monality of law. Characterizing the networks as Muslim leads to an important final point about the relationship between Muslim trade and the spread of Islamic society. Clearly, patterns of conversion developed through commercial and social contacts with successful foreign Muslim merchants. In fact, the initial growth of the commercial networks was due largely if not exclusively to conversion. There were both pragmatic and religious dimensions to this phenomenon. Some historians emphasize the former, even suggesting that by converting, an Asian merchant could raise his credit rating. Pragmatic value attached to assuming a Muslim name as a result of conversion. There is also the case of Buddhist rulers of the Arakan coastal province of Burma who took Muslim names, presumably in the interests of commerce, but did not convert.

The late fifteenth-century Portuguese traveler Duarte Barbosa seemed to believe that commercial success motivated conversion at Melaka: “Many foreign Muslims having established their trade became so rich thereby that they turned the people of the land into Moors [Muslims] also.” (It might be noted, too, that apostasy from Islam was forbidden, technically punishable by death, and was, in any case, rare.) It is, however, difficult to maintain a narrow causal relationship between commercial considerations and Islamization. The South and West Asian Muslims who sailed to East Africa and Southeast Asia were merchants of faith. Whatever the initial rationale of converts, this era saw the permanent spread of Islamic society from Mogadishu to Melaka.

The period of Asian history from roughly 1500 to 1800, when Europeans made their appearance but before the heyday of their imperialism, has generated considerable debate, much of it rooted in ideology. Controversy has had the beneficial result of raising issues and drawing out considerable data that might otherwise have remained unexplored. The debate is not usually directed toward Islamic Asia, per se, but it encompasses Muslims in a context very important to them. This chapter and the next examine the period that has elicited such divergent approaches and premises, with the intention of identifying contributions from the scholarly debate that enhance an understanding of the Muslim role in Indian Ocean history. Chapter 5 will also ask if the different positions can be reconciled.

In 1974, a study titled The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century: The East India Companies and the Decline of the Caravan Trade by the Danish scholar Niels Steensgaard, was published. This book represents an important historiographical position, namely that European presence in Asian commerce was revolutionary as early as the 1620s. Employing effective organization and methods, the English and Dutch East India Companies attracted sufficient trade away from land caravans to the sea route so that they disrupted long-distance overland Asian trade significantly, with secondary effects on regional and local trade. This analysis is consistent with a global interpretation of history associated with Immanuel Wallerstein, who argues that Asia was incorporated into a world-system between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, as modes of production in Asia became more specialized and interdependent, in response to European demand.

In 1979, a collection of essays appeared titled The Age of Partnership: Europeans in Asia Before Dominion, edited by Blair Kling and M. N. Pearson. Although this book was not intended to contrast specifically with Steensgaard’s work, the title and tenor do reflect a very different historiographical position: before nineteenth-century imperialism, Eu-
The European impact on Asia was limited. Whether as individuals or as agents of trading companies, Europeans in Asia before 1800 did not cause alterations in Asian commerce significant enough to be categorized as revolutionary. While Europeans did have an impact on long-distance commerce to Europe, within Asia they had little choice but to blend into regional and local trade as best they could. Some achieved financial success while others were dismal failures. This "partnership" view is roughly consistent with a segment of Marxist historiography that remains skeptical of Wallerstein's ideas.1 Supporters of this position argue that despotic governments prevented Asia from evolving from feudalism into capitalism, a necessary step on the way to socialism. Production and commerce remained essentially traditional until the nineteenth century, when industrial, wage labor capitalism developed sufficiently in Europe to require the exploitation of Asia's raw materials, as opposed to the importation of its manufactured goods. It is important to emphasize that these historiographical lines are not always sharply drawn.

The Early-Modern Empires

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, three dynasties dominated the predominantly Muslim portions of Asia: the Sunni Ottomans, whose rule extended from Asia Minor into Eastern Europe and into the Arab Middle East; the Twelver Shi'i Safavids in Iran, rivals to the Ottomans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and the Mughals, who controlled much though never all of India. In Confucian China, the Manchu Qing dynasty replaced the Chinese Ming. While all four empires remained essentially land-based, they acted on an awareness of the maritime dimension of Eurasia more than their predecessors had.

Ottomans

The Ottoman empire was successful not only as a military state but also as an institutionalized government and society, although eventually the high degree of bureaucratization hindered necessary flexibility. There was central control over administration, land tenure, and the army. The Sunni Islam of the rulers was institutionalized by the state: Islamic education and law were put under the direction of an official called the shaykh al-islam, who was appointed by the sultan himself and who ranked nearly as high as the prime minister (grand vizir). Even popular institutions such as guilds and a few major Sufi brotherhoods became associated with the state. During long Ottoman success, the empire's political thinkers had time to be self-reflective and elaborate upon an unsurprising explanation for the existence of the state. Simply put, their theory posited a secure, productive agrarian population which provided tax revenues to support an ever-enlarging military; the conquering military expanded the agrarian tax base and secured the environment to encourage taxable productivity. This circular theory itself was conceived as land-based.2

In the late fifteenth century, expansion proceeded by sea as well as by land, and the Ottomans engaged in naval conflict with Venice. The Ottomans and Venetians contested former Byzantine ports in the northeastern Mediterranean region. The Ottomans eventually won the sporadic contest, which lasted from 1463 to 1502, and took over some of the Venetian dependencies, such as Lepanto in Greece. During the rest of the sixteenth century, the Ottomans came to a maritime stalemate with the Austrian Hapsburg empire, with its capital in Vienna, another essentially land-based power. Also during the sixteenth century, the Ottomans expanded a system of commercial agreements that later had, for them, negative economic consequences. These were the famous capitulations, by which the Ottomans attempted, in part, to strengthen an alliance with France against the Hapsburgs. The French—and later other Europeans as well—gained trade and legal privileges at Ottoman ports. The arrangements were mutually beneficial until Europe's Industrial Revolution; after that, Europeans were able to take advantage of assured access to Ottoman markets for their less expensively produced goods, doing damage to the Ottoman balance of trade.

