



THE DUTCH OVERSEAS EMPIRE, 1600–1800

Pieter C. Emmer and Jos J.L. Gommans

The Dutch Overseas Empire, 1600–1800

How did the Dutch Empire compare with other imperial enterprises? And how was it experienced by the indigenous peoples who became part of this colonial power? At the start of the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic emerged as the centre of a global empire that stretched along the edges of continents and connected societies surrounding the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In the Dutch Empire, ideas of religious tolerance and scientific curiosity went hand in hand with severe political and economic exploitation of the local populations through violence, monopoly and slavery. This pioneering history of the early-modern Dutch Empire, over two centuries, for the first time provides a comparative and indigenous perspective on Dutch overseas expansion. Apart from discussing the impact of the Empire on the economy and society at home in the Dutch Republic, it also offers a fascinating window into the contemporary societies of Asia, Africa and the Americas and, through their interactions, on processes of early-modern globalisation.

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This publication has been made possible with financial support from the Dutch Foundation for Literature.

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for literature

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108428378

DOI: [10.1017/9781108647403](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108647403)

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First published 2021

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Emmer, P. C., author. | Gommans, Jos J. L., author.

Title: The Dutch Overseas Empire, 1600–1800 / Pieter C. Emmer, Leiden University, Jos J.L. Gommans, Leiden University.

Other titles: Rijk aan de rand van de wereld. English

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Adapted translation of: Rijk aan de rand van de wereld : de geschiedenis van Nederland overzee, 1600–1800. Amsterdam : Bert Bakker, 2012.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020019429 (print) | LCCN 2020019430 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108428378 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108647403 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Netherlands – Colonies – History – 17th century. | Netherlands – Colonies – History – 18th century.

Classification: LCC JV2515 .E4613 2021 (print) | LCC JV2515 (ebook) | DDC 909/.0971249205–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020019429>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020019430>

ISBN 978-1-108-42837-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-44951-9 Paperback

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Cover Image

Detail of an illustration from the *Dastur-i Himmat* produced in Murshidabad (Bengal, India), c. 1755–60. It narrates the story of Prince Kamrup of Awadh and Princess Kamalata of Serendip (Sri Lanka), who fall in love without having met. Kamalata sends the Brahmin Samipi to trace her mysterious lover, after which Kamrup sets sail to Serendip. Overcoming many trials and tribulations, Kamrup and Kamalata marry, and become the new king and queen of Awadh.

In this scene, we see Samipi, Kamrup and his companions at the port of Hugli-Chinsura (Bengal), preparing for embarkation to Serendip. In the background are two European ships with flags inspired by the Dutch red, white and blue. This scene that combines European naturalism (ships and porters) with Indian artistic conventions (Kamrup and his party) reveals a fascinating Indian perspective on both the material and the visual culture of the Netherlands (see Linda York Leach, *Mughal and Other Indian Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library*, Volume II (London, 1995), 623–54).

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Note on Terminology

When discussing ethnic groups, we have attempted to be as specific as possible, ideally referring to a tribe or nation, or, where necessary, using the conventional terms for a specific macro-region, such as Africans, Chinese and Europeans. When referring to the indigenous populations of the Americas in general, we have employed terms that resonate with the various peoples concerned. Thus in the case of the Americas we use the term American Indians but in the case of North America mostly Native Americans, and in the case of Brazil we use the term indigenous Brazilians. The term Indians has been used exclusively for the people of the Indian subcontinent. We have also tried to avoid anachronisms like Indonesians, preferring historical usage. This is also true with our choices of geographical terms, thus Siam instead of Thailand and Iran instead of Persia, although the latter has been used when referring to the antiquarian European interest in that region. We have chosen to use the term 'slaves' rather than 'enslaved', since 'slaves' serves as a conventional legal term that facilitates a comparative analysis throughout time and space. In addition, the term 'enslaved' might seem to refer to those slaves who had been free but were enslaved during their lifetime, whereas the term slaves also denominates slaves who had inherited their slave status from birth. Finally, we feel that the legal aspect of the term does not reduce people to that category and rightly articulates the dehumanising quality of slavery.

Preface

The Empire of Mataram was an Oriental despotism of the traditional kind.

Asian society, whether Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Persian or Malay, had no wish whatever to be changed by European contacts in the 17th and 18th centuries, but wished only to retain its traditional and static forms.

Charles R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800*¹

It was more than fifty years ago that British historian Charles R. Boxer published his masterpiece *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800*. For anyone who does not have a command of the Dutch language, this is still the only written study of early modern Dutch colonial history. It is a very readable book, and in many ways it is far from outdated. You could even say that the book was a forerunner of what fellow historians recently started discussing in what they have called the *New Imperial History*.² Just like this new generation of historians, Boxer pays much attention to the influence of the colonial empire on the metropolis and on the various social and cultural aspects of the empire. He is also surprisingly innovative in his decision to talk of a single empire, with East and West being connected with one another via the Dutch metropolis. As a British historian, he also makes very sharp comparisons with the history of ‘his’ British Empire. Unsurprisingly, therefore, our own undertaking can but admire Boxer’s classic and attempt to build further on it.

Indeed, Boxer’s themes are also our themes. We, too, want to try to bring the Atlantic World and Monsoon Asia closer together through the mediation of the Netherlands, and in so doing we will not shy away from making sometimes bold comparisons with other overseas empires, in particular the British one. That is not to deny that there are two authors in this book, each with his own style and preferences. Although our views

¹ Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, 213, 217.

² For the specific Dutch context in comparison with the British and French cases, see the essay by Raben, ‘A New Dutch Imperial History’, 5–30.

are unlikely to be in complete harmony, we nonetheless hope that a certain level of polyphony will shine through. Differences in tone can also be traced back to the fact that the expansion-hungry Dutch, just like other Europeans, had to adapt to the differing political and economic environments that they faced in East and West. In much of Asia, the Dutch had little option but to adjust to the existing power and trade patterns. To fully grasp the role of the Dutch in the region, the reader needs to be aware of the key historical themes at play in the different Asian societies. The exact opposite applies to the Atlantic region. Trade in the Atlantic was a European invention, and Europeans had the upper hand in the New World. In most of Africa, on the other hand, European influence was not entirely new, but it was certainly more marginal than in either the Americas or Asia.

More than fifty years after the publication of his overview, we can conclude that most of the historical developments Boxer observed are still valid, although the way they are interpreted has altered quite substantially, particularly in the light of the post-colonial and global turns that the field has experienced during recent decades. In this book we will attempt to connect the themes raised by Boxer with the latest insights in the area of intellectual and military history (in Part I), slavery and the slave trade (in Part II) and Asian societies (in Part III). The quotes above show that, at least in this last area, there is ample room for improvement of Boxer's viewpoint.

The present work is a substantially expanded version and adapted translation of the Dutch publication *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee, 1600–1800* published by Bert Bakker, Amsterdam 2012. For the translation we are most grateful, first and foremost, to our translator Marilyn Hedges, to Steven Holt for some meticulous copy-editing, but also to our Dutch publisher Mai Spijkers and to the organisations that have provided the funding: the Dutch Foundation for Literature and the Institute for History at Leiden University. We are also particularly grateful to our colleagues Henk den Heijer, Kiri Paramore and Femme Gaastra from Leiden and Peter Rietbergen from Nijmegen for the comments and suggestions they made on the first version of the Dutch manuscript. The same goes for Larissa Schulte Nordholt for her advice on ethnic terminology. Last, but certainly not least, we are indebted to more than 150 bright Asian and African students who struggled to learn the Dutch language and wrote wonderful BA, MA and PhD theses during the TANAP, ENCOMPASS and COSMOPOLIS training programmes that have been running at Leiden University since the beginning of this millennium. Their research resonates in the footnotes and in the explorative spirit of this book that is

dedicated to them. Naturally, we ourselves remain fully responsible for the content and layout of the book. Parts of Chapters 2, 8 and 9 appeared previously in a slightly different format. We would like to express our appreciation to Atlas Maior Publishers in Voorburg and Van Wijnen in Franeker for permission to re-use these texts.

Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans

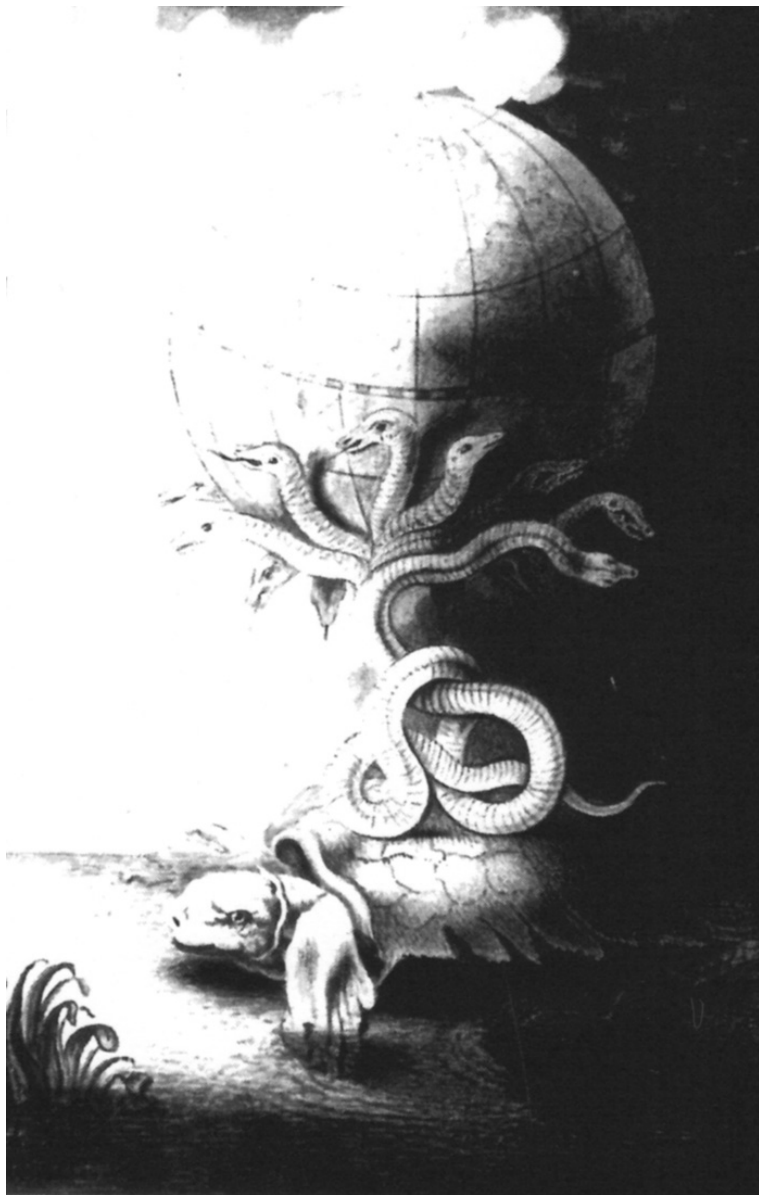


Fig. 1 Title page of Philip Angel, *Deex-antaers*, Batavia 1658. The drawing refers to the Hindu tradition of the thousand-headed serpent Sheshanaga that carried the world, resting on the ocean and on the back of a turtle. According to Angel, it is on these weak fundaments that the heathens, 'seated in deep night' and with 'their lost senses', wait for the enlightenment of the true God.

Introduction

We everywhere see violence and oppression give birth to a commerce founded on œconomy, while men are constrained to take refuge in marshes, in isles, in the shallows of the sea, and even on rocks themselves. Thus it was, that Tyre, Venice, and the cities of Holland, were founded. Fugitives found there a place of safety. It was necessary that they should subsist; they drew therefore their subsistence from all parts of the world.

Montesquieu¹

If we plot Dutch possessions on a map of the world from 1700, a quick glance would be enough to determine that in global terms the early modern Dutch overseas empire was very much a peripheral phenomenon. The Dutch had founded an immense empire that stretched like a string of pearls along the edges of the continents of Europe, Asia, America and Africa. The actual pearls consisted mostly of trading hubs, which were only partially conquered by the Dutch. Especially along the coasts of the powerful Asian empires such as Iran, India, China and Japan, and on the coast of West Africa, the Dutch had only small trading offices with no territorial rights. The Dutch Empire was therefore primarily a maritime phenomenon, with only a few ‘real’ colonies in the Caribbean, the Cape, Java, the Malukus, Ceylon and, for a short time, also in North America, Brazil and Taiwan. The Dutch Republic itself was also a rather marginal, maritime European phenomenon. After a long eighty-year revolt, the Rhine and Maas delta had formally shrugged off the grip of a continental European empire. The resulting Republic was one of seven equal provinces, where the sea-oriented cities of Holland and Zeeland, and Amsterdam in particular, financed the bulk of the state expenditures and had the main say in decision-making, both within the Republic and, via the trading companies, in the overseas territories.

¹ Cited from Book 20, Chapter 5 of his *The Spirit of Laws*, in volume 2 of *The Complete Works*, 6.

The maritime position of the Republic on the periphery of continental Europe gave the commercial spirit of the coastal provinces free rein to develop. Historical geographer Edward Whiting Fox has pointed out that the inhabitants of coastal areas generally have more confidence in the working of the market and trade, and hence believe more in *laissez faire*. In this respect, he even observed a clear division between the France of the interior – i.e. the France of Paris, more reliant on coercion and regulation, destined to be victorious – and that ‘other’ France – i.e. the maritime France of Bordeaux that would ultimately lose out.² From this geopolitical point of view, the Dutch Republic can be regarded as that ‘other’ Germany, a maritime polity that managed to detach itself from the more terrestrial Holy Roman and Spanish empires under Habsburg rule, to be officially sanctioned by the 1648 Peace of Münster. In any event, if there is one thing that characterises the mentality of the reigning Dutch regents in the Republic, then it is the almost blind faith in what the market and trade could achieve. The idea gradually evolved in the Republic that there is such a thing as an economy ruled by human passions, which should be allowed to run its ‘natural’ course without government intervention. Poet and contemporary Joost van den Vondel summed it up quite nicely, saying that the Dutch penetrated ‘as far as the sun shines’, but more importantly travelled ‘to all seas and coasts wherever profit leads us’.³

It was a happy coincidence for the Dutch that during this same period many other ‘maritime peripheries’ experienced a period of economic prosperity. In many parts of Asia, the period is even regarded as an Age of Commerce, a time when especially the coastal regions and its port cities flourished to an unprecedented degree. Unlike the Republic, though, the coastal regions of Asia seldom managed to make themselves independent from their hinterlands. At least in South and East Asia, the vast agricultural wealth and the sheer power of massive cavalry armies of the continental empires made a long-term coastal autonomy very difficult to achieve. It was only in those areas where there was no such imposing hinterland that independent maritime states could be created. The Dutch, too, were able to establish settlements in these very areas, in Java and Ceylon, for example, where they actually encouraged these littorals to become independent from the interior. Re-integration, when it occurred, would be instigated not from the interior, but from the coast and under Dutch authority. This

² Whiting Fox, *History in Geographic Perspective*.

³ Perron, *De muze van Jan Compagnie*, 22.

heralded the birth of a new colonial structure of more intensive government and agrarian exploitation that was to start at the end of our period, but would not reach its peak until the nineteenth century.

Historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries wrestle with the question of whether we should regard the Dutch East India Company or VOC as a commercial or a political entity. Just as in the old days, this is a difficult subject on which to find common ground. It is true that the VOC did evolve to become an empire with considerable territorial power in Asia; however, it ultimately remained a trading company because it did not enable the immigrant population of its territories to put down roots there and to develop further, as happened, for example, in the Portuguese communities in Asia. A mass transfer of immigrants from Europe, as occurred in the New World, was not an option for the VOC. One of the authors in the debate favours the term 'Company State' – a term that also seems to be gaining ground in the literature on the English East India Company (EIC).⁴ In our opinion, this adds little to the notion of an 'overseas empire' as applied in this book, which emphasises the maritime limitations of the Dutch Empire in geopolitical terms and at the same time encompasses the connections of the VOC with the activities of the West India Company or WIC, and other 'Dutch' players in the Atlantic world. Naturally, there was no administrative nerve centre; in practice the Dutch Empire was run by a diffuse group of regents in the province of Holland who tried to maintain their grip on the Companies via various administrative bodies. Although there was no shared institution linking East and West, many of the ruling regents of the VOC and WIC lived within walking distance of each other. They understood one another through and through, routinely exchanged functions with each other, and regularly met one another in the many administrative institutions of the companies, the city, the province and the federal government in The Hague. In the overseas regions there was a relatively clear authority structure, headed by a complex network of officials that held sway over both trade and administration and that controlled a highly diverse body of employees and subjects. In other words, our view is that this Dutch overseas empire should be regarded as a rather fluid conglomerate of overseas activities based on an amalgam of very different rights and privileges managed by a relatively small circle of Dutch regent families. Many of these families also supplied the administrative elites of the city of Amsterdam, the States (or province) of Holland and the Dutch Republic. Given the

⁴ Weststeijn, 'The VOC as a Company-State', 13–34. For the English model, see Stern, *The Company-State*. See also van Meersbergen, 'Writing East India Company History', 10–36.

deep entanglement of private and institutional fortunes, the prime concern of these elites was the profitability of the institutions that they administered, including that of the two Companies. For the VOC administrators, this meant that they adhered as far as possible to monopolies that could minimise the finance of territorial conquest and control. On the other side of the world, after just a brief imperialist phase, the WIC was soon written off and there, too, the Dutch Empire remained primarily a commercial enterprise and could never under any circumstances evolve to become a powerful colonial lobby as in England.

To what extent can this Empire be labelled as ‘colonial’ or even ‘Dutch’? The Empire was ‘colonial’ because it entailed asymmetrical power relationships, as well as one-sided exploitation by a closed, native Dutch elite power that had its home basis far away. When we refer in this book to ‘Dutch’, we mean the Dutch cultural area in the broadest sense of the word. Our focus is on the most important Dutch overseas players in this period: the trading Companies established in the Republic of the United Netherlands. This does not mean that there were no ‘Dutch’ overseas activities outside the Republic and outside the Companies, as in the case of the numerous Dutchmen in the service of the other trading organisations or individuals such as Lambert Ruysch (1549–1611) from Culemborg who served the Jesuit mission and who arrived in Asia much earlier than the merchants from Holland.⁵ Just as for the many private world travellers, the nature of their overseas activities was not specifically Dutch, and for this reason they do not receive the attention they deserve on the grounds of their individual curricula.

The question of the Empire’s Dutchness is hard to answer because the term ‘Dutch’ is both too broad and too narrow. In terms of the ruling group of regents, it is more appropriate to talk of a Holland–Zeeland Empire since the other provinces, not to mention the ‘inland colonies’ of Brabant, Limburg and Drenthe, generally invested much less in overseas expansion. ‘Dutch’ in this sense is an anachronism that relies on the notion of a ‘national’ past that was constructed as such only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An approach that looks only at the Dutch elites fails to do justice to the enormous ethnic diversity of the Dutch Empire – a characteristic of all pre-modern Eurasian empires. Initially the outbound WIC and VOC staff were largely Germans and Scandinavians, mainly sailors and soldiers. The principle was that the lower the rank, and the further on in time, the more foreigners there

⁵ Jacobs, ‘Een Culemborger in India’, 45–54.

were. Among the soldiers, more than half – and among the seamen just under half – of all those outbound were foreigners. Although around a million Europeans left the Republic for overseas destinations, the European colonists planning to settle permanently overseas represented only a fraction of the total population under Dutch rule. The ‘Dutch’ colonisation of Taiwan and Java, for example, would have been unthinkable without the far more numerous Chinese. In addition, there were of course the local population groups, although these had been severely thinned out in South Africa and America, as well as in Taiwan, by various infectious diseases spread at least in part by the Dutch. In the Caribbean, besides the imported African slaves, the growing group of people with a mixed ethnic background had a strong demographic presence but – unlike mestizo groups in Batavia – they were not able to acquire the status of whites.⁶

In short, although we will refer in this book to a Dutch Empire, what we are actually dealing with is an empire in which numerous peoples from Europe, Asia, America and Africa actively participated, whether of their own free will or as a result of having been coerced. Even the many artists and intellectuals in the Republic itself who drew inspiration from the overseas discoveries were often Flemish, French, German and English immigrants. In fact, the Netherlands had never been as un-Dutch as it was during its Golden Age. Having said that, throughout the book, and in particular in the concluding Coda, we will return to this issue and attempt to detect certain specific traits of the Dutch Empire as it evolved.

Anyone interested in the history of the VOC and WIC can choose from the many excellent recent overviews that detail the organisational and maritime aspects of these trading concerns. The present book is not intended to be a repetition of such works, and so we have opted for a different approach that highlights comparison with other European empires as well as the interaction between the Dutch Republic and its overseas territories in both the metropolis and the different contact zones. We make the assumption that Dutch identity evolved in a continuous interaction with the overseas world. In the first part of this work, the Netherlands is the starting point and we look at the world from that pivotal viewpoint. After taking account of the organisational and commercial aspects of the two trading companies, we will more specifically discuss the economic, social and cultural impact of the overseas empire on the metropolis as well as the religious, scientific and artistic dialogue that it engendered with Asia. The second and third

⁶ Kruijtzter, ‘European Migration in the Dutch Sphere’, 96–122.

parts of the book will discuss Dutch operations in respectively the Atlantic world and Monsoon Asia. Given the differences of the indigenous societies in these regions, the two parts follow two different approaches. Whereas we take a more comparative, intra-European perspective for the Atlantic, for Monsoon Asia we have made an effort to understand the process of Dutch expansion from the inside out, that is, from the continuously changing political and economic constellations in Asia. Hence, readers will find the Dutch vessels and trading posts incorporated into the complex dynamics of the major Asian empires, rendering them less prominent than in the more conventional historiography of the VOC. At the same time, this last part offers a unique Dutch window on the most important political and economic developments in the immense Asian hinterland. In the book's Coda, we will pull together the conclusions of the regional parts, reflecting once again, but now for the Dutch Empire as a whole, on the Empire's economic and cultural impact as well as on its specific features compared with other European empires.

Besides offering readers an overview, this book also provides an agenda for future research, in which we hope that the history of Dutch overseas expansion will become more closely integrated into world history, if only for us to be able to continue that quixotic quest to discover the unifying cord, 'hidden in silence', that the Dutch poet and novelist Jan Jacob Slauerhoff (1898–1936) so passionately longed for.

The Discoverer

He loves the land that the sea hid from him
 Love, like a woman to beings who are going to be born
 So was worrying and in dreams was sinking
 At the top of the deck, watching the bow lift.

It seemed to him that something was moving
 A mist in the distance wanting to break
 While the boat, foaming, divided the waters
 Against the land about to be born

When I discovered it though, he knew the betrayal
 Nothing united them. Hidden in silence, no cord
 Again wanted to cover it up, but it was too late:

It lay bare to the world. Only he was left
 To follow the course sadly, no destination or pier
 And without power – empty itself in the emptiness of the seas.⁷

⁷ Translated by Maurice Venning, see <https://lyricstranslate.com/fr/o-descobridor-discoverer.html> (consulted 31 December 2019).



Fig. 2 Allegory of the Dutch Republic as a seapower. This engraving by Bernard Picart (1730) shows how 'Neptune offers the empire of the sea to the Republic of Holland. She is accompanied by religion and the two companies of the East and the West, at the front Mercury shows her a map of the parts of the world where she extends her trade.' The Latin phrase on the lintel reads *Concordia res parvae crescunt*, which translates as 'small things flourish through concord'. The persona of the Republic holds a staff with the cap of liberty, the *pileus libertatis*, i.e. the Roman emblem of manumission.

Part I The Grumbling Hive

Gedwongen ofte gansch uitgeroeyt synde, dwelck wel het sekerste soude syn, alsoe dit schelmachtich gedrocht nemmermeer soe wel in toom en sal gehouden worden [...] Dese plaetse [Banda] soo gepeupleert ende van onse volck bewoont synde sullen UWed. eensdeels een plaetse hebben om eene Republycque te formeeren.

Being curtailed or entirely eradicated, which would be the safest since this roguish monstrosity will never be contained any more [...] Thus having populated and inhabited this place [Banda] with our people, Your Honour will hold a place to create a Republic.

Jacob l'Hermite (1612)¹

¹ Cited in de Jonge, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië*, Volume 3, 389–91.

Introduction

Dutch overseas expansion in the seventeenth century is a difficult phenomenon for a modern political scientist to explain. In terms of their administrative structure, the long string of Dutch settlements along the coasts of Asia, Africa and America was something between a trading diaspora and an empire. Certainly, Dutch contemporaries themselves neither regarded it as an empire, nor did they feel any sympathies for the very idea of empire. Had they not succeeded in repelling such an empire in a tremendously bloody uprising lasting a staggering eighty years? Their rebellion had been against an imperial tyrant who rode roughshod over their traditional privileges and freedoms. Or, as the present-day Dutch national anthem has it: the Spanish-Habsburg Empire was a ‘tyranny that had to be driven out’.

Without an empire, the leaders of the Dutch Revolt had no idea how to cope with the sudden absence of a legitimate sovereign. For the States-General, the Act of Abjuration (1581) may well have signified a break with the Habsburg dynasty, but in the seventeenth century monarchy was still the most prevalent system of state governance. When the successive royal candidates – the Duke of Anjou and the Earl of Leicester – proved unsuccessful in taking up that position, the rebels decided to settle for a Republic in which the seven rebel provinces each remained sovereign. The stadtholder, who originally deputised for the king, now became merely an elected provincial official. Except for the States-General, in which the representatives of the Provincial States met with one another at periodic intervals, and their advisory body, the State Council (*Raad van State*), the Republic of the United Netherlands had no central state institutions. Only the areas that had been conquered, including present-day Zeeland-Flanders, Drenthe, North Brabant and Limburg, were governed directly by the States-General and thus were referred to as *Generaliteitslanden*.

The uncertainty about the legitimacy of the new Republic gave rise to a sudden surge of legal and philosophical reflection. Given the absence of a monarch sanctioned by God, the Dutch governing elites started to look

for other God-given laws. Was there any alternative to kings ruling with the grace of God? The political crisis happened at a time when there was a growing tendency among both Humanists and Calvinist theologians to accept the ‘Book of Nature’ as a second divine revelation beside the Holy Scriptures. If Nature was a source of revealed truth, would it not be possible to interpret the Republic as a perfectly natural phenomenon? Of course, more than the Scriptures, Nature was universal: it applied to everyone everywhere and could not be monopolised by any one of the many religious groups in the Republic. Hence, Nature could bring about unity in religious diversity; probably not an attractive prospect for the numerous orthodox theologians of the country, but certainly a constructive idea for the stability-hungry regents who were to administer the new Republic. Moreover, given their universal nature, natural laws applied not only to the Republic in a predominantly Christian Europe, but also to the rest of God’s creation. For some Dutchmen, even the ‘heathens’ appeared to be aware of Nature as a revealed truth. Haarlem surgeon Wouter Schouten, who travelled for a long time in Asia, noted that

even the Heathens with humble amazement have expressed and confessed that there was a Supreme God, whose sacred and adorable Majesty could be seen and remarked, not only in his great and manifold Miracles, but also, even in the very smallest Creatures.¹

The almost unstoppable influx of new information from Asia, Africa and America further broadened and deepened the growing curiosity about how natural laws could work for humanity as a whole. This is shown in the work of the celebrated Delft legal scholar Hugo Grotius. Grotius can without doubt be considered the most important ideologue behind both the emergence of the Republic and its overseas expansion. He believed that these two developments were bound together by natural, individual freedom. For Grotius, the new Republic was the final rebirth in a long tradition that could be traced back to Greek and Roman predecessors, and, closer to home, to the ancient antecedents of the imagined Batavian ancestors of the Dutch. Grotius married individual freedom with other natural ideals, such as standing up for one’s own interests, property rights and free trade. These issues were expounded in 1604–5 in his famous *De jure praedae*, of which only Chapter 12 was published (as *Mare liberum*)

¹ ‘selfs de Heydenen met een ootmoedige verwondering hebben uytgeboesemt en beleden, dat er een Opperste Godtheyt was, welckers heylige en aenbiddelijcke Majesteyt, niet alleen in sijn groote en menighvuldige Wonderwercken, maar ook, ja selfs tot in de alderminste Schepseltjens konden werden gesien en aangemerckt’, cited in Jorink, *Het Boeck der Natuere*, 34.

during his lifetime, in 1609. He was motivated to write this work because of the Dutch capture of the Portuguese vessel the *Santa Catarina* in the Singapore Straits. In 1604, the East India Company asked Grotius to apply his legal scholarship to devise juridical grounds for acquitting the newly formed Company. Grotius' argument merely amounted to the following: (a) the seas were in principle free, so nobody could claim ownership of them; (b) the military operations of the Portuguese represented a violation of this natural law; (c) as a private organisation, but also as a legitimate representative of the Dutch Republic (*respublica Hollandica*), the VOC was entitled to capture and plunder the Portuguese ship if there was no recourse to an independent court locally; (d) the Portuguese traded in contravention of the VOC treaty with the kingdom of Johore. This made the VOC and the Sultan of Johore allies in an entirely justified war (*justum bellum*).

We will encounter the same idea again later in the efforts of the West India Company (WIC) during its early years to conclude treaties with the 'natural' peoples of Peru and Chile, here too against the backdrop of Iberian aggression and oppression. It is worth noting that Grotius made no distinction between Christian and non-Christian princes (see his *De societate publica cum infidelibus*). It was not Latin Christianity, but natural laws that were the basic principle of trading, which puts Grotius at the start of modern international law. The reasoning that treaties are sacred (*pacta sunt servanda*) – in other words that free trade stops where the treaty begins – would later prove useful both as an argument for keeping the English 'friends' away from the lucrative Spice Islands and as a basis for taking ownership of areas by concluding treaties with the indigenous population. Grotius' works once again illustrate how the new ideas about republic and natural laws were developed in the interchange with the overseas shipping to Asia, Africa and America.² The chapter's opening quotation by Jacob l'Hermite shows, however, that the pursuit of a 'natural' republic in Asia could have dramatic consequences for the local population, certainly when in 1621 Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen, with the depopulation of Banda, very consistently put his money where his mouth was.

It was not only through shipping but also thanks to the development of the microscope and the telescope that completely new worlds were discovered. The Republic, and in particular Amsterdam, was at the centre of the relatively free art of book printing, and as such was the international showcase for all these new discoveries. The administrative, religious and intellectual elite in the Republic could not ignore this wealth of novelties,

² Van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle*.

but the question was, how should they deal with it? Were all these wonders God's creations, or was the devil perhaps behind some of them? In any event, all this new knowledge led to a general rethinking of old political and scientific positions, which slowly but surely created all kinds of new contradictions between the old scholastic canon of Biblical and classical texts and the new rational argumentation that was increasingly based on observation. Building on the ideals of their Humanist predecessors such as Erasmus and Lipsius, the political thinkers in the Republic, such as Grotius, Pieter de la Court, Baruch Spinoza and Bernard Mandeville, became more inclined to structure contemporary society not so much in line with the ethical ideals of how people *should ideally be*, but rather according to an analysis of how man in his natural state *actually is*.

This new view of man and a universe based on natural observation did not immediately make the seventeenth-century Republic unique, but, thanks to the relatively tolerant intellectual climate and consequently the contribution of several radical-thinking asylum seekers such as René Descartes, John Locke and Pierre Bayle, it did mean that it was here that this new view was able to come to full maturity. The liberal and inquisitive ideas of these individuals were vigorously contested by orthodox clergymen, among whom there were many Contra-Remonstrants, who continued to wield authority over public opinion well into the seventeenth century. Behind a facade of public orthodoxy, Dutch regents increasingly succumbed to what they came to regard as a healthy, 'natural' drive for self-interest. In a daring analysis, the British historian Harold Cook has already pointed out the relationship that was drawn by thinkers in the Republic between collecting goods and gathering knowledge.³ Among some intellectuals there was a growing awareness that these primeval human urges should not be fought against, but rather could be guided by a certain amount of moderation and a proper organisation of society. Following Grotius' example, it was the Amsterdam regent Casparus Barlaeus who saw a natural link between the laws of nature and trade. However, he went one step further by linking trade and wealth with the flourishing of the arts and sciences. Both activities arose from natural passions and interests.

The idea that human passions are natural and therefore intrinsically good is expressed in its most extreme form by Rotterdam Republican and atheist doctor Bernard Mandeville in his works *The Grumbling Hive (De morrende korf, 1705)* and *The Fable of the Bees. Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714) published in England. Mandeville observed in these works

³ Cook, *Matters of Exchange*.

that the world was suffering from a surfeit of virtue. Nonetheless, smart management by skilled politicians can convert private vices into public prosperity. According to Mandeville, vice does not come from feeling passions or being influenced by the weaknesses of nature, but from yielding to and obeying their call in contradiction to the voice of reason. The most successful 'hive' was the one with the most vice, in other words, 'the very Wheel that turn'd the Trade'. But giving in to the appeal for moral contemplation will put an end to happiness. 'Now mind the glorious Hive, and see How Honesty and Trade agree. The shew is gone, it thins apace; And looks with quite another Face'.⁴ It should come as no surprise that Mandeville used the metaphor of the bees for his analysis, since Dutch scholars had long been obsessed with 'these most noble, useful and instructive of insects' through which man could observe God's wonders. As early as in 1597, Delft botanist and co-founder of the Leiden Hortus Botanicus Dirk Cluyt had already referred to the beehive as this 'most wondrous example of politicians and government'.⁵ It shows clearly that it is not so much the Bible or the classical texts but Nature that provides the clue to an 'ideal' society. Grotius and Mandeville were by no means alone in their thinking, but were part of a rich Republican tradition inspired by Spinoza and de la Court that may well have followed in the footsteps of older Italian fore-runners, but flourished in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. It would later have an important influence on Anglo-Saxon political-economic thinkers, from one of the architects of the capitalist system, Adam Smith, to one of the founding fathers of American democracy and second president of the United States, John Adams, former ambassador of the United States in The Hague.

This made political-economic naturalism *à la de la Court* one of the most successful Dutch export products. In the seventeenth century the Dutch political-economic model based on the *ars mercatoria* even served as an example for all other European states.⁶ This immaterial form of Dutch expansion also had direct, more tangible repercussions for the way the power of the Republic spread throughout the world. The Company's organisation structure was a remarkable combination of the private, short-term interests of the merchants and the public, long-term interests of the state. The naturalistic world view reached its peak in the second half of the seventeenth century when radical reformers like Coenraad van Beuningen and Cornelis Hudde again examined the operations of the

⁴ From the original paragraph 32, cited from volume 1 in Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*.

⁵ Jorink, *Boeck der Natuere*, 204–5.

⁶ Hoxby, 'The Government of Trade', 591–627; Soll, 'Accounting for Government', 215–38.

VOC and, on the basis of modern management theories, called for a thorough reorganisation of the Company with an even more drastic rationalisation of the available funding. Of course, a monopoly undisputedly contravened the laws of nature, but it will come as no surprise that this practice generated too much income for it to be easily abolished.

Returning to the overseas activities of the Dutch, although the lush tropical forests of Asia lent themselves exceptionally well to observing nature in all its authenticity, it was the supposed *tabula rasa* of the New World that made it a living laboratory for ‘natural’ political experiments. The Dutch Republic was an important operational basis for Protestant splinter groups such as the Quakers, who were keen to find a New Jerusalem in America. But America also offered secular free-thinkers such as the failed Jesuit Franciscus van den Enden, the liberal Baptist Pieter Corneliszoon Plockhoy and the Brabant civil rights activist Adriaen van der Donck a unique opportunity to construct a new, completely free, tolerant and democratic society. Once again people found inspiration not only in the Bible and classical examples, but also in the ‘natural’ lifestyle of the American Indians. Van den Enden, like his student Spinoza, was of the opinion that the ideal form of state organisation was one that reflected the characteristics and mechanisms of human nature. Incidentally, he also rejected slavery – another radical point of view for his time! In fact, van den Enden believed that all people were equal, taking into account ‘each person’s particular, natural, evangelical freedom’.⁷ Unlike Spinoza, in 1661 van den Enden did try to implement his political ideals. His plan for an almost socialist experiment in New Netherland (present-day Delaware), however, lacked the necessary political support of the Amsterdam political establishment. Two years later, Plockhoy established a similar type of egalitarian colony on the Delaware River, although the colony, Swaanendael, was destroyed a year later by the English.⁸ Just like van den Enden’s settlement, van der Donck’s ideal of a free and more democratic New Amsterdam ultimately came up against the unwillingness of the much more conservative Dutch regents to accept it.

The fact that these early Dutch versions of the American Dream did not materialise in no way alters the gradual emergence of that mechanistic, naturalistic world view among the administrative and intellectual elites of the Republic. The rebellion against the established authorities of the Catholic Church and Habsburg Empire had created a unique Dutch sensitivity to nature. This sensitivity meant that, more than other early modern societies, the Republic was open to new observations and ideas – an openness that was further

⁷ Klever, ‘Inleiding’, 54. ⁸ Plantenga, ‘The Mystery of the Plockhoy Settlement’, 4–13.

enhanced by the frequent confrontations with other still unknown cultures of Asia, Africa and America. Imperial rebellion and world discoveries ultimately came together in the adage of individual freedom determined by nature, a principle that would ultimately contribute to the present-day ideals of democracy and the free market.

1 The Eighth Province

The success and subsequent decline of the Dutch Republic and its overseas trading empire in both East and West seem largely determined by the VOC and the WIC, although this applied more for the East than the West. A large, comprehensive monopoly company proved to be less successful in the Atlantic area than in Asia. It was only in the first twenty-five years of the WIC's existence that it was an effective instrument for promoting Dutch trade, and even during this period individual ship owners were starting to undermine the monopoly. But the VOC, too, ran into difficulties, albeit a century later than the WIC, and not because of breaches of its monopoly by private shipping companies, but because of a lack of a solid understanding of its profit- and loss-making activities. In that respect the Companies developed along similar lines to the Republic in Europe. The organisation, government and social structure of the Republic of the United Provinces made it the wonder of Europe at the end of the sixteenth and for a large part of the seventeenth century, but the absence of much-needed innovations and changes meant that, as we move into the next century, the Netherlands became increasingly marginalised.

There is much to be said for regarding the VOC and WIC as the eighth province of the Republic. Both companies were organised as a faithful copy of the administrative structure in the cities and provinces. The whole structure was aimed at allowing the urban elites to take the initiative and to work together only where there was no alternative. The pre-history and foundation of the VOC and the WIC bear witness to this policy.

The Companies' Fortunes

The VOC

Initially, Dutch trade with Asia was the domain of individual traders. Although the first voyages to Asia were unsuccessful, the potential profit that could be earned from trade in Asian products was very tempting, as the Portuguese had shown for decades. Apparently, there were merchants

who had sufficient capital to be able to finance these speculative and often loss-making expeditions. Amsterdam led the way in these expeditions, but merchants and investors from Middelburg, Veere and Rotterdam also equipped vessels for the voyages. This sudden and uncoordinated explosion of activity meant that the Dutch in Asia were competing with one another, which raised purchase prices and lowered sales prices in the Netherlands.

