. The common mode of attack was to throw firepots.²⁴⁷

Piracy, defined as maritime violence without the support or approval of a political entity, and corsair activities, defined as similar violence with the support or approval of a political entity,²⁴⁸ existed in the Indian Ocean and on the Malabari and Gujarati coasts since at least Roman times and was also regularly mentioned by medieval travelers like Marco Polo.²⁴⁹ Such

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²⁴⁵ Das Gupta, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500 – 1800*, 276. Also: Kling and Pearson, eds., *The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia Before Dominion*, 30-31. Also: Al-Malībārī, *Tohfut-Ul-Mujahideen, an Historical Work in the Arabic Language*, 120, 144, 157.

²⁴⁶ Singh, “Indian Ports and European Powers,” 184.

²⁴⁷ Ruby Maloni, “Piracy in Indian Waters in the Seventeenth Century,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 52 (1991): 412.

²⁴⁸ Sebastian R. Prange, “A Trade of No Dishonor: Piracy, Commerce, and Community in the Western Indian Ocean, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 5 (Dec. 2011): 1270-1271.

²⁴⁹ Marco Polo described piratic activities both on the Malabari and Gujarati coasts. See: Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (New York: Orion Press, 1958), 304-306.

activities intensified in response to the aggressive behavior and politics of the European powers.²⁵⁰ The Italian nobleman Della Valle who traveled through India in the early seventeenth century wrote several times in his travel letters about concerns regarding pirates or actual encounters with them. He called the coastal people of Calicut, the Malabari, “an adventitious people” and noted that in the local bazaars of Calicut one could find many Portuguese items, such as weapons and merchandise, which had been taken from Portuguese vessels at sea.²⁵¹ It was also reported that some Portuguese *casados* on the Coromandel coast with family ties with Muslim Marakkar merchants, and had potentially even converted to Islam, participated in armed actions against the Portuguese Estado.²⁵² Similarly, there are records of the Kunjali Marakkar pirates/corsairs allying themselves in the 1560s with the Ali Raja of Cannanore for military and commercial interests against the Portuguese, leading, among other activities, to the ouster of the Portuguese puppet ruler of the Maldives which aided in opening up a different sea route from Aceh to Aden, bypassing Portuguese naval controls.²⁵³

As a consequence of these maritime acts of violence, the Portuguese implemented a system of convoys, called *cafilas*, to protect the merchant ships on route to Portuguese-controlled ports and to ensure that the merchants paid the proper *cartaz* and customs duties to them.²⁵⁴

However, even the *cafila* convoy system with protection by Portuguese warships did not stop the

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²⁵⁰ Prange, “A Trade of No Dishonor,” 1281-1282.

²⁵¹ Edward Grey, ed., *The Travels of Pietro della Valle in India (Vol. 2)* (New York: Burt Franklin, Publisher, 1892), 356-362.

²⁵² Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe, Volume 1: The Century of Discovery, Book 1*, 474.

²⁵³ Prange, “A Trade of No Dishonor,” 1288.

²⁵⁴ Malekandathil, “From Merchant Capitalists to Corsairs,” 478. Also: Al-Malībārī, *Tohfut-UL-Mujahideen, an Historical Work in the Arabic Language*, 158.

Malabari pirates/corsairs from attacking the convoys and capturing or destroying some of the merchant ships.²⁵⁵ The Omani resistance to the Portuguese was especially effective as they built up naval capabilities emulating the Western designs for well-armed warships, copied naval warfare tactics, and implemented a strategy to create a seaborne empire, using military might in support of trade in a state-sponsored strategy. As a consequence of their actions, most of the Portuguese-held chokepoints and trading centers on the western periphery of the Arabian sea fell into their hands during the first half of the seventeenth century, demonstrating that local forces could defeat Western powers.²⁵⁶

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²⁵⁵ Albert Gray, trans./ed., *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil (Vol. 2, Part 1)*, 246.

²⁵⁶ Tonio Andrade, "Beyond Guns, Germs, and Steel: European Expansion and Maritime Asia, 1400 – 1750," *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol 14 (2010): 175-176.