In 1516-1517, the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, called "the Grim," doubled his territory and enhanced his prestige with the conquest of the Mamluk Middle East, that is, Egypt and Syria as well as coastal North Africa and the Hijaz province of Arabia. With the takeover of the Hijaz province the sultan gained Islamic legitimacy by virtue of controlling the holy cities of Mecca and Madina; Selim and his successors could now lay claim to the caliphate, which had been nominal since the Mongol execution of the Abbasid caliph at Baghdad in 1258. The revival of the office entailed stretching its definition: the Turkic Ottoman family did not have the required genealogical tie to the Arabian tribe of the prophet, Muhammad, but they made do. At this point, just before Selim's death in 1520, the Ottoman Empire was perhaps at its zenith.

The inclusion of Mamluk territory enlarged the Ottoman coastline dramatically, and this development was not incidental. Maritime access had figured into the complex motivations for conquest in the first place. The Ottomans had for some time wished to redirect the lucrative trade of Egypt and Syria to Istanbul or, even better, to control Cairo directly. When the Mamluks showed signs of military vulnerability, Sultan Selim began his conquest. Also, the Ottomans were aware that the Portuguese had staked claims in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf and were at-
tempting to gain access to the Red Sea. At an earlier point, the Ottomans had even lent shipbuilding assistance to the Mamluks, who were themselves trying to hold back the Portuguese. There was, therefore, in 1516–1517, a concurrent need to defend the prize of Cairene trade even as it was being won. In 1521, just after Selim’s famous son, Sulayman, ascended the throne, an Ottoman naval officer and cartographer called Piri Re’is wrote a book outlining his extensive knowledge of the world’s seas; from this perspective, he apparently saw dire economic consequences in the European advance, and so his book urged Sulayman to expel the Portuguese. It was only with difficulty, and after seizing the Yemen for obvious strategic reasons, that the Ottomans could close the Red Sea to the Portuguese.

From about 1525 to 1640, the Ottomans vacillated between their efforts by sea and those by land and also between efforts in Asia and in Europe. Even though the Portuguese remained a threat in the Persian Gulf, Sulayman chose a major land campaign, beginning in 1525–1526, into the heart of eastern Europe. This resulted in the conquest of Hungary, bringing the empire to its greatest geographic extent (Map 4.1). Only after that, in the 1530s, did the Ottomans return further if limited attention to the Gulf. There were a few Ottoman raids against the Portuguese in East Africa and western India; however, the pressing objectives were to counter the Portuguese on the strategically located island of Hurmuz, at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, and to compete with the rival Safavids. The Ottomans conquered northern Iraq from Safavid Iran and the southern portion from tenacious independent tribal shaykhs, until finally they reached the Gulf and curved around it to the port town of Kuwait. The Baghdad-Basra corridor of commerce had in the past been a valuable economic asset to the Islamic world, and there was a chance it could be again. Not since early Abbasid times had a single Islamic power been in a position to control the eastern Mediterranean Sea and Iraq, with its access to the Gulf. Over the next seventy years, Baghdad changed hands a few more times, and it fell more decisively to the Ottomans in 1638.

During the same decades, however, it had become increasingly difficult for the Ottomans to hold their own against the Europeans in the West, either commercially or in terms of naval strength. More specifically, the Ottomans had suffered a serious defeat in 1571 at the battle of Lepanto, when a significant portion of their fleet was destroyed by European forces. The sultan, by then Selim II, and his prime minister, Mehmet Sokollu, oversaw the rebuilding of the fleet; the Ottomans continued to be a world power but Central and Western Europe increasingly challenged them. Furthermore, the growing Russian Empire was pressing in on the Black Sea region. The Ottomans believed it necessary to concentrate their naval and other military resources in the north and
west. Correspondingly, Ottoman naval and commercial activity diminished in the Indian Ocean region, although a number of individual merchants were Ottoman subjects. In the mid-eighteenth century, the rise in Arabia of tribal Muslim purists, the Wahhabis, challenged not only the religious legitimacy of the sultan but also residual Ottoman claims to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea.

With benefit of hindsight, one could argue that the Ottomans did not commit themselves sufficiently in the Gulf and Red Sea regions, that they may have lost an opportunity to build an Asian maritime empire. Another and not inconsistent view is that in 1526, with the initiation of a major campaign into Eastern Europe, the Ottoman regime made clear its decision to continue favoring land-based expansion, the traditional source of its strength.

**Safavids**

The Safavids arose from a Turkic military state in northwestern Iran at the turn of the sixteenth century. They established their institutions with Iranian bureaucrats, who could call upon the Sasanid and Abbasid imperial traditions of the past and who also had available contemporary Ottoman models. Safavid institutions were less successful than those of the Ottomans partly because of tensions between a Turkic military and an Iranian administration.