To gain more control of the buying and selling of Asian products, the government in the Republic in the person of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt – as so-called Land's Advocate (*Landsadvocaat*), that is, a kind of secretary-general of the States of Holland – proposed that a representative body of the parties involved should meet to explore possibilities for working together. This consensus or *polder* approach was initially unsuccessful because the Zeeland members were too wary of the dominance of Amsterdam. The discussions did, however, indicate that merchants were willing to collaborate, but only with colleagues from their own city. One result of this was the *Eerste Vereenigde Compagnie op Oost-Indië* in Amsterdam being granted a monopoly by the city. However, it was clear that establishing companies by city would only intensify the existing competition and so, in 1601, the States of Holland proposed to the States-General that a national monopoly company should be set up. After lengthy negotiations, in 1602 the States-General awarded the United East India Company through an *octrooi* (patent) the right to conduct trade, engage in war, negotiate peace and establish settlements in the region to the east of the Cape of Good Hope. The Company was given six chambers, one in Amsterdam, one in Zeeland with its headquarters in Middelburg, and the remaining ones in Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. Amsterdam was not permitted to control more than half of the Company's activities, including building and equipping ships, and trading in Asian products; for Zeeland this was a quarter and for the other chambers one-sixteenth. This division did not reflect the division of the capital amassed. Amsterdam merchants and investors contributed more than half the new Company's share capital.¹

Whether it was the town council, the institutions to care for the poor and the elderly or the defence of the city, the elite classes always made sure there were enough public functions to provide positions for all the important families in a town or province. The same principle applied when the VOC board was set up. Initially, the VOC had no fewer than seventy-two directors, later reduced to sixty. The Amsterdam chamber had twenty directors, Zeeland had twelve and the other chambers each had seven.

¹ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 17–22.

From among their number, twice or three times a year each chamber selected a number of representatives for the main board of the Company, the *Heren XVII* or the Lords XVII. This board met once a year, four consecutive years in Amsterdam and then two consecutive years in Zeeland. Amsterdam sent eight directors to these meetings, Zeeland sent four and the other chambers each sent one. Zeeland and the small chambers were each permitted in turn to send one extra representative. This arrangement shows that the VOC's status as a centralised company was limited and that it was in principle an association of six local companies. It also showed clearly that the cooperation between the various urban merchant elites in the Republic always resulted in a top-heavy compromise.

This last point is also apparent from the fact that politicians and not shareholders were entitled to appoint directors. Initially these were the Provincial States of the region where the chambers were located, but after a while the city councils with a VOC chamber also gained the right of appointment. As a result, members of the cities' regent families became directors of the Company and members of the Lords XVII; not all of them had specialised knowledge of trade or banking. The board of the VOC were aware of this, and occasionally attempts were made to appoint someone from outside the circle of the city regents as director. Incidentally, a number of VOC directors did indeed come from trading families and had had commercial experience before they held a key position in the VOC. The close intermeshing of the political elite and the VOC eventually resulted in cities without a chamber also being given the right to appoint a director. If the VOC asked for financial support, all the cities in Holland with a representative in the Provincial States had to decide on this, and before reaching a decision they demanded insight into the activities of the Company.

Behind the scenes of the official institutions was a complex web of patronage networks. The power struggle between these clans of direct family members, in-laws and friends determined the politics of the cities and thus of the Republic and the companies. It was not so much their religious or political convictions as their family and career planning that largely determined how the regents acted in practice. Anyone who wanted to achieve particular ambitions in the seventeenth-century Republic first needed a patron and his network. The policy of the VOC and WIC was simply a reflection of this. The centre of the clan struggle was, of course, Amsterdam, and the outcome in Amsterdam determined the outcome in the other cities and even in the overseas settlements. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was the more orthodox Protestant faction around Reynier Pauw that was dominant, but in 1628 this alternated

with the more liberal Bicker–de Graeff faction. After the revolutions of 1672, with the return of the stadtholder, a more conservative group came to power again, consisting mainly of the cousins and friends of Gilles Valckenier. This new patron was at the head of a *prima facie* religiously conservative group of regents, a group that publicly acknowledged the leading positions of the stadtholder and the Reformed Church but in practice also secretly sympathised with all kinds of nonconformist political and religious movements.

If we now take this generation of regents as an example, it is striking that this Valckenier network ruled mainly through the Huydecoper and Coymans Amsterdam families. Via the in-laws Thibaut, van der Merct, van de Blocquerie, Boudaen Courten, Muenics and Ingels, there was a network of all manner of influential connections with the cities of Zeeland. Utrecht was well represented thanks to its alliance with the van Reede family, which lent this bourgeois network an air of aristocracy. Joan Huydecoper van Maarseveen was also an extremely influential VOC administrator. His calculating nature – in his diary he even recorded in monthly and annual overviews the number of times that coitus had taken place – made him extremely suitable as bookkeeper of the prevailing social relations.² Together with other pro-reform rulers, he was in favour of the radical cuts and reforms that were implemented during this period. Apart from the need for reform, this new wind of change was an excellent opportunity for him to remove his enemies and extend his personal network to Asia. The instrument *par excellence* for this was the so-called ‘redress commission’, which, under the leadership of his ‘friend’ Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, was charged with putting the house in order in the East. At the same time, in the West his ‘nephew’ Balthasar Coymans acquired the extremely lucrative *Asiento*: the exclusive right of the Spanish king to deliver slaves for his American colonies.

All of this immediately raises the question of whether we can really understand the history of Dutch overseas expansion if we take into consideration only the official policies of the VOC and the WIC. It certainly appears that for the likes of Huydecoper and Coymans the companies were simply instruments that allowed them to strengthen and broaden their family networks. A glance at the list of the administrators shows that, in spite of a ban on combining a directorship in both the VOC and the WIC, the same Holland and Zeeland family networks still dominated both companies.³ The combination of VOC and WIC positions in the Huydecoper–Coymans clan was far from unique. They in their turn came

² Kooijmans, *Vriendschap en de kunst van het overleven*, 152.

³ Den Heijer, *De geotrooieerde compagnie*, 120–1.

from the network of the powerful and wealthy family of Guillelmo Bartolotti. If we track the marriages and children of his many daughters, we arrive automatically at the most influential directors of the VOC and WIC. This explains our previous referral to the existence of a single Dutch colonial Empire.

The directors of the VOC in any event had no need for any concerns about the shareholders, because these had little or no authority, with the exception of the most important investors. Among these last were a number of directors, but there were also shareholders who neither held nor were given any position at all within the VOC. The first register of the shareholders of the Company shows remarkably enough that it was not only merchants and very wealthy private individuals who had bought shares, but also doctors, clergymen and government officials, and even a number of craftsmen and lowly workers.

It is also worth noting that most of the share capital was supplied by a relatively small number of large investors, a large minority of whom came from the Southern Netherlands. The records also show that many of the small shareholders divested themselves of their shares relatively quickly. This gave the Amsterdam investors increasing opportunities to expand their interest in the Company. In time, half of the VOC shares were in the hands of Amsterdam investors, among whom were a relatively large proportion of Sephardic Jews from Portugal.⁴

Just how weak the position of the shareholders was is apparent from a pamphlet in which one of them complained of his difficulties. If he were to file a complaint against the management of the VOC with the municipal magistrates and the aldermen's courts, the directors of the Company would be sitting in court as family members of the other party. Submitting a complaint to the admiralties was even more futile because directors of the Company also held positions there, while a number of members of the States-General were also directors of the VOC. A further point was that the salaries of the VOC directors were only in part related to the Company's profit: they received a percentage of the revenue from the sale of goods from Asia. Initially they even received a percentage of the funds that were invested in the fleet. In time, the directors received a fixed salary. This was 3,100 guilders in Amsterdam, 2,600 in Zeeland and 1,200 for the directors of the smaller chambers. As a comparison, a VOC captain earned between 700 and 1,000 guilders a year.⁵ And there was more: the directors also earned additional income from selling positions in the Company.

⁴ Van Dillen, *Van rijkdom en regenten*, 118–19. ⁵ Lucassen, 'Zeevarenden', 141.

Although the shareholders and other financiers of the VOC were from the outset unhappy with the accountability of the directors, the Company did bring about change in the economic environment. In 1602, for the first time in history, a company was founded with freely marketable shares and permanent working capital. Although the English had founded the East India Company (EIC) a year earlier, that company did not have a permanent working capital, and still financed each expedition separately.

The VOC also differed from the EIC in terms of the size and structure of its operations in Asia. For the VOC, from 1619 these activities were under the management of the Batavia settlement, from where trade was conducted with other areas in the monopoly region and money was transferred without the managers of the chambers or the board of directors being aware of exactly what was going on. The VOC soon realised that gold and silver were essential for trade in Asia and that transporting these precious metals from the Netherlands to Asia was a risky business. Buying silver in Asia was a cheaper option. As a result, and in practical terms, not one but two companies evolved under the auspices of the VOC. The European Company was responsible for constructing and equipping ships, acquiring share capital and employing managers, administrators and seafaring staff and soldiers, as well as for the sale of products imported from Asia. The Company in Asia operated largely independently, endeavouring to generate profits from the trade within Asia, for which shipping Asian products to the Netherlands was just part of the activities. If they expected to earn less revenue from shipping merchandise to the Netherlands than from trade within Asia, they put less effort into sending products back to the Netherlands.

Present-day shareholders of public companies would not be willing to accept the terms under which dividends of VOC shares were paid to the Company's investors. The first payment did not take place until 1610 and was in kind: pepper and mace. The idea was that the shareholders had to try to sell these products on to other buyers. Under pressure from the shareholders, the Lords XVII started to pay the dividend in money, although payment in kind continued for some time. Also, much of the profit was added to the share capital, which gave the head office in Batavia a working capital of almost 7 million guilders. After a difficult start, the VOC began to make some serious profit. Until 1650, the original shareholders received a dividend on eight occasions, albeit partly in spices. By 1650, VOC shares were being sold at almost five times their original value.⁶

⁶ De Vries and van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815*, 461–2.

The WIC

There were a lot more difficulties involved in establishing the WIC than was the case for the VOC. Just as with trade in Asia, at the beginning of the seventeenth century an array of different kinds of collaborative arrangements were made in the Netherlands between groups of traders whose ships sailed occasionally to destinations in South America, the Caribbean and North America. But unlike in Asia, there was no need to sail in a convoy and the destinations in the Atlantic – unlike in Asia – initially had nothing in common with one another.

Soon the busiest trading route became that to the salt marshes in Venezuela, due mainly to political rather than commercial reasons. Salt was a widely used preservative, and an important source of salt was Setúbal in Portugal, where large quantities of sea salt were extracted. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish king decided to close the Spanish and Portuguese harbours to vessels from the Northern Netherlands, which put an end to the supplies of salt from Setúbal. Salt could also be obtained from Brittany, but, because this salt turned herring red, customers did not want it, and consequently from 1599 the Dutch captains (almost all of whom were from West Friesland) sailed to the enormous salt marshes of Punta Araya on the Caribbean peninsula of Margarita, on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, vessels – mainly from Zeeland – sometimes traded with the people on the ‘Wild Coast’, the coastal region between the mouth of the Orinoco and the Amazon, where they exchanged European articles and textiles for tobacco, dyes and cocoa.⁷

Another Dutch effort to compensate for the negative effect of the embargoes on trade with the Iberian Peninsula was the trade with West Africa. The route there was an extension of the voyage to the Azores, the Cape Verde Islands and Madeira. From there it was not far to the Gold Coast and Angola, where European goods could be exchanged for gold, ivory, hides, pepper and gum. In 1599, eight Amsterdam companies decided to join forces in the expeditions to West Africa and founded a Guinea company that would later be expanded with merchants from other cities in Holland. The Zeelanders followed suit and also founded a Guinea company. An effort was made to seize the Portuguese fort of São Jorge da Mina (Elmina), but this failed, and in 1611 the States-General decided to construct their own support station on the West African coast, Fort Nassau on the coast of present-day Ghana, and in 1617 an island close to Cape Verde was conquered and named Goeree. It was fortunate

⁷ Emmer, ‘Les Hollandais et le commerce du sel’, 413.

that, at the time of the first contacts with the Dutch, the local population was firmly opposed to the Iberians, and saw the Zeelanders and the Dutch as allies.

All these different activities could not readily be grouped together under a single umbrella, but in 1606 the States of Holland thought differently. In 1609, however, the Republic signed a twelve-year truce with Spain, stipulating that Dutch expansion could continue in Asia, in return for the Netherlands agreeing to take a step back in the Atlantic region. From then on, the calls to set up an Atlantic company along the lines of the VOC fell on politically deaf ears. After 1609 trade with Spain and Portugal flourished again. The sugar trade with Brazil increased, but the salt trade with Punta Araya came to an end when salt from Setúbal was available again. Trade with West Africa became more difficult after 1609 because, under the terms of the truce, the Dutch were no longer able to wage war on the Portuguese, which gave the Portuguese every opportunity to defend their monopoly.⁸

The truce presented no obstacle to sending Dutch ships to North America because in practice the Spanish were unable to defend their rights to exclusivity in this part of the New World. Remarkably enough, it was not an Atlantic shipping company, a forerunner of the WIC, but the VOC that formed the basis of the Dutch trade with North America. In 1609, when, on the orders of the VOC, Captain Henry Hudson was trying to find a western route to Asia, he sailed up a river that was later to be named after him. The VOC was not interested in Hudson's explorations, but a number of Amsterdam and Hoorn merchants were. In 1614, four companies that traded with North America merged to form the New Netherland Company, acquiring a monopoly for a period of four years.⁹

The plan that emerged towards the end of the Twelve Years' Truce to consolidate all Dutch trade and colonisation activities in the Atlantic region had less to do with commercial interests than with warfare. Commercially, there was still no good rationale for combining all the Atlantic activities in one comprehensive company. On the contrary, such a new, conspicuous company could only damage the illegal but significant trade with Spanish and Portuguese America.

The investors, too, seemed to be convinced of this, not least because the VOC shareholders were far from satisfied with the returns on their investments in the Company. It took more than two years before the new West India Company had amassed the share capital of 7 million guilders,

⁸ Van den Boogaart, 'Los neerlandeses en el mundo comercial atlántico', 81.

⁹ Van Dillen, *Van rijkdom en regenten*, 138–45; Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 13–34.

and even then this was possible only because the government also bought shares in the venture. The slow start of the Company was also brought about by opposition from the West Friesland towns, which were hesitant about bringing the lucrative salt trade with Venezuela under the monopoly of the Company.

In many ways, the WIC founded in 1621 imitated the successful example of the VOC. Just like the VOC in Asia, the WIC's job was to consolidate the existing Dutch trade in the Atlantic region. Like its sister organisation, the WIC enjoyed a monopoly within its trading zone; it was allowed to form alliances, set up a legal system, establish colonies and maintain an armed force. There were indeed many similarities between the companies. The day-to-day management was divided among five chambers: Amsterdam, Zeeland, Maze (head office in Rotterdam), the Northern District (head office in Hoorn) and Stad en Lande (head office in Groningen), with Amsterdam accounting for four-ninths, Zeeland two-ninths and the remaining chambers each one-ninth of the activities. As has already been stated, the real power was in the hands of a few wealthy regent families, albeit with the WIC having a slightly more orthodox Calvinist and Orangist background than the VOC, if only because van Oldenbarnevelt's peace faction had lost out in 1618. Although both trading organisations were in principle sovereign in their own trading zone, the WIC was in part financed with government money and for many operations therefore had to petition the States-General for help much more frequently, which put limits on its own autonomy. Also, unlike the VOC, the WIC had to fight its way into an area that was dominated and exploited almost completely by the Spanish and the Portuguese.

If the WIC had any effect at all on the maritime and commercial activities of the Republic, it was on account of its privateering operations. These were vigorously expanded and in 1628 led to an unprecedented success: the hijacking of a returning Spanish fleet, which traditionally assembled in the Cuban harbour of Havana to cross the Atlantic Ocean in convoy en route to Seville. The sale of the hijacked cargo generated over 11 million guilders, which convinced the directors of the WIC to implement their plan – the *Groot Desseyn* or Grand Design – for a Netherlands-Atlantic Empire. The first step in this direction failed because of the rapid loss (in 1626) of Bahia in Brazil; Bahia had been captured in 1624 with much difficulty and loud fanfare. According to the new plan, the New Netherland colony in North America would specialise in the production of food commodities and the Netherlands would have to gain control of part of Brazil for the production of sugar and brazilwood, which was used for making dyes. This last part of the plan needed slave labour: former

workers who would be brought to Brazil via the Dutch settlements on the west coast of Africa. A number of trading hubs in the Caribbean needed to be conquered in order to maintain access to Spanish America and to act as support stations for the shipping between the different parts of the Dutch Atlantic Empire.

Initially, the realisation of the Grand Design went well. In 1630 part of Portuguese Brazil was conquered. This was followed first by the capture of the Portuguese fort of São Jorge da Mina on the African Gold Coast, and a few years later by the occupation of Portuguese Luanda in Angola. The WIC also managed to gain control of a number of small islands in the Caribbean region that could serve as support stations for trade, but these islands were not suitable for the production of tobacco or sugar. With all these conquests, by 1640–5 the Netherlands Atlantic Empire had reached its maximum size.¹⁰

In comparison with the Atlantic empires of other countries, in 1645 the Netherlands empire was unique. The Spanish part of the Atlantic area had many more colonists and indigenous people, but Spain did not have a colony in North America; it had no forts on the west coast of Africa, neither did it participate in the transatlantic slave trade. This last issue in particular posed a serious limitation for the growth of the economy of Spanish America. The Portuguese, too, had no colony in North America or in the Caribbean region, but they did control the South Atlantic area through their presence on the coast of Angola and Brazil, the jewel in their crown. The Portuguese did not have a trade network in Europe and were not able to sell their sugar to consumers in North-West and Northern Europe, where the purchasing power and consequently the demand for exotic products grew faster than in Southern Europe. Investments in the export economy of Brazil largely had to be financed locally, which meant growth was slow and there was even a reduction in the sugar exports. Finally, although in around 1645 the English and French had colonies in North America and the Caribbean that were larger than those of the Netherlands and were also populated by more colonists, they did not yet have a sugar-exporting colony in tropical America and their share in the slave trade was still limited.

The Decline of the WIC, 1645–1800

After 1645, the Dutch Atlantic Empire lost its large colonies, and as a result the Netherlands fell from first or second place among the

¹⁰ Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 35–68.

colonisers of the Atlantic region to fifth place, after England, Spain, Portugal and France. The question is, what was behind this decline?

The main cause was undoubtedly the fact that the States-General were not willing to finance the administration and defence of the Dutch colonies on a permanent basis. This meant that the WIC had to recoup these costs from its operating profits, which was virtually impossible since the Company had no water-tight monopoly for any of its products that would generate the necessary high profits. In the trade in goods with Africa the WIC had strong competition from smugglers, primarily from Zeeland, while Portugal, France and England also traded with Africa, all in all rendering it impossible to achieve the profits that a monopoly would ensure. The same applied to the trade with North and South America. Even in the protected slave trade to the Dutch colonies, the WIC sometimes had to cope with competition from illegal slave ships from Zeeland, while over time the English and French largely took over the transit trade in slaves to Spanish America.¹¹

The WIC's shortage of cash became painfully clear when in 1665 the Zeelanders had conquered the colony of Suriname and ultimately wanted to bring the colony under the control of the WIC. By that time, the Company had barely any working capital and so decided to take just a one-third shareholding in the 'Society of Suriname', in which the city of Amsterdam and the wealthy private individual Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck were participants. The Dutch colony of Berbice, next to Suriname, was originally in the hands of the Vlissingen merchant family of van Peere, and in 1720 it was taken over by a separate society, not the WIC.¹²

The fact that the Dutch Empire in the Atlantic area lost so many regions relatively rapidly after conquering them is also attributed to the powerlessness of the Republic, and in particular to the inability of the WIC to persuade enough colonists to emigrate to the Dutch colonies. Maintaining a colonial structure was an expensive business because the colonists were not in a position to pay for the management and defence of the colony themselves. The Dutch colonies were not alone in this. In none of the Atlantic colonies were the colonists themselves willing or indeed able to cover in full the costs of the management, defence and protection of the transatlantic trade routes. The fact that the colonists in the New World represented a growing market for sales was good for the trading companies and shipping companies in the respective colonial parent countries, but the revenues were by no means sufficient to pay for the

¹¹ Emmer, 'The West India Company', 65–90.

¹² Van der Meiden, *Betwist bestuur*, 31–40.

costs of managing and defending the colonies. The loss of the Atlantic colonies mattered little to the Dutch trading elite as long as it did not adversely affect trade.

There is no easy explanation for why the costs of the Dutch overseas empire were not paid for from the Republic's tax revenues as happened in England, and there are no comparative studies on this subject. However, it is clear that there was a powerful lobby in the English Parliament by all those parties who had interests in the colonies. The plantation owners, for example, and trading houses with interests in the West Indies had a strong and influential position in the House of Commons. They managed to ensure that until 1832 the import tax on sugar from the British colonies was lower than that on sugar sourced from foreign colonies. There was no such lobby in the Netherlands. A number of Dutch regents may well have had interests in shipping, trade and plantation ownership, but they never managed to exercise the same influence on decision-making as the exceptionally effective 'West Indian Lobby' in England.

To round off these explanations for the fact that the Netherlands remained a minor trading nation in the Atlantic region, there are a number of instances of internal mismanagement in trade and financing that need to be mentioned. These are often covered up, with the shrinking Dutch share in the Atlantic trade mainly being ascribed to the confrontational politics of the other Atlantic powers. Foreign protectionism, the plentiful supply of investment capital and the supremacy of the warships of the larger competing countries are often seen as having unreasonably disadvantaged the relatively small Netherlands. This is in itself true, but it does not alter the fact that the contracting Dutch presence in the Atlantic region was also the consequence of the country's own policies. The first error the Netherlands made was the founding of the WIC. It has already been said that the warmongering, top-heavy WIC was more of a liability than a benefit to the growth of Dutch trade in the Atlantic area. A monopoly company only for the slave trade – and then for no longer than twenty years – would have been worthwhile, as is shown in the English Royal African Company.

The diminishing competitiveness of Dutch merchant shipping appears to be a second reason for the decline. While Dutch ships may have dominated the English on part of the coast of South America in the seventeenth century, by the eighteenth century that situation had been reversed. In about 1770, the supply of slaves to the Spanish mainland via Curaçao halted while the English trade, including the slave trade, with Spanish America increased. This trend was also visible in the shipping within Europe.

A third cause for the decline was the way the plantations in the West Indian colonies were funded. A group of trading companies and investment brokers developed a new financial instrument to provide the necessary funding: an investment fund. Such a fund gave wealthy private individuals the possibility of profiting from the high interest on plantation mortgages by investing relatively modest sums. Between 1750 and 1773, lenders – mainly Amsterdam-based – invested more than 60 million guilders in funds that provided mortgages to planters in the West Indies, including in foreign colonies. It soon became apparent that these planters had over-stretched themselves, borrowing too much money, and that the income from the plantations was insufficient to pay the mortgage interest, let alone to pay off the capital sum. The result was a wave of bankruptcies. This meant that the Dutch plantation colonies were less able to benefit from the new techniques and the new crops than the competing plantations elsewhere.

The final blow to the Dutch in the Atlantic region was the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4), which broke out when the Dutch were found to have been secretly supporting the rebel Americans. In this war that had dramatic effects for the Republic, many Dutch ships all over the world were captured by the English. Together with the crisis on the market for plantation mortgages, this war seriously damaged the competitive power of the Dutch plantation colonies and the commercial transit function of the Netherlands Antilles. A good indicator for the influence of the export colony in the New World was the annual number of slaves that the plantations acquired. Colonies that were expanding economically bought many more slaves than colonies whose export production was growing more slowly. This explains why it was significant that after 1784 it was only the Dutch slave trade in the Atlantic area that declined in size, while the English, French, Portuguese and even Danish slave trade grew rapidly. Even if the Dutch colonies switched to the illegal importation of slaves by non-Dutch vessels, the purchase of slaves in the Dutch plantation colonies and the Netherlands Antilles was at a much lower level than in the expanding regions. If there was any growth in the Dutch plantation colonies, it came largely through the immigration of English planters. In Dutch Demerarij (Demerara) these planters made up three-quarters of the number of colonists. The colonies in the West had become too big for the Dutch economy.¹³

This tendency was also visible in the movements of ships in the Republic. Amsterdam was probably the harbour with the most transatlantic trade, and the percentage of ships from the West Indies, South

¹³ Emmer, 'The Dutch and the Slave Americas', 70–86.

America and Africa rose from 3 per cent in 1742 to 3.7 per cent in 1778, only to drop again to 2.7 per cent in 1782. As a comparison, the percentage of ships coming from the North Sea harbours of Bremen, Hamburg and Altona rose in these same years from 37.6 to 56.1. The decreasing economic significance of the Dutch West did not mean that the role of the plantation products also reduced for the port of Amsterdam. The city obtained most of its coffee and sugar from foreign colonies, mainly the French West Indies, shipped directly or via ports in France. This explains why in 1790 Amsterdam was able to export six times more coffee than in 1753 and why three times as much sugar was refined in Amsterdam. The coffee was forwarded unprocessed, but most of the sugar landed in Amsterdam was refined there. There were some 100 sugar refineries in Amsterdam in around 1780, the largest of which employed twenty-eight workers. Although the colonial transport was considerable, its spin-off effect should not be overestimated: the sugar refineries provided less employment at the end of the eighteenth century than the shipyards.¹⁴

The WIC had very little influence over the decline in Dutch trade in the Atlantic region during the course of the eighteenth century. After 1740 the Company had stopped trading and had become 'a body without a soul', as contemporaries described it. It had been impossible to maintain the Company monopoly even during the first phase of expansion. In 1638, the monopoly was partially abolished for the shareholders of the Company, followed in 1648 by other parties. After the Brazilian adventure, the shares in the Company were virtually worthless, although the price of WIC shares did rise again subsequently because trade with West Africa and with the English and French Caribbean offered some prospects of profit. The opportunities for profit declined again over the following decade as a result of the protectionist measures of the English and French and the founding of a number of competing companies such as the English Royal African Company and the French Company of the West Indies. The share value fell again, and by 1674 the WIC was bankrupt. At the same time, a second West Indian Company was founded; the former shareholders were able to convert their old subscriber certificates into shares in the second WIC by committing to a further investment.¹⁵

But even the second West India Company, with much more modest objectives than its predecessor, was unable to turn the tide. The operating results of this Company, too, were negatively impacted by the competition from foreign trading companies, often partly financed with Dutch capital, as well as by the high costs of a top-heavy organisation. The urge

¹⁴ Lesger, 'Stagnatie en stabiliteit', 219–68.

¹⁵ Schneeloch, *Aktionäre der Westindischen Compagnie von 1674*.

to abolish the Company's last monopoly in the slave trade became ever greater, and after 1734 any shipping company in the Netherlands could trade and transport goods and slaves in the Atlantic region provided they paid taxes to the WIC on each ship based on its tonnage. This revenue was needed to pay for the cost of defending the forts on the west coast of Africa and some of the West Indian colonies which were governed directly by the Company.¹⁶

Just as for the private shipping companies, the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War was an irrevocable setback for the second WIC. The Company continually had to apply to the States-General for financial support, and in 1791 the monopoly was not extended. The States-General bought all the shares at 30 per cent of the nominal value, much to the satisfaction of the shareholders; on the stock market the WIC shares at that time yielded only 22 per cent of the nominal value. The WIC assets were lodged with the 'Committee for the Affairs of the Colonies and Property on the Coast of Guinea and America'. This meant that the Dutch colonies were no longer governed and defended by a private enterprise, but by the government in the mother country. The idea that overseas colonies were a matter for investors and traders never worked well in practice in the Atlantic region. It is typical of the rigid culture of the regents in the Netherlands that it was only in 1791, when the situation really could not be allowed to continue, that consequences were finally attached to this realisation.

The VOC's Relative Contraction, 1650–1800

The history of the VOC looks very different from that of the WIC. The Company did not go into decline immediately after 1650, but only 100 years later. The history of this much greater concern, too, showed clearly how long it took before the administrative elite in the Netherlands understood that the investments in the VOC were barely profitable and that this money, if freed up, could better be invested in more promising segments of the Dutch economy. For some of this elite, for example for those who managed to gain a position in the monopolistic opium trade, the VOC remained a lucrative organisation until well into the eighteenth century.

Incidentally, it took much longer for the VOC to recognise the problem issues than it did the WIC. The profit levels on trade in Asia and between Asia and the Netherlands were high enough to more than cover the considerable overheads of the Company. Unlike the WIC, the VOC also had a monopoly on trade in a number of products, which meant they had more opportunities to make a profit. With the exception of the

¹⁶ Den Heijer, 'The Dutch West India Compagnie', 77–114.

southernmost tip of Africa, the area that fell under the VOC monopoly was not suitable for large-scale, expensive colonisation projects. In Asia, there was no need for costly wars to defend the colonies, although acts of war with competitors did inflict damages from time to time.

Compared with the WIC, the VOC suffered scarcely at all from merchants and investors trying to undermine the Company monopoly. Unlike in the Atlantic region, the threshold to sail to Asia or to trade within Asia was too high for private shipping companies. Added to this, the VOC traded only minimally in bulk products, but dealt rather in luxury goods. In this sector the competition on price was much less fierce than for coffee and sugar from the Atlantic production areas. Textiles from India were an exception. The demand for cotton cloth in Europe proved to be very sensitive to price differences, and the English East India Company in particular knew how to exploit this, although the VOC also had a number of offices on the coasts of India. The trade with Asia grew at a very slow rate: around 1 per cent per annum, rising from 8,000 tons a year to 50,000 tons between 1600 and 1800.

Building to some extent on the experience of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, the VOC was able to set up an extensive Asian trading network of its own. More could be earned from this network than from trade between Asia and the Netherlands. After some years, the trading activities in Asia generated enough profit to pay for the goods that were shipped to the Netherlands. This meant that the number of trading settlements in Asia had to be increased and that more employees needed to be stationed in Asia. During the course of the seventeenth century, the number of employees in Asia doubled in relation to the number of sailors on the VOC ships. In and around the headquarters in Asia, in Batavia, but also in Taiwan, Ceylon and the Maluku Islands (the Moluccas), the VOC even evolved to become a colonial power, wielding the army and administration that such a power warranted.

To make it clear to the VOC in the Netherlands how the Company did business in Asia, one of its first directors in Batavia, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, gave the following description:

On the coast of Sumatra pepper and gold must be exchanged for Gujerat cloth; with cash and Coromandel cloth the pepper from Bantam; Chinese goods and gold from the Chinese must be exchanged for sandalwood, pepper and cash; silver from Japan will be bought with Chinese goods; the cloth from the Coromandel Coast for spices, some other trading and silver pieces of eight; pieces of eight from Arabia for spices and some other small items, thus all depends on each other and can be done without cash from the Netherlands.¹⁷

¹⁷ 'Met Guseratse cleden moet peper ende 't gout op de custe van Sumatra geruyt worden; met realen ende cleden van de Custe [van Coromandel] den peper van Bantam; met sandelhout, peper ende realen moeten Chinese waeren ende het gout van de Chinesen

This business plan of Coen's worked well throughout the seventeenth century. The VOC tried to keep the supplies of money sent to Asia to a minimum by having the Asian branch of the Company generate as much money and as many precious metals as possible. The Company initially managed to make around 300 per cent profit on the sale of Asian products in the Netherlands – far beyond what the WIC achieved with sugar from the New World.

Even so, the success of the VOC could not last. After 1690, trade in Asia no longer generated any profit, and the rate of return on the sale of Asian products in Europe was under pressure. The reversal from profit to loss in Asia was due to a number of factors. In the first place, Japan restricted the export of gold and copper, which meant that the VOC's Asian branch had to look for other means of generating income. This had only limited success, and the VOC's activities consequently became loss-making; as a result, the European branch had to prop up the Asian branch financially. A second factor behind the decline in the Company's results was its bookkeeping, which lacked transparency. The directors did report regularly on the profit margins by product, but the Lords XVII lacked a good overview of the income and expenditure, including the ever-increasing overhead costs. Without proper information, all that the directors could do was to trust to their commercial instincts, which unfortunately at times also proved inadequate. During the course of the eighteenth century, a number of regent families in the Republic were no longer involved in the trading activities on a daily basis, and it was from these families that the directors of the WIC and VOC originated.¹⁸

In spite of these drawbacks, the VOC did adapt substantially to the changes in demand, both in Asia and in Europe. Unlike textiles from India and tea and porcelain from China, pepper and spices were not products for which lower prices would mean a lot more customers. This prompted the VOC to move from trading in and transporting expensive products with small volumes and high profit margins, to shipping and trading in cheaper products with higher volumes and a lower profit margin. This led to a rise in turnover but not in profit. The VOC had to continue to invest in an expensive network of trading settlements, ever larger ships and more employees, while profit margins remained under pressure, also because the competition with the other European

geruylt worden; silver sal men uut Jappon voor Chineese waeren haelen; de cleden van de Custe van Coromandel voor speceryen, eenige andere coopmanschappen ende realen van achten; de realen van achten van Arabia voor speceryen ende eenige andere cleenichheden, in voegen dat het een aen 't ander hangt, ende sonder gelt van Nederlandt met schepen gedaen wordt.' Cited in Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 129.

¹⁸ De Vries and van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815*, 513.

companies became stronger. An additional factor was that the costs of the administration and defence of the regions and settlements under the VOC's control rose, while the expenditure was only partly compensated by local tolls and taxes. The VOC as a colonial administrator suffered losses, while its English counterpart, the EIC, as a colonial power in Bengal in the second half of the eighteenth century, managed to gather so much income from local taxes that this more than outstripped the costs of administration.

The growing losses meant that the VOC's own assets hardly increased at all while its debts grew rapidly. The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War exacerbated the situation, just as in the Atlantic region, with many ships falling into English hands and the intra-Asiatic trade being hampered by the war. Negapatnam (Nagappattinam), on the coast of Coromandel, was taken over permanently by the English. The Company fell into financial difficulties and, rather than issuing loans and making donations to the Dutch treasury, the directors were now in need of financial support themselves. Many of the directors had lent money to the VOC privately, and the same applied to the more senior VOC officers in Asia. These employees often earned enormous sums of money with all kinds of illegal private deals, and before leaving to return to the Netherlands they deposited the money with a VOC office in Asia, with the right to claim the money at the offices of their employer in the Netherlands. It is quite telling that the Company directors were not in the least surprised by the huge sums that their employees in Asia had been able to amass and that had to be paid out via this construction in Europe. A simple calculation would show that the sums saved were much greater than the sum of the salaries paid to these Company employees.

There was no avoiding the obvious outcome: after 1784 the VOC needed permanent cash injections from the Dutch government. In total, the States-General invested more than 100 million guilders in the VOC in the vain hope of restoring the Company to profit. This is quite remarkable, because a return to the situation before 1780 would mean that the VOC would again become a loss-making business. Government support was counterproductive because it did not bring about any serious clean-up. It was also strange that dividend payments were resumed, which should have been halted long ago because even before the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War there were no grounds for paying dividends according to modern standards. These payments only served to exacerbate the losses.

In contrast to the way the WIC was dealt with, the board of regents in the Republic failed to restructure or dissolve the VOC. This did not happen until after the French invasion. At the end of 1795 the VOC was nationalised, with no compensation being paid to the shareholders,

and in 1796 the Company's management was no longer in the hands of the Lords XVII, but of the 'Committee for the Affairs of East Indian Trade and Property' and, from 1800, the 'Council of Asian Property and Institutions'. The Batavian Republic had thus become the owner of a debt of more than 120 million guilders, as well as of the trading posts in Asia and the Cape, at least insofar as they were not occupied by the English.

From Trading Post to Colony

It was only after the dissolution of the WIC and the VOC that the Netherlands became a centrally governed colonial empire. Initially, this change made little difference, because towards the end of the eighteenth century all the possessions of the former companies fell into the hands of the English, with the exception of the small, artificial island of Deshima in the harbour of Nagasaki and the Elmina fort on the Gold Coast.

Nevertheless, the VOC and the WIC at times acted as colonial powers. From the official point of view of the thrifty directors in the Netherlands, this mostly went against the grain, given that both companies were originally founded to engage in trade and make a profit, and the administration and defence of colonial property was primarily seen as a cost item. Surprisingly, it was not the WIC but the VOC that became the predecessor of the later Ministry of the Colonies. The WIC did govern two large colonies, New Netherland in North America and Netherlands Brazil, but this was short-lived. Even so, the administration of these colonies, particularly Brazil, was extremely costly for the Company. After the loss of Dutch Brazil, this prompted the WIC to reduce the costs of administration in New Netherland by issuing monopolies and leaving the administration and defence of Suriname and Berbice to separate societies. This 'privatisation' of colonial activities to contractors was nothing new and followed the earlier practice of the Iberian Empire, which from the start outsourced different aspects of the colonial operations to contractors.

What remained was manageable: six small islands in the Caribbean Sea, Essequibo, Demerara on the mainland of South America and the forts on the African Gold Coast. After the abolition of the monopoly, the operational costs could no longer be offset from the revenues, because, after about 1740, the WIC no longer engaged in commercial activities itself. As a result, between 1740 and the dissolution of the WIC in 1792, the Dutch Empire was financed by the users themselves, at least on paper. In reality, the States-General had to use taxpayers' money to subsidise the WIC. The decrease in the number of expeditions in the Atlantic region

and above all the catastrophic Fourth Anglo-Dutch War had drastically reduced the Company's income.

No government support was needed for the administration of the VOC in Asia. Unlike the WIC, the VOC traded in luxury goods and more exclusive products, which commanded higher profit margins than bulk products from the Atlantic area. The VOC governed and defended only one truly European settlement: the Cape colony. On the other hand, the VOC had dozens of trading establishments with only a small number of Europeans, such as along the east and west coasts of India, in the Middle East and Japan. Deshima, with only a few dozen Company employees on an island of less than one and a half hectares, was probably the best example of the limited extent of the Dutch presence. Deshima, however, is an extreme example of the limited size of VOC possessions in Asia: most trading locations elsewhere in Asia were larger.

Batavia and its surrounding area, a number of the Maluku Islands, Taiwan and Ceylon should also be regarded as exceptions, where the colonial power of the VOC also extended to non-Europeans. The VOC played a different role as a colonial power in each of these regions, and they will consequently be dealt with separately in Part III. In about 1700, the VOC had some 18,000 employees in Asia, a number that was to increase to about 25,000 in the course of the eighteenth century. To keep this number of positions filled, there were always between 6,000 and 15,000 workers at sea, who were needed to maintain the trading network in Asia. The settlements with more than 500 employees were Batavia and the surrounding areas in Java (about 7,000), the Maluku Islands (about 2,000), Makassar (about 900), Ceylon (about 3,000), Coromandel (about 600), Malabar (about 800) and the Cape of Good Hope (about 1,000). Besides free employees, the VOC had about 4,000 non-free Asian workers. Almost two-thirds of these Company slaves were in Batavia and Ceylon. Many more slaves were also employed by private individuals in areas neighbouring the VOC settlements. The number of VOC and private slaves in and around all the VOC settlements, including the Cape, around 1700 has been estimated to be in the region of 60,000.