Conclusion

The period of the late fifteenth to the early eighteenth century was a period of transition for many regions of the world, including India. While the appearance of the Portuguese caused some disruptions to the flow of commerce with spices and pepper in the first three to five decades of the sixteenth century, the disruption of the spice supply through the traditional Middle Eastern routes was only partially due to the monopolistic attempts of the Portuguese to shut down those trade routes and traditional traders. Some trade routes were under tighter Portuguese controls and select regional traders were inconvenienced by having to pay cartaz fees and customs duties to the Estado. The trading communities, however, realized very soon that the Portuguese did not have the necessary resources everywhere in the region and, therefore, had insufficient control over the spice trade to effectively monopolize the physical commodity flows. The Portuguese situation was further weakened by the early divergence of the economic strategies between the Crown in Lisbon and the Estado in Goa (enforcing a trade monopoly vs. revenue maximization for self-funding) and especially that Portuguese of all ranks and positions, inside and outside the control of the Estado, were highly motivated to trade on private accounts. These conditions were skillfully exploited by the local trading communities, mitigated the activities of the Portuguese, and allowed the traditional trading communities to mostly continue in a “business as usual” framework. The Portuguese Estado was only capable of implementing a partial monopoly on the pepper trade and only for a short period.

The arrival of the Dutch about one hundred years later exposed the traditional trading communities to a more serious business threat. The VOC’s focus on profit and revenue maximization was supported by a strategy of complete control of the supply chain from local

spice production to sales in Europe in addition to controlling the quantities and prices in the Asian spice markets. Through the application and enforcement of (European) treaties granting exclusive rights, the VOC gained geographical control over the key spice production and transshipment areas, including Ceylon and its cinnamon production; these “rights” were vigorously defended with military force. While the VOC was able to monopolize the trade in cinnamon from Ceylon and also effectively shut down select trade routes for local traders in the region, native traders were able to continue to make money through the provisioning of an array of services. The Dutch, while being more ruthless and effective in implementing their fine spice monopolies, were more dependent on local merchants, and rulers, for not only their business and financial services due to the high, and critical, volume of their intra-Asian trade but also because of the sensitive relationships with important merchant communities and rulers across their region of operations often requiring delicate balancing acts. Leveraging any commercial or political advantage these traders could apply, augmented, if needed, by multiple forms of resistance, meant that the traditional trading communities continued to thrive and were even able to expand their commercial activities, primarily outside the physical trade in cinnamon.

Additionally, the traditional merchant communities were capable of leveraging their frequently critical business and financial services, and political connections, in support of, or in opposition to, the Portuguese and Dutch ambitions. In both the Portuguese and Dutch period, many local traders found and took advantage of numerous opportunities for collaborating with the Europeans. The very sophisticated, complex, and highly specialized business environment in India required the European powers to look for local business partners where they needed them to be successful or to survive. Even during the more effectively managed monopoly trade of the

Dutch, the traditional native merchants continued to participate significantly in the trades, not necessarily in the trans-continental spice trades into Europe, but with other commodities or through the provisioning of key services, such as brokering, financing, insurance, currency exchange, as well as in- and intra-regional freighting for the spice trade which both the Portuguese and Dutch depended on.

In addition, the well-established trade routes, overland, via coastal navigation, or ocean going, combined with the complex and highly interconnected trade relationships and the multitude of transport nodes, offered many opportunities for monopoly trade leakages from within and outside the Portuguese and Dutch administrative systems. Private trade, and private profiteering, could not be suppressed and anti-monopolistic activities by local traders against both the Portuguese and the Dutch ranged from the manipulation of the implemented system to evasion, sabotage, and armed resistance, frequently in collaboration with local rulers or across several trading communities.

Manipulating the imposed new system of monopoly took the form of a) taking advantage of loop holes and disagreements, or local variations, in the implementation and interpretation of the monopoly strategy, b) leveraging any available local patronage and political power conditions, or c) conducting, as judged by the Europeans, “criminal” activities. Evasion was another coping mechanism and included a) geographic evasion, b) cartaz or tax evasion, or c) evasive collusion between different trading communities, including European members and officials. Moving to the more confrontational, but still non-military responses to monopolies, the native trading communities used a) access restrictions to production areas or transportation restrictions in native controlled areas, b) product or sales embargoes, c) delaying access to

supplies, potentially forcing the targeted traders to miss the European sailing windows, and d) cheating on weights, or substituting and mixing in inferior grade products. And, finally, despite the overall superior military capabilities of the European naval vessels, maritime military confrontations were not unusual as a response to the oppressive commercial regimes. Armed responses included a) those by local merchants, and rulers, who armed their vessels for protection and self-defense, often with armament on par with European vessels, b) through piracy and corsair activities, either as a direct response by merchants, or, frequently, with the tacit approval, and even support, of the local ruler, c) by means of guerilla warfare on land and at sea, and, d) through the collaboration with regional naval powers.