The Safavids sharply differentiated themselves from the Sunni Ottomans, who were their principal territorial rivals, by imposing the Twelver Shi'i branch of Islam as their official ideology. The early Safavids arose from a mystical (sufi) order, the Safaviyya, popular among the Turkic tribesmen in northwestern Iran. The heterodox beliefs of the order included many ideas adapted from the Shi'i tradition. The founder of the dynasty, Isma'il, apparently decided that orthodox Shi'ism was preferable to his own eclectic, regional heterodoxy for the purposes of building an empire. There may have been an early expectation that Isma'il was the returned twelfth Imam, but it was soon apparent that the Safavids were not going to fulfill messianic hopes. In the absence of the twelfth imam, any government could only be imperfect; therefore, many of the Shi'i religious leaders, the ulama or mullahs, remained aloof from the regime. Losing clear religious endorsement, the Safavid rulers relied more and more on the pre-Islamic Iranian past for legitimation. For example, they emphasized surviving ancient imperial symbols, such as the sun, the lion, and the title shah (king). Thus, an uneasy juxtaposition of ancient imperial and orthodox Shi'i traditions was established, even though the two rested on incompatible authorities. Unlike the Sunni Ottomans, who incorporated into their state Islamic institutions such as education and law, the Safavids failed to co-opt all the Shi'i leaders and the institutions they controlled as teachers and judges. Many of the mullahs maintained grassroots ties and could influence public opinion against any actions of the Safavid or subsequent regimes which they construed as godless. The religious difference between the Ottomans and the Safavids did not much affect their respective commercial laws, but it did provide sanction for imperial competition that included commerce, such as the overland silk trade.

The Safavids competed with the Ottomans for control of Iraq and the region extending north into the Caucasus, including much of traditional Armenia and Kurdistan. Although they enjoyed initial victories, the Safavids were unable to hold all their territorial gains. The loss of Iraq during the 1530s, mentioned earlier in the Ottoman section, not only had economic consequences but also meant that Shi'i shrines in that region were now in Sunni Ottoman hands. To the east, the Safavids reached an impasse against the Central Asian tribal state of the Uzbegs, and to the north they, like the Ottomans, soon had to worry about Russian imperial intentions. Although Twelver Shi'ism spread to eastern Arabian and island ports, the Persian Gulf did not provide an avenue for expansion because the Safavids lacked a naval force of any consequence.

Unable to expand their land-based state or its tax base, and at times blocked in the Persian Gulf by both the Ottomans established at Basra and the Portuguese, the Safavids had to be creative to retain power. It was the famous Shah Abbas, on the throne from 1588 until 1629, who gave his dynasty a new if short-lived lease on life by drawing Iran into international trade. Abbas made overtures to northern European states that had followed the Portuguese into the Gulf region. The English responded first, entering into a trade arrangement and agreeing to provide naval power to expel the Portuguese from the island of Hormuz, which was accomplished in 1622. The Dutch and the French also made commercial agreements.

What did Shah Abbas have to offer the northern Europeans? Initially, he held out the hope of concerted action against the Portuguese, a common enemy. Perhaps more important than any possible military cooperation, Abbas could offer a desirable commodity: silk. Shah Abbas monopolized the production and sale of silk in his realm and, therefore, was in a position to benefit from the high demand in Europe for raw silk and for cloth and rugs made from it. By selling some of his silk to Europeans at his ports, Shah Abbas could both bypass Ottoman middlemen and increase Iran's share of the market in relation to the silk produced in Ottoman Syria. Some historians who see the Safavids as oriental despots tend to argue that in the long term, the high degree of economic central-
The Conduct of Asian Muslim Trade

The trade revenues generated by Persian exports were a boon to the Safavid economy. Isfahan became a well-financed showcase for Persian Islam, and a mainland entrepôt opposite the island of Hormuz was renamed Bandar (port) Abbas, for the shah, and became a major commercial center.

Abbas's less capable successors soon left Iran open to fragmentation and invasion. They mismanaged revenues, failing to make necessary investments in irrigation and roads, so that the agrarian infrastructure began to erode. The hemmed-in and inactive military also began to degenerate. By 1722, when an Afghan tribal prince temporarily seized Isfahan, Safavid control had disintegrated, leaving the region to competing tribal groups. The most impressive competitor was Nadir Khan, who ruled southern Iran in the 1730s and 1740s and who took for himself the title of shah. Perhaps aware of the limits of his land-based power, he saw the value of a navy. He proceeded to buy, build, and capture vessels, which he manned with Arab crews, because his Persianized Turkic tribesmen lacked naval experience. The effort was insufficient. In 1740, a general mutiny occurred and many of the vessels found new owners on the Arab side of the Gulf. Nadir Shah tried to rebuild the force but was unable to achieve his maritime goal before his death in 1747.

Mughals

The Mughals, of Central Asian origin, established themselves in northern India between 1526 and 1556 (Map 4.2). While sometimes in conflict with the contemporary Safavids, the Mughals also maintained political and cultural ties with Iran through diplomacy and royal marriage. The name Mughal is a corruption of Mongol; the dynasty called itself Timuri, indicative of their claim to descent from the Mongols through Timur the Lame, who in turn had claimed to be a descendant of Chinggis Khan on his mother's side. The Mongol-Timuri genealogical claims indicate a continued reliance on military prowess and prestige as the basis of rule. Like their predecessors of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals were a Persianized Muslim minority ruling over a vast Hindu majority. South Asian conversions did occur, often through the eclectic ministrations of sufi brotherhoods.