The important role of slaves in the Atlantic region will be discussed in greater detail in Part II. For now, we can note that, compared with the Atlantic, the Dutch in Asia also exploited slave labour extensively but were less prominently involved in the trade in slaves. Nonetheless, the arrival of the VOC had consequences for the slave trade and for slavery in general, because the Company and the free citizens in and around the VOC settlements could make good use of the slaves as workers in the warehouses, at the shipyards and on the ships as well as in domestic service, cleaning and looking after the Europeans. Initially it seemed an

attractive proposition, just as in America, to use slaves to fill the shortfall in workers in Batavia and the Maluku Islands. In the first instance, the VOC focused its attention mainly on the Indian Coromandel Coast. For Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen, it was as plain as day that 'hundreds of thousands' of Indian slaves from here could be used for the exploitation of the Spice Islands.¹⁹ Coen proposed that the Company need only follow the good example of the Muslims and the Portuguese. Although 1,167 slaves were transported from Coromandel to Batavia in 1623, Coen later had to accept that enough Indian slaves were available only in times of famine and war. In the middle of the seventeenth century, thousands of slaves were still traded from eastern Bengal by Portuguese and Arakan traders to the Indonesian archipelago. Apart from slaves, there were the so-called *Mardijkers* who made up a fifth of the Batavian population in the middle of the seventeenth century. These *orang merdeka* (free people) were ex-slaves who had been given their freedom and had converted to Christianity. In this early period, they originated mainly from the coastal areas of India – Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal – and communicated in Portuguese, the lingua franca of the Indian coast. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the proportion of what we would now call Indonesians in Batavia increased among both slaves and free people. Nevertheless, in the main Dutch trading cities in Asia – Batavia, Colombo, Cochin – between about a quarter and a half of the population consisted of slaves. As mentioned already, most of these slaves were owned not by the VOC itself but by Company officials and free citizens, both for their own use and for hiring out to others. In the cities this usually involved a relatively small number of slaves per household, although at the docks in Batavia, at Sumatra's gold mines and on some of the new plantations on Banda and in the Batavian Ommelanden slaves were used on a larger scale. Overall, though, Javanese plantations seem to have relied more on local Javanese 'free' and *corvée* labour than on imported slaves.

Given the broad geographical spread of the VOC branches, the Company ultimately bought slaves originating from a number of different regions, most of whom were young adult males. More important than the Company itself was the legal and illegal, private participation in the slave trade by its high- and middle-ranking officials as well as its ships' officers. Although slaves were primarily bought from Asian traders, both the Company and these private individuals in some instances sent ships to India and other parts of the Indonesian archipelago – in particular from

¹⁹ See the letter from Coen to Masulipatnam of 8 May 1622 in Prakash (ed.), *The Dutch Factories*, 201.

Borneo, Sulawesi, Maluku and Bali – or even to Madagascar, where large numbers of slaves were available for sale. We have no good records of these slave sailings, but the mortality rates among the VOC's slave fleet sailing from Madagascar to Batavia certainly do not seem to be lower than for the Atlantic slave trade. No data are available on the mortality rates on board non-European ships. Although less systematically than in the Atlantic region, the Dutch made a substantial contribution to the slave trade and to slavery in Asia. According to the latest estimates, which range from roughly half a million to more than a million, even more slaves were shipped from VOC territories than in the Dutch West Indies.²⁰ We should bear in mind, though, that, as in most of their other businesses in Asia, the Dutch very effectively tapped into a trade that had existed for centuries.

Administration under the VOC and WIC

The administration of the VOC in Asia was in the hands of the Governor-General in Batavia, who, together with a number of other high-ranking VOC officials, made up the *Raad van Indië*, also known as the *Hoge Regering* or High Government. Each of the members of this council had his own portfolio: bookkeeping, the law, military matters and shipping. The council sent a 'general missive' every year to the Lords XVII in the Republic giving an overview of the state of affairs in the Company's offices and settlements. A further document detailed the demands made by the different offices to the directors in the Netherlands, such as the number of military staff needed from the Netherlands to make up any shortfall, the goods to be traded, the ships and the money that the VOC offices considered necessary to continue operating. The directors in the Netherlands sent a similar letter via Batavia to the offices in Asia, including instructions about the acquisition of goods intended for the markets in Europe. The problem with this exchange between Batavia and the VOC directors was that there was generally a delay of around nine months between the sending and receipt of the correspondence. This meant that, in practice, the High Government in Batavia operated autonomously and their actions were not always approved afterwards by the directors back home.

As might be expected, there were a relatively large number of VOC staff in Batavia. Apart from being home to the Governor-General and Council,

²⁰ Warren, 'Southeast Asia', 80–7; Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade', 131–77. Recent studies on VOC slavery include the various studies by van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek*; 'Vervloekte goudzugt', 29–57; Mbeki and van Rossum, 'Private Slave Trade in the Dutch Indian Ocean World', 95–116; and Geelen *et al.*, 'On the Run'.

Batavia was also the residence of the Court of Justice (*Raad van Justitie*). Although the president of the Court was also a member of the Council, all other members were appointed by the Lords XVII. The Court of Justice dealt with all civil and criminal cases involving the Company and its servants, including their families and slaves, as well as cases between Company people and free citizens or Asians. Non-Company issues fell under the responsibility of the local Board of Aldermen (*Schepenbank*). The authority of the Court of Justice in Batavia covered the Company's entire chartered territory. Cases that could not be resolved in the various local Courts of Justice were transferred to the Court of Justice in Batavia. After 1642, the judicial system in Batavia operated on the basis of the Statutes of Batavia, a collection of all the edicts and laws that had been promulgated in Batavia since its foundation. Apart from being the Company's political and judicial headquarters, Batavia functioned as the main transshipment and repair workshop for shipping within Asia and for traffic with Europe.

Outside its capital, VOC workers were also needed to implement the Company's plan to stimulate the production of coffee and sugar, which could not be supplied by the free market. The VOC did not cultivate the coffee plantations itself. It was unable to assemble enough free workers to grow coffee plants and was unwilling to buy slaves on a large scale for this purpose. Instead, the VOC managed to interest the Javanese ruling elites in and around Bandung in taking on the coffee bean cultivation. This proved to be a successful manoeuvre because the VOC paid well for the coffee harvests, which generated extra income for the villagers and for the Javanese regents. At a later point, the VOC reduced the price, out of fear of over-production. Initially this did not result in lower supplies because the regents forced the villagers to continue to supply coffee in the region under their control. The VOC then destroyed a proportion of the coffee plants and later in the eighteenth century switched to a quota system, under which the regencies supplied a fixed amount of coffee.

It is not clear why the VOC wanted to limit the production of coffee. One possibility is that they feared that the cultivation of coffee might endanger the growing of food crops in Java. It is in any event striking that the production of coffee was being restricted in Asia, while at the same time the Dutch plantation colonies in the Caribbean region were producing ever larger amounts of coffee. This seems to indicate that the costs of the expensive slave labour in the West Indies were more than offset by the higher labour productivity on the plantations and the lower transport costs.

Indirect management of production was also a feature of sugar cultivation in the area around Batavia, in this case primarily relying on Chinese

entrepreneurship. The Chinese were already familiar with the cultivation and processing of sugar cane in their own country. They did use a few slaves, but it was primarily Chinese professionals that were employed in the top layer of the Chinese plantations, assisted by a large number of relatively cheap, unskilled Javanese labourers recruited through local chiefs.²¹ Here again, this product could not compete on the Dutch market with the sugar from the West Indies; the VOC therefore sold the Javanese sugar mainly in Iran, while the Chinese sold their products on the local market.

The extensive VOC presence on the Maluku Islands and in particular on Ambon was again the result of the Company's interest in the production of a marketable crop: cloves. The harvesting of this spice had a long tradition, and the Company was keen to regulate and enforce a monopoly on its production and procurement. This led the VOC to govern the Maluku Islands itself. However, the practice of the law was left to the village heads, assembled in the land council. As a tax in kind, the inhabitants of Ambon had to maintain the Company buildings, as well as allowing the use of their boats to make an annual inspection of the surrounding islands in order to completely eradicate illegally planted clove trees and to punish the population. Each family had to supply the Company with a certain quantity of cloves at a fixed price, which enabled the VOC to acquire a monopoly on the European market, which they were able to maintain for a long time. The Ambonese were converted to Protestantism, and the village schools were provided with teaching materials in Malay made available by the VOC, which ensured that over time a large proportion of the Ambonese were able to read and write.

From an exploitative, colonial perspective, the VOC's administration of the spice colonies was a tremendous success. The Ambonese did not seem particularly concerned about the forced deliveries and the elimination of competing buyers. For them, the cultivation of cloves was an outlet for surplus supplies: it generated extra income and posed no threat to their normal food production. Over time, the VOC was offered far more cloves than it had expected, because the Ambonese kept up the supplies since there was always some profit to be earned from them, even when the price dropped. In order to maintain the monopoly, the VOC resignedly bought all the available cloves. While maintaining its monopoly, the VOC imposed its own rule of law, which allowed the Ambonese to complain to the Company if the village chiefs and regents attempted to assert unjust claims. At the time, the Company rule on Ambon caused little anti-colonial criticism in the Netherlands, albeit that later, during the

²¹ Xu, *Monsoon Plantation*.

nineteenth century, the monopolistic VOC regime in Ambon was often cited as an example of how much the VOC policy was based on ruthless coercion rather than on the market.²²

If the VOC board on Ambon led in the long run to an administrative compromise, in which both the Company and the local population knew where they stood, in the Banda Islands the VOC's determination to acquire and retain a monopoly had a completely opposite effect. Events on Banda were a smaller-scale version of what happened in the New World: the original inhabitants were driven out or murdered, and in their place, colonists were brought in from Europe and slaves from elsewhere who could meet the needs of the regional governors. Ex-employees of the VOC could be considered for the allocation of a parcel of land, a *perk*. In their turn, the holders of these parcels of land (*perkeniers*) imported slaves, some even from as far away as Madagascar, to cultivate the nutmeg and mace. Food products had to be imported from other islands. All in all, the Banda Islands of the VOC in Asia shared many similarities with the plantation areas in the Atlantic region.

Incidentally, it was not in Java and Ambon but in Ceylon that the VOC's role as a colonial power was most apparent. Initially, the VOC was invited onto the island by the Sinhalese king of Kandy as an ally against the Portuguese, but once this opponent had been vanquished, the Company's position became more like that of a cuckoo in someone else's nest. After many hitches, the VOC initially recognised the authority of the king of Kandy but in the middle of the eighteenth century the Company conquered the coastal area, and in so doing became the ruler over 200,000 to 300,000 subjects, primarily Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils, but also Muslims, including a group of political exiles displaced by the Dutch from the Indonesian archipelago. The Company took no interest in the followers of non-Christian religions, but did send ministers to Ceylon, who, beside their work for the Company staff, were expected to make Dutch Reformed Christians out of those Ceylonese people who had previously been converted by the Portuguese to Roman Catholicism. A small number of Ceylonese were trained as ministers, and an even smaller number were able to continue their studies in the Netherlands. The indigenous system of government that the Company had found on the island was retained on the understanding that only Europeans could be provincial governors. The VOC even took over the *corvée* services, obligations and taxes from the previous rulers and recorded them with great precision. The local legal system continued to exist in the north, while in other areas Roman-Dutch law was introduced.

²² Van Goor, *De Nederlandse koloniën*, 135–6.

Unlike in Batavia and the Cape of Good Hope, tropical diseases did not have such a devastating effect on the Europeans living in Ceylon. In the course of time, a group of free citizens evolved there, some of whom had previously been in the service of the VOC. Some of the lower-level VOC workers also continued to live in Ceylon, and a number of these married Asian women. Only more senior Company officers married European partners. Around the middle of the eighteenth century, more than 1,500 Europeans were living in Ceylon, and almost an equal number of slaves. About 10 per cent of these were descendants of Portuguese settlers. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Reformed Church had some 2,100 members, not counting the descendants of the Portuguese settlers.

Besides Ceylon, the Cape was a further settlement where Europeans seemed to thrive. Unlike in and around Batavia and in Ceylon, the indigenous population was by no means an important factor. The Company did not regard the indigenous Khoi and San in the region as its subjects. Maintaining the original administrative structure and legal system was not an issue in the Cape colony. There was a clear boundary between the region administered by the VOC and the area outside VOC control, which did shift further outwards, but never crossed over large groups of non-Europeans. The Europeans in that part of the Cape administered by the VOC were thus not a small minority, which meant that the VOC in South Africa should have developed an administrative structure that represented not only the VOC but also the 'free citizens'. However, the VOC failed to do this, largely because the composition of the Political Council, the highest administrative body in the colony, was the same as the Political Council in Batavia, where the ethnic composition of the population was very different from that in South Africa.²³

What was relevant for the VOC region was also applicable to the administration of the WIC settlements in Africa and the New World. Increasingly, the administration was made up of a director or governor, assisted by a number of senior Company officials. Important matters first had to be submitted to the Company directors, but in practice the director or governor had a lot of freedom to manoeuvre because applying for permission or approval from the Netherlands took several months and in many instances there was no time for this. In fact, the governance system of the settlements of both companies most resembled a ship's council: all decisions were taken by the captain in his role as skipper beside God, and if it suited him, he might first listen to the advice of other officers. The ship's crew had to hold their tongues, as did the free citizens or colonists in the settlements.

²³ Biewenga, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, 15.

In the West Indies, Dutch Brazil, New Netherland and West Africa the legal infrastructure was similar to that in the VOC settlements in Asia, i.e. in each colony or major trading post a council for legal and administrative affairs (*Raad van Politie en Justitie*) was set up. The members of this Council were the governor or director and other high-ranking officials, such as the military commander. However, the majority of the members were unpaid colonists of some importance in society. Even the captains of those ships that were temporarily anchored in the harbour of Curaçao could be asked to participate in the affairs of the Council. The Court dealt with the same civil and criminal cases as in Asia. Non-European inhabitants also had access to the courts, although non-Christians and slaves had few or no rights to be heard. In the fortress of Elmina a special room was reserved for *palavers*, disputes between African states or individuals. Whenever the local African courts did not return a verdict or were seen as biased, the director of the WIC at Elmina was asked to mediate or to return a verdict. Rather than applying Dutch laws, the European mediators used African customary law in order to settle these disputes between African individuals and states in areas surrounding the Dutch fort.²⁴

In most Dutch overseas settlements, the hierarchical administrative structure did not give rise to any major protests. Conflicts did occur between the governors and the colonists, but in the VOC settlements in Asia and at the Cape and in the WIC settlements on the African coast and in Brazil, most inhabitants accepted that the Company had the last word. At the end of the day, the colonists who were not in the service of one of the two Companies were represented in the lower administrative and legal bodies. Admitting free colonists to the administration and the law was in the gift of the Companies, rather than a right. There are several possible reasons for this democratic shortcoming in the Dutch colonies, such as the relatively small size of many of the settlements, the large majority of non-Dutch Europeans living there and the fear of endangering trade monopolies.

Many of the VOC settlements in Asia were so small that they had hardly any free colonists living there. This was not the case in Batavia, in Ceylon or at the Cape, but the large proportion of foreigners among the free citizens hampered the sense of community among this group. Added to this, the colonists in Batavia and in Ceylon constantly had to take into account the dominance of the Asian population outside their colonies. The Cape colony too had many non-Dutch inhabitants: of the 157 free citizens in Stellenbosch, 29 males were born at the Cape in 1704 and 33

²⁴ Kunst, *Recht, commercie en kolonialisme*; den Heijer, 'Institutional Interaction on the Gold Coast', 203–25.

men had immigrated from the Republic. The majority of the population came from other European countries. Add to this that half the VOC settlements at the Cape and in colonial cities such as Batavia, Colombo and Cochin were made up of slaves, and it is obvious that the colonists would be reluctant to antagonise the VOC. The hierarchical VOC administration did not mean that the Lords XVII in the Netherlands ignored the colonists: their role in the production of food crops was too important for that. In 1706, a group of free citizens at the Cape wrote to the VOC directors complaining that a number of senior VOC officials were lining their own pockets, that they owned and farmed land illegally, bought the best slaves and hired the best servants. The Company directors reacted immediately and recalled the guilty officials, including the governor, to the Netherlands.²⁵

What applied to the Cape, Ceylon and Batavia was also true for Netherlands Brazil. In this colony, there was at one point even a one-man administration, when Johan Maurits of Nassau was appointed governor in 1637. Before he took office, the Political Council, consisting of the highest-ranking WIC representatives, governed the colony jointly, with the members fulfilling the role of chairman in turn. Johan Maurits took the helm himself and became the permanent chairman of the 'High and Secret Council'. However, this change by no means meant that Netherlands Brazil was ruled by a despotic style of government. Johan Maurits understood all too well that, if he wanted to increase their loyalty to the Dutch authorities, he would have to give the Portuguese majority in the colony a voice. The Portuguese guerrillas who made large parts of the colony in the south unsafe would then no longer be able to rely on the support of their religious brothers in the Dutch colony. Johan Maurits' solution was to set up a form of parliament in which the Portuguese and Dutch colonists were represented; this parliament met once a year.²⁶

This Brazilian parliament was a unique phenomenon in South America, but in North America the influence of the colonies on the administrative and legal system in New Netherland was considerably weaker than in the neighbouring English colonies. The Amsterdam chamber of the WIC played a strong role in the administration of New Netherland, and within the colony the representatives of the WIC also took a top-down approach to governing the area under their control; it was only in the course of time that the colonists themselves gained greater influence over affairs in the colony. The governance of the Dutch colony seems to be at odds with the idea that democracy in the United States was created by freedom-loving and democratic settlers who had deliberately

²⁵ Biewenga, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, 34. ²⁶ Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil*, 119.

severed ties with an unfree and autocratic Europe. Some nineteenth-century American historians even regarded the patronage system of New Netherland as a return to medieval feudality.²⁷

This seems to be a strange paradox. How was it possible for one of the most 'democratic' countries in Europe – at least according to the norms of the seventeenth century – to establish such an autocratically governed colony in North America? To answer this question, we first have to reiterate that the Dutch colony in North America originally started as a trading settlement whose purpose was to make a profit from trading with the indigenous population. The idea of making New Netherland into a settlement colony was a later development. Incidentally, in the long run the WIC did indeed allow the settlers to have a say in local government and in the practice of the law.

It is true that in the last decades of the existence of New Netherland there was a power struggle between the colonists and the Company, both of which were pursuing different interests. The colonists wanted to expand the colonised area, even if this posed a threat to the relationship with the indigenous people. Free trade was also high on their agenda, both within the New World and with Europe, while the trade in beaver skins and trade crops was seen not as an essential, but as a subsidiary activity. Providing for their own needs was the first priority for the colonists. The opposition between the Company and the colonists centred on the question of how much the Company should expend on the administration and defence of the colony and whether and how much the colonists and the indigenous people living in the colony should contribute. This disparity was a factor not only in New Netherland, but also in the settlement colonies in other countries.

Just how heavy was the burden of administration and defence? In Asia in the eighteenth century the administrative and military staff numbered around 20,000. The VOC was able to justify the administration and defence costs because of the high profit margins from which it benefited. When these profit margins came under pressure, the Company had to arrange loans in order to be able to finance its endless military campaigns. For the VOC, warfare was not an exceptional activity but was rather part of a very common combination of trade and violence in Asia. It is, therefore, no surprise that the VOC was embroiled in a violent conflict somewhere in its widespread monopoly area almost every year. The clash of arms was no greater in Asia than in Europe, but in Asia warfare was less of a state monopoly and was therefore less predictable and often on a smaller scale.

²⁷ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 21.

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch administrative and military presence in the Atlantic region was much smaller than it ever was in Asia. This is remarkable, considering that between 1630 and 1664 the area included the two largest Dutch settlement colonies: New Holland in Brazil and New Netherland in North America. This would lead us to believe that there were more administrators and militia in these colonies than in other Dutch colonies elsewhere; however, the financial position of the WIC did not permit this. Unlike the VOC, the WIC had no opportunity to enjoy high monopoly profits, which meant that the costs of administration and defence had to be kept as low as possible. The army in Netherlands Brazil, where the Company had a staff of 10,000 men during Johan Maurits' administration, was an exception, but this number was rapidly reduced to 4,000 after the Dutch and the Portuguese agreed a truce in 1642.²⁸ New Netherland had between 250 and 300 soldiers at the time of the handover to the English.²⁹

There are no precise data for the number of WIC overseas officials, but in total it must have been less than 1,000, a number that declined rapidly after the loss of assets in Brazil and North America. After 1664, the WIC still administered the forts in West Africa, Essequibo and later Demerara, as well as the six Netherlands Antilles; the defence and administration of Suriname and Berbice were in the hands of separate societies. It is not clear whether the administration of the WIC and the two societies were very different from the English or French colonial administrations in the New World. England in any event had a larger maritime force, which meant that the links between the metropolis and the Atlantic colonies were better protected in times of war than was the case for France and the Netherlands. The fact that it was only after the middle of the eighteenth century that the government in London had serious problems with the colonists, who were objecting to having to pay towards the cost of the militia while they had no voice in the English parliament, indicates that until that time London had contributed to the defence and also the administration of its American colonies. After the loss of Brazil, the WIC was forced to be more economical with its expenditure on the administration and defence of its remaining assets, and much earlier than England the Company tried to get the colonists to pay for the majority of the administration and defence costs. Despite a structural subsidy from the States-General from 1674 onwards, covering the costs for a militia of 200, the WIC suffered a chronic lack of funds.

²⁸ Van den Boogaart, 'De Nederlandse expansie in het Atlantische gebied', 121.

²⁹ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 74.

These financial shortcomings forced the administration of New Netherland not only to tax the colonists, but also to find ways of having the indigenous population contribute to the costs of administration and defence of the Dutch-controlled regions. The colonial governors believed that the local population in the area under its administration benefited from the maintenance of public order in the colony and in the repelling of raids by other native groups. If the local people could not pay the tax in money, then they had to provide the relevant amount in corn. They, however, saw things differently, as is apparent from a report by one of the colonists. They rejected the tax absolutely:

[...] considering that they had always lived there, and this being their fatherland, this was contrary to all right, reason and reasonableness. They were forced to make a contribution to someone with whom they were not connected on the basis of any laws or by natural reasons.

Another 'Indian' apparently remarked disparagingly that

[...] the ruler [in this case the Dutch], who now occupied the fort [...] must be a very barren baker who came uninvited to live here in their country, and now forced them to give their grain for nothing.³⁰

The VOC recruitment records, remarkably well preserved for the eighteenth century, show who was sent overseas in a military or civic function. No such data are available for the WIC, but there is no reason to suppose that the Atlantic company had a different way of recruiting its workforce. The lowest category comprised soldiers and sailors, mainly from throughout Europe. The VOC and WIC were in reality foreign legions comprising people from all parts of Europe, but in particular from Germany, Poland and Scandinavia, or, as this Dutch source has it, which we think it better to leave untranslated:

alderhande vreemdelinge en uitheemse natie, als Polakke, Sweeden, Deenen, Noor-luyde, Jutte, Hamborgers, Bremers, Lubekkers, Dantsikers, Koninxbergers, Hoogduytse, Oosterlingers, Westfaalders, Bergse, Gulikse, Kleefse, en voorts alderhande Moffen, Poepen, Knoete, Hannekemaijers en andere groene kassoepers die 't gras nog tussen de tanden steekt.³¹

³⁰ '[...] daer bij wegende dat sij van ouders tot ouwers aldaer gewoon hebbende, ende hunne vaderlandt sijnde, tegen alle recht, redenen ende billichheyt was, sijlied aen die gene welke sij gants nijet uijt eenige wetten offte natuerlicke redenen verbonden waeren sulcx te doen contributie geven souden'; '[...] de sackima die nu aen 't fort was [...] moest een heel kale backer wesen die hier haer lant quamen bewoonen, ende haer hier niet gheroepen en hadden, en dat die haer nu dwinghen wilde haer koorn te geven voor niet.' Cited in Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 134.

³¹ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 97.

Incidentally, there was a higher proportion of foreigners among the soldiers than among the sailors. It is impossible to explain why so many young men went to the Netherlands to serve as soldiers, given the extremely high death rate. Only one in three returned from the Tropics, which must have been known in the countries of origin. The stream of men making their way to the recruitment offices of the VOC and the WIC shows just how desperate the living conditions of the poor in Europe were: although working for the VOC may well have given them a modest income, it also entailed a strong likelihood of not reaching old age. Recent research has shown that it was not just the lower classes who served in the Dutch companies but also impoverished boys and men from the middle classes. The misery of the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) in Central Europe was one factor that increased the supply of young men to the VOC, many of whom, under normal circumstances, would have ended up in skilled professions. The VOC needed not only soldiers and sailors in the lower ranks but also craftsmen such as carpenters, sail makers, bookkeepers, surgeons, ministers, comforters of the sick, schoolmasters and vergers for the settlements overseas.

The VOC had more than 100 senior management positions. Some of the incumbents came from the better circles in Europe, but it was equally possible to start in a low position and end up in a senior post. This was true both for the VOC and for the WIC, largely because these rapid promotions were primarily due to the high death rate in certain parts of the Dutch overseas empire. As the case of Johannes Camphuys shows, even progressing from ship's boy to Governor-General was not unknown, although it was the exception rather than the rule. Many of the directors of the companies made sure that one or more of their family members were despatched to the colonies to take up these highly desirable senior positions. Besides the standard, generally meagre salary, the higher Company officials were able to engage in private trading, which could earn them many times their salary, allowing them to return to the Netherlands as rich men. It is not entirely clear how these senior officials were able to supplement their salaries, but many of them paid large amounts of cash into the VOC offices in Asia and claimed the sums back again on their return to the Netherlands. The very fact of providing this banking service meant that the VOC must have been aware of the sizeable and illegal earnings of its staff, but the Company did little or nothing to prevent it, and whistle-blowers were ignored. It is little wonder that the abbreviation VOC was interpreted by many in the Netherlands as *Vergaan onder Corruptie* ('rotten with corruption'). The question remains whether corruption really did increase in the eighteenth century or whether it was simply a case of views on corruption becoming stricter, as happened with the English company. There was

almost certainly corruption in the WIC too, but it is impossible to get blood from a stone. In any event, the sketchy information from the archives has brought to light far fewer details about fraud than about the excellently documented VOC.

The Company as Military Enterpriser

Perhaps one of the most neglected key motives behind establishing the two overseas Companies was to privatise the huge war effort against the combined Spanish–Portuguese arch enemy. With this purpose in mind, one could simply follow the workings of the sprawling military labour market of the Holy Roman Empire in which states hired fairly autonomous military companies lock, stock and barrel. Especially during the Thirty Years' War, military outsourcing reached unprecedented levels and witnessed the rise of powerful military enterprisers, such as Albrecht von Wallenstein, who were expected to cover the initial expenses of warfare against the right to recoup these expenses by taxing earmarked territories at a later stage. Although this became general practice in the empire, the army of the Dutch Republic did not engage such autonomous military companies but continued to depend on the traditional mercenary contract, in which the provinces, assisted by financial contractors, paid for the levy of an agreed number of troops, raised by colonels who were treated and paid as employees rather than as independent proprietors. Since the Dutch were waging a defensive war, conducted by a relatively static, permanent state garrison, the States-General were not particularly interested in stimulating private warlords to spoil an already exhausted Dutch countryside; one or two princes of Orange were more than enough for the rulers of the Republic. As regards Dutch naval activities, however, the situation was radically different. In fact, the autonomous operations of the East and West India Companies developed out of an already-existing practice of using private capital to build and equip the ships of the five Admiralty Boards in the Netherlands. As recently stressed by David Parrott, the two Companies represented just one higher level of delegated naval authority by the Dutch state. Not unlike the big military enterprisers of the Thirty Years' War, the Companies were virtually sovereign actors who were licensed to build their own little states within the state.³²

As some recent studies have rightfully stressed, even after the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648), the Companies, and in particular the VOC, continued to wage war, if not against their European adversaries then

³² Parrott, *The Business of War*, 111–13, 320–3. See also the perceptive comments on the topic in Brady, Jr., 'The Rise of Merchant Empires', 142–61.

against the various indigenous peoples in Asia, Africa and America.³³ It should be stressed, though, that most warfare was of a regional nature and, if we are to grasp its dynamic, we need to look at the widely different regional balances of power. Nonetheless, by focusing on ships, forts and manpower, the next sections will briefly discuss some general characteristics of the military apparatus of the two trading companies. The more specific regional military developments will be addressed in Parts 2 and 3.

Armed Merchantmen and Warships

To start with the main military asset of Dutch overseas power, the design of their ships, it is clear that early Dutch ships were quite often able to beat their Iberian adversaries because they were smaller, more manoeuvrable and more seaworthy. In combination with the highly effective use of – mostly cast iron – cannon, this made them almost invincible in the face of Asian adversaries, albeit only on the high seas. In the shallow waters off the coast, Asian galley-like ships and junks could nonetheless still be very effective. The most typical Dutch Company ship was the *fregat* that had two decks, three masts and a relatively sharp keel, which made it much faster than the more rounded *fluyt*. In contrast to the English East India Company, the VOC built its own ships, more than 1,400 in total, coming from either the docks of the home chambers or, increasingly, from its wharfs in Asia: Rembang and Djuwana in Java and Cochin in India. Interestingly, the VOC never developed a distinct, specialised navy of warships but continued to use various types of relatively large armed merchantmen of 600–1,100 tons, primarily meant to carry a maximum quantity of personnel and cargo. During the eighteenth century, these so-called *spiegelschepen* – *spiegel* or ‘mirror’ indicating the ship’s flat stern – tended to become larger, using a standard armament of thirty-two twelve-pound guns. Many smaller types of vessels also frequented the intra-Asian trade routes and were also increasingly produced in Asian wharfs. Overall, one-third of all ships remained in Asian waters and after some time were written off as unsuitable for the long journey back to Holland.³⁴ All this worked quite well for the Company until the middle of the eighteenth century, when the British and French started to equip specialised warships that brought a rapid end to a long era in which VOC Indiamen had ruled the Asian waves.

³³ See Knaap, *De core business van de VOC*. Much in the next section is based on the excellent recent survey by Knaap, den Heijer and de Jong, *Oorlogen overzee*. For an earlier volume on the topic, see Knaap and Teitler (eds.), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie*.

³⁴ De Vries, ‘Connecting Europe and Asia’, 35–106.

At home, the Dutch had developed their own navy, employing specialised warships much earlier. This had been a direct consequence of the First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652–4, when the Dutch suddenly faced English warships of superior quality. Although the WIC had built its own warships during the first two decades of its existence, as early as the 1640s the state had to step in with Dutch Admiralty warships to support the WIC's ambitious military operations in Brazil and along the African West Coast. In fact, the Dutch 'new navy' that was created during the 1650s now extended its protection to the sea routes of the Atlantic.³⁵ After 1650, the WIC almost completely gave up its military role, increasingly hiring or buying (used) merchantmen of a much smaller size than those of the VOC. Meanwhile, and into the eighteenth century, the warships of the Admiralty continued to provide convoys against the ongoing threat of piracy in the Caribbean.

Forts

Dominating the high seas is one thing, but building an overseas empire is quite another. For this the two companies needed to start amphibious operations that included extensive siege operations against mostly Portuguese-held port cities. Once they had conquered these cities, the Dutch usually completely demolished or thoroughly reconstructed the existing Portuguese fortification works. These often originated from the sixteenth century and, although modified from time to time, were less in line with the latest European insights. These insights are often seen as the core of a 'military revolution' that took first Europe and then the entire world by surprise. Without wanting to elaborate on an already hotly debated issue, it seems fair to conclude that the revolution was mainly about how to maximise the effectiveness of new gunpowder weaponry – both cannon and muskets – at sea and on land. As with the use of cannon on ships, the challenge on land was how one could employ this new firepower in battle, but more importantly in the context of the seventeenth-century Dutch Revolt, in defending and attacking fortified places. Hence, by building 'modern' bastioned forts in Africa, Asia and America, the Dutch and other Europeans exported a phenomenon that had proven its mettle in a theatre of war that was completely different from these overseas territories. As with artillery *shipping*, introducing the latest artillery *fortification* overseas was mainly directed against European adversaries.³⁶ Until the middle of the

³⁵ Bruijn, *Varend verleden*.

³⁶ The terms are Erik Odegard's, see his *The Company Fortress*.

eighteenth century, the regional powers that the two Companies faced found it very difficult to conquer such fortifications. At the same time, it is very important to note that, in places such as the Mughal and Qing Empires, the Dutch were never allowed to build extensive fortified strongholds. So, at least in the tropical parts of the world, it was difficult for relatively weak indigenous adversaries to take Dutch artillery forts. In the more arid parts of Asia, however, indigenous armies were perfectly able to keep the Europeans at a distance and, if necessary, to use impressive logistical operations and massive manpower to capture even the strongest of their forts.

So how up to date were these Dutch overseas forts? In a fascinating recent study it is observed that, although most of the Dutch forts in South Asia seem to have been quite modern, this is only on first appearance.³⁷ Closer scrutiny reveals that these forts used the latest designs of angled bastions but actually lacked the important outworks of external crown-works, half-bastions, ravelins and covered roads. In Europe these were meant to keep the artillery of the enemy at a distance, which could be realised only if a large number of preferably well-armed defensive troops were employed. As much as most Asian adversaries in the tropics lacked the logistics and the artillery to carry out long-drawn-out siege operations, the Companies themselves lacked the finances and the manpower to effectively operate such articulated defence systems. Nonetheless, despite the challenge of financial and human resources, at a wider strategic level the Dutch did build extensive fortification systems. Although they were not able to resist a major military attack, the strategic combination of small, medium-sized and large forts did provide some degree of territorial control against indigenous adversaries. Because the Companies lacked a specialised department of military engineers, the sophistication of these defence works depended entirely on the patronage and imagination of the ruling men on the spot. Hence, the most extensive fortification systems of the Dutch overseas empire were the initiative of ambitious regional commanders-cum-engineers such as Rijckloff van Goens in Ceylon and Johan Maurits in Brazil, whose expensive tastes for military grandeur proved stronger than their loyalty to the cost-cutting guidelines of their superiors. Building the latest fort designs was often as much a matter of personal branding as of military effectiveness.

Interestingly, from about the second half of the eighteenth century, engineers started to play a more prominent role in discussing the improvement of VOC fortifications. This happened at a point in time when the attacking power of both European and Asian contenders had

³⁷ Odegard, *Company Fortress*.

exceeded a crucial tipping point. All of a sudden there was an awareness that the existing fortifications were outdated and needed to be modernised, especially considering the increasingly poor performance of the Dutch armed forces both on land and at sea. With very few exceptions, most plans remained on the drawing board and, maybe as a result of this, many Dutch forts proved easy targets in the various wars against the British, and partly also against the new regional states of Mysore and Travancore in south India.

Manpower

Perhaps the most impressive of the VOC's activities was its capacity to mobilise manpower. Indeed, the VOC grew to become the world's largest enterprise, with around 40,000 employees at the height of its existence, about 90 per cent being sailors or soldiers. The average recruit was a man of about twenty-five years of age and unmarried, who had signed a five-year contract on a relatively low salary. The VOC was able to achieve this staggering number only by recruiting young men from the whole of Europe, although the majority of the foreign workers came from the countries neighbouring the Republic. They populated the lower ranks on board the ships and in the settlements in Asia. The death rate among these workers was shockingly high. This was only partly the result of the long and hazardous journey to Asia. Compared with the Portuguese case, shipwrecks were relatively few: one out of fifty on the passage to Asia, one out of twenty-five on the way back. Most casualties on the voyage were the result of illness: one out of five or six on the outgoing passage, one out of eight on the return trip. Even if they managed to arrive in Batavia alive, many quickly fell victim to severe tropical diseases. As we will see in Part III, after 1733 more than half of all arrivals died in Batavia hospitals as a result of malaria. In any event, throughout the entire period, only one out of three emigrants to Asia returned to Europe. In the southern Atlantic the situation was hardly less terrifying: in Berbice about 15 per cent of the soldiers met their death within a year of their arrival; Elmina in Africa had an average annual mortality rate as high as 20 per cent.

Nonetheless, the young men from Germany, Scandinavia and Northern France went more or less willingly to the VOC recruitment offices. Even though some of the lodging holders for sailors in the Dutch ports used deceitful and dishonest means to encourage their boarders to enlist, they were nothing like the English press gangs that used violent means to manoeuvre penniless, unemployed young boys and men on board ships. Nor were offenders in the Netherlands and members of

religious minorities punished by being forced to work overseas as sailors or contract workers, as happened in France.³⁸

As a result of the ever-increasing death rate among Europeans, the non-European contingent among both sailors and soldiers became more and more prominent, and at the end of the eighteenth century the majority of sailors serving the VOC were Asian, primarily Chinese, Javanese and Bengali. In the VOC army, too, the Asian component was on the rise, to a lesser extent in the permanent garrisons of the Dutch establishments, and rather more so as distinct groups of temporarily mobilised militia and auxiliaries.

Neither the VOC nor the WIC ever developed a separate military branch. A local captain and his garrison simply fell under the authority of the chief local administrator and not, for example, under the Colonel, the highest military official in Batavia, who also followed the orders of the High Government. For their colonial establishments in Asia and the Atlantic, the Dutch tried to follow the example of the homeland by setting up companies of armed citizens (*schutterijen*), which in the overseas situation consisted of European freeburghers, sometimes supplemented by non-military Company servants as well as increasingly by mestizo and indigenous inhabitants. We find such companies not only in the main Dutch port towns in the East – ten to twenty in Batavia – but also in places like Paramaribo and Curaçao in the West and at the Cape of Good Hope. In case of emergency, however, the Companies depended on indigenous auxiliary troops that were organised by war-jobbers who were able to tap into the various regional military labour markets. At least nominally, many of these troops were recruited along ethnic lines, hence surrounding the walled city of Batavia we find distinct Ambonese, Balinese, Makassarese, Buginese and Malay military settlements or *kampongs*. Probably on the same basis, the WIC in Elmina could recruit about 5,000 African soldiers from seven military quarters (*asafo* companies) to defend the city in the event of a military emergency. In Suriname, the colonial government started to organise freed African slaves in a company of *zwarte jagers*. Although not always in permanent employment, it was mainly through such militias and auxiliaries that the Dutch military establishment in both East and West became increasingly indigenised.

In Asia, the VOC also tried to exploit the feudal military services of local rulers, as it did most successfully in the Maluku Islands and Ceylon. But overall, the Dutch thought that these feudal levies lacked discipline and, because their loyalty was in doubt, they also remained poorly armed. From about the middle of the eighteenth century the Company in Ceylon

³⁸ Bruijn, 'De personeelsbehoefte van de VOC overzee en aan boord', 218–48.

partly followed the British and French example and started to recruit sepoy from the Indian subcontinent. But this is a rare case as the Dutch remained altogether hesitant to recruit any indigenous troops on a permanent basis. Asian troops, whether allies, auxiliaries or sepoys, were mobilised only in the case of emergency and as such the military arm of the Company remained vulnerable, certainly compared with the eighteenth-century standing armies of their European rivals in Asia, which were on almost permanent service during the mid-century wars on the subcontinent – much of their expenses being paid by South Asian rulers. At the end of the eighteenth century, the VOC even preferred to follow the example of the WIC during its heyday by hiring fully equipped European regiments. In Asia the VOC's failure to organise a permanent navy and a standing army of sepoys was the main reason behind the disastrous defeats of the VOC during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.

By the end of the eighteenth century, both in Europe and in Asia, war had become less about ships and forts, and more about the massive mobilisation of highly disciplined infantry units with increased firepower due to improved drilling and ever more standardised muskets equipped with rapidly reloading flintlocks and bayonets. Although flintlocks had already replaced the much slower matchlock at the end of the seventeenth century, it was during the middle of the eighteenth century that these new infantry armies demonstrated that they could beat even the most powerful of the Asian imperial armies that still depended so heavily on cavalry. Insofar as the VOC is concerned, it seems that its troops had easy access to the best and the newest weaponry from both Europe and Asia. Batavia, for example, even had its own foundry and powder mill. In 1790, the Asian establishments of the VOC had access to about 6,500 pieces of artillery, large and small, 30,000 flintlocks and 1,500 pistols. As was the case in previous periods, Dutch weakness was not caused by deficient military technology but arose from a sheer lack of manpower. This became more evident during the eighteenth century against European adversaries who were more willing than the Dutch to exploit the huge military labour market of the Indian subcontinent. Let us not forget that it was Indian sepoys under British command who were to deliver to the British their Asian empire. Meanwhile, in the Indonesian archipelago well-equipped Dutch armies, typically assisted by Asian auxiliaries, still proved powerful enough against the main indigenous powers.