The attempts by the European trading organizations, both the Portuguese Estado and Dutch VOC, to institute a monopoly on the trade of pepper and cinnamon were of limited effectiveness, at least throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in particular in the post-Napoleonic war period, did these traditional merchant networks lose their position and significance. This was due to the territorial colonization by the British and an accelerated modernization of trade and commerce that included innovations in transportation, in particular the steam engine, which eliminated the dependence on the existing, monsoon wind-based trade routes.

The question why the commercial and political forces did not try to “beat the Europeans at their own game” once they saw the potential impact on their business remains. Quite a few Westerners worked independently in India as renegades and mercenaries/soldiers-of-fortune,

outside the structures and confines of the Estado and the VOC.²⁵⁷ This included the not infrequent employment of European specialists by local rulers, including the Mughals,²⁵⁸ and wealthy native ship owners, mainly providing tactical or operational services related to the military, engineering and navigation; some of these Europeans also converted to Islam and taught their skills to locals.²⁵⁹ It is puzzling, however, that there does not seem to be any evidence that demonstrates how the commercial, legal and negotiating skills of such “specialists” were used to counter the activities of either the Estado or the VOC.²⁶⁰ Could it be that such “interlopers and mercenaries,” often deserted soldiers, did not come from the ranks of the individuals with power, who used to be in decision making roles and had access to strategic insights? Was it that such high-ranking individuals encountered many opportunities to enrich themselves and, therefore, did not have an incentive to look for other alternative lucrative engagements? Or, on the other hand, were the opportunities for collaboration and mutual profits sufficiently broad and plentiful for the majority of the interested native merchants and rulers that they did not require any other skills than they had access to through hiring the available Westerners with more technical skills? Such hypotheses are almost impossible to research based on the available sources.

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²⁵⁷ According to a Portuguese report in 1627, an estimated 5,000 Portuguese and Eurasian mercenaries were active and employed in Bengal, Southeast Asia and Makassar, compared to about 4,500 fighting men in all of the Portuguese forts and fleets east of the Cape of Good Hope. See: Disney, *The History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire: The Portuguese Empire (Vol. 2)*, 192.

²⁵⁸ According to Tavernier, all the Mughal’s chief gunners were “Franks” (French, English, Dutch) See: Tavernier, *Travels in India (1640 – 1676) (Volume I)*, 49.

²⁵⁹ Van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies (Vol. 2 of 2)*, 199.

²⁶⁰ G. V. Scammell, “European Exiles, Renegades and Outlaws and the Maritime Economy of Asia c. 1500 – 1700,” *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992): 645-649.

On the other hand, both the Acehnese and the Yemeni sultans collaborated with their merchant communities and built up their military, especially naval, capabilities in support of a local, even regional, joint politico-economic strategy against the European powers. These efforts demonstrated that joint efforts of the state and the merchant community could stand up to the military might of the Europeans, but these efforts were not, or could not be, replicated elsewhere.

Revisiting John Locke's statement in the introduction to this thesis, "in a country not furnished with mines, there are but two ways of growing rich, either conquest or commerce," neither the Kingdom of Portugal nor the United Dutch Provinces were rich in natural resources within their own borders. However, neither country chose either conquest or commerce for their path to enrichment; both countries selected a combination of both choices, with varying degrees of intensity for either option. What this thesis attempted to address was the response of the recipients of these options in one region in the early modern world, the Indian Ocean, as any action triggers a corresponding reaction, be it in physics, politics or commerce. The reactions of the well-established native trading communities, often in collaboration with local rulers and across communities, demonstrated that these native trading communities were flexible enough and possessed the necessary infrastructure and resources to adapt to and mitigate the effects of the European monopoly strategies. Both the Portuguese Estado and the Dutch VOC in the Indian Ocean region experienced limitations to their monopolistic ambitions and the native trading communities continued to operate successfully, sometimes in cooperation, but often in competition and conflict, with these European institutions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Appendices