The Mughals were stronger militarily and administratively than any of the Delhi Sultans had been. The architect of the regime, Akbar, who ruled from 1556 to 1605, extended his military reach into part of the Deccan plateau of south central India. Akbar has been favorably compared with his near contemporaries the Ottoman Sultan Sulayman and the Safavid Shah Abbas. One of Akbar's achievements was to consolidate his new empire under a combination of military and administrative land-

MAP 4.2 Mughal India, circa 1600
holdings which were to be regularly assessed for taxable value. The idea was to balance the army and the bureaucracy and give them both a vested interest in the stability of the central government. The land-based premise of power is unmistakable. Akbar also tried to overcome problems inherent in minority Islamic rule over Hindus by relaxing laws that burdened non-Muslims and by establishing a cult of his own, in which Hindu and other Indian traditions were grafted onto an Islamic core. Akbar's efforts to organize land and to achieve religious harmony eroded after his death in 1605.13

Under Akbar, the Mughals gained access to both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. In 1573–1574, they took the sultanate of Gujarat, which had been independent of Delhi since about 1400. By the 1570s, Gujarat's main port, Cambay, was silted over; as a result, trade there shifted to the up-and-coming port of Surat to the south, which then became the major entrepôt of Mughal India. The huge province of Bengal, along with its ports that traded to the Coromandel coast, to Burmese and Thai ports, and to Southeast Asia, also came under Mughal dominance in 1576. The main effect of this coast-to-coast expansion was improved efficiency in getting inland products to ports, rather than the extension of the empire overseas.14 Also, Akbar had additional roads built, which meant more goods traveled within the enlarged Mughal interior instead of being carried on vessels from port to port along India's coast.15 The Portuguese had established themselves in various ports along both the east and west coasts, including areas beyond Mughal administration. Where Mughals did have coastal influence—for example at Hugli in Bengal—they took advantage of investment possibilities stimulated by the Portuguese presence but also endured the dampening effect on trade caused by pirates of mixed Portuguese and Asian parentage, some of whom harbored in Arakan on the Burmese coast.

In the seventeenth century, during the reigns of Shah Jahan and later Aurangzeb, the Mughals began to show more interest in the sea, for purposes of defense and trade. In the 1660s, for example, the Mughal governor of Bengal subdued the Burman pirates and temporarily extended Mughal influence to Arakan.16 Aurangzeb conquered Golconda, a region of northern Coromandel, and gained temporary control over its port, Masulipatnam, which had become important due to its exchange of locally woven cloth for Southeast Asian pepper and which attracted not only Muslim trade but also that of the Dutch and English.17 On the other side of the empire, where the major competition came from the fleet of the Hindu Marathas and marauders from Malabar ports, the number of Mughal ships at Surat rose from about fifty to over one hundred, and many of the new ones were large; also, an Arab mercenary fleet in the service of the Mughals was harbored just south of Bombay.18 Rulers and officials invested in trade, welcomed Europeans at Surat, and tried to enrich public coffers through trade levies. However, unlike some of the smaller coastal polities who were dependent on sea trade, the Mughals had no ongoing maritime policy or strategy.19

Aurangzeb, also known as Alamgir, was the last powerful Mughal ruler (r. 1658 to 1707). In addition to his exploits mentioned earlier, which had direct maritime consequences, he also had to spend much of his time subduing regional rebels including Muslim Bengalis, Hindu Marathas in central India, and Sikhs in the Punjab. He also dealt with a tribal upsurge among the Rajputs and Jats of the northwest, an upsurge that continued beyond his reign, through the eighteenth century.20 In an effort to stave off the collapse of centralized authority, he reimposed Islamic law on non-Muslims, which, instead of providing stability, contributed to the alienation of much of his subject population.

**China**

The other empire relevant to Asian maritime history during this era was China, which continued to defy its own isolationist image. Most economic growth was domestic: production within and trade among the regions of China increased. The Ming ruled until 1644 and were replaced by the Manchu Qing dynasty, which lasted until the early twentieth century. There were two expansionist phases of foreign trade.21 The first phase occurred between 1550 and 1620, in the late Ming era, and appears to have been triggered by naval competition with Japan following several decades of relative maritime lawlessness.22 The second phase fell within the Qing period, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was associated with the European presence. Focal points of trade included Canton, where European trade was concentrated, Amoy, Fuzhou, Portuguese Macao, Taiwan, and Spanish Manila, where there was a Chinese community. The predominantly Muslim port of Banten (Bantam), on the coast of Java, was the focal point of Chinese trade in Southeast Asia; in 1682, the Dutch took Banten into their sphere of influence. Japan, a source of much of the silver that reached China, was by this time playing a significant East Asian maritime role despite its relative lack of contact with Muslim networks and its closure to most Europeans.

Muslims, per se, whether Chinese or foreign, had a much lower profile in maritime China than they had in the past. Now most import and export was in the hands of Chinese merchants and port officials; some of these men were Muslim, but they had blended into Chinese commercial patterns. Chinese ships seldom sailed further west than the Thai coast. While the Muslim maritime networks no longer seemed to extend di-
rectly to China’s ports, they still had access to the China trade indirectly in Southeast Asia. A European observer noted in the seventeenth century that some Chinese “turned Javanese,” that is, converted to Islam and changed their political and cultural identity. References to Chinese Muslim merchants are few and inconclusive. For example, a Dutch source reported that in 1661 Indian Muslims from the Coromandel coast had sent shiploads of merchandise to Vietnam and Japan, in partnership with Chinese Muslim merchants, with the hope of forging a commercial relationship. The outcome is unclear and, in any case, must have been limited.

Better documentation shifts historical attention to the foreign Muslims concentrated in the northwest, who were sometimes perceived as an economic or political threat by the Ming and Qing. Soon after the Ming came to power, in 1368, they claimed tribute and submission from Timur, the military ruler of the major Islamic regime of Central Asia. Timur, however, clearly did not consider himself to be subordinate. He launched an invasion of China but died, in 1405, before he could acquire any territory. After his state collapsed in about 1450, Islamic polities of Central Asia were far smaller and not often threatening to China. The major issue of contention was control over caravan trade.