A final word needs to be said about the costs that all these military activities incurred for what were still considered commercial companies. To start with the VOC, according to some estimates, the protection costs for shipping, fortification, arms, sailors and soldiers amounted to a total of 3.5 million guilders per year during the eighteenth century, which would

be about 30 per cent of the Company's annual profits at that time – i.e. European sales minus Asian purchase price. This suggests that the VOC was perfectly able to bear the enormous costs of the military enterprise. How different this was for the WIC, which had to be rescued time and again by financial and military support paid for by the federal government of the Dutch Republic. Although both Companies were supposed to build their own ships and forts and to recruit their own employees, it was only the VOC that managed to do this for most of its two centuries of existence.

Distance

In discussing warships, forts and armies as a means to safeguard or extend Dutch power overseas, it should be stressed that there was an important difference between East and West: distance. It was virtually impossible to react in the same way to internal as well as external wars, mutinies and insurrections in the Dutch possessions in Asia, as was possible in the Atlantic. In Asia, the military commanders of the VOC had to rely on the resources that were present in the area. In case of need, it would take more than one or more likely almost two years to reinforce the military and naval presence of the Company. In the Atlantic, on the other hand, such reinforcements could reach any Dutch colony in eight weeks at most. This enabled the Dutch as well as their European opponents to extend the European wars into the Atlantic.

The frequent wars explain why several trade forts on the coast of West Africa changed hands. A case in point is the Dutch island of Goeree on the coast of Senegal that was taken by an English fleet during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–7) and was subsequently retaken by a Dutch fleet, only to be conquered by the French a decade later. It would have been unthinkable that these attacks and counterattacks could have taken place if the fighting had been limited to European troops on the spot, even if their numbers had been supplemented by locally recruited African soldiers. A similar situation existed in the New World. Most of the time, the English and the French constituted the major threat to the defence of the Dutch colonies. Suriname, the largest Dutch colony in the Caribbean, provides a good example. The colony had been taken from the English in 1667 during the Second Anglo-Dutch War. During the following War of the Grand Alliance (1688–1797), a French fleet attacked the capital of Suriname, Paramaribo, but was repelled in spite of the fact that the defence consisted of only 200 professional soldiers – many of whom were too ill to fight – and a badly trained group of colonists. This was a unique outcome, because usually the local militia was unable to

withstand a fleet with hundreds if not thousands of soldiers aboard sent from Europe. In 1712, during the War of the Spanish Succession, Suriname was attacked again by a fleet from France, and only the payment of a substantial ransom prevented the destruction of the plantations around the capital. In North America, the Dutch colony of New Netherland was taken by a fleet arriving from England in 1667 and retaken by a Dutch fleet in 1673 during the next war, only to be restored to the English a year later.

In addition to fighting external enemies, the Dutch colonial military had to cope with various kinds of internal resistance. In Brazil, in Angola and on the island of São Tomé, the Dutch could not rely on the loyalty of the Portuguese colonists nor on all of the indigenous inhabitants and Africans. The Dutch could have coped with the internal resistance, but were forced to surrender when a fleet from Portugal arrived. In Suriname and the neighbouring Dutch colonies, the internal threat was caused by slave revolts as well as by gangs of runaway slaves, who attacked the plantations. The colonial army could not halt these attacks, and additional troops had to be sent from the Netherlands. A major slave revolt in the Dutch colony of Berbice in 1763 was quelled first by troops from neighbouring Suriname as well as from British Barbados – a rare example of international colonial solidarity – and later by soldiers sent from the Netherlands.³⁹

³⁹ Enthoven, den Heijer and Jordaan, 'De Nederlandse Atlantische wereld in militaire context', 15–44.

2 The Empire at Home

Dutch overseas expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries intensified the phenomenon that we currently refer to under the umbrella term ‘globalisation’. As we have seen, the operations of the two trading companies in the Republic created a global commodity market. But it was not only the goods from all corners of the world that gave the Dutch ‘beehive’ its global appearance; ideas from the rest of the world also left a cosmopolitan mark on life in the Republic. But how many people from Asia, Africa or America actually participated in this highly acclaimed Dutch cosmopolitanism? Unfortunately, there is precious little evidence left of those very few who actually visited the Republic at that time. Of course, the colourful envoys from Aceh, Iran and Siam, and Armenian and Iranian merchants, were part of their own trading diaspora in Amsterdam, as were the black servants in the portraits of the Dutch regents. Indeed, the fact that Rembrandt and other Amsterdam painters depicted black people suggests that there must have been at least a small community of Africans who found themselves stranded in the city as a result of the Atlantic trade. There were also other exotic characters such as the intriguing Jacobus Capitein, the Ghanaian ex-slave who took up the cause of slavery in his dissertation defended in Leiden in 1742 (Figure 3). There was also Ram Singh from Bhuj in Kathiawar, who had arrived in the Netherlands on board a VOC ship to learn the basics of metal foundry, tile making and glassblowing during his eighteen-year stay, crafts that he subsequently introduced to his native country in the 1750s.¹ Another character was the Ceylonese half-blood and Patriots’ leader Quint Ondaatje, who was a leading revolutionary during the Utrecht uprising of 1785. Unfortunately, we know little or nothing about the extent to which these foreigners were marked by their immigrant background; instead, they have the appearance of being strongly influenced by Western ideas.

¹ Rushbrook Williams, *The Black Hills*, 136–9.

So although, at first sight, there seemed to be very little intercultural exchange with these far-off continents in the Republic itself, careful attention will reveal a multitude of non-Western voices in the numerous travel stories and scholarly reviews published in the Republic, as the centre of the European book market. These voices contributed to an unstoppable influx of new information that somehow or other had to be processed and incorporated in the existing context of the then world view. These contexts proved not always able to withstand this early modern form of globalisation, and a fascinating development occurred where existing patterns of thought were constantly adapted to be able to accommodate new information and new ideas. As indicated in the Introduction to this part of the book, this occurred increasingly through observation and categorisation in a comprehensive 'natural' system. It is this permanent local translation of new ideas from the rest of the world, that forms such a fascinating chapter in Dutch colonial history.²

This chapter will discuss a range of examples of this early modern 'glocalisation' process.³ We will begin by focusing on its economic dimension by discussing the often overrated economic impact of the Dutch Empire on its domestic economy. This will be followed by an investigation of how the increasing interaction with the outside world led to new patterns of consumption in the Netherlands and may have laid the foundation for our present consumer society. Finally, turning to the cultural impact of empire, we will show how the ever-expanding world was represented in Dutch microcosms of gardens and cabinets, periodicals and books, atlases and maps.

Economic Impact: The Handicap of a Head Start?

Between 1600 and 1800 the Netherlands was a remarkable country for two reasons. Unlike almost all other countries in Europe, the Netherlands was a republic, a form of government that for a long time seemed to offer many advantages. There was no real court and only a minimal nobility, and it was the simple, hard-working trading families who held the reins of power. Political refugees and religious minorities often sought refuge in the Republic because they were not persecuted there. Where were there better economic opportunities than in the Netherlands? Overseas expansion was a second reason. No other country in the world had built such

² For an interesting but also very fragmented attempt to engage with this process, see Heerma van Voss *et al.* (eds.), *Wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland*.

³ For some other examples, see the recent volume by Huigen, De Jong and Kolfin (eds.), *The Dutch Trading Companies*.

a large trading empire in Asia as the Dutch Republic, and in the Atlantic region too the Netherlands was initially an important trading nation.

In our view, these two specific characteristics of the Netherlands conflicted with one another. In the overseas Netherlands, the violent annihilation of the population of Banda, as well as the growth of the slave trade and slavery in East and West, seemed to be in direct contrast to the liberal, tolerant culture of the Netherlands in Europe. This dichotomy was not unique. In overseas England and France, too, the customs, habits and laws overseas were different from those in the metropolis. At the end of the eighteenth century, this difference caused dissatisfaction with the colonial policies in these countries. Not that these countries themselves had any doubts about the superiority of Europe and the Europeans, but the native populations of Africa, America and Asia deserved a modicum of respect and should no longer be traded like cattle. In the Netherlands there was no such discourse, which could have been because, for this country, trade with distant continents carried more economic weight than it did for the much larger and differently oriented economies of the neighbouring countries that had much more internal economic activity.

The composition of the Dutch national income supports this contention. In an estimate of the national income at the end of the eighteenth century, the total comes to more than 300 million guilders, of which agriculture accounted for less than half. Approximately 20 million, i.e. less than 10 per cent, was generated by trade with the East Indies and the West Indies, of which the coffee, sugar and cotton plantations cultivated by slaves accounted for just under half. A recent study of the impact of slave-produced sugar and coffee on the Dutch economy during its heyday years between 1750 and 1775, including the sugar and coffee imports from foreign colonies, estimated the contribution of all economic activities connected with these activities at 5 per cent of the Dutch GNP.⁴ What weight should we give to colonial trade? Long-distance trade can be said to have had a much greater impact on the economy than agriculture or domestic trade. Overseas trade required a great deal of planning, complex payment instruments, major investments and a lot of manpower. All these elements could have been more useful in the later modernisation of the Netherlands than, for example, agriculture, where tradition and smallness of scale played a much greater role.

This hypothesis is faulty, because in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Dutch economy stagnated compared with its neighbours. The fact that the Dutch overseas activities were highly risk-laden, involving a great deal of violence and inhumane working and living conditions,

⁴ Brandon and Bosma, 'De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij', 5–45.

and were associated with the large-scale slave trade and slavery and with a disastrously high mortality rate among Europeans and non-Europeans from all social strata, apparently still did not mean that these activities were extremely profitable or even economically significant.

Let us try to assess the influence of the 'pride of the nation', the VOC, on the Dutch economy. What did this impressive concern actually achieve in economic terms? The VOC transported a limited number of Asian luxury goods to the Netherlands, where they were sold, but did not bring about any substantial change in the economy. The evidence for this can be seen in the slow growth of sales: about 1 per cent per year. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, each inhabitant of Europe consumed on average one pound of Asian products. The VOC was probably responsible for making consumption in the Netherlands slightly higher than the European average, but even then, the effect is modest.⁵

The same also applied to the share of the VOC in the Dutch merchant navy. Of the annual number of 4,000 ships, the fifty or so departing and returning VOC ships represented just a couple of per cent. However, this number does not do justice to the VOC's share in the total Dutch tonnage and in the number of nautical miles sailed, bearing in mind that the VOC ships were among the largest merchant ships of the time and their voyages were also much longer than those of vessels with shipping routes within Europe. The value of the goods was also much higher than average and in the course of the eighteenth century exceeded the value of the so-called *moedernegotie*, that is the trade with the countries around the Baltic Sea.

This is where we come to the crux of this story. The above figures lead us to conclude that the VOC did not have a dominant position in Dutch merchant shipping, let alone in the Dutch economy as a whole. The same applied to the WIC. This company ended its commercial activities in the middle of the eighteenth century, while Dutch trade in the Atlantic increased during this period, but was now in the hands of private shipping companies. Because Dutch trade within Europe stagnated or declined, the Netherlands increasingly became a hub for colonial products, but it is still questionable whether the importation of coffee and sugar gave an impetus to economic renewal.

In the seventeenth century, the Republic benefited from its extensive trade with Asia because it strengthened the position of the Netherlands on the commodities market. Over time, the composition of the cargoes returning from Asia changed, because in percentage terms fewer expensive, high-value spices were transported from Asia to the Netherlands,

⁵ De Vries, 'Connecting Europe and Asia', 67.

and more and more textiles, coffee and tea. The VOC therefore had to build and maintain more and larger ships, sail more, work harder and employ more staff, all for lower profits. Such a process cannot be called a stepping stone, let alone a good preparation, for a modern economy.

Would the Netherlands have been better off without the VOC? We cannot be certain about this. The VOC made great demands on the market for seafarers, and without the Company the influx of hundreds of thousands of poor, unmarried young labour migrants to the Netherlands would have been very much more limited. The number of men from Holland and Zeeland who sailed the seas would also have been smaller without the VOC, but it is unclear in which other sectors of the economy they would have found employment. However, all those Dutch and foreign workers would most probably have lived longer if it had not been for the VOC. It has already been pointed out that under half of the VOC crews returned to the Netherlands alive, although the mortality rate was disproportionately high in the lower ranks and particularly among the VOC soldiers, where the proportion of foreigners was very high.

What applied to the people also applied to finances. The VOC relied heavily on the Dutch capital market, and it is questionable what would have been done with this money if the Company had not existed or had failed earlier. As a result of the unorthodox dividend policy of the Lords XVII, the shares in the Company were treated by the investors more or less the same as state bonds with a yield of a few per cent, as was customary at that time. There were few alternative investments for the VOC capital. Without the Company, the Dutch would probably have bought more foreign state bonds, and the interest on the capital market might have been a fraction lower.

Were exports via the VOC important for Dutch industry? During the course of its existence the Company not only sent money to Asia for purchasing Asian products, but also exported goods such as Leiden cloth, which were in high demand in Japan and China. This generated more turnover and more profit for some branches of industry, but 2 million guilders out of the total value of exports of manufactured products of 15 million guilders is important but not essential.

In short, in the eighteenth century the VOC tempered the relative decline of the Dutch economy, but did not contribute to modernising it. There might even be reason to suppose that the Netherlands would have changed course sooner and made earlier efforts to compete in Europe if the VOC had ceased to exist in about 1700. Certainly there would have been more capital and labour available for new activities. It is hard to deny that in the eighteenth century the Company had become an instrument of the conservative regent elite, which, by approving state

subsidies, had the taxpayers in the Netherlands contribute to their business activities. It is no surprise that at the end of the eighteenth century the VOC acted as a red rag to a bull for patriots inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution. The Company symbolised everything that the clique of regents had done wrong.

Trade with Asia may have had a relatively limited influence on the Dutch economy, but trade in the Atlantic area could be a different matter. Here exports were mainly goods and not money, and imports were bulk products rather than luxury items. The slave trade and plantation slavery were an essential part of the Atlantic economy, and the Netherlands would not have become involved if these institutions had not delivered major benefits.

These assumptions have led to fierce debates in the historiography of the English and American share in the Atlantic economy. England was the country with the largest number of slaves in its colonies, and in the second half of the eighteenth century it was the English merchant marine forces that transported the most slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. It cannot be a coincidence that England was also the country where the Industrial Revolution started its triumphal spread throughout the world. It can hardly be anything but a logical assumption that the English and later the West as a whole became rich at the cost of the human suffering, the high mortality rate and the persistent discrimination against the African slaves.

For the Netherlands, this rather sensitive debate can be regarded as irrelevant because the Industrial Revolution in that country took place only in the second half of the nineteenth century when the slave trade and slavery had long been halted. Moreover, the extent of the Dutch slave trade declined towards the end of the eighteenth century, and the Dutch plantation colonies were plagued by a persistent credit crisis that had caused investors to lose confidence. The strong argument in favour of the theory that the Atlantic economy was much more important for England at the end of the eighteenth century than it was for the Netherlands lies in the fact that in around 1750 in England about one-third of all trade was from and to the New World, while for the Netherlands this figure was less than 10 per cent.⁶

Trade and production in the Atlantic region may not have brought about a breakthrough to a modern economy, but these activities generated a relatively high income in certain cities and in particular branches of industry. The number of ships sailing from and to Atlantic destinations outside Europe was larger than for the VOC, but still much smaller than

⁶ De Vries and van der Woude, *Nederland 1500–1815*, 575.

the number of ships that plied their trade within Europe. This meant that without the Atlantic economy the ports in the Netherlands would have been smaller, but even without the Atlantic region there would still have been shipyards in the Netherlands. The same applied to the companies that made gunpowder, guns, textiles and alcohol – products that were used to buy slaves on the coast of Africa and for the plantations in the West, where the slaves were regularly supplied with textiles. Moreover, some of the Atlantic trade goods came not from the Netherlands but from other European countries and from Asia.

The Dutch plantation colonies were not strictly necessary even for the supply of raw sugar because by far most of the sugar for the 130 Dutch sugar refineries came from foreign colonies and was bought in European ports. Textiles from India and raw cotton from the Caribbean region, both of which were important at the start of the Industrial Revolution in England, played a lesser role in industry in the Netherlands, which was lagging behind. Another factor for the Netherlands was that as a result of lack of investment capital the growth of the production of the plantations in the West was slower at the end of the eighteenth century than in the colonies of other countries. The capital that was invested resulted in losses, particularly after 1774, when it appeared that too many mortgages had been granted to the planters in Suriname. All in all, the plantations had little benefit for the Dutch investors, and the Dutch slave trade also made only a very modest profit. As was often the case, the opportunities for profit in far-off, exotic lands seemed more attractive in theory than they proved to be in reality.

Although the plantations in the British West Indian colonies experienced a boom after the end of the war with the United States in 1784, and the English slave ships traded more slaves than ever, at times more than 100,000 a year, the Dutch slave trade declined because the planters in the Caribbean region lacked funds. The Dutch slave trade was in such a state of decline that by 1790 this branch of merchant shipping could have been banned with very little economic harm, although this did not happen. It led to a remarkable paradox, because Great Britain stopped its trade in slaves in 1808 even though the country was earning more and more from the slave trade. This turnaround was the consequence of the fact that the lobby by opponents of slavery and the slave trade in Great Britain was stronger than elsewhere in Europe. The Dutch slave trade came to an official end in 1814 because the Netherlands was forced to concede to the demand of the British government to ban the slave trade, and in 1818 this ban was confirmed with a bilateral treaty that provided for the foundation of a number of English–Dutch courts to punish offenders who infringed the terms of the treaty.

The abolition of the slave trade put an end to the economic cohesion within the Dutch Atlantic Empire. Moreover, the Netherlands was forced in 1814, after the end of the Napoleonic wars, to cede not only the Cape and Ceylon but also part of the Dutch plantation colonies to England. The planters in these colonies would have shed no tears over this because this change of fatherland gave them the opportunity to sell their products in England, where – because of the protection of sugar from the British West Indies, higher prices were paid than in the Netherlands with its open market.

The economic significance of the only remaining Dutch plantation colony – Suriname – diminished rapidly after the implementation of the Cultivation System in Java in the 1830s, when sugar and coffee imports from Java increased: this was a new tax system that forced the Javanese to produce sugar and coffee as a tax in kind. With the introduction of free trade in 1848, it became clear just how weak the economic link between Suriname and the Netherlands was, given that, after a short time, most Surinamese planters preferred to sell their products in England and the United States rather than in the Netherlands.

The economic importance of the Antilles for the Netherlands also reduced after 1815. The decolonisation of the former Spanish colonies in the region meant that trade in the Caribbean region became liberalised. As a consequence, the transport of goods and people to the new republics of Venezuela, Colombia and Peru fell largely into the hands of English ship owners. The Netherlands was unable to get a foot in the door, and after a number of failed attempts the Netherlands Trading Company (Nederlandse Handel-Maatschappij, NHM) called it a day in the West Indies. The NHM was able to keep its head above water only because the English and American competition was excluded from trade and shipping with the Netherlands Indies.

Incidentally, after 1830, it was the positive balances from the Cultivation System in Java that ensured that the Netherlands could continue to pay the administrative costs of its Atlantic assets. Without this income, the Netherlands might have been prepared to accept offers from a number of nations and to sell the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. Venezuela expressed an interest in the Antilles, while Belgium and Italy were interested in Suriname. The Netherlands did not accept these proposals, but did sell the loss-making fortresses on the African Gold Coast to Great Britain in 1871.

The Dutch colonies in the West turned out to be a dubious possession for the metropolis, because in 1863 the Netherlands abolished slavery in its colonies, which speeded up the economic decline. Without slavery, the production of tropical export products in Suriname would no longer be

very profitable, while the abolition of slavery elsewhere in the region reduced the flow of goods and thus the importance of the Antilles as a transit port. It was little consolation that the economic situation in the English and French Caribbean colonies was not much better. The darlings of empire of yesteryear had become the Cinderellas of colonialism.

Social Impact: Consumption and *gezelligheid*⁷

While the colonies may have had relatively little influence on the Dutch economy in quantitative terms, in a qualitative sense there was a noticeable change in the pattern of Dutch consumption. This was due to the introduction of new crops and products: a process that without the VOC and the WIC would have occurred anyway, either to a lesser degree or later. When considering the Dutch Empire at home, domestic consumption of new colonial commodities, and the way this impacted the European economy, is an important issue to bear in mind. In recent studies on consumption, it is the later Industrial Revolution that looms on the horizon. How was it possible that the North-Western part of Europe was suddenly able to outstrip all the other areas in economic growth? As a mere pre-history of this ‘Great Divergence’ as it is now called, most of the attention has focused on the experience of early modern Britain, the first country in Europe to start to industrialise. During the past few years, however, historians have emphatically tried to bring Asian agency into what has long been a Eurocentric story. Indeed, their argument has been that new products from the colonies altered existing European consumer patterns, thus paving the way for the Industrial Revolution.⁸

There is a growing awareness that rising levels and changing patterns of consumption are not exclusively a British, nor even North-West European, phenomenon but are part of a much wider global development. Although it is far too early to draw firm conclusions, it seems that what made North-West Europe – that is, Britain and the Low Countries together – different was the increasing purchasing power of the lower layers of society, which implies that new consumer goods had a deeper impact on more people. To explore this particular aspect in more detail, we should revisit the argument of that other, less well-known revolution, the ‘industrious revolution’, and try to situate it more specifically in time and place.

⁷ This is a condensed version of an earlier publication on the topic, see Gommans, ‘For the Home and the Body’, 331–49.

⁸ Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure*.

Any re-evaluation of the impact of global trade on Dutch consumption automatically raises the complex issue of the supposed seventeenth-century economic crisis. How can rising levels of consumption of colonial goods be squared with an economy that is supposedly in decline?⁹ Actually, the idea of a seventeenth-century crisis never really appealed to historians of the Dutch Golden Age. As in most of North-West Europe, until the middle of the century, the population continued to grow, mainly in cities and mainly along the North Sea coast; decline set in only after about 1660. So the economy of the seventeenth century was certainly in crisis for most of southern and eastern Europe, but not in the Netherlands, where expanding overseas trade gave new urban merchant communities the bargaining power to break away from the imperial mainland. What is crucial from the point of view of demand in this Atlantic zone is that real income did not decline there as it did in most of Europe. When prices in general were on the increase, prices for manufactured and luxury goods usually rose less than prices of staple goods, which benefited the purchasing power of the rich. Hence we know that the new merchant elites of Dutch port cities were able to emulate the courtly lifestyles of the nobility and spent much of their purchasing power on the relatively cheap luxuries both from the Atlantic (tobacco, sugar and chocolate) and from Asia (spices, textiles, porcelain, coffee and tea).¹⁰

Although this economic shift towards Europe's north-western port cities may explain why consumption was greater in these areas than in others, it is hardly sufficient to understand why people in general were able to consume more when their purchasing power at best remained the same. This was the conundrum tackled so well in the early 1990s by Jan de Vries, who proposed an 'industrious revolution' that focused on the changing behaviour of households.¹¹ The gist of his idea is that in the seventeenth century North-Western European households started to compulsively maximise their utility by reducing their leisure time, in order to produce more goods for the market and to consume more and more non-durable goods.¹² Thus, although wages per hour did not increase during our period, more people worked for more and longer days, generating an increase in the purchasing power of unskilled labourers. This increased purchasing power was not spent on basic food-stuffs, but primarily on manufactures. It is particularly in urban environments, where market forces work well and agriculture is less dominant,

⁹ De Vries, 'The Economic Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', 151–94.

¹⁰ Kriedte, 'Vom Großhändler zum Detaillisten', 21–4.

¹¹ De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*.

¹² De Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution', 249–70.

that the industrious revolution is most likely to occur and its effects on consumption to be most striking.

So, despite the crises of the seventeenth century, and thanks to the industrious revolution, the consumption of manufactures and luxuries in the coastal cities of North-West Europe appears to have been on the rise, particularly in England and the Low Countries. But if the industrious revolution is really crucial to our understanding of the rise of consumption, how and to what extent did the new goods from the East and the West contribute to this? As by far the two most important East and West India Companies were launched from North-West Europe, the overseas connection is highly suggestive. But what came first, the new pattern of consumption or the goods from outside Europe?

Focusing on the Southern Netherlands, some historians seem to confirm the overall picture that colonial goods transformed the structure and timing of meals and profoundly influenced patterns of sociability.¹³ The greatest impact was through the consumption of sweetened hot drinks, which also affected material culture with the introduction of more disposable, decorative ceramic tableware. Very much in line with the industrious revolution theory, the new luxuries were characterised by novelty, design and fashion rather than by volume and 'intrinsic value'; they also reached ever wider parts of society. Simultaneously, the same historians are also quite sceptical about attributing to these goods a significant role in the emergence of what they call a more modern 'consumer mentality' in the eighteenth century. In fact, it has been observed that the fundamental shift in the mental attitude towards less durable consumer goods had occurred at least two centuries earlier. This would take us back to the sixteenth century, when Italian majolica production techniques rather than Asian imports seem to have played a pivotal role in creating an appetite for 'material modernity'. The mentality tending towards a more modern consumer pattern was, therefore, already being fostered from at least the sixteenth century; hence *before* the arrival of colonial goods.

This begs the question, however, of what makes this consumption so 'modern' and how is it linked to the industrious revolution? For example, does it mean that we should situate the industrious revolution a century earlier, or should the latter be seen as something that enabled the sixteenth-century pattern to continue into the seventeenth century (i.e. under crisis conditions)? For now, it seems safe to conclude that the consumption of luxuries and other colonial commodities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries might have remained limited, yet reached

¹³ Blondé and Ryckbosch, 'Arriving to a Set Table', 309–27.

unprecedented levels as it penetrated more deeply into society. By the eighteenth century there was a true mass consumer market for American and Asian goods and their equivalents produced in Europe.¹⁴ To elaborate on this for the Dutch Republic, let us summarise these important developments for the consumption of chintz, hot drinks and porcelain: commodities that generated half of the VOC's sales in Amsterdam in the middle of the eighteenth century.

The popularity of Indian coloured textiles or chintz in the Netherlands was a late extension of the much older intra-Asian trade in Indian textiles. Although small quantities of so-called *pintadoes* reached the Dutch market much earlier through the overland routes and Portuguese channels, it was only after the middle of the seventeenth century that a wider demand started to arise, mainly for clothing and interior decoration. Earlier that century, however, following French developments, a baroque desire had already emerged among the nobility and richest urban elites for *régularité* of home interiors decorated with Turkish and Persian carpets and with beautiful wall paintings of gold leather or silk. The arrival of relatively cheap Indian chintz in the seventeenth century made this affordable for the emerging urban middle class, who started to use it for decorating walls, windows, tables and beds. In the late seventeenth century, chintz became more exclusively reserved for the private domain of the bedroom. Hence, when the use of chintz spread to the lower layers of society, it was mainly used for blankets and other bed furnishings. In the case of clothing, chintz followed a similar route, from elites who followed the fashion of the French court, it trickled down to the middle classes and even to the common man. Overall, chintz served as an affordable middle-class substitute for silk, which explains why the French silk industry became one of the fiercest protagonists of protectionism.¹⁵ Although the consumption of chintz may have revolutionised Dutch fashion, we should be aware that it was a hidden revolution, a revolution very much in the domestic domain; a phenomenon Simon Schama tellingly describes as 'domesticated exoticism'.¹⁶

To serve such new fashions, the VOC sent its own patterns to the main production centres in India. At the same time, from about 1675, there was a growing tendency to produce cheaper, printed calicoes at home. The earliest cotton printers in the Dutch Republic, in Amersfoort and Amsterdam, mostly used white Indian cottons and built their production partly on the expertise of Turkish and Armenian producers. From the end

¹⁴ See, for example, McCants, 'Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption', 433–62.

¹⁵ Scholten, 'Het interieur', 42–54; de Jong, 'Sits and bedrukte katoen', 54–64.

¹⁶ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 196.

of the seventeenth century, the technology soon spread to places like Augsburg, Eaux-Vives (near Geneva) and Basle, and even across the Atlantic to Boston. We know that in 1738 at least one Company servant, Ewout van Dishoeck, the director of the VOC settlement in Bengal from 1717 to 1722, invested some of his Indian fortune in setting up a cotton printing factory in Domburg. Although he acquired a patent for the province of Zeeland, the business was closed down only two years later.¹⁷

Overall, the decision of the Dutch authorities to keep the home market open contrasts sharply with the other West European countries that started to protect the home market by banning Indian imports. From the last quarter of the eighteenth century, British domestic production accelerated thanks to the technological advances of copper plates and rotary printing, and started to dominate the open Dutch market.¹⁸

Even more than chintz, coffee and tea became widespread Dutch consumer goods during the eighteenth century, more or less following a pattern from coast to interior, city to countryside, high to low. From its introduction in the early seventeenth century, coffee gradually became a morning drink for the common man, mostly consumed in public coffee houses. During the eighteenth century it became the most popular beverage among burghers and peasants alike, replacing beer, buttermilk and whey. Tea, however, started as a more private drink of gentlewomen, served in the afternoon and surrounded by considerable ritual. But apart from in the coastal, western parts of the country, it never became a national drink. The following overall pattern can be observed: the further one goes eastwards into the country and downwards on the social scale, the more coffee is consumed. But the conquered territories of the Catholic south east were the least affected, and people there continued to drink beer as their main beverage into the early twentieth century. The social context in which the new drinks were consumed indeed produced a new sociability.¹⁹ This again raises the question of whether this was really a new phenomenon, brought about by new Asian consumer goods, or whether it was simply able to build on already-existing notions of such sociability, or, in Dutch, *gezelligheid*.

The new custom of drinking sometimes sweetened hot drinks went hand in hand with the widespread distribution of relatively cheap home-made porcelain coffee and tea ware, mostly provided by the rapidly emerging industry in Delft. Just as cheap chintz had substituted for silk,

¹⁷ Van der Weel, 'In die kunst en wetenschap gebruyckt'.

¹⁸ Hartkamp-Jonxis, 'Sits en katoendruk, handel en fabricage in Nederland', 31–41; Lemire and Reillo, 'East and West', 890–2.

¹⁹ Voskuil, 'De verspreiding van koffie en thee in Nederland', 68–92. For a more recent survey, see McCants, 'Poor Consumers as Global Consumers', 172–200.

Delftware evoked the real China and was affordable at the same time. During the early seventeenth century, the Dutch had been prepared for these imitations thanks to the introduction of so-called *kraakporselein* from China, which was cheap enough to reach the interiors of quite a few Dutch burgher homes. When China began to produce better-quality porcelain for the export market in the 1630s, the VOC placed its first specific porcelain orders (*Chine en commande*) through Taiwan. From the late 1650s, the Company started to import high-quality, multi-coloured Japanese porcelain, known as *kakiemon*, from Kyushu. After 1680, when the Qing rulers had pacified most of China, it was mainly through Chinese shipping with Batavia that the porcelain trade with the Netherlands really took off. As with chintz, Dutch burghers started to emulate courtly and noble circles by collecting and exhibiting both China and Delftware. A most interesting cross-cultural exchange of shapes and themes emerged: Chinese patterns influenced European tastes, and, in turn, European tastes influenced Chinese and European producers.²⁰

A review of the overall consumption patterns of colonial goods in the Netherlands partly suggests a sense of continuity. For example, royal courts elsewhere in Europe continued to influence fashion even among the regent elites of the Dutch Republic with their exquisite canal houses, mansions and gardens. It also suggests that the highly urbanised character of the Low Countries created sociability before Asian commodities could have an impact on it. This very sociability was one of the prime conditions, though, for a new kind of consumerism, indeed further stimulated by the introduction and the substitution by European imitations of Asian and other non-Western commodities. Consumers were still looking to royalty for the latest examples of refinement and style, but many more of them, including less affluent ones, were increasingly able to emulate the courtly styles with fairly cheap, uniform products that could be easily replicated.²¹ The spread of this new pattern towards the new Dutch middle class may have provided a major incentive for the expansion of the production of these objects, both at home and abroad.²² But did the new consumer pattern also launch the Industrial Revolution? Here one could argue that the eighteenth-century 'calico craze' was indeed a fundamental precondition for the development of new production techniques in the European textile industry. In Britain, the increasing efficiency of the cotton mills in Manchester was the wellspring of the Industrial Revolution. In the nineteenth century, India even started

²⁰ Van Campen and Hartkamp-Jonxis, *Aziatische weelde*, 12–23, 69–80.

²¹ This builds heavily on de Vries, 'Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age', 41–57.

²² Nef, *Cultural Foundations of Industrial Civilization*.

importing British cotton fabrics. Without these seventeenth-century imports of cheap Indian cotton and the calico craze this sparked in the eighteenth century, there would have been much less motivation in the British textile industry of the nineteenth century to switch to industrial production. This raises the question of whether there would have been an industrial revolution at all were it not for Indian cotton. What is also clear, however, is that the Netherlands shared a similar consumer pattern but lacked the industrial spurt that typified England. Hence, the Dutch case demonstrates two things. Firstly, although the ‘modern’ consumption pattern engendered by the industrious revolution was certainly stimulated by the imports of colonial products, it actually predated it. Secondly, the early-modern Dutch economy shows that the same ‘modern’ consumption pattern alone was not a sufficient precondition for triggering an industrial revolution. Here it should also be stressed that, although the consumption of colonial commodities increased massively, the latter remained marginal in the overall consumption of households that were overwhelmingly focused on domestic production.

Cultural Impact: Microcosm

More significant than either the economic or the social impact on the Dutch Republic were the Dutch Empire’s cultural and intellectual repercussions for the way the Dutch started to perceive the world and themselves. As the global information hub par excellence, the Dutch developed a talent for collecting, comparing, ordering and also selling that information. Consequently, the Dutch Republic itself became a microcosm of the expanding universe that it discovered. It was a microcosm that consisted of numerous other, even smaller microcosms contained in atlases and maps, books and magazines, and gardens and cabinets. It is to these manifestations of glocalisation that we will turn in the next three sections.

Gardens and Cabinets

For centuries, gardens were a popular instrument for reconstructing the world in miniature. Both in Europe and in Asia, sovereigns used their gardens to portray that their rule encompassed the universe. A garden, divided into four similarly shaped quarters, could constitute an emblematic representation of the world as a whole. At the same time, a ruler could use gardens to collect and arrange plants from all parts of the world. Gardens were thus a means of stimulating research on the ‘effectiveness’ of plants for medicinal and nutritional purposes. The first European highlight of this synthesis between idealism and utility can be found in

the botanical gardens at the courts and universities of the fifteenth-century Italian city states. This tradition of ornamental gardens also reached the Netherlands, in particular via the contacts with the Habsburg court under Emperors Maximilian II and Rudolf II, with their close bonds with Italy. One result of this was the establishment of the Leiden Hortus Botanicus in 1590.²³ Following the example of Italy and partly inspired by the ideas of their friend Lipsius, the physician Rembertus Dodonaeus and the botanist Carolus Clusius developed the Leiden Hortus to become a true, living encyclopaedia of natural science, where the whole of God's creation could be assembled, classified, named and studied in an atmosphere of tranquil scholarship. Other Dutch botanical gardens were set up in Franeker (1589), Amsterdam (1638), Utrecht (1639), Groningen (1642), Breda (1646) and Harderwijk (1649). Although from the very outset taxonomy played an important role, it was the eighteenth-century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who had been working in the Netherlands for a long time, who developed a seemingly ultimate plant classification based on physical characteristics. As the originator of this classification, he was a child of a time in which 'objective' taxonomy increasingly dominated the natural sciences.

Leiden in particular, but after 1682 Amsterdam too, became prominent international centres of botany. The character of the botanical garden as a microcosm is nicely expressed in the poem by the neo-Latinist H. P. Francius about Joan Commelin, one of the founders of the Amsterdam botanical garden, which proudly proclaimed that

The River Amstel has received plants brought over from other countries and hides and feeds them somewhere in her lap. Let the gardens of Alcinous and Adonis yield, and you hanging gardens of Semiramis made by hand. Give way, people of the world: whatever hails from anywhere in the world, earth not its own feeds it in Amsterdam's soil.²⁴

As a result of its overseas expansion, the Republic became the main European centre for an ever wider variety of American, African and Asian exotic plants, which were described and classified in precise detail not only in the botanical gardens, but also in herbaria as well as in prints and books. Thanks to the numerous publishing houses that sprang up in the country like mushrooms, the new knowledge spread rapidly and easily. Botany evolved from a relatively esoteric science purely for

²³ Morford, 'The Stoic Garden', 151–75.

²⁴ 'Amstela transmissas aliis regionibus herbas/ Excipit, & gremio condit alitque suo./ Cedant Alcinoi, cedant & Adonidis horti,/ Vosque Semiramia pendula texta manu./ Cedite, terrarum populi: quod provenit usquam,/ Nutrit in Amstelio non sua terra solo.' Cited in Wijnands, Zevenhuizen and Heniger (eds.), *Een sieraad voor de stad*, 72–3. We are most grateful to Ineke Loots for the translation from Latin to English.

Humanists into a true interest for a broader circle of scholars, including an increasing number of Dutch regents and company directors.

Dutch botanical expertise flourished largely as a result of the confrontation with new, exotic plant species from the overseas territories. What must also have played a role is the emerging Protestantism that was characterised by an increasing orientation towards the individual exegesis of the Bible and that other book, the Book of Nature, in which God's creation manifested itself. For this reason, a revivalist group like the Anabaptists showed a more than usual interest in gardens and nature. Further Protestant movements that played a very prominent role in natural science research were the Collegiants and the so-called Labadists, the most famous individual from the latter group being the entomologist Maria Sibylla Merian. In the case of the followers of Jean de Labadie, there was a very direct overseas relationship. The commune of the Labadists was located on an estate in the Frisian state of Waltha (Wieuwerd), a family estate of Surinamese governor Cornelis van Aerssen, who, although not a Labadist himself, had two sisters in the commune. Two branches of the Labadist commune were set up in the New World, one in Maryland and one in Suriname, although neither community was to have a long existence. Probably attracted by the exotic animals and plants in the Dutch gardens, as well as stories about the wonders of the Americas, Merian sailed to Suriname in 1699 in order to study the native plants and insects with her own eyes. For someone like Merian, the religious fascination for God's creation shifted imperceptibly to become an irresistible desire for scientific observation.²⁵

The increasing influence of Cartesianism and empiricism at Dutch universities naturally strengthened the tendency among Protestant scholars to arrive at new insights through observation. As stressed already in the Introduction, for an increasing number of scholars, knowledge of the Book of Nature was separate from belief, and it was no longer exclusively the domain of Christians. The voyages of discovery had shown that other cultures were able to read this Book of Nature too. At the same time, many of the peoples, animals and plants of the New World could no longer be accommodated through the Renaissance episteme that derived from classical sources. Ultimately, this led to a substantially different way of thinking about both the classics and God's creation, paving the way for what some scholars have called a scientific revolution.²⁶

Unlike the scientific gardens, the political role of gardens is most apparent in the large early-modern palace gardens of the European

²⁵ Davis, *Women on the Margins*, 140–202.