Glossary

- Bahar: An Indian measure of weight of about 200 kg (~ 441 lbs.), but varying widely by region and by commodity.
- Banyia: (also Bania or Vania) a term used by contemporary Europeans to denote all Hindu traders and brokers, mainly in/from northern India. Also, a set of Hindu and Jain merchant communities, residing throughout a great part of northern and western India.
- Cafila: (also quafila) A form of Portuguese trade control, ostensibly to protect ship traffic between key Portuguese ports from pirates and corsairs, by setting up convoys of both Portuguese and native vessels under the protection of Portuguese war ships. Ships were escorted to Portuguese controlled ports to pay customs duties. (of Arab origin)
- Cartaz: A system of mandatory, usually fee-based safe-conduct passes implemented by the Portuguese in order to control local merchants, including where they were allowed to sail, who could be on board, and what kind of merchandise could be carried. Also, the sale of protection for sailing destinations not reserved by the Portuguese for their own trade under the threat of vessel seizure and merchandise confiscation. (of Arab origin)
- Casado: Portuguese who had come to Asia usually as soldiers and stayed after having completed their military service. They married locally, mainly native women, and became private residents, often operating as craftsmen or small traders. As traders, casados often operated outside the sphere of operations of the Estado da Índia.
- Chetty: (also Chetti/Chettiar) Hindu merchants from the Tamil coast.
- Chulia: (also Cholia) Members of the native Muslim merchant communities of South East India residing in South East Asia, also known as Marakkayars on the Coromandel (South Indian) coast.
- Cruzado: A Portuguese coin worth 360 reis (pre-1570) (400 reis post-1570). Pre-1570, the equivalent of a Spanish Dollar (or Piece of Eight), or 2.5 Dutch Florins (or Guilders), or 2 Mughal Rupees.

- Dallah: A trade broker.
- Dutch Guilder: A Dutch silver coin, worth about 1/3 of a Portuguese cruzado.
- Dutch Pond: A Dutch measure of weight equal to 0.494 kg (~ 1.1 lbs.).
- Emporium: A place of trade, especially a commercial center.
- Entrepôt: An intermediary center of trade and transshipment.
- Keling: (also Kling) South Indian, Tamil-speaking, mainly Hindu, traders who settled in the Indonesian archipelago.
- Labbai: Muslim, mainly coastal traders on the east and south coast of India.
- Law of Reciprocity: The unwritten agreement that rulers and princes in and around the Indian Ocean refrained from interfering in the commercial affairs of merchants from abroad, and they in turn guaranteed good behavior through their own law-enforcing agencies.
- Mappila: (also Moplah) Native Muslim traders in India, mainly in the southwest, in and around Malabar, Ceylon and the Maldives. Also, originally, the offspring of the union of Arab navigators and (low caste) Hindu women on the west coast of India.
- Marakkayar: Muslim overseas trader, originally of Arab origin, on the Coromandel and Malabar coast.
- Monopoly: Exclusive ownership through legal privilege, command of supply, or concerted action, or, exclusive possession or control, a commodity controlled by one party.
- Monopsony: A market situation in which there is only one buyer.
- Navayat: Muslim trader claiming Persian origin.
- Pardesi: (also Paradesi) Temporary, non-Indian Muslim residents from the Middle East (mainly from Egypt, Arabia, Iraq, and Persia). Also, Iranian and Rumi Muslims in Calicut/Malabar.
- Quintal: A Portuguese measure of weight used in two different ways: Light Quintal: 51.4 kg (~ 113 lbs.), used when selling spices in Europe, and Heavy Quintal: 58.7 kg (~ 129 lbs.), used when buying spices in Asia.

- Saraswat: Hindu merchants (or accountants?) of the Brahmin caste from/in northern, north-western India.
- Shroff: (also Sarraf) A banker or money changer. Someone who validated coinage, called shroffing.
- St. Thomas Christians: (also: Nestorian Christians) an early Christian sect initially from Syria who settled in southern India before the arrival of Islam.

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