Despite the occasional perception of external threat, Ming policy within China was generally tolerant of Muslims, who continued to hold positions of prestige and influence as they had during the Yuan period. A few foreign Muslims became sinicized, even to the extent of becoming Confucian scholar-bureaucrats; most, however, retained a distinct culture and identity and maintained contact with the wider Islamic world through Muslim Central Asia. Foreign Muslims in northwestern China provided essential services: the conduct of trade, such as the export of tea, and the raising of horses and camels needed by the Chinese. For reasons inadequately understood, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Muslims revolted against Ming rule several times. The cause may have been rooted in economic depression. Muslims also figured prominently in wider rebellions of the seventeenth century that contributed to the fall of the Ming in 1644. After that, blame for continued economic difficulties was placed on the Qing regime, and Muslims then sided with Ming loyalists. During the Qing era, there was a shift in the transport of tea from the caravan route to the coast, which cut into the trade economy of the northwest. Also, taxation on trade was considered burdensome. As the Qing attempted to expand political control farther into Central Asia in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, revolts against them in the region tended to be decidedly Muslim in composition and ideology. Nevertheless, Qing expansion had the effect of including more Muslims within the Chinese empire.

While Muslims still figured prominently in interior China and in overland trade, their role in coastal China diminished. Islamic and Chinese maritime histories diverged considerably. The acculturation of Chinese Muslims, the sinicizing of port administrations, and restrictive government policies all contributed to this situation. It was the case, too, that China was not experiencing economic growth or technological innovation comparable to that of the Song era and, therefore, did not stimulate Indian Ocean trade, navigation, and shipbuilding as it had in the past.

A Comparative View

For all the imperial powers of Asia, the seventeenth century held difficult times. In the previous century, there had been a sharp increase in the population of many parts of Asia, related to an increase in food production made possible by the introduction of crops from the Americas, such as yams, potatoes, peanuts, and corn, that could grow in poor, previously uncultivated soil. In the seventeenth century, however, population growth outstripped new food production, a situation that led to inflation and to taxation that was exorbitant but never adequate to the needs of the states. There were also drought and disease in many parts of Asia between about 1630 and 1650. These problems led to dissatisfaction among both peasants and regionally based elites, including provincial military officers. Also, the Ottomans and the Ming (as well as seventeenth-century Safavids and Mughals, for that matter) had reached their geographic limits of expansion, although they may not have realized it at the time. Thus, no new tax bases could be conquered and, in fact, some were lost. To the west, the Ottomans were forced out of Hungary in 1699. To the east, they found themselves competing with Shah Abbas for territory and for the silk trade. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, the Ming overextended their military resources and began to experience stiff competition in mainland Southeast Asia and from the Japanese in Korea, while the Manchus flexed their muscles in the north.

All of this resulted in political upheaval and breakdown of law and order during the seventeenth century and well into the eighteenth. The Ottoman heartland of Asia Minor saw regional military revolts against Istanbul and the emergence of bandit gangs and later the spread of Wahhabi influence in Arabian areas claimed by Istanbul. In China, there were both urban and rural uprisings—including those of Muslims in the northwest, described previously—as well as banditry, all of which opened the door to Manchu conquest. The Mughals had to confront Rajput and Jat uprisings, while the Safavids fell to an Afghan incursion. Imperial responses proved inadequate to internal economic and political problems. All this happened as the Dutch and English were
making their maritime presence felt throughout Asia. Despite indications of new maritime interests, the distracted imperial regimes provide a somewhat remote backdrop for coastal merchants, to whom we now turn. It is important to consider how these men conducted their transactions, what role Islam played, and how Europeans fit into this world that was still dominated by Muslims.

Asian and Muslim Trade

Muslim maritime merchants were, by and large, involved in the carrying trade. They were not usually involved in the larger economic linkage of production with export-import. A notable exception was the Safavid monopoly over the production and export of silk. The usual circumstances of the carrying trade, however, have generated numerous questions in the literature regarding the nature of Asian maritime trade, especially in the three centuries under consideration. One persistent question is whether Asian traders were mostly peddlers. This question involves issues of size and level of organization: maritime peddlers have been defined as merchants of limited means who bought small quantities of goods, leased space on a vessel, and typically accompanied their merchandise. A conclusion that most Asian maritime merchants, including predominant Muslims, fit this definition would have implications for any comparisons made between Asian and Western European trade. Evidence from contemporary European travelers and merchants suggests peddling was pervasive in Asia. Trade was generally not organized into corporate bodies, such as the exceptional Karimis in Egypt or the Hindu guilds of earlier times.

However, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, there is evidence of increasingly sophisticated, larger scale commerce. Various types of partnerships existed and bills of exchange provided a means of credit. Muslim moneylenders, sarafis, who circumvented the restrictions against interest, continued to provide banking services as they had since early Islamic times, while certain Hindu sub-castes did the same for their communities. The administration of commercial and maritime law at each port was overseen by an official who was either chosen by the resident merchants themselves or appointed by a government able to exert that kind of influence. Ship size and cargo capacity were increasing. At least by the sixteenth century, bulk quantities of inexpensive commodities, such as common textiles and grains, required considerable initial investment, usually supplied by a group of wealthy merchants. By the seventeenth century, there are records of private individuals owning large ships. Peddling seems an inappropriate term for such conditions. There clearly were levels of trade that required capital formation. Some would argue that this situation was not true capitalism, depending on how the term is defined; others see it as merchant capitalism, as distinct from financial (banking) capitalism, bureaucratic capitalism of the tax-collecting elite, or the later industrial capitalism associated with Western Europe. If merchant capitalism is defined as capital accumulated from and reinvested in trade, then there were in this era increases in the scale and scope of merchant capitalism in Asia, which enabled Asians to compete at the local and regional levels with European merchant capitalists, even though the structures of their economic systems were not the same.