²⁶ Ashworth, 'Natural History and the Emblematic World View', 303–33.

royal houses, the most famous example being, of course, the Jardin du Roi in Versailles. This extensive palace garden proclaimed not only that the French king was able to reproduce the whole of creation in microcosm, but also that he was able to fashion it as he wished. This world in a garden was a visual expression of how these rulers would govern the real world. The way in which the numerous types of plants in all their variety were manipulated and arranged in precise beds symbolised the territorial claim of the monarch over his realm. In the rest of the empire, around the royal outposts, formal classical gardens were laid out, also in Versailles style, where large parcels of land were measured out, cultivated and re-arranged. These gardens were a display not only of royal power but, more generally, of the rational administration of the country. The French royal parks often had large scientific gardens, orangeries and *potagers*, where, just as in the gardens of the Republic, new varieties from the furthest borders of the empire were constantly being introduced. The palace gardens, too, served as large botanical laboratories serving agrarian development. This philosophy of *mesnagement* served to demonstrate that agricultural prosperity and the moral authority of the king were inextricably linked.²⁷

The stadtholders' gardens in the Republic played a similar political role, albeit on a smaller scale, with the position of Versailles as a botanical laboratory being assumed by the garden of Honselaarsdijk near The Hague. This garden, which had been laid out in the 1630s by Frederik Hendrik, introduced new exotic plants from all parts of the world and supplied other royal gardens with new species. The best Dutch example of a case where the palace garden was most directly related to political propaganda was the garden of Het Loo, which was laid out by William III. The Dutch garden style of the period, which was based on Italian and predominantly French style, with its tendency towards relatively small enclosed areas and its many water features, was imitated internationally, mainly in England, but also in the Dutch overseas possessions, thanks to the politico-military successes of the Glorious Revolution, the prominence of Dutch botany and, once again, the productive Dutch publishing world.²⁸ Although the emphasis in these palace gardens was on political symbolism, just as with the earlier scientific gardens, here, too, we see religious and ethical ideas coinciding with economic usefulness. In the palace gardens, good stewardship of God's creation went hand in hand with striving for agrarian expansion. In the second half of the seventeenth

²⁷ Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Garden of Versailles*.

²⁸ Hunt, 'But who knows what a Dutch Garden is?', 175–206; Jacques, 'Who knows what a Dutch Garden is?', 114–30.

century, the religious–moral aspect retreated further into the background in favour of scientific and economic approaches.

The combination of ethical idealism, usefulness and to an increasing degree also scientific curiosity was apparent in the Republic not only in the university gardens and the stadtholders' palace gardens, but also in the many country estates such as those developed by the new Holland and Utrecht regent classes along the Rivers Spaarne, Amstel and Vecht. For the urban *nouveau riche*, the ideal country life was played out in these relatively small ensembles of house, garden and farmland. As the garden historian Eric de Jong argues, gardens provided useful and honest entertainment, brought both profit and embellishment, and inspired religion and virtue.²⁹ In the second half of the seventeenth century, there was an enormous impetus to introduce as many new plant species as possible, partly out of curiosity and practical usefulness, but mainly also out of the need to display the newly won prosperity and an almost aristocratic status in a cosmopolitan way.

As in idyllic court poems sung by regent poets Constantijn Huyjgens and Jacob Cats, gentlemen of the Hofwijck estate near Voorburg and Sorghvliet just outside The Hague respectively, the outdoors represented a twofold ideal of nature and art. Art brings order to nature and benefits it, or, as the Dutch Shakespeare, Joost van den Vondel, wrote in 1658 about the transformation of 's-Gravenland's sparse and barren heath into fertile plains with country estates and gardens: here 'art benefits nature, and can teach us what agriculture, labour and care can do'.³⁰ Similarly to the French palace gardens, the construction of country estates was an important factor here. This last applied even more to the Republic with its large-scale draining of the Beemster, Purmer and Schermer polders. Just as with these polders, in the case of the country estates, areas of wilderness were largely transformed into mathematically structured pleasure places. These reclamations must have been financed at least in part directly from the private profits in the overseas territories as in the case of Sichterman, Huysman and other rich South Asian 'nabobs', to be discussed in Chapter 8.

In the existing literature about the Dutch elites, too little attention is paid to the burgeoning garden mania and the move towards aristocratism, as a result of which the urban, mercantile nature of the regent class is over-emphasised. Just as in England, and later in the early United States, some members of the political elite in the Republic preferred to see themselves as small, but highly enthusiastic land developers who looked for meaning in the more practical, agrarian development of their country parks. For the Holland regents, an interest in gardens was far from a minor pastime

²⁹ De Jong, *Natuur en kunst*. ³⁰ De Jong, *Natuur en kunst*, 38.

but was rather a true passion and an integral element of an aristocratic lifestyle, focusing on the idyllic country life of hunting and garden design, on which enormous sums of money were spent. This is illustrated by the famous tulip mania of the 1630s, one of the first speculation bubbles in world history, when endless speculation forced up the price of particular types of tulips out of all proportion. In 1637, a handful of these plants that were once imported from the Middle East by Clusius was equal in value to a mansion in Amsterdam! But, in all seriousness, for many merchants and regents their country estate was a wise investment and above all a pleasant and meaningful lifestyle.

If the garden in the Republic represented a microcosm of the world charted by the trading companies, for the Company directors it was the potential medicinal significance of the garden that was of primary importance. Growing medicinal herbs locally was cheaper and more effective than shipping medicines over enormously long distances. More importantly, here specialists could make use of the local medicinal empiricism. As a result of this policy, a worldwide network of botanists, specialists in medicine and local informants rapidly developed. In the second half of the seventeenth century, this worldwide botanical network was even a powerful shadow organisation behind the scenes of the official Company. The spider in the web was the powerful Amsterdam regent and VOC director Joan Huydecoper, co-founder of the Amsterdam Hortus Medicus (1682) and owner of the opulent country estate of Goudesteyn. As we saw in the previous chapter, he was also the patron of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, a man who, just like Huydecoper, combined his powerful position with a truly heartwarming love of botany, as is also apparent from his famous twelve-volume *Hortus Malabaricus*, a systematic study of the plants from the Indian Malabar Coast. Together, Huydecoper and van Reede had at their disposal a global patronage network of like-minded individuals, all garden lovers who were happy to exchange seeds with one another: from learned botanists such as Arnold Syen in Leiden, Paul Hermann in Ceylon, Willem ten Rhijne in Japan, Andreas Cleyer in Batavia and Georg Everhard Rumphius on Ambon to important administrators like Joan Commelin in Amsterdam, Simon van der Stel at the Cape and Johannes Camphuys in Batavia. It will come as no surprise that van Reede's friends Joan van Hoorn and Isaac de Saint-Martin were at the forefront of the exploitation of the area outside Batavia in Java with their creation of country estates.

The same estates were also used incidentally as public reception areas for foreign missions. Just as in the Republic, colonial gardens combined many different functions. While at the botanical gardens of Recife, the

Cape, Colombo and Batavia the medicinal aspect was the main concern, the private estates in Ceylon and Java mainly served a social and sometimes also a diplomatic purpose. Both were used to experiment with new plant species that were later also grown commercially. One usage that all Company gardens shared was that the Company officers could withdraw there alone or in company to relax. The most spectacular example of a colonial garden that combined all these elements magnificently was the garden that Johan Maurits van Nassau had laid out at his Brazilian palace Vrijburg. This palace garden had a botanical garden, a zoo and a museum with no fewer than 300 stuffed apes. Vrijburg was the most complete overseas copy of the European original where new exotic plants, animals and objects from the colonial realm were gathered in an orangery, menagerie and *ambulacrum*, partly to be exhibited and admired and to entertain, partly for further study to benefit medical and botanical applications.

Foreign travellers marvelled at the wealth of East and West Indies curiosities that were collected in the Republic. For Europe, the Republic was a kind of global shop window in which *naturalia*, living and dead objects from nature, as well as *artificialia*, human treatments of that nature, were displayed. Many of these rarities could be bought in all kinds of East India shops, apothecaries and chemists. The well-to-do classes decorated their houses with them: from Indian chintzes and Persian carpets to Chinese porcelain. For the regents, a kind of consumption market began to emerge that allowed them to outdo all the surrounding monarchies. In Europe, the taste of the royal courts generally dominated the demand for luxury consumer goods; in the Republic it was the new regent class of merchants and administrators that created a more bourgeois pattern of consumption, recognisable and accessible to wider sections of the population. Besides antiques, books, paintings and prints, it was mainly the exotic artefacts that were part of the personal collection of the new Holland *honnête homme*, assembled in a cabinet of curiosities in the living room or even in a specially designed 'art room'; a storage cupboard and a room could both serve as a cabinet. The ideal to strive for was of course the large *Kunst- und Wunderkammer* of the princely court, in particular those in the neighbouring Holy Roman Empire. Nonetheless, in the sumptuous atmosphere of his own cabinet, the bourgeois regent could imagine himself as a true nobleman or even a little king.

While these kinds of collections were for one person an accessible status symbol, for another they were also a true hobby. For the intellectuals under the regents, it was a way of studying and organising the world in its ever-increasing diversity. A number of them, such as Bernardus Paludanus and Nicolaes Witsen, kept extensive collections of their own. It was precisely the continuing supply of Asian, African and American

natural and artificial materials that led to permanent adjustments to the existing classification schemes and, in this sense, made an important contribution to scientific developments in the Republic.³¹

In the eighteenth century, the private collections lost their importance. Just as in the botanical gardens, at the end of the eighteenth century, the idea of the perfect, emblematic microcosm had to be abandoned. The great passion for collecting had gradually given way to the urge to create order, and the ever-increasing amount of data had led to increasing specialisation. In comparison with the surrounding countries, the government played a passive role in all this; the collections of the stadtholders remained a private matter for a long time. It was not until 1766 that the cabinet of natural science of Stadtholder William V was opened for the public, becoming the first public museum in the Netherlands. In the second half of the eighteenth century, many learned societies were founded, each with its own collections, initiated by the local authorities, such as the Royal Holland Society of Sciences and Humanities (after 1752) and the Zeeland Society of Sciences (after 1769). In the East Indies this was followed in 1778 by the establishment of the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences in Batavia. The founder, regent and extraordinary counsel Jacobus Radermacher had been appointed director of the Haarlem Society the previous year. In the subsequent decades, with many dual memberships of both societies, close personal relations developed between the Haarlem Society and the Batavian Society. In Batavia, the Society remained an environment for the white ruling elite, who wanted a closer association with the European way of life while at the same time distancing themselves more from Batavia's mestizo culture. In Batavia itself, there was no demographic basis for a fruitful Society life. The Holland Society in Haarlem opened its doors to the public in 1772, making this improvised Cabinet of Natural Artefacts the second public museum in the Netherlands. This was followed twelve years later by the oldest still extant Dutch museum, Teylers Museum, also in Haarlem. By the nineteenth century, the rich private collections in the Republic had largely disappeared and become dispersed over the various 'national' collections of the major European royal houses. By this time, it was not the natural and artificial objects themselves but their representation in print and images that had become the primary medium for scholarly exchange.³²

³¹ See the various contributions in Bergvelt and Kistemaker (eds.), *De wereld binnen handbereik*, more particularly van Gelder, 'De wereld binnen handbereik', 15–39.

³² Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden*.

Books and Magazines

In the seventeenth century, the Republic evolved to become not only the world's showcase, but also the most important producer of news about the overseas world. Nowhere were as many words and images printed as in Amsterdam. By the start of the century, the first periodical newspapers with news from all parts of the world were being printed in the city. In the midst of the war against Spain, it was mainly the latest messages about the overseas battles in Brazil as well as in Asia that occupied the thoughts of the relatively literate Amsterdammers. But foreign diplomats and trade correspondents soon came to appreciate Amsterdam as an international centre for news. The newspapers gave rise to attractive new news genres. There was the useful news print from publishers Claes Jansz Visscher and Hessel Gerritsz, where text and illustrations could be emblematically combined on one page and easily distributed. Another type of publication, the news chronicle, such as the *Historisch Verhael* by Nicolaes van Wassenauer, offered a very handy summary of all kinds of rumours and news facts from different perspectives. Part of this new news collection would certainly be classed as 'fake news' today and served not only to inform but also to entertain and influence public opinion. Consequently, the Companies also made various attempts to manipulate the supply of news to their advantage. Nevertheless, in the seventeenth century Amsterdam became one of the world's best-informed and most cosmopolitan cities.³³

Dutch cosmopolitanism manifested itself not only in global news reports, but also in the enormous number of travel accounts, atlases, theological treatments and other scholarly works that were printed in the Republic from then onwards. The country's relative press freedom attracted authors and engravers from all parts of Europe. Besides Latin, which was the main language for scholarly works, more and more works were printed in the regional languages, in the first instance in Dutch, but also in French and other European languages – even in Hebrew and Arabic. All this meant that not only were goods from all parts of the world sold in the Republic, but also the world's 'civilisations' came to be displayed and advertised as commodities. All across Western Europe, the emerging new middle class developed a craving for this new, often sensational information from exotic world regions. Towards the middle of the seventeenth century this marketing of the globe gave the world an increasingly exotic allure. Ingenious printers such as Jacob van Meurs tried to reach an even greater readership by giving alien cultures an ever

³³ Van Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*.

more stereotypical character in spectacular illustrations, thus ironing out the differences between these cultures. Hence, on going through these glossy works, one should not be surprised to suddenly detect an Arabian camel in China or a Chinese pagoda in India.³⁴

It was in particular in the context of the early Dutch Revolt that the image of distant worlds in news reports, pamphlets and adventurous travel books was dictated by a strongly anti-Catholic discourse in which simultaneously solidarity was shown with the folks still living in innocence in East and West, who, like the Dutch, were subdued under the papal yoke.³⁵ At the same time, though, the actual contact with the non-European outside world led to the publication of the first exploratory, often very practical guidelines, such as the *Itinerario* by Jan Huygen van Linschoten and the *Toortse der Zee-vaert* by Dierick Ruiters. The desire to conduct trade based on a better understanding of the facts led to a need among the first VOC rulers for more business-oriented, practical information about the geographical, cultural, political and economic circumstances of specific regions. This sparked a series of more or less standardised, bureaucratic country descriptions and market studies that often remained within the trading organisation, but partly, directly or via all kinds of detours, reached the press and the public at large, such as the *beschryvingen* of Pieter de Marees about Guinea, François Caron about Japan or Joris Schouten about Siam. In their attempts at an objective approach, these 'descriptions' followed the conventions of the so-called *ars apodemica* (from the Greek *apodemeo* that meant 'travels'), a sixteenth-century genre of travel accounts that focused on a variable number of topical observations relating to the lay-out of cities, the geography, nomenclature, politics and culture of the regions to which people travelled, but, even more than this, their main focus was on the practical applications.³⁶ The business-oriented histories of senior Company officials, such as those of the WIC administrator Johannes de Laet on the New World, as well as the envoy reports such as those of the voyages of Joan Nieuhof to China and Johan van Twist to Bijapur in India, belonged to this more informative, official category. Besides these, there were Protestant clergymen such as Godefridus Carolinus, Abraham Rogerius and Philippus Baldaeus, who, spurred by a missionary zeal, produced the first Dutch descriptions of 'heathendom'. At the same time, a first generation of botanists and medical specialists, such as Georg Marcgraf and Willem Piso in Brazil, Jacobus Bontius in Java, Georgius Everhardus Rumphius on Ambon and Hendrik van Reede tot Drakenstein in

³⁴ Van Groesen, *The Representation of the Overseas World*; Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism*.

³⁵ Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*. ³⁶ Huigen, *De weg naar Monomotapa*, 30–1.

Malabar, created detailed inventories of the non-European flora and fauna.

In all these instances it was a matter of an initial, rather business-like survey of new markets, potential converts and new plants that resulted directly from overseas conquests and ambition, but at the same time these publications answered the demand of an ever broader and more curious public at home. Much of this curiosity was aroused by a long series of both fantasy and real-life travel adventures, mainly of mariners and soldiers, who in this period served not so much the scholarly as the much larger literate public. An absolute bestseller was the *Journal ofte gedenkwaerdige beschrijvinghe van de Oost-Indische reyse* by ship's captain Bontekoe, that first appeared in 1646 and subsequently became one of the most edited and re-printed Dutch publications of all times. In a number of these early Dutch reports, there can be heard the voices and even names of native informants, who gradually disappeared over the course of the century, in favour of an increasingly Orientalist discourse on approaching and passing into the eighteenth century.

These early-seventeenth-century explorations and inventories were followed at the end of the century by diverse attempts by intellectuals in the Republic to collect and classify the enormous amount of new information by means of more systematic comparison, with the Bible and classical traditions as well as with some better-known experience of the neighbouring world. This is the period of the first Dutch 'world historians' such as Arnoldus Montanus and Olfert Dapper, who, in broad historical studies, showed a genuine curiosity for non-European cultures, although their publisher, by inserting fantastical but unrealistic illustrations, was primarily interested in promoting the sale of these works. In any event, reading these works could not help but bring new insights.

The emerging interest in exotic cultures also trickled down into the Amsterdam theatre, which showed a surprising interest in the current affairs of oriental empires. This was mainly applied to spectacular, grand-scale 'revolutions' (*omwentelingen*) – a concept that contemporaries immediately associated with conquest in Asia and not yet with regime change in the West. Hence, we find the tragedies of Vondel, *Zungchin, of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (1667), and Joannes Antonides van der Goes, *Trazil, of overrompelt Sina* (1685), about the Manchu conquest of China and later that of Frans van Steenwyk, *Thamas Koelikan of de verovering van het Mogolsche Ryk* (1745), about the Iranian conquest of northern India. In the last of these cases, the conqueror Nadir Shah is presented not as an oriental despot – that role is reserved for the Mughal emperor he defeats – but as a model of magnanimity to Christian princes. As such, Nadir Shah's image neatly fits the already-existing popular

appeal of the great Asian world conquerors from the past, such as Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, the latter also heroically featuring on stage in *De Grooten Tamelan* (1657) by Johannes Serwouters.³⁷

As well as building on the existing knowledge of these great conquerors, the new world historians could base their studies on the already very extensive classical descriptions of the ‘heathens’. For historically oriented theologians like Gerardus Vossius this created a complicated but also fascinating problem: how does the old paganism of the classical and early-Christian authors relate to the newly discovered heathendom as described by the missionaries in India and China? For the missionaries themselves this question immediately raised an even more urgent one: how should these new, more distant heathens who could have no knowledge at all of Christian revelations be treated? Some theologians used the new knowledge of Asian paganism to call for a new missionary zeal by reminding the Christians of their own sinfulness and neglect of duty. The Leiden theologian Johannes Hoornbeeck even believed that, thanks to the enormous flow of goods from the overseas regions to the Netherlands, the Dutch were actually indebted to the heathens and thus were obliged to offer them something even more valuable – i.e. True Religion – in return.³⁸ A more ‘progressive’ theologian who threw himself into studying paganism was Balthasar Bekker, who, in his crusade against witchcraft and other superstitions, felt compelled to make a worldwide comparison of superstition in other world religions. With his *De betoverde weereld* (1691), he not only opened the door for comparative religious sciences but also, with his deconstruction of all superstitions, wherever they might appear in the world, unwittingly made a crucial contribution to the Dutch Enlightenment. Nevertheless, the adventurous and colourful travel accounts of surgeons – such as Wouter Schouten and Nicolaas de Graaff – and especially German soldiers remained popular until well into the eighteenth century in the somewhat lower intellectual segment of the market, especially in the German regions.³⁹

In the second half of the seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century, slowly but surely, an interest emerged in bringing together all the very different results of these comparative studies in one comprehensive framework or structure. In the European context this was anything but a new phenomenon; nonetheless, nobody had so far written a comprehensive survey of the history both of the Old and of the New World in one work. One of the first Netherlands-based scholars to make

³⁷ Kuruppath, ‘Casting Despots in Dutch Drama’, 241–86.

³⁸ Gommans and Loots, ‘Arguing with the Heathens’, 45–68.

³⁹ Van Gelder, *Het Oost-Indisch avontuur*, 96–101.

such an attempt was the German historian Georgius Hornius, who worked in Harderwijk and Leiden. In his universal world history *Arca Noae* (1666), Hornius contended that the European peoples through their overseas trade had managed to construct a new Noah's Ark for humanity. Hornius' work is unique not only in its completeness but also in the way in which secular history was separated from religious history. In other words, Hornius decoupled the more recent developments (including the Middle Ages) from the Biblical chronology of the Creation, the Flood and the Four World Empires. Hence, this almost forgotten Leiden historian may rightly be considered as one of the founding fathers of modern world history.⁴⁰

The need for integration and cohesion was felt even within a trade organisation like the VOC, as is apparent from the official survey that the lawyer of the Company Pieter van Dam started writing in 1693 on behalf of the administrators, who were keen to have an orderly overview. This unpublished *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie* was purely for internal use. It was not long before van Dam's work had a published and more popular counterpart in the voluminous VOC chronicle *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* (1724–6) by the verbose minister François Valentijn. It was undoubtedly Valentijn's firm intention to create a sense of order, but this was unfortunately lost in the multiplicity of different voices that had to be combined in this work. A similar work in terms of religious studies is the *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723–1737) by Jean Frédéric Bernard, a Huguenot living in the Republic, and his engraver Bernard Picart. They partly followed Bekker's agenda, but took a deist stand in which they openly criticised their own Christian organisations, dogmas and rituals. The authors of other, more encyclopaedic collections, such as Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), accepted the impossibility of an integral synthesis and were content with producing a summary of newly amassed knowledge. All these studies show that, unlike in the natural sciences after Linnaeus, for the emerging humanities universal systematisation remained a very distant dream.

Beside the proto-Orientalism of the travel accounts and chronicles, there emerged also a scholarly tradition that attempted to understand the 'other' in his own language: not so much by conducting an open dialogue with this 'other', but by looking for indigenous texts that rendered other cultures as authentically as possible, that is, with as little intervention as possible from translators, editors and other intermediaries. Translated Chinese or Sanskrit texts were extremely rare in the

⁴⁰ Gommans and Loots, 'Reconnecting Asia', 56–66.

Dutch cultural area and, in spite of a series of VOC embassies to China and India, Dutch scholars remained dependent on the translations by the Jesuits. One of these exceptions is the work of Pieter van Hoorn, who in 1665 led one of these embassies to Beijing. He produced a Dutch version of the virtues of Confucius from the *Lunyu*. Van Hoorn knew no Chinese and had no option but to trust the Latin version he had received from the Mechelen Jesuit Philippe Couplet.⁴¹ Apart from this exception, the purely textual approach was mainly important in the relations between the Republic and the more familiar and therefore also more accessible Islamic world of Arabia, Iran, India and partly also the Indonesian archipelago. At the Universities of Leiden and Utrecht this led to the first signs of what later became Oriental Studies, based primarily on philology. This discipline was much more closely related to the practice of Dutch overseas expansion than is generally suggested.

An interesting example is the way that knowledge about Persia developed in the seventeenth century. Persia was by no means unknown territory for the Republic. It had entered the Dutch scholarly world not as a result of overseas expansion, but much earlier as an effect of classical antiquity and the Old Testament. The intellectual preoccupation with Persia was from the very outset focused on the pre-Islamic period, with the Bible and the traditions of Herodotus, Xenophon and Ctesias as a frame of reference. It was not Isfahan, the lively capital of the Safavid Empire, but the dead ruins of Persepolis, adorned with hieroglyphs, that most appealed to the imagination of Dutch scholars such as Nicolaes Witsen and Gysbert Cuper. Even the more present-minded VOC historian François Valentijn depicted Persia, unlike the rest of Asia, against the background of all kinds of Biblical stories. In Leiden, among scholars such as Raphelengius, Lipsius, Vulcanus and Elichmann, there was a budding etymological interest in the surprising affinity of Persian with, for example, Dutch, and for someone like Becanus even with the Antwerp dialect! In that sense they followed in the footsteps of the famous sixteenth-century Cabalist and father of Oriental Studies Guillaume Postel, who continued to believe in a shared origin and universal unity of God's creation not only in the area of languages, but also in all his innumerable discoveries in other fields. Under the influence of Postel's students Raphelengius and Scaliger, a golden century of oriental scholarship began in Leiden, with high spots such as the Arabic grammar of Thomas Erpenius, the Arabic and Persian dictionaries of Jacobus

⁴¹ Of great influence on Western intellectuals was the Jesuit edition *Confucius Sinarum philosophus, sive scientia Sinensis latine exposita*, dedicated to Louis XIV, translated (among others) by Philippe Couplet and François de Rougemont (1624–76) from Maastricht. See Pos, 'Het paviljoen van porselein', 105, 115.

Golius and, not to be forgotten, the fantastic manuscript collections of Levinus Warner.⁴²

Among the seventeenth-century students of Arabic we find mainly those who regarded Arabic as an interesting intellectual tool. For medical scholars such as Adrianus Guilielmi, Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius, Anonie Deusing and Johannes Elichmann, Arabic offered access to important treatises in their specialist field, particularly those of Avicenna (Ibn Sina). Besides medical scholars, students of oriental languages also included a number of diplomats en route to overseas postings. One of these, whose main interest was in the relations with Arabia, Persia and India, was Pieter de Groot, the son of Hugo Grotius, who must have mastered some elementary knowledge of Arabic. In the circle of regents, too, we find practitioners of oriental literature, such as Johannes Boreel, David Le Leu de Wilhem, Laurens de Geer, Nicolaes Witsen and the Ansló brothers. At that time, many students went to the Levant to study, to collect manuscripts or to serve as news reporters, diplomats or commercial agents.

Some philologists, driven purely by curiosity, tried to acquire as much linguistic knowledge as possible via VOC channels. We know from Golius that he maintained contact with his student Herbert de Jager, also a VOC diplomat, and that, to arrive at the correct nomenclature for herbs, he sought contact with such authorities as Geleynssen de Jongh in Surat and Mattheo à St Joseph in Malabar, one of the contributors to van Reede tot Drakenstein's *Hortus Malabaricus*. Via Governor Laurens Reael, Golius also acquired Catholic propaganda scripts written by the Jesuit missionary Hieronymus Xavier in the Persian language. These texts packed with numerous apocryphal elements were originally intended to convince the Mughal emperor in India of the truth of the Catholic version of Christianity. Shortly after this (1639), these same texts served in the Republic to illustrate Roman Catholic manipulation, and were published in this light by Golius' student de Dieu with the publisher Elsevier. Language scholars like Golius were also tasked with translating the correspondence between the States-General and Eastern potentates. In short, seventeenth-century oriental scholarship arose out of curiosity, but was also interwoven in all kinds of ways with the political and social life of the Republic and overseas empire. It was not until the eighteenth century that this social interweaving diminished and specialised academic learning increased.

⁴² Juynboll, *Zeventiende-eeuwse beoefenaars*; Nat, *De studie van de oostersche talen in Nederland*; Brugman, 'Arabic Scholarship', 203–15.

Early Dutch philologists typically paid attention to literary treasures outside the purely religious genre. Two German students of Golius, for example, Gentius and Warner, made text editions and Latin translations of the *Gulistan* (*The Rose Garden*), the classic work by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Saadi. In 1654 there was even a Dutch translation by Amsterdam book seller and printer Jan van Duisberg, which was based on a German translation by Adam Olearius. Saadi's *Bustan* was translated into Dutch a few decades later by Daniel Havart as *Den Persiaanschen bogaard* (1689).⁴³ There was also interest in the famous Persian wisdom literature with its myriad moralistic reflections on society and politics in the form of 'mirrors for princes' and philosophical allegories. For Golius, Persian literature formed a bridge to the chronological and cosmographical traditions of China. He made grateful use of the fifteenth-century work by Ulugh Beg, studied by his Utrecht colleague Graevius, which in its turn went back to thirteenth-century philosopher Nasir al-Din Tusi. Tusi wrote about China at a time when large parts of Eurasia had been connected with one another, not by the Europeans via the oceans but by the Mongols via the steppes. Quite unusually for his time, Golius did not omit to test his philological findings against the real-life experiences of Martino Martini, a Jesuit from South Tyrol who had ended up in the Netherlands after the VOC intercepted him on his way from Beijing to Rome and imprisoned him.⁴⁴

Among the new oriental literature that arrived in the Low Countries, the wisdom genre enjoyed particular popularity, both among scholars and among a larger public of interested citizens. Although this literature reached the Republic mainly via Arabic and Hebrew, these works originated in Persia and India. The fables from the Indian *Kalila-wa-dimna* tradition – also known as *The Fables of Bidpai* – which became known in the West mainly thanks to the thirteenth-century Latin translation (from Hebrew) by Johannes van Capua also enjoyed early popularity. In the Republic this work was also known from the edition by Zacharias Heyns. French translations would have a major influence on La Fontaine. Scholars, too, were highly interested in this genre. Erpenius, for example, published an Arabic–Latin edition of the comparable fables of Luqman as early as 1615. At the end of the eighteenth century Leiden professor H. A. Schultgens (1749–93) produced his own Arabic–Latin edition of the *Kalila-wa-dimna*.

⁴³ De Bruijn, *De ontdekking van het Perzisch*; De Bruijn, 'De Perzische muze in de polder', 13–46.

⁴⁴ Duyvendak, 'Early Chinese studies in Holland', 293–344.

Another work that attracted a lot of interest is Ibn Tufayl's famous twelfth-century allegory *Treatise on Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. *About the Secrets of Oriental Wisdom*. The title page of the Dutch translation from 1672 describes the subject very succinctly: 'in which it is shown how a person without any contact with people or education can arrive at knowledge of himself and of God'.⁴⁵ That person was Hayy ibn Yaqzan, who grew up on an uninhabited island and yet acquired knowledge of the material world, personal insight and an understanding of the supernatural. The Dutch edition was based on the English translation by Edward Pococke dating from 1671. The author of this edition was Johannes Bouwmeester, one of the intimates of Spinoza. Both were inspired by Ibn Tufayl's vision that man could acquire higher knowledge by reflecting on numerous chance experiences, something that Spinoza claimed to have discovered earlier mathematically in his *Ethics*. Pococke's English version, like Bouwmeester's translation, had a major influence on the empirical thinking of such notable philosophers as John Locke, who, like Ibn Tufayl, in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), studied the God-given abilities with which man was equipped in order to acquire knowledge. Again we see a continued, parallel interest of the philologists in this text, this time in the person of Utrecht Professor Adriaan Reland, who corrected Pococke's translation and even made a Dutch edition, which was published in 1701. Through this and other channels, Ibn Yaqzan had a major influence on later Western authors, such as Daniel Defoe in his famous *Robinson Crusoe* story (1719), or, in the Netherlands, Hendrik Smeeks in his *Beschryvinge van het magtig Koninkryk Krinke Kesmes* (*Description of the powerful kingdom of Kinke Kesmes*, 1708). In the latter work, this doctor from Zwolle describes a utopian island where all the world's religions exist side by side. In the ensuing chaos, the residents decide to put an end to all religions and to turn to philosophy. Even at the start of the twenty-first century Smeeks' theme seems anything but dated!

The wisdom genre influenced the philosophical discussion in the Republic, on the one hand, and on the other it can be said that it paved the way for the eighteenth-century popularity of the famous Thousand-and-One-Nights stories, indeed a rather different tradition from the fables and allegories, but with equally clear Persian and Indian connotations. This fairy-tale tradition was largely the work of French court curator Antoine Galland during the period 1704–17, and consisted in part of his translations and adaptations of Arabic originals, including the *Alf layla-wa-layla*, and partly from additions drawn from his own imagination. This work was the basis of a large number of translations and

⁴⁵ Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*.

revisions that appealed to a very broad European public. In the Republic, too, there were numerous translations and revisions of works from this genre. In contrast to the fables and allegories that emerged directly from Arabic, Persian and Indo-Persian traditions, eighteenth-century Dutch philologists showed little interest in the many stories of the Thousand and One Nights. In fact, this heralded for the first time a parting of the ways between what later became known as Oriental Studies and Orientalism; the first evolved to become an increasingly specialised and relatively isolated philological science; the second was to play an important role in literature, the arts and philosophy. Whatever the difference, though, both remained deeply entangled with the history of the Dutch overseas empire.

Atlases and Maps

The history of Dutch overseas cartography shows a remarkable parallel with the development of print. Even more than gardens, cabinets and books, the benefit of maps was that they showed the world in miniature. Maps were excellently suited both for planning long journeys and for envisioning extensive possessions, such as those of the VOC and WIC. Their format was particularly suited for use while in transit and for distribution at a long distance. This practical usage also combined remarkably well with the implicit political message of maps. For the ambitious spirit, a map represented much more than pure objective space; it always hinted at the call of distant travel, conquests and control.

In the first instance, Dutch map-makers built on the rich southern European cartographic tradition that was perfected in the sixteenth century mainly in the Southern Netherlands by Mercator and others. Under Habsburg supervision, Antwerp evolved to become the foremost cartographic centre of Europe, with its prestigious high spot being the richly illustrated atlas produced by Abraham Ortelius, the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), which was also to have a profound influence on the prevailing world view at various royal courts in Asia. Thanks to the Dutch blockade of Antwerp and the new trade ambitions of the Northern Dutch traders, at around the turn of the century, the focus of cartography shifted to Amsterdam, where the Dutch map-makers – led by Petrus Plancius, Augustijn Robert, Hessel Gerritz and three generations of the Blaeu family – took over the cartographic hegemony from the Spanish-Habsburg Empire.

In the Republic, map-making remained in the hands of private map-makers who worked only on behalf of the Companies. For some of these map-makers, their friendship with powerful officials within the Companies meant they were able to acquire the exclusive contract for supplying maps to the VOC and WIC. One example was the Blaeu family,

who managed to benefit from their good contacts with influential officials for more than fifty years. In the overseas regions, where this could not be sub-contracted, the production of maps was a company matter, and the governments of Batavia, Ceylon, Taiwan, the Cape and Recife had their own map-makers – in those very regions where the companies also felt the need to chart new territorial conquests.⁴⁶

Turning to the practice of map production, it is striking that the first decades of the seventeenth century were mainly used to update the existing geographical data for navigation purposes. These modifications were based on the insights of the ships' captains, who were obliged to report all novelties and deviations of the maps used by them. Naturally, due to its intensive shipping activities, over time the Republic had the most advanced navigation charts at its disposal. The best known is the ill-fated search for India 'via the northern route' by the heroes Willem Barentsz and Jacob van Heemskerck (1596), commissioned by the cartographer Plancius. The same pioneering spirit was shown by the expeditions to the unknown South Land by such explorers as Willem Jansz (1616), Dirk Hartogh (1616) and Francois Thijssen (1637), who were the first to chart Australia; and, of course, there was also Abel Tasman (1642–3), who added New Zealand, Tasmania and many other nearby islands. A unique example of continental exploration is the famous map of Central Asia published by Nicolaes Witsen in 1690; this was followed two years later by the weighty commentary *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (North and East Tartary). Witsen's impressive research was supported in part by his own expedition to Moscow twenty-five years earlier, but mainly by his worldwide network of informants: from explorer Maerten Gerritsz Vries, who explored the Kuril Islands in 1643, to his influential cousin Andrej Winius, who served as interpreter and confidant to Peter the Great.⁴⁷

When at the end of the seventeenth century little new information was being gathered – Jacob Roggeveen's discovery of Easter Island in 1722 was one of the few exceptions – the need slowly but surely arose to bring all these charts together in standardised atlases. In the case of the VOC, this led to the so-called de Graaff Atlas in 1689, which can be seen as the cartographic counterpart of van Dam's historical survey mentioned above and one of the final achievements in which the Dutch Republic could proudly claim to represent the world in miniature.

In the eighteenth century, the Republic lost its leading position in the field of map-making, which, thanks to government support and

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive survey of Dutch VOC and WIC maps, see the recent works by the publisher Asia Maior/Atlas Maior, *Comprehensive Atlas of the United East India Company* and *Comprehensive Atlas of the West India Company*.

⁴⁷ Wladimiroff, *De kaart van een verzwegen vriendschap*.

institutionalisation, was overtaken by French cartography. The professionalisation of cartography and its military importance stimulated the establishment of naval academies in Java (Batavia and Semarang) and the Cape, and, after 1786, the establishment of the so-called Military Commission to carry out a thorough investigation of the defence works in the East.

The success of seventeenth-century Dutch cartography was largely due to the fact that many well-to-do citizens were keen to have maps as interior decoration, in imitation of the stadtholder in his Huis ten Bosch in The Hague or the magistrates in their magnificent city palace at Amsterdam. Besides their practical usefulness and political prestige, Dutch maps were now also marketed as consumer goods that, like cabinets, allowed people to portray a cosmopolitan lifestyle. As a close business relation to the map-maker Blaeu, the painter Johannes Vingboons adapted his maps and other, colourful topographical images that served both decorative and propaganda purposes at home and abroad. The Amsterdam lawyer Laurens van der Hem even compiled an extremely valuable atlas for himself, containing not only maps but also numerous topographical, mythical, botanical and other images and portraits. Like maps, globes too became very popular. This genre was imitated by the Dutch regents, albeit not only as a sign of status but – typically for the Dutch conscience – also as a symbol of vanity. At Leiden University, for example, the reading room was adorned with a pair of globes, i.e. an earth and sky globe, which symbolised the classified order that the university was also striving for.⁴⁸ As already pointed out in the case of the popular news cards of the Amsterdam Visscher and Gerritsz, richly illustrated maps and bird's-eye views lent themselves particularly well to the visualisation and marketing of the Dutch overseas empire both to the home audience and to the international community.

⁴⁸ For Dutch overseas cartography, see van Mil and Scharloo (eds.), *De VOC in de kaart gekeken*; Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money*; Wildeman, *De wereld in het klein*.

3 Dialogue

Looking back at what has been said so far, we may ask to what extent the increasing number of overseas news reports and goods that reached Dutch homes actually did justice to the cultures that they represented. To take up the question that was raised earlier: was there any sign of Asian, African and American voices in the news gathering about overseas regions? Those who really try, and have a lot of knowledge of these 'other' cultures, may discover the agency of an indigenous intermediary here and there, albeit increasingly hidden in anonymity. Overall, there certainly is a lack of a balanced dialogue with 'the other', and as such we stand at the early beginnings of a long and still continuing European tradition that, thanks to the work of Edward Said, can be recognised under the term Orientalism.¹ For Said this was a direct consequence of the colonial need to dominate 'the other', but it is clear that the Orientalist discourse also arose from the limited epistemological apparatus of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Inspired by the insights from the new natural sciences, attempts were made to structure the complexity of all the available material in universal schemes. As a result, the individual voice of 'the other' disappeared and in many cases all that remained was a one-sided, somewhat stereotypical exoticism that sold well on the European book market. Nonetheless, these studies created fascinating insights that led to fundamental rethinking and many new insights both into 'the other' and, indeed as a consequence of that, into 'the self'.

An important side-effect of early oriental scholarship was an increasing doubt about the eternal validity of one's own historical and religious world view. This added fuel almost unnoticed to the already-igniting fire of the Radical Enlightenment instigated by Descartes, Spinoza and other early *philosophes*.² This was in spite of the fact that in the polarised Republic of the seventeenth century most oriental scholars kept out of the public debate on such highly sensitive issues as Cartesianism and Socinianism. For example, although the Leiden scholar Golius supported

¹ Said, *Orientalism*. ² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

both the production of Protestant propaganda in Arabic and the ideas of his friend Descartes, his support for the latter was expressed only in the most discreet of ways. One other student of oriental languages, Anna Maria van Schurman, a pupil of the orthodox Utrecht theologian Voetius, turned away and inwards. Through her contacts with Descartes, who did not see any value in her study of the Hebrew Bible, she began to doubt traditional scholasticism and – just like the aforementioned Merian – she sought refuge with the Labadists in Wieuwerd. Another intriguing linkage between the Radical Enlightenment and the Orient is provided by Johannes Casearius. Casearius was a very intimate student of Spinoza, having even lived with him in Rijnsburg, but at a young age left as a clergyman for Cochin, where he became responsible for the Latin descriptions of van Reede's *Hortus Malabaricus*. Albeit incidentally and often indirectly, such individual cases – one could add those of the Spinozist Bouwmeester or the Tamil revolutionary Ondaatje – are suggestive of the way empire could affect radical thinking and vice versa. Indeed, early scholarly curiosity about the Orient was primarily directed at revealing the origin of one's own civilisation: Christian, European or Dutch. And yes, of course, knowledge of contemporary, 'living' oriental languages like Arabic, Persian and Malay continued to merely serve the 'oldest and most holy language' Hebrew, and to a lesser extent, the other Christian and classical languages: Amharic, Syriac and Aramaic. But because not all information that the scholars put forward could be assimilated into the familiar order of things, orientalist scholars had to look for a new universal framework that could provide a link between the old and the new. If only in their search for such linkages, seventeenth-century Dutch Oriental Studies made a significant contribution to undermining people's traditional world views as informed by Biblical and classical concepts, and in that sense helped to pave the way for the Radical Enlightenment.

Given these developments, it should come as no surprise that the most important representative of the Radical Enlightenment, Baruch Spinoza, was often associated by his contemporaries with oriental wisdom, in his case the Far East. This is all the more remarkable because, even more so than the ideas from the Islamic world, the influence of China and Japan on Dutch intellectuals was largely indirect. In the Republic, there was still a high level of dependence on the stories and texts passed on and revised by the Jesuits, supplemented by the piecemeal information that filtered through via the VOC. Although there was no independent study of authentic texts – as in the case of Arabic and Persian works – rather 'secular' scholars such as Georgius Hornius and Isaac Vossius used the Far East also to question their own civilisational origins and epistemic

premises. Did the sophisticated example of China not demonstrate that the world was much older than had been thought and that a well-functioning society could manage perfectly well without Christianity?³

If we return to the orientalists, we can discern that oriental scholarship underwent a somewhat similar development to that of the world of books and maps discussed previously. Particularly in the initial period, scholars were very closely involved in the more practical aspects of missions and trade. In Leiden, a scholar such as Erpenius would test his knowledge of Islam, which was based on texts, during discussions he conducted with the Moroccan visitor Ahmad b. Qasim al-Hajari. The rise of an increasingly stereotypical Orientalism, as well as the ever more philological Oriental Studies in the eighteenth century, weakened this relatively open and spontaneous engagement with ‘the other’, and indigenous agency disappeared slowly but surely behind an increasingly impressive apparatus of exotic stereotypes and supposedly authentic texts. European expectations and experiences increasingly occupied the foreground. Interestingly, it seems that in the earliest cultural encounters there was still room for a relatively unbiased and sincere exchange of ideas.

This chapter will discuss three areas where intercultural dialogue is key. The first of these is the Protestant missions that were directed expressly towards ‘the other’, albeit not in an open dialogue but in the task of convincing ‘the other’ of that one True Belief in order to save him/her from the devil and God’s damnation. We will then focus on the unique case of a much more balanced dialogue: the exchange of medical theories between the Netherlands and Japan. Finally, the visual arts will be discussed as we address the remarkable impact in India of images produced in the Netherlands and, vice versa, the equally remarkable use of Indian miniatures by the Dutch painters Willem Schellinks and Rembrandt van Rijn.

Mission: Monologues with the Other

In the existing literature on the Dutch overseas empire, the emphasis is primarily on the history of the trading companies. This could be taken as an indication that the only issues of any importance in Dutch expansion in Asia and the Atlantic region were trade and profit. One of the first English governors of Jamaica is said to have observed with a smirk that the motto of the Dutch operating in the Caribbean area was ‘Jesus Christ is good, but trade is better.’ However, the impression given here is not true. Besides trade, there were attempts to introduce European culture and

³ Weststeijn, ‘*Spinoza Sinicus*’, 537–61.

the Protestant form of Christianity to the native inhabitants of the Dutch colonial empire, albeit not everywhere; there were no missions or attempts at education in the smaller trading posts. If a clergyman was present, his services were intended exclusively for the European staff of the companies. In Asia, the area in and around Batavia run by the VOC, comprising Ambon, Ceylon and the short-lived colony of Formosa, were an exception. This also applied to the Cape, Netherlands Brazil and New Netherland. There was no question of a large-scale effort, as the Portuguese and Spanish had made, to convert large parts of the Asian, African and American populations. The same was true of English overseas expansion, so there is no justification for accusing the Dutch in particular of an unethical, materialistic, horse-trading mentality and a lack of any civilising mission.

There were theological reasons and a practical explanation for why the Netherlands and England initially had little interest in familiarising the people they colonised with their variant of Christianity. The official state religions of the two countries – the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands and the Anglican Church in England – were influenced by the doctrine of Calvin, where predestination plays an important role. God has made a list of all those who may enter Heaven, and man has no way of influencing this list through good works or in any other way. There is therefore no certainty whether the ‘heathens’ will be given a place on this list after their conversion, and – unlike with the Roman Catholic Church – there is no way of saving their souls. For the first advocate of the establishment of the WIC, the Antwerp merchant Willem Usselincx, the colonisation of the New World was intended to provide refuge for the fleeing southern Dutch Calvinists, allowing them to build a better world there. At home, too, the Protestant churches did not engage in missions to convert the followers of religious minorities such as the Roman Catholics, the Old Catholics and the Jews.

The religious landscape changed dramatically in the eighteenth century in England, Wales and Scotland. It is true that the Anglican Church continued to be the only state religion, but large groups from the new middle class converted to new, Pietistic movements such as the Quakers, Methodists and Baptists. These religious communities were highly committed to missions and were successful in acquiring many supporters among the slaves in the English plantation colonies. The Anglican Church became the planters’ church. This Pietistic movement largely ignored the Dutch colonies, although the tolerant and cosmopolitan climate in the Republic was an ideal springboard for the messianic colonisation plans of Quaker leaders such as John Robinson from Leiden and William Penn from Rotterdam. However, the slaves in the colonies of the

Netherlands West Indies were converted to Christianity by the Roman Catholic Church (Antilles) and the Unity of the Brethren (Moravian) Church from Germany. As a result, the Christianised slaves in the Dutch colonies in the Caribbean area and the colonists from Europe did not belong to a single denomination, as was the case in the Spanish, Portuguese and French colonies. In addition, the Dutch colonial government had some difficulty with Christianisation, because most planters had no interest in it, and their wishes were paramount. Conversion could entail the danger that the slaves saw their subjugated position as incompatible with membership of a Christian church.

In a number of Dutch colonies there were also practical reasons for not actively promoting conversion, because, unlike the Portuguese and Spanish, neither the English nor the Dutch were prepared to cohabit or mix with the indigenous population in their settlements overseas. In the English and Dutch colonies there continued to be a divide between the colonists and the native population groups. There was no intention for them to become subjects of the Republic, which explains why the missionary zeal of the Dutch was limited to a small number of indigenous groups who were considered important for the Dutch presence overseas.

In and around the forts in West Africa this group was very small. The WIC occasionally sent ministers to the main fort of Elmina, but their religious activities focused only on the European staff of the Company, not on the Africans. In rare cases, children born of unions between Company staff and African women were sent to the Netherlands for their education. The best known of these was undoubtedly Jacobus Capitein, who, incidentally, was not of mixed race, but who at a young age became the slave of a WIC merchant. As mentioned already, Capitein studied theology in Leiden, and was subsequently appointed as a minister in Elmina. The staff at the fort were not happy having a black spiritual leader, and Capitein consequently began to teach some thirty or forty children of Europeans and Africans who lived in or around the fort or who belonged to the court of the king of the Asante, with whom the Dutch on the Gold Coast maintained amicable relations. The region did have a school of sorts.⁴

What applied to the forts on the Gold Coast also applied to most of the VOC settlements in Asia and the Dutch possessions in and around the Caribbean Sea. Where there were already ministers and schools in these regions, they were intended for the Europeans and their dependants. One exception was Taiwan between 1630 and 1662, which was populated not only by the original animistic Taiwanese, but also by Chinese workers,

⁴ Henri van der Zee, *'s Heeren Slaaf*, 110–12.

whose numbers grew rapidly and who worked on the cultivation of sugar cane and rice. The Chinese bought slaughtered deer from the local population, shipping the hides to Japan and the dried meat to the mainland of China. The VOC's colonisation project got off to a flying start; in around 1650, Dutch authority was spread over 300 villages and almost 70,000 Taiwanese people. A complete town had grown up around the VOC fort on the island with almost 1,800 Europeans, most of whom were in the service of the Company. The lucrative deer trade made it possible for the VOC to pay for six ministers and dozens of so-called comforters of the sick (*ziekentroosters*) in Taiwan. By learning to speak the local language (Siraya), the ministers managed to convert no fewer than 3,000 Taiwanese to Christianity. The VOC's colonisation project came to an end with the conquest of the island by the independent Chinese warlord 'Koxinga', about whom we will read more in Chapter 9.⁵

The presence of clergymen and schools in the VOC's main settlement of Batavia should not be seen as an indication of any missionary zeal. In about 1700 there were some 6,000 Europeans living in and around Batavia, and the VOC was responsible for their spiritual welfare and for their children's education.⁶ However, as the VOC declined to pay the costs of founding a Latin school, there was no option but for children to return to the Netherlands for their further education.

In Ceylon and Ambon, the VOC put more effort into missionary activities and teaching as a result of earlier Portuguese missions. In order to counter the influence of Catholicism, the VOC set up simple country schools where both girls and boys were taught the principles of the 'true religion'. To staff these schools, the VOC had to train Ambonese and Ceylon teachers, as well as translating and distributing school books and hymn books. In addition, the VOC had to exercise caution at least in Ceylon because the king of Kandy was not only leader of the Sinhalese but also leader of the Buddhists. The numbers of Protestants in Ceylon (in 1800 some 360,000) and on Ambon (in 1775 some 20,000) may seem considerable, but in comparison with the numbers of Muslims, Animists, Buddhists and Hindus in the VOC region, they were negligible.⁷ Moreover, it is questionable whether all these Asian Protestants truly internalised the religious beliefs propagated by the Company. It is often suggested that Catholic rituals, rosaries, processions, devotions of saints and the Virgin Mary were more in keeping with the lives of many Asians. Indeed, whereas membership of the Protestant Church in Ceylon

⁵ Van Goor, *De Nederlandse koloniën*, 108–10. ⁶ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 80

⁷ Van Goor, *De Nederlandse koloniën*, 161–4.

declined when the Dutch were driven out by the English, the many Catholic churches in Ceylon had become strongly rooted.

This also seems to have been the case with the indigenous inhabitants of the Dutch-conquered part of Brazil. In this short-lived colony, the WIC left the Catholic inhabitants (*moradores*) more or less to their own devices as far as religion was concerned. Their loyalty was in any event so fragile that forced conversion to Protestantism was out of the question:

[...] the Portuguese inhabitants are very obstinate with their religion and convinced with such stupid prejudice that they refuse to even listen. So also are their religious leaders who plant this prejudice in their minds; they refuse to listen to any other religion [...] they have almost no knowledge of the fundamentals of the Christian Religion and the paths to salvation are completely hidden.⁸

The religious activities of the WIC in Brazil concentrated on the spiritual care of their own employees and on the native population. The WIC seemed to be aware that the success of Netherlands Brazil depended on this last group, which could be a deciding factor in the struggle with the Portuguese. Ministers and schoolmasters were therefore deployed to convert the native population to the true Protestant faith. To support these efforts, the catechism was translated into Portuguese and Tupi. In practice, the native population appeared to pay little heed to the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. For rosaries and baptism certificates and the celebration of holy days they continued to attend Catholic churches. It was not the Dutch variant of Protestantism, but the fact that the Dutch, unlike the Portuguese, did not make slaves of them, that may have made Dutch governance of the region a more attractive proposition for the country's native inhabitants. It is therefore very questionable how sincere the conversion of the Brazilians to the 'true religion' really was.

In any event, the government of Netherlands Brazil in time ceased trying to convert the whole of the local population. The older indigenous people seemed to be irredeemable, but there was still hope for the young children. Dutch couples with children could be deployed to live in every village, and would then be able to found a school where their own and the native children could learn to read, write and study the 'true religion' together:

⁸ '[...] de Portugeese inwoonderen sijn dapper opstinaet in 't stuck van haer religie met soo dommen vooroordeel ingenomen datse niet eens tot gehoor willen comen. Soo sijn insgelijcx haeren geestelijcken die haer dat vooroordeel inplanten, jae willen selfs van geene religie hooren spreekken [...] sij hebben gansch gene kennisse van de fondamenten der Christelijcke Religie ende den wege ter zalicheyt in haer gansch verborgen.' Cited in van der Straaten, *Hollandse pioniers*, 73.

The Brazilians have little knowledge of the Christian religion other than reading prayers and listening to the mission; but we have no one who can teach them the true religion and the path to salvation in their own language, so they leave and return to their old godless superstition and incantations; and the older Brazilians have little interest in religion as a result of their stupidity and rebelliousness. A sufficient number of senior and married people, who have conducted themselves properly and have young children, being better able to teach the young, should be sent. These families should be placed in every aldea [indigenous village] to found a school there. All the young children of the Brazilians would be sent to these schools as soon as they reach the age of 5, 6 or 7.⁹

A number of village schools were indeed set up for the native children in Mauritsstad, where a former monastery was converted to a boarding school, but it came to nothing because the parents were unwilling to take their children there. It is unclear how many of them in total converted to Protestantism.

There is the same uncertainty about the effect of the conversion activities in New Netherland. These were aimed partly at the slaves from Africa, of whom there were around 100 in the colony in 1640 and over 500 by the time the English conquered New Netherland. Unlike in Netherlands Brazil, the WIC did not send clergymen to work as missionaries among the non-European population. The clergy in Dutch North America therefore proposed engaging a teacher, who 'would instruct and educate the young people, both Dutch and black, in the knowledge of Jesus Christ'.¹⁰ Some African slaves wanted to have their children christened, but not all ministers were enthusiastic about this. They doubted whether parents who wanted to have their children christened had the right 'knowledge and belief' themselves to give their baptised children a Christian upbringing. The request could also have been prompted by 'the physical and improper intentions' of the parents, 'who did not look beyond this measure as a means of freeing their children from physical slavery without striving for Godliness and Christian virtues'.¹¹

⁹ 'De Brasilianen, die noch weynich kennisse hebben van de christelijcke religie anders als haere paternosters te lesen ende misse te hooren; doch alsoo wij niemant hebben die haer in haere taele het waer geloove en het recht weg ter salicheijt leere, soo slaen sij ter sijden off ende begeven hun wederom tot haere oude afgodische superstitiën ende besweringen, alsoo de oude Brasiliaenen door haere dommicheyt ende wederspalticheyt weynich religieus sijn. En bestant getal bedeachde ende getrouwde luyden, getuygenisse hebbende van goet leven, bequaem sijnde om de jonge jeugt te leeren, [moeten] overgesonden werden die, soo se jonge kinderen hadden, te bequaemer souden sijn. Deser soodaniger familiën soude men in yder aldea eene stellen om aldaer school te houden. In deze scholen soude men steken alle jonge kinderen van de Brasiliaenen soo haest deselve 5, 6 ofte 7 jaeren out waren.' Cited in Gonsalves de Mello, *Nederlanders in Brazilië*, 217.

¹⁰ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 268. ¹¹ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 269.

The clergymen in the colony also tried to convert the locals, but had as little success there as in Brazil. One of the ministers tried to learn a local language, but his admonitions made no impression:

When we are preaching, some 10 or 12 of them come, each with a hand-made, long tobacco pipe in their mouths and they stand around just looking. They ask me what I am doing and what I want that I stand there, saying so many words that none of the rest may speak. I tell them that I exhort Christians that they may not steal, go whoring, drink, kill, and that they too must not do these things. The Indians thought it was 'good that I teach Christians' but 'why do so many Christians do these things?'¹²

As in Brazil, the ministers' main interest in New Netherland was to convert and educate the native children, and again they suggested setting up boarding schools for this purpose. However, nothing came of this because a bloody war broke out as a result of a clumsy attempt by Governor Kieft to impose taxes on the indigenous population. The minister could do little but sigh that they would have no success with converting the 'Indians' until 'the time when they have been subjected to the might and power of our nation, and have been reduced to some polity, and that our people set a better example than they have done so far'.¹³

It seems justifiable to conclude that any spread of the Dutch variant of Protestantism arising from Dutch expansion overseas was purely incidental. This was partly because of the conviction that only a select few people were called upon to know the true belief anyway. The Dutch were content with this situation, because in their own country the members of the Dutch Reformed Church also had to live together with numerous people who in their eyes followed a false religion. Things were no different in the overseas colonies in this respect. There was also a practical obstacle: the rather doctrinal and bookish Dutch variant of Christianity, based on the study of the Bible, proved far less easy to propagate than the Roman Catholic faith and its much more elaborate ritual. Not only this, but also the Protestant churches had no missionary orders that travelled to overseas countries at their own cost.

Can we deduce from this that there was little or no question of a cultural dialogue in the Dutch missions? Was such an element confined

¹² 'Wanneer wij predicatie houden, soo komen sy altemet 10, 12 minder en meerder daer elck met een groote lange toebacxpijp bij haerself gemaect, inde mont en staan wat te kijken. Daer na so vragen sy mijn wat ick doe en wat ick wil hebben dat ick daer alleen stae en maeck soo veel woorden dat niemant vande rest mach spreekken? Ick segge haer dat ick den Christenen dan vermane datse niet moeten steelen, hoereren, dronckendrincken, dootslaen en dat sy 't oock niet moeten doen. De Indianen vonden het "goet dat ick den Christenen leere", maar "waerom doent dan soo veel Christenen?"' Cited in Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 274.

¹³ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 274.

to Jesuit missionaries like Matteo Ricci, Franciscus Xaverius and Roberto di Nobili, who made more efforts to understand the religion of 'the other', even though this was mainly as a means of making it easier to convert them? The Protestant theologian Johannes Hoornbeeck would certainly have disagreed. In his learned instructions for the conversion of the 'heathens' *De conversione indorum et gentilium* (1669), he admirably presents his Leiden pupils with some 'best cases' taken from the successful Jesuit experience: 'With their example and their method', Protestant missionaries could 'try to do the same and far better', since 'it is fitting that as those to whom God had given the greatest purity of religion . . . also add a more burning zeal to promote these things'.¹⁴ Other Protestant theologians such as Heurnius and Voetius could only agree with their colleague that studying the conviction of people with different opinions formed an indispensable part of training theological students. This strongly suggests that a conservative, puritanical background was not always incompatible with critical scholarship and in fact could stimulate intellectual debates about the history of other cultures and of idolatry in particular.¹⁵ But, just as in the case of the closely related Oriental Studies, missionary learning could not but strike back on the world views of the Dutch at home, affecting their conscience more than that of the targeted heathens.

Initially, Dutch theologians thought it was possible to compensate for the lack of mission orders like the Jesuits by establishing a Seminarium Indicum in Leiden that concentrated on educating Dutch clergymen in preaching in the local Asian languages. Although it existed for just eleven years (1622–33), the curriculum of this Protestant counterpart of the Catholic Congregatio de Propaganda Fide was intended to fruitfully combine theology, missionary practice and knowledge of oriental languages. Apart from Leiden, the same approach was apparent in Utrecht, not least thanks to the efforts of Gisbertus Voetius. This orthodox theologian wanted to use Arabic primarily to enable missionaries to combat Islam, and advocated in that same light the printing of a 'critical' Koran. In his – for that time – surprisingly nuanced study of Islam (*De Religione Mohammedica*, Utrecht 1705), Utrecht Professor Adriaan Reland had to recognise that detailed knowledge of the original Arabic texts was necessary to effectively counter Islam – as well as to enjoy trade with Muslims, he added meaningfully. Leiden sage Golius agreed with him: it was important to penetrate to the innermost heart of the Orient, comprising

¹⁴ Gommans and Loots, 'Arguing with the Heathens', 52–3. For an annotated translation of the full text, see Loots and Spaans, *Johannes Hoornbeeck*.

¹⁵ For this phenomenon, see e.g. Kors, *Atheism in France*, and Levitin, *Ancient Wisdom in the Age of the New Science*.

‘the deceit of pseudo-prophet Mohammed and his demagoguery’.¹⁶ By no means all Protestant scholars were so convinced of their own truth. De Dieu, for example, after a study of Eastern Bible traditions, could not avoid concluding that the Catholic Vulgate translation was not that bad after all. Golius himself even had a brother who had converted to Catholicism and who in 1660 was appointed professor of oriental languages at the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* in Rome! This Pieter Golius alias *Celestinus à St Liduina* died in 1672 in Surat on a missionary visit to the west coast of India.

Another rather Dutch, bookish way to influence the hearts and minds of the unbelievers was by making a series of translations of the basic Christian texts. Owing to the high level of Arabic expertise in Leiden and the closely related Arabic printing press, the New Testament in Arabic, written by Erpenius, was published as early as 1616. Just like the earlier Antwerp Polyglot Bibles, these served not only the mission, but also diplomacy with Eastern powers. In 1623, Huybert Visnich presented a copy of this *D N Iesu Christi Testamentum Arabice, Ex bibliotheca Leidensi* to the Mughal ambassador in Golconda, in so doing securing for himself free access to the ambassador’s tent. Somewhat closer to home, in the Levant in 1632, the Dutchman Cornelis Haga developed the idea of having a New Greek translation of the New Testament printed that would help Greek patriarch Lukaris in his fight against Rome. The States-General supported the project, but when the books were ready in 1638, it took almost 100 years before they were actually delivered to the Middle East! The broad-minded Golius, who had good contacts with the Elsevier publishing house, supported the publication of a Turkish New Testament and the Arabic translation of the *Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis*, Calvin’s *Institutie* and the *Heidelbergse Catechismus*.

Also for the benefit of the missions, 1660 saw the publication of the Arabic translation of Grotius’ *Bewijs van den waeren Godsdienst in ses Boecken gestelt*, which was intended to enable the Dutch overseas to ‘defend their religion; to convince the heathens, Jews and Mahommedans of the sanctifying truth, and to further extend the Christian Empire’. The Arabic publication was not the work of a Leiden scholar, but was provided by the aforementioned Englishman Pococke, only after he had made a number of additions and corrections in consultation with Grotius. The edition was financed largely by the English scholar Robert Boyle and was distributed throughout the English Levant Company. For reasons of security, this version did not include the charge to refute Islam, and in time the sixth book, that

¹⁶ Otterspeer, *Groepsportret met Dame*, 397.

contested Islam, was also omitted.¹⁷ This example shows once again how the confrontation with ‘the other’ stimulated thinking about one’s ‘own’ identity and how this led in the seventeenth century to one of the earliest attempts of canonise Dutch identity.

This and comparable texts were also translated into other Asian languages, such as Chinese, Sinhalese and, of course, into the language of the area with which the VOC first came into contact: Malay. During their earliest trade missions, the Dutch compiled rudimentary Malay–Dutch vocabulary lists that were mainly intended for the trade contacts with Aceh, Banten and the Maluku Islands. The best known work is Frederick de Houtman’s *Spraek ende woord-boeck, inde Maleysche ende Madagaskarsche talen, met vele Arabisch ende Turcsche woorden* (1603), which he compiled during his imprisonment of almost two years in Aceh. A few years later, de Houtman as governor of Ambon used the knowledge he had acquired to write a Malay translation of the catechism of Philip Marnix of St Aldegonde. His missionary work on Ambon was continued by Albert Cornelis Ruyl, one of whose works was a Malay translation of the Gospel of Matthew. The work of translation, mainly commissioned by the VOC, was continued until well into the eighteenth century by Justus Heurnius (1587–1652), Melchior Leijendecker (1645–1701), Pieter Worm (1664–1731), George Henrik Werndly (1694–1744) and J. M. Mohr (1716–75). At the same time, the Company assembled all kinds of native manuscripts in its own *Generale Secretarye*. These works came mainly from the Malay religious traditions of the western archipelago and were oriented towards the Arabo–Persianate world. The Dutch tendency to use this western form of ‘High Malay’ for the entire archipelago met with early criticism from missionaries such as Caspar Wiltens, Sebastiaan Dankaerts and François Valentijn, who noted that this bore little resemblance to the language spoken by the inhabitants of the Maluku Islands and Java. Malay proved to be of little use for the missions to Java and the eastern archipelago.¹⁸

We can conclude that, in spite of these efforts, the colonial authorities had little interest in over-enthusiastic missionaries. The colonial government had to protect the Church, but that was as far as it went. The whole apparatus of the mission – ministers, comforters of the sick and school teachers – was under the authority of a trading company that appointed all these people, paid them, and, if necessary, transferred them. When clergymen were sent to the Dutch colonies overseas, the administrators knew

¹⁷ Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for Christian Religion*.

¹⁸ Laffan, *The Making of Indonesian Islam*, 67–85.

perfectly well that their costs would undoubtedly impact the profit margins of the companies.

Science: Dialogue with Japan

With the expansion of Dutch global trade, the need arose for medical knowledge that would provide protection against previously relatively unknown tropical diseases and for medicines that could preferably be manufactured locally. To develop such medicines, research was needed on the working of medicinal plants in the various overseas settlements. A very famous example is the project undertaken by van Reede tot Drakenstein on the Malabar Coast that has already been touched upon. Prompted by the VOC's need for medicines, the commander of this Indian settlement set up a botanical laboratory in Cochin. From 1674, the laboratory was manned by an exceptionally cosmopolitan research team: Portuguese translator Emanuel Carneiro, Dutch translators Christiaan Herman van Donep, Spinoza's pupil Johannes Casearius, the Brahmin doctors Ranga Botto, Vinaique Pandito and Apu Botto and, last but not least, Itti Achudem from the low caste of the palm wine tappers, the Ezhava. The Indians could fall back on a combination of ancient Ayurvedic knowledge and local experiences passed on by word of mouth or recorded on palm leaves. The impressive result of the Malabar project was the twelve-volume *Hortus Malabaricus*, printed in the Netherlands between 1678 and 1693. This work contained an inventory of plants in four languages and scripts: Latin, Malayalam in Aryazuthu script, Malayalam in Arabic script, and Konkani in Nagari script. With a fair dose of benevolence, this important botanical work could be regarded as the product of scientific dialogue; the Western compiler was able to fall back on a wealth of indigenous knowledge, and in this instance simply made use of his power to mobilise this knowledge for his own benefit. In short, this is another example of Asian agency in the making of Dutch science.¹⁹

Apart from van Reede and other botanists such as Rumphius in Ambon and Georg Marcgraf in Brazil, medical doctors in particular worked hard to find a solution to the problem posed by tropical diseases. In the case of the VOC and WIC, this group comprised for the most part traditionally trained surgeons and a few university-educated doctors or pharmacists. Despite their poor reputation as oddjobbing hairdressers and quacks, recent literature emphasises that surgeons were indeed well trained.²⁰

¹⁹ Grove, 'Indigenous Knowledge and the Significance of South-West India', 121–43.

²⁰ Bruijn, *Ship's Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company*, 254–5. See also Cook, *Matters of Exchange*.

A number of them, Jacob Bontius in the East and Willem Piso in the West, even showed a more than ordinary interest in and appreciation for the local medicinal traditions. Japan is a very interesting case here, where a highly intensive exchange took place between Western and non-Western doctors.

Japanese curiosity about medical science even led to the rise of what was known as *Rangaku*: a kind of Dutch Studies which focused on the study of the European works introduced by the Dutch and published in Dutch, thus mainly in the field of medicine, but also astronomy. At the time, this was for Asia a truly unique development. Although initially it seemed like incidental hobbyism on the part of Japanese interpreters and medical experts, in the second half of the eighteenth century *Rangaku* evolved to become a serious science that, at times sponsored by members of the landed nobility, was practised in small circles informally, but also in schools by many members of the Samurai class. The new knowledge focused primarily on application-related aspects of Western knowledge – not so much its ideological, but rather its technological aspects. It represented a considerable simplification of the Western knowledge system. The fact that the language barrier – it should be borne in mind that for a long time people had neither dictionaries nor grammars – was much less relevant for concrete phenomena than for abstract concepts played a role in this. Another important factor was that people tried to incorporate *Rangaku* ‘safely’ into the prevailing Sinocentric episteme and Confucian world view, with the latest Cartesianism finding no place in it. It should come as no surprise that, in this sense, something that could be considered an example of Japanese Occidentalism did not differ substantially from Dutch Orientalism. In both cases, being open to the knowledge of others did not necessarily imply an understanding or acceptance of the underlying ideas.

Although initially a matter for a small group of scholarly interpreters, *Rangaku* was anything but an esoteric pastime. It was without doubt an important area of interest for such inquisitive scholars as Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725). This author of a large number of scholarly works on the West and the Netherlands was equally an influential adviser to the court of Shogun Ietsugu, as well as the inspiration behind the *Shotoku* reforms of 1715 that will be considered further in Chapter 9.²¹ He also believed that, contrary to the concrete, practical level of knowledge, the West had little to offer in a more abstract, spiritual sense. Under Ietsugu’s successor Yoshimune, who ruled from 1716 to 1745, *Rangaku* even became a state matter where the interest was mainly in functional, practical issues such as

²¹ Arano, ‘Arai Hakuseki and His Trade Regulations’, 77.

medicine, timekeeping, geography and economics (including, for example, the Dutch monetary system). During their annual court visits from their trading station in Deshima, the Dutch were relentlessly questioned by Yoshimune about Dutch history, statecraft and trade. On some occasions he instructed them to dance and sing for him, to engage in duels, to eat with chopsticks, to undress, and more: a rather fascinating example of Japan's global anthropological interests.

Under Yoshimune, the Dutch Studies of Nagasaki, where this remained primarily a matter for interpreter families, spread to the court of the Shogun in Edo, where *Rangaku* acquired a more literary character, based less on the real-life communication with Deshima and more on printed Dutch texts, which were now gaining wider distribution in Japan. Just as in the Western oriental scholarship of the time, it seems that in this Japanese version of Dutch Studies people began to rely less on human teachers and more on texts. In a certain sense, it was only then that *Rangaku* was inaugurated as a true science in 1774 with the *Kaitai Shinsho* (*New Book of Anatomy*), a series of translations from Dutch, compiled by medical scholars Maeno Ryotaku, Sugita Genpaku and Nakagawa Junan, in which the anatomical concepts of Vesalius were explained in detail. The heliocentric ideas of Copernicus were disseminated by geographer Motoki Ryohei in Japan, again based on the Dutch-language works in this field available in Japan. A housemate of Motoki, Otsuki Gentaku, founded in Edo the Shirando, the first private school in *Rangaku* – an example that was also followed elsewhere in Japan. The schools are an illustration of the further institutionalisation of the discipline.

In the subsequent period, an interesting exchange developed, particularly in the area of medicine, prompted by the continuing demand for VOC surgeons, both by the local authorities in Nagasaki and at the court in Edo.²² The series of influential doctors in Japan must in any event include the German Caspar Schambergen, who, thanks to his successful work in Edo in about 1650, gave rise to the Caspar School of Medicine (*Kasuparu-ryu geka* or 'Caspar-style' surgery) and a variety of textbooks and pupils (*Caspar dempo* or 'Caspar's methods'). The work of the VOC surgeons instigated an endless series of visits by Japanese doctors who always fired at their colleagues a rain of very detailed questions about Dutch treatment methods. Many of these questions and answers were later published so that the knowledge could be disseminated further among interested parties. Other surgeons who played a more modest,

²² Beukers, 'The Introduction of Western Medicine in Japan', 103–15; Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 339–78.

but comparable, role are Daniel Busch between 1662 and 1664 and Willem Hoffman between 1671 and 1675.

The example of Willem ten Rhijne, who served as a doctor in Deshima and Edo at intervals between 1670 and 1675, shows that Japanese medical knowledge could also be transferred to Europe – incidentally, here too, without absorbing the more abstract ideology that goes with it. Ten Rhijne, a Leiden-trained medical scholar, introduced the technique of Japanese acupuncture into Europe. Many of his observations were later confirmed by the much more famous Engelbert Kaempfer, who served as a surgeon in Deshima from 1690 to 1692. For both Ten Rhijne and Kaempfer, their medical expertise was supported by knowledge of botany. Their work in Japan led to the systematic description and introduction into Europe of numerous new plant species, both via scientific book publications and through the transfer of cuttings and seeds sent to various botanical gardens in Europe. Kaempfer acquired great fame posthumously through the publication in London in 1727, eleven years after his death, of his translated, edited and collected writings on Japan under the title *The History of Japan*; two years later, the first Dutch edition of this work appeared: *Beschryving van Japan*. Kaempfer's writings were based partly on unpublished reports by Governor-General Johannes Camphuys, who earlier in his career with the Company had three times held the position of the Company's director on Deshima.

Important names among their later colleagues in Deshima are those of the Swedish doctor and botanist Karl Pieter Thunberg and the surgeon Isaac Titsingh. Titsingh was one of the rare true savants in the service of the VOC and, moreover, was one of the few savants whose extensive personal correspondence has been preserved. This not only bears witness to his interest in and knowledge of Japanese culture, but also shows the extent and diversity of his circle of intellectual correspondents in Europe and Japan. Among them were the renowned English Indologist William Jones (1746–94), the French Sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1823) and the Japanese *daimyo* and *Rangaku* scholar Kutsuki Masatsuna (1750–1802), who was also the patron of Otsuki Gentaku, who set up the first private *Rangaku* school in 1786. Masatsuna had nothing but praise for the Netherlands and wrote the following:

It is a pretentious habit to call China the 'Middle Kingdom' and it is irrational to emulate it. In order to know all about the geography of many countries and escape this bad custom, I looked to the Netherlands, a country which trades with all the countries of the world, and I learned Dutch. As I expected, their descriptions were ten, no, a hundred times more detailed than those of the Chinese.²³

²³ Cited in Torii, 'Dutch Studies', 136.

This quotation illustrates not only Japan's sincere interest in the cosmopolitan Netherlands, but also how that interest among Japanese intellectuals could lead to question marks about their own Sinocentric world view and thus also about the existing social order in Japan. It was no different in the Netherlands; there too the confrontation with Japan led to a rethinking of the world and the self. It shows that Japanese–Dutch relations went beyond purely commercial interests and actually involved a relatively balanced intellectual dialogue.

Art: Emblematic Continuum with India

In the previous pages we explained how a new fascination for nature emerged in the Republic. The new impetus for the scientific observation of nature as God's creation also had consequences for the development of Dutch painting, which exhibited an increasing tendency towards 'describing' nature. In the meantime, more than ever before, painting became a commercial enterprise, in which the exotic commodities that it depicted were marketed in the numerous portraits and still lifes so cherished by the Dutch regent class. Just like wall maps, globes, antiques and all kinds of glassware that were used to decorate homes, these were the new must-have attributes of the *nouveau riche* cosmopolites.

From the point of view of the artistic encounter, more interesting than describing the various exotic aspects of these Dutch paintings is the way painting itself was able to cross cultural boundaries. For this we need to realise that talking about *the* image in painting is problematic since art historians have conducted heated debates about the correct interpretation of such an image. The controversy centred primarily on the question of whether we should understand an image emblematically or realistically. In other words, can we as modern viewers comprehend these paintings without taking into account the seventeenth-century, more emblematic understanding of images? Are we really seeing what we think we are seeing or is there a moral message, a particular hierarchy, or a deeper truth behind the image depicted? The most likely answer is that emblematic and empirical observation existed in parallel. In both cases there was an increasing fascination with the relationship between the image and the real, but in the first case the primacy lay with images *uyt de geest*, from the spirit or from the imagination, that were able to expose the intrinsic nature of things, while in the second case it was mainly a matter of credible, immediate external observations of things *naer het leven*, as they were in real life.²⁴

²⁴ Alpers, *The Art of Describing*.

In the Netherlands, the emblematic approach to the depiction of the image became particularly fashionable during the sixteenth century, when the patronage of the Church and especially of the royal court still played a key role. This tradition, here referred to as Mannerism, recognised the value of meticulous realism, but mainly for 'lower' genres, such as portraits, landscapes and still lifes. The true *grand peinture* was made up of historical, Biblical, mythological and allegorical representations. This great ecclesiastical and courtly art *à la* Peter Paul Rubens managed to hold its own, but in a Republic where bishops and kings were in short supply disappeared increasingly into the background in the face of empirical science and market-driven realism. With the growing orientation towards a market that was dominated by a new urban middle class, Dutch painted and printed imagery tended to become less elitist and esoteric; the remaining symbolism became less complicated and more moralising and didactic.

For the specialist art historian, this social division between the emblematic focus of church and court and the realism of the market is controversial to say the least. The dichotomy is by no means clear and rather refers to two different approaches with which painters and engravers themselves experimented with varying outcomes, also depending on the genre. But to properly understand the interaction between Dutch painting and the rest of the world, it is important to be aware of this division. In reality, it was the princely courts in both Europe *and* Asia that were interested in Dutch painting. Although the naturalism of Dutch painting attracted the courts' admiration, it was mainly emblematic and allegorical images that appealed to royal tastes.²⁵ This tradition of emblematic imagery can be traced back to the ideas attributed to the Greek philosopher Plato and his many Neoplatonic followers who continued his legacy both in Europe and in the Islamic world. In fact, from the fifteenth century onwards, both the Christian West and the Muslim East experienced a Neoplatonist revival that deeply affected artistic taste. Hence, from the Brazil of Johan Maurits in the west to the Bijapur of Ibrahim Adil Shah II in the east, this brought about a continuum of like-minded royal courts with a common emblematic worldview that transcended the deep religious and cultural divisions between these regions.²⁶ What is most relevant for us is that this connecting Neoplatonist undercurrent allowed a fascinating artistic dialogue to develop between the Netherlands and the Mughal Empire.²⁷

²⁵ Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 194.

²⁶ For this emblematic worldview, see Ashworth, 'Natural History and the Emblematic World View', 303–33; see also Gommans, 'Cosmopolitanism and Imagination', 1–21.

²⁷ For more on this artistic interaction, see Gommans, *The Unseen World*.

From the sixteenth century, in other words before the foundation of the VOC, artists from the Southern Netherlands had had a strong influence on the painting of miniatures at the Mughal court. This is mainly attributable to the policy of Emperors Akbar and Jahangir, both of whom showed great curiosity and a fervour for collecting artefacts related to Christianity and Europe. From 1580 it was the Jesuits who took advantage of this openness and via the Portuguese settlements bombarded the court with beautiful Catholic propaganda material in the form of paintings and especially engravings. Apparently, the Mughal princes became fascinated with what they saw, and they encouraged the reproduction of these images, using them to adorn their palaces and libraries. The Mughal appreciation of European painting had clear Mannerist traits. On the one hand, they praised European artists for their talent for portraying even inanimate things as if they were living, while on the other hand they saw this as an effect of their more philosophical insight into the hidden, essential wisdom behind the things that were depicted. For the Mughals, European painting was not purely a matter of realism, but rather an expression of pathos and a Neoplatonic desire for some inner philosophical insight into the higher forms of things. This approach was very much in keeping with the long mystical traditions of Islam, which made a distinction between the outer, material form and the inner, spiritual meaning of things. The image of a miniature became a representation of a spiritual truth or an abstract concept. From this point of view, by looking at a portrait of Jesus or Mary, one could also glimpse God; all this in spite of Islamic iconoclasm, which was strongly relegated to the background in India during this period.²⁸

In any event, thanks to this artistic kinship, we now have numerous Mughal miniatures of Christ, Maria and many Catholic saints. In the eyes of the Mughals, all this contributed to the universal splendour of their court and, to the great sorrow of the Jesuit Fathers, they had no intention whatsoever of being converted to Christianity. The aim of the Mughal emperors was and remained the creation of a comprehensive, cosmopolitan court culture, within which there could be no room for narrow religious preferences. The Catholic icons thus became instruments of their own Pax Mongolica. The Jesuits were not discouraged and continued to tempt the court not only with catechisms translated into Persian and other theological treatises, but also with secular works such as the *Biblia Polyglotta* by Christoffel Plantijn and the atlas *Theatrum orbis terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius. Almost all these works were made more appealing by the addition of images by artists from the Southern

²⁸ Bailey, 'The Truth-Showing Mirror', 380–401.