There was also during this era Muslim political expansion, which tied some areas of production and agrarian taxation to maritime enterprise. For example, in Southeast Asia, notably on Java, several Hindu-Buddhist principalities were conquered by Muslims and exposed to Islamization. We know most about this expansion and Islamization for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the Europeans were making their presence felt and were recording what they saw. In 1605, the rulers of the port of Makassar, near the southwestern tip of the largest Celebes island, converted to Islam, and they embarked on a sporadic naval campaign over the next thirty-five years referred to as the "Islam wars," during which several nearby ports were forced to embrace Islam. Before 1500, such Muslim military activity can be inferred, as in the case of Majapahit; due to scant documentation, however, it is usually assumed to have been absent. That assumption contributes to a generalization that Islam spread peacefully in Southeast Asia. In fact, political expansion there echoes the aggressive state-building impetus of the earliest era of Islam; it is also consistent with increasing sophistication in the organization and financing of trade.

Another area of debate relates specifically to Islam's role in Asian maritime trade. Islamic jurisprudence prohibited interest and provided favorable customs rates for Muslims. Both stipulations favored networking among Muslim merchants. Both were ideals that were not always and everywhere employed, but there is evidence that they were well known. Networking could be accomplished through an Islamic state or through individuals, but both types are extremely difficult to document. When and where Muslims were in the majority, when and where they were in political power, networks—for the historian trying to trace them—are camouflaged by those very circumstances. In other words, if most merchants in the pool were Muslim, it was not necessarily by design that Muslims dealt extensively with each other, but rather it simply could have been an artifact of probability. The issue is further confused by the fact that various Muslims involved in a transaction might have had different ethnicities and languages, but their Arabic Muslim names
appear undifferentiated in the sources. Networks could also be obscured from historians by the wide use of service providers from outside Islam—Hindus, Jews, Armenians—people such as brokers, moneylenders, and insurers. The easiest way to find Muslim networks is to look at the better-documented commercial enterprises established by small coastal states, rather than those of individuals. A Muslim ruler, for example, might have exchanged commercial brokers as well as political agents with another Muslim ruler. He might have acquired control over distant ports and then sent members of his ruling family to oversee trade. These initial efforts were often followed by settlements, enclaves that looked out over the ocean for their cultural and commercial connections. If it is accepted that the expression “Muslim trade” means something more than a shorthand for the trade carried on by merchants who happened to be Muslim, then the expression can be used to refer to these cohesive enterprises. It should be emphasised that networks of Muslims were not based on a legal concept and they were not companies or corporations; there was no provision in Islamic law for a corporate person. Rather, they were made up of individuals with interconnected objectives.

Networks show up more clearly for minority groups, such as Jews and Armenians, and for distinct merchant sub-castes in India. Each group was likely to have a high degree of internal homogeneity in terms of ethnicity and language. The designation “trade diaspora” has been applied to such a network in which minority cooperation was sought not only to facilitate trade but also to help preserve the minority group. A well-known individual who provides evidence of such minority networks is Havannes Joughayetsi, a seventeenth-century merchant from the Armenian community on the outskirts of Isfahan, the Safavid capital city. The community had been established earlier by Shah Abbas, through forced relocation from Armenia, in order to serve the commercial interests of the regime. It became the most important center of Armenian networks extending from London and Amsterdam to Canton and Manila. Havannes traveled extensively, particularly in India. He kept a journal, which is extant for the years 1682 to 1693 and in which he indicates his dependence on distant Armenians for their hospitality and for their ability to serve as translators for his commercial transactions.

Even when they lived in minority enclaves, Muslims did not have the same kind of minority concerns as did Jews and Armenians because Muslims were numerous and Islamic imperial powers ensured that the Muslim community as a whole would thrive. Also, Muslims were not subject to the same caste restrictions as Hindus, although caste-like differentiations survived conversion in India. If, then, minority status and caste restrictions were not motivations, why would Muslims choose net-working in the first place? Most simply, networks helped counterbalance the diversity and uncertainty of commercial variables. In the vast Indian Ocean region, weights, measures, coinage, and exchange rates differed from port to port, and prices were not predictable. This situation necessitated distant business contacts and reliable information. Also, since the monsoons delimited arrival and departure times, it was useful to have agents in various ports who could purchase commodities when the prices were low and warehouse them until they could be sold at an attractive profit.

But why Muslim networks? The process of networking provided a structure for the apparent preference of many Muslim merchants to deal with coreligionists. As mentioned earlier, a very important element in the common culture was the commercial law provided by Islamic jurisprudence. Commercial law was often observed in the breach, but at least it provided a standard from which to deviate. Beyond that standard, there was a commonality of Islamic culture which overlay distinct and potentially divisive regional variations. The common culture included the Qur’an, communal prayer and other rituals, dietary restrictions against pork and alcohol, regulations about family and social relationships, mosques, and, for many, sufi affiliations. There were often marriage ties between the merchant class and the ulama. Many Muslims had at least a passing knowledge of Arabic or Persian, and even a smattering of common language was advantageous in trade.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the sufi tradition has generated brotherhoods that often provided room and board for merchants and other travelers. In the maritime world, one such organization was the Kazaruniyya, named for the Iranian hometown, Kazarun, of its eleventh-century founding saint, Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Shahriyar. By the thirteenth century, adherents had spread to ports along the coast of India and in China. Like several other sufi groups, this one sold spiritual insurance: merchants would enter into an agreement whereby they accepted baraka, “blessing,” meaning here the protective blessing derived from the virtue of the order’s dead founder, in exchange for a payment upon the safe completion of a commercial journey. Ibn Battuta remarked on this practice and the presence of the Kazaruniyya at Cambay, Calicut, and Quillon in India and also at Canton in China. Presumably, all their clients were Muslims.