Netherlands from the Mannerist studios of Antwerp, such as Pieter van den Borcht, Jan Wierix, Geeraert van Kampen, Pieter Huys and Philip Galle, which increased their influence on the Mughal court even further.²⁹

It should be mentioned here that after the Spanish takeover of Antwerp in 1585 many artists from the Southern Netherlands moved to the north. In Haarlem in particular, Mannerism developed further in the studio of Cornelis Cornelisz, and painter and art historian Karel van Mander became the foremost Dutch thinker of the Mannerist school of painting. Other Dutch and Flemish painters found employment at the European courts. The Habsburg court in Prague evolved to become the European centre of Mannerism, with influential artists from the Low Countries such as Bartholomeus Spranger, Joris Hoefnagel and the engraver Aegidius Sadeler.³⁰ As a busy diplomatic exchange developed at the start of the seventeenth century between the Habsburg and Safavid Empires, Mannerist paintings and prints also found their way overland via Iran to India.³¹ We know, for example, that the Prague works of the Sadeler family were highly influential at the Mughal court of Emperor Jahangir, even though we do not know whether the dissemination of these prints took place over land or by sea. Anyway, the overland spread seems to have skipped the Ottoman Empire, possibly because the latter was experiencing an iconoclastic backlash during this period. Anyway, when the Dutch painter and traveller Cornelis de Bruijn made a comparison between the Ottoman Empire and Iran on this issue, he observed that, unlike their counterparts in Iran, the Ottoman elites did not adorn their houses with paintings and illustrated books.³²

Despite the global activities of the Jesuits, the influence of European painting on the rest of Asia remained largely peripheral. After a promising start in Japan, where the Jesuits were even able to set up their own studio for Japanese pupils, the development of a Euro-Japanese style was nipped in the bud by the anti-Christian policy of the Shogunate. It was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that Japanese artists started to experiment with Dutch themes (landscapes, maps, ships), materials (oil, paints) and techniques (shadow and perspective). This interest was closely linked to the scientific fascination of the *Rangaku* school, the most important representatives being Hiraga Gennai, Maruyama Okyo and in particular Shiba Kokan. There were also the so-called *Nagasaki-e*: coloured wood engravings with archetypical Dutch subjects intended

²⁹ Jennes, *Invloed der Vlaamsche prentkunst*, 33–69.

³⁰ For the intellectual relations between the Republic and Prague, see Mout, 'Political and Religious Ideas', 1–29.

³¹ Kurz, 'Künstlerische Beziehungen', 1–22. ³² De Hond, 'Cornelis de Bruijn', 57–61.

for the popular market. As with the so-called *firangi* (foreign) theme in India (for this see also Chapter 8), this was an interesting kind of occidentalism rather than a serious artistic dialogue between Asia and the Netherlands.³³

At the Chinese court there was simply too great a gulf between the aesthetic views held by Dutch and other European artists and the Chinese, which explains why there was no demand in China for Dutch artistry. In India and Iran, on the other hand, a rich breeding ground developed for Dutch painting that benefited some twenty artists. There are only a few about whom we know more than simply their names, but what we do know suggests that they also built on the Mannerist tradition.

Dutch Painters in Iran and India

Obviously, the spread of Dutch painters throughout Asia was not a direct consequence of the activities of the VOC. It was, nonetheless, mainly via Company channels that the Asian royal courts were able to learn about the latest trends in the European art world and could commission artists to produce works for them. Of the twelve Dutch artists who worked in Iran, we know that in any event Jan Luyckassen van Hasselt, Barend van Sichem, Hendrik Boudewijn van Lockhorst and Philip Angel served as court painters.³⁴ Jan Luyckassen van Hasselt not only acted as a VOC representative in Iran, but also accompanied two Iranian embassies to the Republic, in 1625 and 1629. On the last occasion he was even the Iranian representative in the Republic, and in 1631 he managed to persuade the States-General, against the will of the VOC, to sign a unique bilateral treaty with Shah Abbas I, under which Iranian merchants were given the same rights in the Republic as Dutch merchants in Iran. We know very little about van Hasselt's artistic background, but we do know from Pietro della Valle that he liked to paint portraits, monuments and elephants, and according to Herbert he had painted one of the ceilings in Shah Abbas' country estate in Ashraf on the Caspian Sea, 'all which see'd to strife whether Art or Nature to a judicious eye would be more acceptable'.³⁵ It was quite common at this time for artists to also act as ambassadors, and it seems to have been a phenomenon that was particularly prevalent among

³³ Boxer, *Jan Compagnie in Japan*, 67–116. For the *firangi* theme, see Topsfield, 'Ketelaar's Embassy', 350–67.

³⁴ Others included Joost Lampen, Hendrick Juriaen Ambdis, one Romajjn, Jan de Hart, Adriaen Gouda and finally an unknown painter from Brabant; of a later generation: Cornelis de Bruijn and G. Hofstede van Essen. See Floor, 'Dutch Painters', 145–57.

³⁵ Floor, 'Dutch Painters', 146; Herbert, *Some Yeares Travels*, 169.

Mannerist painters such as Rubens, Israël and van Aken – these artists spoke and understood the metaphorical language of the courts.

Another artist about whose activities in Iran we know very little is Philip Angel. Like many other European artists, he painted the ruins of Persepolis. Once in the service of Shah Abbas II, in 1653 he opened a studio in Isfahan and painted five works for the Shah, which earned him no less than 150 toman (6,000 guilders). Although all these paintings have been lost, the name of one of them has remained: *Offer van Abraham*, depicting Isaac's sacrifice by Abraham, not only a well-known theme for Rembrandt but probably the most popular representation from the Old Testament in the seventeenth century. Just like van Hasselt, Angel too decorated palace walls – it is thought that he may have painted some of the murals of Chihil Sutun palace in Isfahan – and just like van Lockhorst he gave painting lessons to the Shah.

Fortunately, we know a little more of the period before and after his time in Iran. In 1642 he published the theoretical treatise *Lof der schilder-konst* (*In praise of painting*), his lecture for Leiden's St Lucas guild, in which he proved himself familiar with the Mannerist principles of van Mander, but at the same time was open to the naturalism that was gaining ground all around him.³⁶

After his Iranian period we come across Angel again quite prominently, this time as the author of the illustrated treatise on the incarnations, or avatars, of the Hindu god Vishnu: the *Deex Autaers* from 1658, a genre that thanks to the books by Kircher (1668), Baldaeus (1672) and Dapper (1672) would find a broad distribution.³⁷ Beside several images borrowed from Indian sources, we also have the more authentic title print (Figure 1), which refers to the tradition of the thousand-headed serpent Sheshanaga that carried the world, resting on the ocean and on the back of a turtle. Angel's explanation in rhyme indicates that this is about the weak fundamentals (*kranck gestel*) of the Banias: heathens 'seated in deep night' and with 'their lost senses', waiting as it were for the enlightenment of the true God. The latter was articulated with the dramatic use of chiaroscuro in which Angel showed himself to be very much a child of his time. On the one hand, this representation is of course a somewhat arrogant claim of the superiority of Christianity; on the other hand, there is also the suggestion that in the case of the Indian Banias we are dealing with one of the lost tribes of Israel:

³⁶ Slatkes, *Rembrandt and Persia*; Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung*, 544–5 and Miedema, 'Philips Angels *Lof der schilder-konst*', 181–222.

³⁷ Pott, *Naar wijder horizon*, 55–61.

If this be Ephraims stock, came here by way of Joseph,
 Then join this sep'rate branch to Jacob's ancient line,
 Then let it be no longer devoided of your spirit,
 So that they, next to us, may know the one true lamb.³⁸

Now moving to Mughal India, just a few names of Dutch painters appear, as only Hendrick Arentsz Vapoer, Joseph Vosch and Abraham Emanuelz van Meteren can be directly associated with the Mughal court, the latter in the service not of the emperor, but of prince Dara Shukoh. One Isaac Jansz Koedijck was predestined for the Mughal court, but would never actually serve there, as it could not reasonably be expected of him that he and his family would continuously follow the peripatetic Mughal emperor. Incidentally, we know that Koedijck was an adherent of the Leiden painter Gerrit Dou, but also that just after his Company period he began to paint in the Mannerist style. Nothing remains of the Mughal work of Vapoer, Vosch and van Meteren. Further to the south in Bijapur we find Anthonio de Wit, who also acted as intermediary for the Portuguese, and Cornelis Claeszn Heda.³⁹

Heda fits firmly into the Prague Mannerist context. He was a pupil of the aforementioned Mannerist master Cornelis Cornelisz in Haarlem and from there travelled to the Prague court, where he remained from 1600 to 1605. He was sent to Iran as a volunteer in the Iranian diplomatic delegation of Mahdi Quli Beg in Prague, but via all kinds of detours, and following storms at sea and a period of captivity by the Portuguese, he eventually ended up in Bijapur, where he worked for Ibrahim Adil Shah II as a painter while at the same time representing the interests of the VOC. The sultan had already been looking for Dutch artists for some time. Heda was thoroughly pampered and the sultan even bestowed on him the honorary title *nadir uz-zamam ma'ani naqash*, 'the best artist of his time'. Unfortunately, there are no known extant works by this Heda, and we know of only one plasterwork made in Bijapur entitled *Bacchus, Venus and Cupido*. The sultan is said to have been so fascinated by this work that he stood for two hours gazing at it. A similarly named painting by the Prague painter Spranger, whom Heda himself probably admired, suggests that this is a typical example of the Mannerist school. Heda's correspondence with the VOC is, incidentally, much less in keeping with the cosmopolitan Prague atmosphere, because Heda emphasises his Dutch, emphatically

³⁸ From the title page of Philip Angel's *Deex Autaers*. For a detailed study, see Stolte, *Philip Angel's Deex-Autaers*. This translation is on p. 108. Safely behind locked doors in the Premonstratensian monastery in Postel (Belgium), the original manuscript sadly remains inaccessible for research.

³⁹ De Loos-Haaxman, *De landsverzameling schilderijen in Batavia*, volume 1, 35–86; Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung*, 540–3.

Protestant identity. It can only be surmised whether this was inspired by his anti-Portuguese feelings – having been imprisoned by the Portuguese during his journey – or by a more pragmatic attitude that derived from his Humanist background and that considered the political and religious dogmas so unimportant that you could freely simulate supporting them. Heda's influence continues to be a matter of speculation, although experts like Zebrowski believe the atmospheric perspective of the painter Farrukh Beg, who was at the court from about 1596 to 1609, may have been influenced by his conversations with Heda.⁴⁰

What more can we say, besides noting the more general, shared artistic disposition of Mannerism, about the reception of Dutch painting in Asia? The sparse Dutch reports on the demand side provide a contradictory image. On the advice of a Mughal nobleman, VOC merchant Francisco Pelsaert thought that battle scenes would do well in India, preferably 'by a master who has a sweet brush, paints true, because the Moors want to see everything from close by, also a chart or two of the whole world, along with some paintings for amusement, comprising entertaining scenes or naked images'.⁴¹ As far as the battlefields were concerned, these were far from appreciated by all Asian princes. We hear via the Italian adventurer Manucci about a canvas of a land battle between the Dutch and the Spanish that was presented to Sultan Abul Hasan of Golconda by the VOC. The sultan was unimpressed, so much so that he had to return it the following day because it kept him awake at night.⁴² In Iran, too, battle scenes 'with horses' were far from popular. But even a sea battle like *The Battle of Gibraltar*, probably by Cornelis Claesz van Wieringen, was impossible for the VOC to give away, as neither the shah of Iran nor the king of Thailand wanted the painting and the shogun of Japan even felt compelled to refuse it as a gift.⁴³ In the case of Pegu, the Company again insisted on especially grand portraits and battle scenes, which could count on a much better reception from the king than the smaller and finer works.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ For Heda's correspondence from Bijapur, see Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, 18–74. For his Haarlem background, see van der Willigen, *Les artistes de Harlem*, 152–6. For his impact on Bijapur painting, see Zebrowski, *Deccani Painting*, 95–6; Seyller, 'Farrukh Beg in the Deccan', 229; Hutton, *Art of the Court of Bijapur*, 117, 161.

⁴¹ Kolff and van Santen (eds.), *De geschriften van Francisco Pelsaert*, 272.

⁴² Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, volume 4, 87–8.

⁴³ Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung*, 541–6.

⁴⁴ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag: Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, no. 1119, f. 1130. Letter from Pegu to Batavia, 8 October 1636. We are grateful to Gijs Kruijtzter for this reference.

Fortunately, art historians offer more points of reference for the reception and influence of European painting. Again, it was the Mughal court painters who proved to be by far the most receptive. Kesu Das, Manohar, Basawan, Kesu Khurd, Lal, Mani and Husain drew inspiration from European works and started experimenting with new subjects, styles, techniques and materials, including pigments, as shown by an order placed by Jahangir in 1626 with the VOC for ‘the colouring of a thousand people’.⁴⁵ There were a number of important innovations that started the confrontation with Dutch art, the most prominent of which were the increasing focus on naturalism, where greater attention was paid to perspective, details of the landscape, the physique of human and animal bodies, portraits in general and facial expressions in particular. Meanwhile, the old Mannerist work in the form of political allegories gained further strength under Emperor Jahangir, this time stimulated also by the English artworks that reached the Mughal court via the English envoy Sir Thomas Roe. The Mughal painters were very open to all these developments and were keen to learn.⁴⁶ The question that then arises is whether the Dutch painters so famed for their creativity were equally open to being inspired by the more intensive contacts with Asia.

A Dutch Dialogue with Asia?

When looking for other examples of the artistic exchange between the Netherlands and Asia, the most obvious place to start would be Batavia, the headquarters of the VOC, the place in Asia where most Dutch artists spent their time. Although barely a handful of oil paintings have been preserved, we do have a large number of drawings and prints that can be attributed to specific artists.⁴⁷ However meritorious it may be, this East Indian work in no way demonstrates a serious commitment to the artistic traditions of the East. With its portraits, landscapes and scenes from daily life, Batavia closely reflected the prevailing trend in the Republic, where the demand for artworks was determined not so much by the court as by a market increasingly shaped by the elite and upper middle class. In Asia, on the other hand, all indications point to the fact that there was very little interest in visual art outside the royal courts. De Bruijn, for example, could only conclude that the appreciation for painting among the Iranians may have been greater than among the Ottomans, but nonetheless that nobody should think that ‘the sensual appreciation of these people here is

⁴⁵ Gerson, *Ausbreitung und Nachwirkung*, 542, 545.

⁴⁶ Koch, ‘Netherlandish Naturalism in Imperial Mughal Painting’, 29–37.

⁴⁷ Scalliet, ‘Twee eeuwen Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie’, 12–38.

so great that they would want to give money for it, or pay for other beautiful objects from their own pockets'.⁴⁸ Outside the courts, there was no regional elite that was prepared to provide financial support for painting, whether by European or by indigenous artists. This is certainly true for the Indonesian archipelago, where there was no flourishing artistic tradition, not even at the royal courts. In the archipelago, the Dutch artists constituted a complete *Fremdkörper*.

Both in Batavia and at home in the Dutch Republic, the VOC was not a patron of the fine arts, but it certainly stimulated a genre of visual culture in which maps, topographical images and portraits were combined into a different, more realistic style of propaganda than was customary in the royal courts. The Dutch painters Frans Post and Albert Eckhout, who worked at the Brazilian court of Johan Maurits in the middle of the seventeenth century, seem to belong in both categories. Post fits well into the topographical VOC approach, whereas the paintings of Eckhout were more in the style of van Mander, whose work placed greater emphasis on emblematic representation.⁴⁹ The combination of the two is not surprising, considering that in Brazil court and Company merged into one another, albeit incidentally.

One of the few citizen regents who were interested in authentic representations of Asia and who had the means to make this interest reality was Nicolaes Witsen. As discussed earlier, he had an impressive worldwide network of protégés, which included the sketch artist Joan Nieuhof and the previously mentioned Cornelis de Bruijn. Another 'friend' of Witsen was Olfert Dapper, who, thanks to Witsen's contacts, was able to develop as a 'world historian' with studies on Africa (1668), China (1670), Mughal India and Persia (1672) and the Middle East (1677–80). Many of the paintings and drawings that were collected via the Witsen network came from India; apart from Surat, these came mainly from the southern Indian Golconda, where the VOC also had a trading post. The Witsen network was present here in the person of the Dutch interpreter, sketch artist and scholar Herbert de Jager, whom we have already come across as a student and informant of the orientalist Golius.⁵⁰ It appears that, before the Mughal conquest in 1687, Golconda had a highly flourishing miniature tradition that the Dutch made ready use of, for example by having their portraits painted by Indian artists, or indeed by sending home miniatures that may or may not have been ordered by the Dutch, largely

⁴⁸ De Hond, 'Cornelis de Bruijn', 60.

⁴⁹ On the basis of van Mander, one could also make a distinction between Marcgraf and Eckhout. See Brienens, *Visions of Savage Paradise*, 69–70. For the possible parallels with the work of van Linschoten, see van den Boogaart, *Het verheven en verdorven Azië*, 30–2.

⁵⁰ Peters, *De wijze koopman*, 229–37.

miniatures of important political personalities at the court. Just as in the case of the previously mentioned ten avatars of Vishnu, this resulted in a wonderful series of rulers and ministers that we find in the Dutch albums and in the printed works of such authors as Baldaeus, Havart, Dapper and Valentijn.⁵¹ Besides authors, engravers and publishers of travel and history books associated with Witsen, painters who were friends of this group were able to draw inspiration from these collections.

Even so, there are only two Dutch painters who can be said to have had a more intensive creative dialogue with these Indian works: Rembrandt van Rijn and Willem Schellinks. A great deal of research has been carried out on Rembrandt's Indian work. Whereas for someone like the German Indologist and art-historian Hermann Goetz the Iranian embassy to the Republic in 1627 was the impetus for this new interest, more recent research mainly focuses on the collections and albums as a source of inspiration. Some of these studies point out that Rembrandt used Mughal miniatures to depict an – in his eyes – unchanging Orient. People and scenes from the Old Testament, for example, are suddenly given a very Indian appearance. In terms of the artistic interpretation of these works, opinions are divided. According to most authors, Rembrandt breathed new life into the stiff Mughal types, but according to Nicola Courtright, Rembrandt's Indian drawings were rather an imitation of an older classical style of painting.⁵² Seen from this perspective, the Mughal miniatures were objects of study that helped Rembrandt in his search for a new, more refined drawing style.⁵³ If that is true, Mughal miniature painting played a significant part in the making of this most famous of Dutch painters!

Let us turn briefly to the second painter, Rembrandt's contemporary, Willem Schellinks, also based in Amsterdam. Although he never went as far as Asia, Schellinks travelled extensively throughout Europe and he contributed paintings for van der Hem's atlas, mentioned before. It is highly likely that he was also given access by van der Hem to the Indian collections in Amsterdam. Another possible connection to Asia is his brother Laurens, who travelled throughout Asia.⁵⁴ We have seven works by Willem

⁵¹ Two that had themselves depicted were Johannes Bacherus and Cornelis van den Bogaerde. See the following recent works: Lunsingh Scheurleer and Kruijtzter, 'Camping with the Mughal Emperor', 48–60; Kruijtzter, 'Pomp before Disgrace', 161–79.

⁵² Goetz, 'Persians and Persian Costumes', 280–90; Benesch, *The Drawings of Rembrandt*, volume 2, 450; volume 5, 1187–206; Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'Mogol-miniaturen door Rembrandt nagetekend', 10–40; Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'De Moghul-miniaturen van Rembrandt', 7–9; Courtright, 'Origins and Meanings of Rembrandt's Late Drawing Style', 485–510.

⁵³ Schrader (ed.), *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*, in particular the excellent contribution of Robinson in that volume (Robinson, 'A Book of Indian Drawings', 43–61.

⁵⁴ Aikema (ed.), *W. Schellinkx fecit*, 21.

Schellinks with Indian subjects, four of them depicting the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, who ruled from 1628 to 1658. The two most remarkable paintings seem to mirror each other to show a highly exotic tableau that appears to be set in the Amsterdam theatre and emblematically depicts Shah Jahan watching as his four sons confront each other in the war of succession. Without embarking on an extensive explanation of the paintings, it is interesting to realise that Schellinks not only, like Rembrandt, used Mughal miniatures, but also must have had detailed knowledge of the latest political developments in the Mughal Empire. From a poem that he wrote, we know that Schellinks admired Mughal painting to such an extent that he considered it the best in the world. This probably makes him the first European artist to show his appreciation of oriental art.⁵⁵

Looking back on two centuries of artistic exchanges in painting between East and West, we can conclude that this exchange could occur only in the more or less like-minded artistic cultures of Europe and the Islamic world, in particular in Iran and India. Here a courtly continuum had developed that provided Dutch painters with an extensive network of potential patrons and new sources of inspiration. It was only in the case of India that something approaching a true dialogue can be registered, where several Indian painters and at least two Dutch painters showed great eagerness to learn from each other. The question remains whether Dutch artistry with its widespread acclaim also benefited the Company's interests. In the worst case, as in the courts in Southeast Asia, paintings were important only as business gifts that may or may not have been appreciated by the recipients. In the best case, however, the Company had a very attractive visiting card at its disposal. The Iranian and Indian princes were indeed intrigued by Dutch paintings, which, in the form of globes, aureoles, cupids and other political symbols, made an important contribution to the already-existing idiom of imperial propaganda.

⁵⁵ For a more detailed analysis of Schellinks' India work, see Gommans and de Hond, 'The Unseen World of Willem Schellinks'.

Conclusion

Contemplating the overall impact of the overseas activities on the Dutch Republic, we can conclude that the direct effects of overseas trade with America, Africa and Asia were much more limited than is generally assumed. Having said that, it is also true that the Netherlands experienced the very far-reaching social effects of an almost worldwide changing pattern of consumption. The consumption of tobacco, tea and coffee played an important role as early as the seventeenth century, but in the eighteenth century their usage became more widespread, which had sweeping repercussions for the rhythm of daily life for the wealthy bourgeoisie. The bulk import of Indian textiles and Chinese porcelain brought about a similar drastic change in patterns of consumption in the eighteenth century. Both caused real manias and stimulated the production of cheaper, home-made alternatives in the form of 'typically Dutch' Delft blue and printed chintzes. Although these products were introduced in the seventeenth century, the enormous influence of potato and corn, two originally South American crops, is mainly a story of the nineteenth century. The important change in the pattern of consumption was of course a much broader European phenomenon, but the Republic and increasingly England, as 'colonial' powers, were at the forefront of this change and were significant contributors to it. Later, the import of overseas cotton would stimulate the Industrial Revolution, but there was no question of this in the Netherlands. The changing consumer behaviour points towards the even more important impact of the overseas activities in the cultural and intellectual domain. Unfortunately, though, this is also still the most neglected dimension of the Dutch empire and hence our conclusions cannot go beyond the level of a hypothesis that argues along the following lines.

The relatively sudden confrontation with other, non-European cultures led to a fascinating epistemological coping process in the Republic. The first half-century was a time of sincere admiration, where the various new worlds were charted through a mixture of observation and participation. In Dutch philology and painting, this early period still

had an open character. Some Dutch writers and painters even sought an active dialogue with the literary and visual representations of other cultures, especially where there was already some basic commensurability between them. The high point of this period was in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Dutch were still relatively new to the experience of encounter. Although Humanist philology and modern empiricism had started to grow apart, the two were still interlinked. The same goes for the distinction between the emblematic and the real in the realm of visual culture and the fine arts. Characteristic of this period was the comparative method, whereby the new information was domesticated in modified but still familiar categories. This led to new insights, but, particularly in the eighteenth century, to an even greater need to give everything a place in ever greater reference works based on observation.

If, thanks to Linnaeus and his ilk, this seemed to work pretty well for the natural sciences, for the humanities and social sciences the insight that was required lagged far behind the ongoing input of information. As a result, the pursuit of a comprehensive universal order was abandoned; people sought refuge in scientific specialisation in which the authentic voice of the living 'other' was increasingly relegated to the background or even completely silenced. The development of learned societies in the second half of the eighteenth century could not reverse this trend and even caused a further distancing between the European and overseas worlds. Insofar as the Netherlands is concerned, this puts us at the start of what we now recognise as Orientalism, whereby the other cultures lost their intrinsic dynamism as a result of museification and colonial rule.

In parallel with these developments, Dutch culture underwent substantial changes as a result of the confrontation with other cultures. The intellectual rethinking of the Dutch Radical Enlightenment would have been unthinkable without the influx of new information from both the New and the Old World. It was not for nothing that the ideas of Spinoza, who was after all an outstanding representative of the reputedly tolerant and open Dutch state of mind, were associated with the Orient. The need to convert the 'other' initially led to a greater knowledge of this same 'other', knowledge that eventually rebounded on one's own consciousness and identity. It was precisely thanks to the long confrontation and interaction with other cultures that the Netherlands became the Netherlands we know today.

In this context, it is interesting to examine how the changing reception of overseas cultures was reflected in different generations of Dutch overseas administrators. For example, are there any parallels to be found with the successive epistemological traditions of discovery, comparison and empirical ordering? The first generation of administrators was also one of

conquerors who had a tendency to considerably exacerbate the differences with the 'other'. This generation of Jan Pieterszoon Coen (c. 1587–1629) was a generation of doers. Raised in the war, they knew who the enemy was and what was at stake. They were extremely energetic, sometimes even brutal and fanatical, fighting fiercely for the 'good cause', be it the Protestant faith or the Company's monopoly. They stood face to face with the 'other' on the overseas battlefields and bazaars, and their drive inspired awe in the hearts of people far and wide. It was this heroic war generation of the late Renaissance that gave many names to streets and statues in the Netherlands and which generations of politicians, mostly from confessional parties, thought of when they passionately appealed to the 'VOC mentality' as an example of the Dutch success story. However, this is also the most controversial generation. Nowadays its heroism lends itself more to the legitimisation of 'wars on terror' than to peaceful multiculturalism.

The next generation, which emerged around the middle of the century, was much less shaped by the experiences of the Eighty Years' War. This generation of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein (1636–91) was more contemplative and relied more on the beneficial effects of trade than on the clash of arms. They secretly accepted Cartesian empiricism and had a greater awareness than the previous generation of the overseas world in which they lived and which they partly began to govern. This generation was also more inclined to listen to the 'other', sometimes out of pure curiosity, sometimes out of lust for power and profit. The differences from the 'other' cultures were subordinated to the pursuit of a 'civilised' way of life. This cosmopolitan – or dare we say Baroque? – generation did not fight against, but preferred to adorn itself with, the 'other' for the sake of social status and intellectual insight. Strangely enough, the heroes of this generation are less visible in contemporary public discourse, while it is precisely their open-minded attitude that could be more meaningful for an increasingly multicultural Dutch society.

Yet another generation, that of, for example, Governor-General Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff (1705–50), was brought up in the cosmopolitanism of their parents and grandparents. This generation had seen its own world change most, and had strong doubts about the old truths of the Bible and the Church. Its ideals were those of the Enlightenment, which emanated from France and spread throughout the Republic and the rest of Europe. For them, both the increasingly petrified Republic and the overseas cultures lagged far behind. The motto was reform based on the new norms of European rationalism and good government. From this perspective, the non-European 'other' had very little to offer and could at

best count on being re-educated. Until the end of the eighteenth century, this generation of 'modern' reformers would dominate politics in the Dutch colonies – and particularly in Ceylon – although overall it had less resonance in the Dutch than in the British and French colonies. At this juncture, one would expect more interest in this generation of reformers, especially from present-day politicians who are constantly stressing the importance of the European Enlightenment as a universal paradigm. However, they too will not want to run the risk of being associated with the lethargic spirit of decay that still dominates the public image of this period so strongly.

All the above refers primarily to the upper layer of society and, of course, there were numerous exceptions that show that the cultural experience of overseas expansion was extremely varied. It goes without saying that there was no such thing as *the* VOC mentality, to which the then Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende so patriotically appealed in 2006. What we actually need is a more in-depth engagement with the history of mentalities in the plural. Further biographical and prosopographical research into the successive generations of administrators, scholars, mariners, soldiers and others in East and West will have to show whether the division of Dutch colonial mentalities into three distinct phases – Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment – really holds water.

STAATKUNDIG-GODGELEERD ONDERZOEKSCRIFT
 OVER
De Slaverny, als niet strydig tegen de Christelyke Vryheid,
 WELK,
 ONDER HET GEHENGEN VAN DEN ALGENOEGZAMEN GOD,
 En de Voorzittinge van den Hoog-Verwaarden en Wyd-Beroemden Heere
JOAN VAN DEN HONERT, T. H. SOON,
*Doctör der Heylige Godgeleerdheid; Professor in dezelve Wetenschap, en in de
 Kerkelyke Geschiedenissen, in de Hollandische Universteit; en Predikant
 in de Gemeente des HEEREN te LEIDEN,*
 Aan eene openlyke en gematigde beproeving onderwerpt
JACOBUS ELISA JOANNES CAPITEIN, een Moor uyt AFRICA.
 SCHRYVER EN VERDEDIGER.
 Uyt het Latyn vertaalt

D O R
HIERONYMUS DE WILHEM,



TE LEIDEN, BY PHILIPPUS BONK. 1742.

Fig. 3 Title page of *Staatkundig-Godgeleerd onderzoekscrift over de Slavernij, als niet strydig tegen de Christelyke Vryheid*, dissertation at Leiden University by Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein (1742). A poem by Barandyn Ryser that accompanies the illustration explains that we see a Dutch ship that, under the sun that brings salvation to the barbarians, is directed by the angel of God to the scorched Guinea. As the Christians fulfil their duty with joy, God extends his grace over the descendants of Ham (i.e. the black Africans). Since Japheth's offspring (i.e. the white Europeans) dwell in the tents of Shem (Genesis 9:27), Elmina becomes a perfect castle of salvation.

Part II The Atlantic World

The discovery of America, and of a passage to the East Indies via the Cape of Good Hope, are the two greatest and most important events recorded in the history of Mankind.

Adam Smith¹

¹ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, volume 2, 141.

Introduction

The history of Dutch trade and colonisation in the Atlantic region is not really a subject that appeals greatly to the imagination. The only place where it was possible to show what a small country was capable of was in Asia. And what it was capable of was primarily trade, since major colonial conquests were not feasible there at that time: they were too expensive, not economically viable and almost impossible to achieve because of the high mortality rate of Europeans in the tropics or the dominance of their Asian adversaries. All these limitations confirmed to the Dutch that in Asia they had to concentrate on what they were good at, and that was doing business. Colonisation was something they barely engaged in, and if they did – such as in Taiwan or Ceylon – it did not entail any large-scale migration by European colonists. This policy had been successful for a long time, although the Dutch were not the only nation whose trading activities connected the different Asian regions with one another and with Europe. In Asia, the Dutch faced competition not only from Arab, Chinese and Indian traders, but also from merchants from Portugal, England and France, the last of whom were also actively trading between Europe and Asia. The Dutch had one unique trump card, namely the company that under the auspices of the Dutch government monopolised trade in Asia and between Asia and Europe: the United East India Company. In the first century of its existence this company was able to remain ahead of all its competitors, regardless of whether they were from Europe or Asia. During the peak of its existence, the VOC employed no fewer than 40,000 staff, making it the world's biggest commercial undertaking. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, cynical observers had found a new name for the Company: *Vergaan Onder Corruptie*, meaning 'rotten with corruption'.

There were no significant Dutch achievements in the Atlantic area. Opportunities for trade in the region were limited because, unlike the Asians, the indigenous populations of Africa and the Americas produced virtually no goods for which there was a market in Europe. In the Atlantic region the Europeans had to manage the production of export goods

themselves, which meant large-scale colonisation projects and mass migration of Europeans and Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. It proved almost impossible to employ the local population because they died *en masse* due to their lack of immunity to the many new diseases that were carried like silent stowaways on the ships from Europe and Africa. In Africa, producing goods that were needed in Europe was out of the question. The Africans refused to cooperate and the Europeans could not force them to do so. In tropical Africa the Europeans were completely powerless, mainly because most of them survived for only a few months after arriving because of their poor resistance to the unfamiliar diseases they encountered – a parallel with the indigenous populations in the European enclaves in the New World. Unlike in Asia, European settlements and plantation colonies were highly important in the Atlantic area if merchants wanted to be able to acquire products that could be traded at a profit. However, the investors in the Netherlands had very little interest in establishing colonies. This explains why by about 1650 any thoughts of constructing a Dutch Atlantic empire had been abandoned, even before the economic position of the Netherlands in Europe started to crumble.¹

Migration, Colonisation and Regional Interaction in the Atlantic World

European expansion in the Atlantic region was something of a paradox until the middle of the nineteenth century. The Europeans could not and did not want to force their way into West Africa because they had no resistance against the region's many tropical diseases. The only place they were able to settle was at the non-tropical southern tip of the continent. The opposite was true in the New World. There the Europeans quickly gained the upper hand because the indigenous inhabitants of North and South America had no immunity against diseases from Europe. Even in the tropical parts of the New World, initially there were no diseases that prevented the Europeans settling there. However, the arrival of the Africans and their pathogens changed this. The Caribbean region may have remained less dangerous for newcomers than the west coast of Africa, but among both Europeans and Africans the mortality rate was considerably higher than on their own continent. This did not change until the nineteenth century.²

It was the differences in the human immune system that largely determined European expansion in the Atlantic region. With the exception of the Dutch presence in the Cape Colony and the Portuguese in Angola,

¹ Israel, *Dutch Primacy*. ² Curtin, 'Epidemiology and the Slave Trade', 190–216.

there was no European colonisation in tropical Africa. Precisely the opposite occurred in the New World, where the European infiltrators cut through the region like a knife through butter. The disastrous effect of the European and later also the African pathogens on the population of the New World may have made it easy for the Europeans to conquer the region, but the mass mortality among the indigenous population rapidly resulted in an acute lack of workers, a shortage that could only to a limited extent be compensated for by employing Europeans. In total, between 1500 and 1800 some 2.5 million Europeans left for the New World, although some of these migrants soon returned to their home country. This meant that the annual average number of migrants per year in the first three centuries of European expansion amounted to fewer than 10,000, a number that was much too low to provide the labour force needed in the American colonies. In addition, the European immigrants very soon bypassed the tropical parts of America, while these were the very regions where large numbers of workers were needed to produce sugar and coffee. Europeans simply could not be forced to cross the Atlantic Ocean, apart from a small number of penal prisoners. Consequently, following the example of the use of African slaves during the Arab rule over the Iberian Peninsula, all the European colonists began to import African slaves. The total number of slaves transported between 1500 and 1800 is estimated at between nine and ten million, an average of 30,000 to 33,000 Africans every year. The Dutch share in these migration flows was limited. Of the total number of African slaves, around 5 per cent were transported on Dutch vessels to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, and this percentage was even smaller for the European emigrants.³

Unlike in Asia, the pattern of Dutch expansion in the Atlantic region was no different from that of other countries. The VOC gave the Republic a much stronger place in the ranking of European trading nations in Asia than in Europe itself. In the Atlantic area, on the other hand, the Dutch military, commercial and colonisation activities were far less extensive than in Asia. There was one exception to this rule: the Dutch colonisation of the Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost tip of Africa. No other country followed the example of the Dutch colonisation activities in this region. There was yet another difference: the Dutch settlement in North America came to an end much earlier than the colonies of Portugal, Spain, France and England in the New World. The main reason for this was that the Netherlands was unwilling to invest adequately in the defence of its colonial possessions. The loss was not a consequence of any local conditions: the climate of the Dutch colony was no different

³ Kruijtzter, 'European Migration', 108–11.

from that of the neighbouring colonies in New England, and neither did the American Indians behave any differently from those in the English and French regions.

In the Caribbean region, too, that in addition to the islands also encompasses the coastal area of South America between the mouths of the Orinoco and the Amazon, the Dutch were faced with almost identical circumstances to the English and the French. There, the indigenous inhabitants after 1600, that is before the first Dutch conquests, were barely of any consequence because the majority of them had already died or been wiped out during the Spanish rule in the previous century. The Spanish themselves represented no threat to the English, French and Dutch, because they deployed their army and fleet in the New World primarily to defend their colonies on the mainland of South America. That the Netherlands lost part of its colonies in the Caribbean only in the nineteenth century had to do with the major influence of the colonists in this region, who forced the governments in Europe to adopt a status quo policy to protect their economic interests. The English planters in particular saw little benefit in annexing foreign colonies, because this would mean more competition for sales of their export products on the protected English home market.⁴ This explains why the Dutch colonies were always returned after the end of a war. In North America the situation was different. There, it was in the economic interests of the English to conquer New Netherland because the area formed a wedge between the English colonies along the east coast.

What happened in North America also happened in South America. The Netherlands may well have been successful in conquering part of Portuguese Brazil, but here, too, was not prepared to invest in the defence of the area. However, an effective defence was necessary because the majority of the colonists were Portuguese who never really accepted Dutch colonial authority. Even though the Dutch in Brazil managed to get a number of indigenous nations on their side, this was not enough to prevent the colony falling into Portuguese hands again within twenty-five years of having been conquered.

Finally, mention should be made of the Dutch presence in West Africa, where the Netherlands, along with other European powers, had a number of forts on the Gold Coast. And just like the other Europeans, the Dutch concluded friendship treaties with some African nations on the coast and waged war with others. The Dutch were barely tolerated in the region, nothing more, and the same was true of the other Europeans.

⁴ Drescher, *Econocide*, 92.

The Atlantic region is, in fact, a European construction. Before 1492 there were no links between Africa, Europe and the New World. Unlike in Asia, the Europeans achieved something completely new in the Atlantic region. Here, the intercontinental connections remained in Western hands, because the indigenous populations lacked the knowledge and the infrastructure to build and fit out vessels for such long journeys. The same also applied to a number of trade routes within Africa and the New World. The first African slaves that the Europeans traded were sold not in Europe or the New World but along the coast of West Africa. And in the tropical part of the New World the plantation colonies could never have focused so much of their attention on the production of sugar, coffee and cotton without supplies of fish, meat and horses from the east coast of North America. The other side of this coin is that the Europeans in tropical Africa were not able to engage in long-distance trading over land. They had no resistance against the tropical diseases prevalent in the region, and neither were they in a position to protect themselves against attacks by the Africans. As soon as the Europeans left their forts along the coast, they were defenceless. In fact, it took all their efforts to protect their strongholds against attacks by local adversaries. These factors go some way towards explaining why long-distance trade in Africa remained the monopoly of Africans and Arabs until well into the nineteenth century.