A powerful symbol of the universality of Islam amid plurality was the pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj, required once in the lifetimes of all Muslims physically and financially able to make the journey. The hajj takes place during the last month of the Muslim lunar calendar, and the rituals require several days. People have always come from all over the Islamic world by land and sea. In the period in question, transportation to
Mecca was an annual boon to the maritime industry, as large numbers of paying pilgrims crowded onto merchant ships sailing to Mecca’s Red Sea port, Jidda. Many merchants themselves proudly used the title hajji, indicating that they had fulfilled the pilgrimage obligation. A merchant community in Southeast Asia had a saying: If one of them had silver, he would buy gold, but if he prospered further, he would go to Mecca. Professional merchants from throughout the Islamic world assembled along with the general throng of pilgrims, and even many of these latter brought with them something to sell in order to help finance their journey. International transactions could be carried out, information could be shared and disseminated. A French source from the early eighteenth century describes the hajj as perhaps the world’s greatest trade fair conducted in a short space of time. This commercially significant event was, by definition, exclusive to Muslims.

The components of religious identity mentioned so far had positive effects within the Muslim networks. There were some negative effects as well. Two examples, from the many available, of clashes between Hindus and Muslims are given here. The first incident occurred in 1669, when Aurangzeb’s Islamization policy reached Surat, the Mughal empire’s principal port, in the form of orders to suppress Hinduism. The effects were severe enough to cause Hindu merchants to leave the city in protest, thereby disrupting trade and shutting down many of the commercial services on which the port relied. They returned only after promises of fair treatment were made by government officials. The second example dates from the 1780s, in Sind. In that decade, an intolerant Muslim regime called the Talpurs came to power and began persecuting Hindus. As in the Surat example, this practice only had the effect of seriously disrupting trade for everyone.

**European Participation**

Another major question that may be asked in this context is how Europeans fit into the well-established trade patterns. This issue is distinct from European dominance over long-distance East-West routes because it involves local and regional trade. There were at least two reasons why European companies or their employees became involved in local and regional Asian trade. One was more or less official: the companies needed to help finance their long-distance trade. The other was unofficial: individual company “servants,” as employees were called, needed to supplement their meager salaries.

Before an answer on European participation is hazarded, it should be pointed out that introducing Europeans into the picture greatly enlarges the pool of sources. Books by Western merchants and travelers abounded in an era when the information they could provide was very valuable. Several European countries had trading companies in Asia and each kept records, often in considerable detail and in hand-copied triplicate, many of which have survived in archives. The companies, of course, were interested in their own affairs rather than in those of Asians, but scattered observations and occasional reports on Asian trade are valuable. It is difficult to overestimate the historiographical significance of the increasing amount of documentation, because it skews the story toward Europeans. No longer do a few works, such as the Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires, stand out; by the time the British dismantled the East India Company in the mid-nineteenth century, a large building was required to house a set of the company’s archives in London. Asians kept current customs registers and shipping lists but often regarded them as ephemeral information not worthy of archives. The Ottomans provide an exception, since their bureaucracy kept land, tax, and legal records. The Ottoman archives are indispensable for Mediterranean history but so far have not proven to be of great help for Asian maritime history beyond the Red Sea and Persian Gulf regions.

The European penchant for record-keeping may have been a dynamic factor in and of itself. Europeans could analyze their data over a long period of time and make adjustments in their business practices accordingly. Long-standing records and decisions based on them lent a corporateness to their enterprise that is not apparent in the Asian case. However, while documentation by Europeans may have had an impact on East-West trade, it did not especially work to their advantage in an Asian setting.

It is not easy to estimate the impact that either the companies or their employees had on local trade. The difficulty is not only the lopsidedness of sources but also the fact that European policies, meant to enhance long-distance trade, had local consequences. An example is the Dutch policy to exclude the English from the long-distance pepper trade from Southeast Asia to Europe. Particularly as a result of this closed trade, Bengali merchants accustomed to doing business at Melaka or Java tended to shift to the South Asian Coromandel coast and buy and sell different commodities. This sort of shift had ripple effects that are immediately ascribed to Bengalis but are ultimately attributable to the Dutch.

Europeans had both advantages and vulnerabilities in the Asian markets. It was expected, for example, that Europeans would pay higher prices than anyone else, would buy in larger volume, and would pay cash. In some cases, these expectations provided an incentive to court European merchants by offering prices and rates in their favor. An example is the coffee trade at Mocha, in the Yemen, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the early 1770s, Muslims who traded
at Mocha paid seven percent import duties and up to eight percent more in various fees; the English were asked to pay only three percent plus modest fees. This preferential treatment angered Muslim merchants in Jidda and Cairo. Another, rather different example is the tin trade at Perak, a Muslim port principality on the west coast of the Malay peninsula. During the seventeenth century, Perak was subordinate to the sultanate of Aceh, on Sumatra; but, by the eighteenth century, it was sufficiently independent to negotiate on its own with the Dutch East India Company. The Dutch wanted tin; Perak wanted a steady income. Perak's rulers realized that the only way to secure Dutch patronage was to make sure the Dutch had a vested interest in the port. They therefore drew up a treaty which gave the Dutch rights to all the tin available at Perak. The resulting Dutch monopoly over tin exports kept most other regional and foreign merchants away, since there was nothing else to buy at Perak except some opium and cloth. Mocha and Perak were both secondary ports, each largely dependent on a single commodity and, for those reasons, ready and willing to entice Europeans, even at the risk of alienating their usual customers.

There were several clear disadvantages experienced by the Europeans. One was their higher overhead expense. Their vessels were bigger than local craft and required larger crews. The demand in local markets—as opposed to the long-distance market for which the ships had been built—meant that cargo space was often underutilized. In contrast, the dhows of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf could be managed with small crews, and they carried commodities in efficient volume. Europeans were also disadvantaged in relation to specific local trade practices. One such practice was called in Persian dastgardan, roughly, “transferring from hand to hand.” It consisted of installment purchases, whereby a merchant with limited funds could pay for and acquire goods piecemeal over a period of weeks or even months. This method took patience on the part of both the seller and buyer and proved to be an unattractive method to Europeans accustomed to the immediate transfer of commodities, even when they were purchased on credit. Another problem for Europeans was that they brought with them few commodities desired in Asia, whereas they themselves had a constant demand for Asian pepper, spices, silk, and tea. This situation helps explain why Europeans paid cash and had difficulty financing long-distance trade. Europeans had to work hard to understand and accommodate Asian tastes. Armenian silk merchants operating from Iran could find little in Europe to bring back: some woolen cloth, metal items such as knives and scissors, watches, Venetian glass. There are examples of the English East India Company trying deliberately to enlarge the Indian market for English-made broadcloth. For example, in 1717, the company suggested that Indian merchants be required to wear English cloth when they approached the company's council at Calcutta to transact business. The council responded to its employers that it would be difficult to interfere with clothing traditions and, furthermore, that Indians used broadcloth for purposes other than clothing, such as for floor coverings. As we will see in Chapter 5, it was not until the nineteenth century, after political domination had been imposed, that the British could legislate the import of British-made cotton into India, thereby hurting the local cotton industry. Sometimes Europeans were not adept at marketing even within Asia: the Dutch company, for example, failed to interest Middle Eastern consumers in Javanese coffee, since they had already developed a taste for the Yemeni variety exported from Mocha. Other areas in which Europeans had difficulty were in money lending and insurance. There were several European-owned agency houses which offered banking services and insurance. They were seldom able to attract Asian customers for the simple reason that such services were already well provided by other Asians.

Before examining, in the next chapter, the competitive impact of European companies, it might be useful to consider the frustrations of an individual company agent named Samuel Manesty who, on his own behalf, often did business in partnership with Asians. Manesty served as the British East India Company's resident at Basra; his term of office was lengthy, extending from the late eighteenth into the early nineteenth century. He was successful enough as a private merchant to be able to buy his own vessels but could never exert the influence he clearly desired. Manesty's job description, as resident, was to facilitate company business at the Ottoman end of the Persian Gulf. However, he tended to reserve his business acumen for his private trade and regarded his official capacity as essentially political. He was periodically reprimanded from London for neglecting the company's trade. While he was the resident, the company was trying to walk a fine line between two mutually hostile polities, namely, the Ottoman province of southern Iraq and the current regime of Iran, which, by the 1790s, was the Qajar dynasty. Manesty did not help matters by getting into squabbles with the Ottoman provincial lieutenant-governor, the mutassallim. As the result of one such clash, in 1793, Manesty decided independently to move the residency from Basra to the port of Kuwait. His surprised and embarrassed superiors had to cajole him back to Basra and smooth things over with the Ottomans. Why he was allowed to keep his job for so long appears to be inexplicable.

Manesty's frustrations as a private merchant are amply demonstrated by an incident of piracy. One of Manesty's ships, called the Pearl, was often hired out to his own employer, the East India Company. On one such
occasion, in the autumn of 1799, the ship carried commodities belonging to various Asian and European interests, including horses owned by Manesty himself. A French pirate seized the Pearl and sold the cargo at the Omani port of Muscat. The British regarded the individual Frenchman's behavior as an act of war. In addition, the authorities at Muscat had recently signed a friendship pact with the British, ostensibly to the exclusion of the French, and this appeared to be a violation of that agreement. Because the Pearl had been to their port several times in the past, the Muscatis probably recognized it and knew that both its owner and the lessee were British. None of these factors, however, stopped the Muscatis from taking advantage of the bargains offered by the French pirate. The angry British were limited in their reaction by their political concerns. Wanting to maintain the new friendship with Muscat, they chose a low-key response of diplomatic protest. There was little that Manesty, as an individual, could do about his ship or his horses. Enmeshed in its own regional complexities, there was little the company could do either. Manesty's experiences help illustrate both the successes and the limitations of Europeans involved in the local and regional trade during this period.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Europeans learned what Asians already knew: how to use the wind systems of the Indian Ocean. They also learned the wind systems of the Atlantic and Pacific, knowledge which would give them an advantage on a global scale. However, they entered Asian waters before European naval technology greatly exceeded that of Asia and before the Industrial Revolution. By many measures, economic productivity in China and possibly also in India was still ahead of that in Europe. Asia had a relatively large population and possessed urban cultures that were highly complex. The role that Europeans would play in Asia was not at all obvious.

When the Europeans arrived in Asia at the turn of the sixteenth century, there were four powerful land-based Asian regimes: Ming China, Mughal India, Safavid Iran, and the Ottoman Empire, the last three Muslim dominated. The Ottomans extended their political control nearly to Vienna. They—and, by emotional extension, Muslims in general—were perceived as a military and cultural threat to the heart of Europe. Iberians also had the memory of Muslim conquest and of a centuries-long occupation that had only recently been ended, in 1492. This perception of threat colored the views of Europeans who sailed into Asian waters. The land-based strength of Asia and the European fear of Islamic expansion were important elements in the early phase of contact.

By the mid-nineteenth century, for reasons discussed in this chapter, perceptions were very different. The Qing successors to the Ming of China had been compelled to open several of their ports to Western trade, and Europeans were beginning to have economic and cultural impact in some Chinese coastal areas. The Safavids were long gone, replaced eventually by the less effective Qajar regime. The last figurehead Mughal shah lost his East India Company pension in 1858, and minor principalities were unable to resist annexation to British India. The Ottomans were the last cohesive Islamic empire, but they had suffered military and territorial losses already to Russians and Austrians, beginning...