While the Europeans could gain no footing in Africa, they had the whole of the Atlantic Ocean to themselves. Unlike in the Indian Ocean, where all manner of merchants and ships were operating, the Europeans were able to develop the trade connections between Europe, Africa and the New World into a unique trading and transport system that had not existed before 1500 and that remained under the control of the Europeans and European colonists in the New World. This applied not only for intercontinental trade, but also for the slave trade along the coasts of West Africa and the New World. This coastal slave trade was another European innovation.

Still, the question remains of whether the Europeans managed to create a single Atlantic region, in which goods, colonists and slaves were able to circulate without too many obstacles. This would seem to have been the case because, given the state of technology at the time, it would have been impossible to keep track of all the vessels on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and to monitor all the ports in the region. Initially, the lack of control and authority provided an excellent opportunity to engage in smuggling and piracy, but ultimately plundering and hijacking one another's merchant vessels proved to have too many drawbacks for all the parties concerned. Almost all the naval vessels in the region began to

hunt the pirates, which made the sea routes between the New World and Europe much safer, apart from at times of war. For a while the Atlantic region seemed set to become an early area of free trade. The long distances and the attendant lack of control made it possible to evade laws and regulations that permitted the transport of people and goods only under the flag of the vessel's mother country. Those captains who exploited this situation were able to offer the lowest transport costs and to ask the lowest prices for their goods. In the seventeenth century these were often the Dutch captains, and in the eighteenth century the English.

However, before 1800, the Atlantic region was never an economic entity where the prices for goods and services converged.⁵ The development of a common Atlantic market for goods and services was prevented by the various national protectionist systems that were put in place banning foreign competition. This can be demonstrated most easily in terms of the transportation of colonists. The transport to the New World was generally organised on a national basis and the colonists generally only went to a colony of the country from which they departed, although a small number of colonists from the Netherlands may have found themselves in South America in the sixteenth century as Spanish subjects. The Germans and East Europeans, who travelled to North America via Dutch and English ports and ships, were an exception in the early New World. However, there was by no means a single Atlantic transport market for the colonists, and the same applied to the transport of slaves. An increasing number of slaves were bought on credit, but this method of payment deterred the illegal slave traders, who needed cash payments. Most slave owners preferred not to buy the cheapest slaves, but rather those for whom payment could be spread over a period of time. This meant that the slaves could be set to work in the production of coffee, sugar and cotton for a relatively small deposit, and so could work to earn their purchase price. It was only in the transport of goods that competition was sometimes possible between carriers of different nationalities, but here, too, the protectionist legislation did its work. There were two exceptions: the smuggling by Dutch and English ships from and to Hispanic America and the North American trade in food products with the French and Dutch West Indies.

There were not only legal and financial obstacles in the Atlantic area, but also cultural ones, which goes some way towards explaining why the Spanish and Portuguese colonisation of the New World progressed differently from that of France, England and the Netherlands. For the Iberians, the expansion in the Atlantic region was a continuation of the

⁵ Emmer, 'The Myth of Early Globalization', 37–47.

Reconquista at home, the medieval reconquest of the Muslim Iberian Peninsula. For the countries of North-West Europe, the colonisation of the Caribbean region and North America was a continuation of their long-distance fishing in the Atlantic Ocean. In the first case, colonisation aimed to make the local population Spanish or Portuguese. In the second case, it was more a matter of creating European enclaves where the colonists could produce goods that were different from or cheaper than those produced in the mother country. Unlike in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, there was no place for the Africans and the indigenous inhabitants in the English, French and Dutch colonial communities. They fell outside the social order.⁶

The difference in ideas about colonisation can be seen in the way in which the different European nations populated their colonies. The Spanish and Portuguese used family networks, while a proportion of the soldiers and sailors temporarily seconded overseas over time became permanent colonists. Furthermore, there was considerable mixing with the local population. Colonisation from North-West Europe was dictated much more by the economics of the market. Apart from a number of forced transatlantic migrations, such as those of the Puritans, the Huguenots, and the Irish and royalist prisoners of war, it was the European transport market that determined the price of the crossing, the European market for agricultural products that encouraged the independent colonists to move their farming business to the other side of the Ocean, and the employment market that stimulated the non-land-owning workers to look for work outside Europe. The market for labour migrants in Spain and Portugal was underdeveloped, which meant that too few Iberian land workers left for the New World, and African slaves on the Iberian Peninsula were already part of the labour market. As a result, the colonists in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies very quickly resorted to buying slaves from Africa.⁷

Matters were different in North-West Europe. There, the employment market initially was able to supply migrants for the colonies in the New World via the system of contract migration, where for a number of years the migrants received only housing and food in exchange for the costs of transportation. England in particular managed to delay the use of the slave trade by employing this method. What is surprising is that the Netherlands did not send many migrants to the New World or to the Cape, while of all the countries in North-West Europe it had the most international employment market. Between 1600 and 1800 the

⁶ Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, 51–4.

⁷ Slicher van Bath, 'The Absence of White Contract Labour', 19–32.

Netherlands sent more than half a million sailors and soldiers from a range of nationalities to the Orient, and probably a further half a million sailors manned the ships in European and Atlantic waters, while the maximum number of colonists in the Dutch colonies in the Atlantic region together amounted to only 40,000 or so, of whom 20,000 were in South Africa.⁸

In each European country there were different factors which determined the extent of migration. The Netherlands apparently preferred to man the ships and exploit the trade and shipping in Europe, the Atlantic region and Asia rather than populating the New World, despite the high mortality rate in sections of the merchant navy and despite the large international supply of labour migrants. France sent very few of its subjects overseas and also did not attract many foreign workers, but England invested in sending colonists to the New World, although these migrants were not recruited only from the British islands, but also from Middle and Central Europe. This may give the impression that there was an integrated market for migrants, but this was in fact not the case.

There were also major differences between the positions of the native population in the European colonies in the New World. In the Portuguese and Spanish colonies in the New World and parts of French America, the indigenous peoples initially were an important factor, but they were quite quickly marginalised and sometimes even excluded from the new colonial enclaves in these countries. It is true to say that, for all European countries with contacts in West Africa, interaction with the indigenous societies was much less intensive than with Asian societies. The military power of the Africans always outweighed that of the Europeans, which left the Europeans able to construct no more than a couple of forts along the coast.

This last fact suggests that European expansion was very similar in Asia and Africa, but this is only partly the case. Just as in Africa, the share of Europeans in Asia was limited, but the demand for precious metals from Europe ensured that the Asian people started to produce goods for the European market. This was something the Africans always refused to do, and the Europeans had little or no success in altering their minds. As a result, in their accounts of their travels the Europeans were quick to paint the Africans as lazy and incapable. The same was said of the proletariat in Western Europe, but people there were ruled by the iron discipline of salaried employment, a consequence of the high population pressure.

⁸ Kruijtzter, 'European Migration', 98–111, and Lucassen, 'The Netherlands, the Dutch and Long-Distance Migration', 153–91.

The role of women in Africa was very different from that of women in Europe at that time. In West Africa, women were involved in many different types of work, both within the family and outside, whereas in Western Europe women and children had a limited role in economic life, at least outside the family. In Europe, there were numerous professions that were not accessible for women; in many countries bordering the Netherlands women were even barred from acting in any legal context. This difference explains why female slaves were more sought after in the internal African slave trade than men: female slaves could produce offspring, and these children did not belong automatically to the mother's family because in legal terms a slave mother had no family. This was an attractive plus point, just like the fact that female slaves could provide for their own living and only very rarely rebelled or ran away. European traders preferred to buy male slaves, because they could command higher prices in the colonies than female slaves. Europeans were at that time firmly convinced that only men were widely employable. This attitude to women also applied to children. Initially, European slave traders agreed through gritted teeth to allow infants to stay with their mothers during the Atlantic voyage, but eventually they also bought unaccompanied child slaves from Africans. In order to satisfy their demand for labour, the employers in the New World had to make use of women and children in those jobs that in Europe would have been reserved for men.

These developments in the slave trade show that the Europeans adapted to African norms and values because the Africans themselves were clearly not prepared to change. And what applied to the slave traders also applied to the planters and other slave owners in the New World. If they had held fast to their European ideas and refused to buy women and children, the slave trade would have shrunk by more than a third and there would have been an enormous shortage of slaves in all those parts of the New World where slaves were used. This meant that African women in the New World sometimes did long and strenuous work that would have been unheard of for many European women at home or overseas. And what applied to the slaves also applied to the trade in goods as well as to missionary work in Africa. The Africans called the tune and the Europeans went along with it.⁹

Although the Atlantic coast of Africa appeared to be a major barrier for Europeans, most parts of the New World were readily accessible to them. In North and South America the death rate among Europeans was often lower than at home, at least in the non-tropical parts of the New World.

⁹ Eltis and Engerman, 'Was the Slave Trade Dominated by Men?', 237–57.

However, this accessibility meant death for millions of the indigenous population, because it was only their isolation that saved them from being infected with a large number of European and African diseases. The largest concentration of the local population was in the regions that were conquered by the Spanish. Estimates indicate that in the first two centuries after Columbus the indigenous population probably declined to under half its number before Columbus. Even so, the Spanish colonies in the New World were home to millions of American Indians, some of whom mixed with the immigrants from Spain and the slaves from Africa.¹⁰

Hispanic America differed from Portuguese Brazil in this respect because the latter region had a smaller number of indigenous inhabitants and there was a higher demand for labour. Workers were needed in the north-east of the colony to work on the sugar plantations, where the cultivation and processing of sugar cane was very labour intensive. To meet the need for workers, the Portuguese enslaved an increasing number of local people so they could put them to work on the plantations. The resulting close contacts with the colonists led to an increasingly high death rate, which then prompted the Portuguese plantation managers to buy African slaves. When the Dutch took control of part of Portuguese Brazil in about 1630, it seemed economically and tactically more sensible not to enslave any more of the indigenous peoples as a means of encouraging their loyalty to Dutch authority, but to use only African slaves on the plantations. Nonetheless, the Dutch could not prevent the natives themselves from enslaving other natives.

The most dramatic fall in the indigenous population was in the Caribbean region. Before Columbus' arrival, probably more than a million people lived in the region, whereas a century later their number was estimated at just a few tens of thousands. This rapid drop coincided with the development of the Caribbean region as the preferred destination of Spanish migrants between 1500 and 1600. When the Dutch conquered a number of small islands in the eastern part of the Caribbean Sea in the seventeenth century, there were no longer any indigenous inhabitants there. The situation was different in Suriname, Berbice, Essequibo and Demerara on the mainland of South America. The indigenous peoples in the non-colonised interior of these colonies played no role in the plantation agriculture, which suggests that their number was small. Just as in Brazil, it proved cheaper to have slaves brought from Africa and to treat the indigenous inhabitants as allies who could be called on to help recover runaway slaves.

¹⁰ Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, 64–6.

The Iberians had not made contact with the native population everywhere that their successors colonised. During the 'Iberian century' between 1500 and 1600, the number of the original population in South America and the Caribbean region had been reduced so dramatically that the new colonists from North-West Europe, including the Dutch, barely needed to take the native populations in these parts of the New World into account. Matters were different in North America, and the same applied to the native inhabitants of southern Africa, the Khoisan. In neither region did the Dutch have any European predecessors on whom they could fall back in initiating and maintaining relations with the original population.

There are no indications that the Dutch were different from the other Europeans in how they colonised New Netherland and the Cape. In both colonies the native population was slowly but surely driven out, in both colonies there were conflicts and sometimes wars over the use of land and cattle, and in both colonies slowly but surely a frontier was formed that constantly shifted in favour of the colonists and to the disadvantage of the indigenous population. In both colonies, too, there were colonists who entered into mixed marriages with women (very rarely men) from the original population, but these were exceptions. The Dutch regions in the New World showed no sign of large-scale intermingling of populations as in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies.

There was some integration in West Africa, but the numbers involved were small. It was very common for the staff of the Dutch forts during their stay to have temporary relationships with African women. According to local tradition, the children of such a union belonged to the family of the mother, and sometimes these women managed to acquire an important position in the trade with and supply to the Dutch forts. This is not surprising since the Dutch who manned the forts had to rely on the food, the maintenance materials and the purchase of slaves from the surrounding area, and who better to do business with than with the 'mulatto' families, who were familiar with both European and African business practices? Moreover, the 'mulattoes' were able to build up their experience over a longer period because they generally had a longer life expectancy than their European trading partners in the forts. Fortunately for them, their birth and upbringing in Africa had given them an immune system that was able to resist tropical diseases.¹¹

The rapid turnover and their short stay made Africa an unfamiliar continent for the Europeans who were sent there, and time and again the Dutch had to accept that the Africans were resistant to European

¹¹ Everts, 'Social Outcome of Trade Relations', 141–64.

views. The captains and crews of the Dutch ships and forts understood that there were African polities, that the Africans held particular religious beliefs and had a fixed – close and extended – family structure, and that the Africans somehow or other were able to provide a living for themselves, although how that worked was something most Europeans did not understand. This did not mean that the Dutch did not have their own opinions about this, and, according to most observers who committed their ideas to paper, the Africans did almost everything wrong. They allowed themselves to be dictated to by their priests, worshipped trees, had no system of private land ownership, let the women do heavy field-work, and raised their children lovingly but with little discipline, also because a two-parent family and marital fidelity held little meaning for them.¹² Moreover, they often complained that the Africans were troubled by few needs, were happy simply to smoke their pipes, and liked to spend their time in indolent leisure. These derogatory observations did not alter the fact that the Africans were nonetheless able to impose their will on the Europeans. There was no way that the Europeans were able to exploit mines or set up plantations; the Africans only allowed them to trade in ivory, gold and slaves.¹³

The Europeans had no idea how Africa worked economically and socially. In this respect the writings of the English, French and Dutch were very similar, even though some of these authors had spent some time in Africa. There were kings, there were nobles, and polygamy was the order of the day; the Africans waged wars with one another for reasons that were difficult to fathom, and these wars caused trade to stagnate. The Europeans were unable to understand that the position of the individual and the place of men and women in African society were different from at home. An African had to belong to a collective; he had to be one of the subjects of a king, or of a town chief, and he also had to be part of the family of his father or mother. All in all, the sentiment in African society was that an individual lacked the ability to protect himself. Instead of individual migration, where the migrant himself decided whether or not to migrate, group migration was common in Africa. Whole nations might migrate as a group to another area due to soil depletion or other ecological conditions, and groups of prisoners of war, who might possibly start an uprising, were therefore usually quickly sold to one or more traders in order to be sold again far away, elsewhere in Africa.¹⁴

Given all these factors, it comes as no surprise that all the attempts by the Dutch to mine precious metals and cultivate export crops along

¹² Emmer, *Engeland, Nederland, Afrika en de slavenhandel*, 54–5.

¹³ Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery*, 137–49. ¹⁴ Thornton, *Africa and Africans*, 98–128.

European lines failed. The Africans were not prepared to adapt to European wishes, and in the reports to the fatherland they were generally described as lazy and indolent. Most Europeans regarded work as a duty and believed that only the drive to prevent starvation could force other people to work, whether these others were the proletariat in Europe or the Africans in the tropics. What most struck the Europeans was the Africans' desire for dependence. Africans felt safe only when they were part of a group; there was a complete lack of any desire for individual freedom to come and go when and where they wanted.¹⁵

There was more interaction between the Dutch colonists and native North Americans, but these contacts were limited to the trade in beaver skins, which was insignificant in terms of both market size and value. There were a few mixed marriages between immigrants and locals, but nothing like the large-scale intermarriage that was common in Hispanic America.

The likelihood of intermingling was greatest in the Cape Colony. Although there are no precise figures, it can probably be assumed that because of the non-tropical climate of the Cape the death rate among the native Khoisan as a result of European diseases was lower than that of the indigenous peoples of the New World, and the same applied to the slaves. In many descriptions, the slave activities of the VOC in Cape Town were likened to a bordello. Every year dozens of the Company's female slaves gave birth to children of mixed origin. There are good reasons for assuming that this situation was unique to Cape Town. Elsewhere private owners watched over the well-being of their slaves, male and female, and outside Cape Town there were far fewer soldiers and passing seafarers.¹⁶

Everywhere in the Cape Colony there was an unequal ratio of men to women, but this was most noticeable in Cape Town, this being the temporary home of a large number of single Company workers. Relationships between European men and Khoisan women were very rare. A study of the marriage records of the Protestant Church in Cape Town shows that only 2.3 per cent of all marriages between 1665 and 1784 were mixed, while 94.4 per cent of marriages were between people with a European name. The number of mixed marriages was even smaller than the number of marriages among free black people (5.4 per cent). Still, the numbers of Europeans in the Dutch colonies in the Atlantic region and Asia were nowhere as high as at the Cape: in about 1800, some 20,000 colonists lived there, while the number of slaves can be put at

¹⁵ Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery*, 137–49.

¹⁶ Elphick and Shell, 'Intergroup Relations', 126–35.

more than 25,000. Most of these colonists and slaves arrived at the Cape after 1770 as in that year the number of colonists came to only about 7,000 and that of the slaves to 8,000.¹⁷

When referring to Asia, we mostly talk about trade circuits, but in the Atlantic region, the word 'system' is commonly used to describe the flows of trade. From an economic point of view, this is correct, because a number of economic activities were possible only with systematic cooperation between several regions on both sides of the Atlantic. Sugar, tobacco and cotton are the most obvious examples, but North America also supplied grains and other food crops to Europe and to the West Indian plantations, and Hispanic America exported tobacco and hides to Europe. Most of these goods could be produced only by combining labour, capital and agricultural land in different continents. Immigrants and slaves, for example, were needed from Europe and Africa. The money flows were Atlantic because the capital-intensive export agriculture and the mines in the New World were financed in part with investments from Europe. In short, if shipping and trade in the Atlantic region were to dry up or disappear, this would have immediate consequences for a number of regions in Western Europe, West Africa and North and South America. A break with the Atlantic system would probably mean as much as a halving of the size of the economy of the plantation regions in north-east Brazil, the Caribbean area and the south of North America. Although the circuits of the Indian Ocean also created a connected trading world, there was no such strong mutual dependence between the different overseas regions.

Nonetheless, the extent of the Atlantic system should not be over-estimated. It consisted of a number of political, economic and cultural enclaves on three continents, all with major differences. The clearest was in West Africa, where these enclaves were generally no bigger than a fort and where there was least influence from the Atlantic economy and culture. Apart from a small number of traders, the great majority of the inhabitants of West Africa were part of a local and regional economy in Africa rather than of the Atlantic economy. The settlement colonies in North and South America were not completely dependent upon the Atlantic economy as the greater part of the production and consumption related to goods and services produced locally, at most supplemented with goods that were manufactured elsewhere in the region. In terms of culture, things were different, since the religion, norms and values, family structure, justice systems and so on of the Spanish, English, Portuguese and French colonies reflected the culture of their respective

¹⁷ Giliomee and Elphick, 'An Overview', 359–90.

European motherlands. Until 1800, outside the European settlement areas the largest part of the New World remained in the hands of the indigenous populations, who had very much their own culture.

The Atlantic economy had without doubt most influence in the plantation areas in and around the Caribbean Sea, these being the most globalised parts of the then New World. Nonetheless, even there, goods and services produced locally or regionally accounted for at least half the economy. In a cultural sense, too, the plantation regions did not belong with North and South America, Europe or Africa, but were very much separate areas. There was no question of a common Atlantic culture: the free people from Europe did their utmost to preserve their European roots, while the slaves had to develop a completely new culture that encompassed not only African but also European and indigenous elements.

The Atlantic and the Industrial Revolution

European expansion in the Atlantic area sparked a fierce debate about the effects of the intensive trade and migration flows in Europe, Africa and the New World. Unlike the early European trade and migration to and within Asia, the flows of goods and people in the Atlantic region between 1500 and 1800 led some historians and sociologists to assume that the Atlantic area helped Europe and North America to become rich, while the early Atlantic trade, migration and partial colonisation meant poverty for the inhabitants of large parts of Africa and Latin America.

The country that is generally thought to have benefited most from its Atlantic expansion is England. There is some justification for this, because in the eighteenth century until 1800 England not only supplied half the European migrants in the Atlantic region, but also transported the most slaves from Africa to the New World. Furthermore, English capitalists probably invested most in the New Atlantic economy. Admittedly, England did obtain around 40 per cent of its imports from the Atlantic area, but it has to be remembered that the sum of foreign trade made up no more than about 15 per cent of the total British national income at the end of the eighteenth century. If trade and colonisation in the Atlantic region made no essential contribution to the British economy, then this was far from being the case for the other Atlantic powers in Europe. The Netherlands was a case in point; the country supplied far fewer migrants, invested less, and transported much smaller numbers of slaves, even in relation to the size of the economy of the Republic at that time. Foreign trade in the Netherlands may have been a larger percentage of the national income than in England, but still the Netherlands' share of

activities in the Atlantic region amounted to no more than 15 per cent. Nevertheless, research on the economic weight of the Atlantic economy for Europe continues to occupy a central place in historical research. In the second half of the eighteenth century, at a time when England was more active in the Atlantic area than ever before, it became the first country in Europe to industrialise. This seems to indicate that the two were connected, and around the time of the Second World War it was already being suggested that England had been able to industrialise only thanks to the profits from the Atlantic slave trade and slavery.¹⁸

There are those who claim that these profits from the Atlantic economy were the root cause of poverty outside Europe. Today, tropical Africa has some of the world's poorest countries, and large parts of Latin America have a relatively low per capita income. Apparently, there was a price to pay for the wealth enjoyed by Western Europe and North America. It can safely be assumed that the extensive and forced migration of slaves from West Africa must have damaged the development of that continent, and the same is probably also true of South America and the decimation of the indigenous population there, as well as of the unilateral orientation towards the export of a few tropical products in the Caribbean.

This is not the place to test all these suppositions against the results of recent historical research, because this issue was of little significance for the Netherlands. The Netherlands was a smaller player in the Atlantic region and, since industrialisation did not reach the Netherlands until the second half of the nineteenth century, there is little likelihood of any link between this and the profits from the slave trade and from slavery. Conversely, the Dutch slave trade with Africa and the Dutch trade with Spanish and Portuguese America were too limited to have any major effect on the demographics or economy of these continents. Furthermore, the most recent studies on the impact of the English profits from the slave trade and slavery show no evidence of a link between these profits and industrialisation.

The Dutch Atlantic

The Dutch presence in the Atlantic region underwent a circular development. Initially, Dutch merchant shipping was concentrated in a no man's land in and around the Caribbean Sea, where the Spanish and Portuguese

¹⁸ The classic work on the influence of the profits from the slave trade and slavery is Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, first published in 1944 and with many reprints. For the Netherlands, a recent study calculated the contribution of those economic activities linked to slavery and the slave trade at about 5 per cent of the Dutch GNP in 1770. See Brandon and Bosma, 'De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij', 5–46.

inhabitants were powerless to repel these unwanted invaders. Both the trade with Seville and Lisbon and the successful piracy activities ensured that the Dutch also benefited from the economic growth of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The Dutch made enormous financial gains, so much so that in the 1630s and 1640s the Netherlands tried to convert part of Portuguese Brazil into a Dutch export colony. Unfortunately, this attempt failed. The so-called *versuymt Brasil* or 'neglected Brazil' can rightly be termed the biggest debacle in the early history of Dutch expansion. The Netherlands was equally unsuccessful in making a success of colonising North America. This explains why after the middle of the seventeenth century the Caribbean again became the centre of Dutch colonisation in the Atlantic region, together with the colony at the Cape of Good Hope, which was set up as a refuelling station for the voyage to Asia.

The formal conquests in the Atlantic give only a limited impression of the Dutch activities in the region. In the first place, the Dutch sailed to West Africa in spite of Portuguese activities in the region. There they bought wild pepper, ivory, ostrich feathers and mainly gold. In the second place, the Dutch managed to transport brazilwood (that contained a dye for textiles) and part of the Brazilian sugar harvest to their home country, partly directly, partly via the Portuguese ports of Lisbon, Porto and Viana do Castelo. Thirdly, the same applied to the products from Hispanic America that entered Europe via Seville and were transported on from there by the Flemish and Dutch. In the fourth place, the Dutch traded with the at times unstable European settlements on the coasts of North and South America, as well as with the local populations. The contacts with the native inhabitants of the Caribbean region were of particular interest because they probably had access to the gold stocks of the mythical Eldorado, which was generally thought to be located in the hinterland of the Wild Coast, that is, the coastal regions beyond the mouths of the Orinoco and Amazon rivers. Fifthly, the Dutch ships were engaged in piracy, and in sixth place, large numbers of ships from North Holland sailed to the coast of Venezuela to obtain salt when at the end of the sixteenth century the Spanish king had closed the traditional port, Setúbal near to Lisbon, to prevent the sale of salt to the heretical enemy from the Low Countries.

The Dutch were not a prominent presence in the region, primarily because the Atlantic destinations of many Dutch freighters were part of the sailings to Iberian and North African destinations. This came about because, until after the beginning of the Dutch Revolt, the Dutch were regarded as subjects of the Spanish crown and were consequently free to sail and trade in the region under Iberian monopoly. Understandably, then, the Spanish and Portuguese were initially more concerned about the

French and English intrusions in the Atlantic region. The French tried to establish a colony in Brazil around Rio de Janeiro, but were driven out again, and the English were a thorn in the side of the Spanish with their devastating privateering attacks on Spanish colonial settlements such as Cartagena. The Netherlands had no such privateering captains as Francis Drake and John Hawkins in the sixteenth century.

Just as with the shipping to Asia and the Mediterranean Sea area, shipping companies from Holland and Zeeland tried to divide up the investments in the lengthy and risky long-distance trade so that, if any harm did befall the vessels, their losses would be limited to part of the investments. Most ships and their cargoes were financed and insured by several investors and insurers. Over time, companies were formed for the passage to Africa and North America, in which merchants from different cities in the Republic collaborated. The number of sailings was limited, as was the volume of trade, because the ships themselves were small. At the start of the seventeenth century the route to the salt pans of Punta Araya was the busiest, with about 100 ships a year. An average of twenty ships per year sailed to West Africa and ten to North America. No figures are available for the number of Dutch ships that sailed to Brazil, nor for how many obtained Brazilian goods from Portuguese ports. There is no firm information about the number of ships that traded not in salt but in pearls and gold in the Caribbean. The Dutch did not have many firm footholds in the region: in 1612 they established Fort Nassau at Moree in West Africa, in 1616 a small settlement on the Essequibo River on the Wild Coast of South America, and in 1624 Fort Orange in Albany in North America. There were certainly more attempts to establish permanent settlements, but these very probably quickly came to nothing.¹⁹

¹⁹ Enthoven, 'Early Dutch Expansion', 17–47.

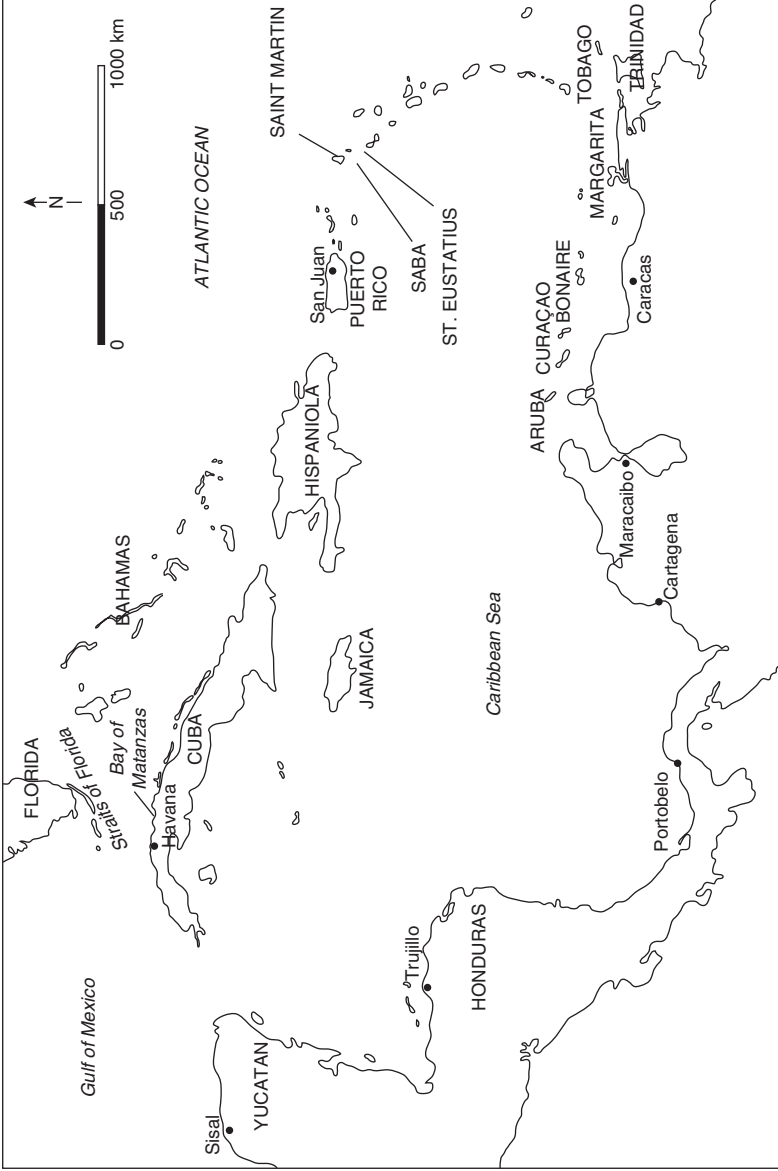
4 The Caribbean

The colonisation of the Caribbean region exhibited major differences between Spanish–Portuguese expansion in the Atlantic area and that of the English, French and Dutch. This region included not only the islands in the Caribbean Sea, but also the areas on the mainland that bordered on the sea, such as the Dutch colonies of Suriname, Essequibo, Berbice and Demerara. Both forms of expansion made it possible to construct sizeable merchant and war fleets, and both were able to settle a relatively large number of colonists in the temperate zones of North and South America, as well as maintaining trading posts on the African coast. Only the second system – that of the English, French and Dutch – was able to establish plantation colonies that concentrated wholly on the production of export crops. In Brazil, the Portuguese came close to this, but nowhere in this colony was there such a strong focus on the export of tropical crops as in the Caribbean region. In Portuguese Brazil it was the European colonists and not the slaves who were in the majority, and a large proportion of the colonists were not directly involved in the cultivation of sugar cane and coffee, let alone in the processing of these crops.¹

In the English, French and Dutch plantation colonies in the Caribbean region, on the other hand, the numbers, amounts and ratios of capital, workers, shipping capacity and management were closely aligned with the demands of the export economy. The Iberian economies were barely able to meet the needs of the export agriculture because the merchant elite played only a subordinate role in Spain and Portugal, while the state dominated economic life. The Iberian merchants, emigrants and investors were consequently not in a position to be able to make real use of the new overseas opportunities.

The loss of Brazil put an end to the Dutch *Sonderweg* in the Atlantic region. Like England and France, the Republic concentrated on the Caribbean area, particularly after the loss of New Netherland in North America. Dutch expansion in the West Indies also developed differently

¹ Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy*, 11–32.



Map 1 The Caribbean

from that of England and France. The prime reason was that the Republic had no plans for any major new colonisation project; the Dutch settlement colonies in Brazil and North America had attracted far too few colonists for this to be an option. This explains why the Dutch attacks on the large Spanish islands in the Caribbean area never resulted in a conquest of the islands. The Dutch managed merely to acquire small, rocky islands that were totally unsuited to export agriculture. One exception was the island of New Walcheren (Tobago), where the Zeelanders had undertaken a number of failed Dutch colonisation projects between 1632 and 1678. There were other places more suitable for export agriculture, such as the Dutch colonies on the Wild Coast, Essequibo, Berbice and later Suriname, but none of these colonies evolved in the same way as the French and English islands: colonisation first with European contract workers and then with African slaves. And just as with Dutch Brazil, the biggest plantation colony, Suriname, was already partly cultivated and populated when it fell into Dutch hands.

There was another remarkable aspect of Dutch expansion in the Caribbean region that should be mentioned, namely the position of the indigenous population. In about 1650, the indigenous people were hardly a significant factor on the English, French and Spanish islands, and the same was true of the Netherlands Antilles. However, the situation in the Dutch plantation colonies on the mainland was different because the native inhabitants of the New World were still present there and played a role in the colonisation process.

Indigenous Population

Of all the original inhabitants of the Caribbean area – the Taino, the Caribs and the Arawaks – the Arawaks were the least able to resist the invading Europeans. The Arawaks inhabited the large islands that at the time of Columbus's arrival were confronted with a new group of immigrants from the mainland, the Caribs, a nation of aggressive warriors. They were followed after 1492 by the Europeans, and the hope of a number of Arawak political leaders of an alliance with the Europeans against the Caribs came to nothing. The Spanish conquerors were not prepared to give any American Indians whatsoever a place of any significance in their new island settlements, as later occurred in the Spanish settlements on the mainland. The Spanish colonists learned from the locals how to work the land and which plants and animals could be useful for them, and after that 'the best Indian was a dead Indian', particularly when they were not prepared to pan for gold or work on the land day and night. Unlike in the jungles on the mainland, the locals on the islands

could not retreat to areas far removed from the European settlements. Within the space of 100 years, the indigenous population in the Caribbean had become marginalised: on most islands their numbers fell by 90 per cent.²

Initially, the Caribs were an exception. Unlike the Arawaks, this indigenous group inhabited no large islands; in about 1500 they were still trying to conquer a place for themselves in the Caribbean region. They were known to be formidable warriors, so the Europeans left them in peace. During the course of the eighteenth century, their numbers nonetheless became depleted. By that time they may well have built up some immunity against European diseases, but not against two killer diseases from Africa: malaria and yellow fever. Malaria became deadly only during the course of the eighteenth century with the explosive growth in the influx of African slaves. The number of slaves who ran away and ended up among the Caribs also increased. However, by taking in runaway slaves, the Caribs were exposing themselves to a bacteriological snake in the grass. The growth in the slave trade also meant that the Caribbean area became more densely populated, increasing the likelihood of yellow fever reaching epidemic proportions. The Europeans on the densely populated island of Barbados had experienced this disease in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth century it also caused the Caribs to die in droves. The sad remnants of this last group had become so small that, following a revolt by the Caribs on the island of St Vincent, the English transported all the surviving insurgents to Honduras.³

Consequently, after 1750 the indigenous population had disappeared almost completely from the Caribbean region. One side-effect of this is that many books and articles idealise their lost society. Some publications even go so far as to portray the original population in the Caribbean area as living in a kind of pre-Columbian earthly paradise. This image is owed in part to the descriptions given by Columbus himself, who spoke of the inhabitants of the first islands that he discovered in his voyages of discovery as poor, but noble, helpful and empathetic people. These comments are often used to depict the Europeans as having driven the 'Indians' out of their paradise. However, there is another side to this romantic black and white interpretation of the 'noble savage'. Did Columbus not say that the locals were willing to share all that they owned with him, but that they actually had nothing? A further observation made by this explorer was that among the native population there was hardly anyone older than thirty. It also became clear that in the Caribbean region some of them were cannibals. All in all, reading between the lines

² Watts, 'The Caribbean Environment', 35–8. ³ Watts, *The West Indies*, 346–7.

of the accounts of Columbus' travels reveals a great deal about the less idyllic side of the indigenous society.

It has already been mentioned that the indigenous people in the Dutch part of the Caribbean region on the mainland of South America were more important for the colonists than elsewhere in the region. Their presence there was permanent because the dangerous European and African diseases could not reach the peoples in the interior of these colonies far from the coast. Nonetheless, even in these Dutch colonies there was a dramatic decrease in number of the local population. Before the arrival of Columbus there were as many as 70,000 American Indians living in the Guyanas, whereas in the nineteenth century their number in Suriname was estimated at no more than 1,000.

The American Indians had better relations with the Dutch colonists than with the Spanish. After the first governor of Suriname, van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck, had concluded a peace treaty with the indigenous nations of the Arawaks and the Caribs of Suriname in 1686, they even became allies in the struggle against the runaway slaves, the Maroons.⁴ American Indians were not forced into slavery, but some plantation owners did occasionally buy 'red' slaves: prisoners of war from the conflicts between the Caribs and the Arawaks. The indigenous slaves were treated completely differently from the African slaves. They were neither forced to live on the plantations, nor made to work in the fields or in the factories, but were used only for hunting and fishing – and their children were not slaves.

Europeans

The Spanish and Portuguese rulers made it almost impossible to settle freely overseas: anyone who wanted to go to the New World first had to be carefully 'screened'. Jews and Protestants were largely refused. Unlike the countries in North-West Europe, in Spain and Portugal there was no international capital market to support rapidly growing, profitable projects in the New World. By the time of the second Atlantic system, set up by the English, French and Dutch, modern economic principles were in place. From the outset, this second system was internationally oriented. In the settlement colonies in North America, but also in the plantation colonies in the Caribbean area, Europeans from different nationalities lived in close proximity to one another. Dutch planters and merchants had settled on English Barbados and French Martinique, while the majority of the Europeans in Dutch Suriname came from England,

⁴ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 272.

Germany and France. Four-fifths of the colonists in the later Dutch colony of Demerara were English.

What applied to people also applied to the capital market. Although Dutch and English capital was mainly invested in their own colonies, some of these investments crossed the colonial borders. This was also true of the import and export of goods. In principle, trade with foreign ships was prohibited, but this ruling had little effect in the second Atlantic system. To illustrate this point, in times of war the French planters often used neutral Dutch vessels to transport their sugar and coffee to Europe, while planters in the French and Dutch colonies in the West Indies relied on merchants and shippers from English North America for the supply of food and horses.

Slaves

Although the Spanish had brought thousands of African slaves to the Caribbean region in the sixteenth century, contract workers from Europe were cheaper for the region's new colonists, namely the English and the French. Between 1625 and 1660 no fewer than 60,000 contract workers left for the Caribbean area, mainly to the small island of Barbados that rapidly became the most densely populated area in the world, with no fewer than seventy-seven inhabitants per square kilometre. As a comparison, the colonisation of the Caribbean area by the Spanish had until that point not reached more than one European per 110 square kilometres. However, the flow of contract workers suddenly dried up when it became clear to them how poor the working and living conditions were in the West Indies and how high the death rate was. A further contributing factor to this sudden downturn may be that the contract workers from Europe found themselves working in the fields side by side with slaves from Africa. After 1660, hardly any new contracts were concluded for the West Indies. Only a few orphans, who had no other choice, followed, but from then on the poor European migrants were interested exclusively in North America.⁵

As the Netherlands was a latecomer in establishing plantation colonies in the West Indies, the sudden end of contract migration to the Caribbean region meant that, although contract workers from the Republic did leave for New Netherland, contract work was not a significant factor in the development of the Dutch plantation colonies. After the conquest of Suriname by the Zeelanders, contract migration was limited to the plantation directors, overseers and a few craftsmen. Poor Dutch migrants had

⁵ Solow, 'The Transition of Plantation Slavery', 89–112.

no desire to work as contract workers on the plantations; they preferred to work for the VOC. As a result, the planters in the English, French and Dutch West Indies reverted to the Spanish and Portuguese model: slaves from Africa.

What is remarkable is that in the older English and French literature the Dutch are typified as the main force behind the new combination of slavery and export agriculture in the Caribbean region. The Dutch are portrayed as being absolutely bent on converting the region into a replacement for their 'neglected Brazil', and it was supposedly the Dutch slave traders who encouraged the planters on the English and French islands to move from the cultivation of tobacco to sugar cane. There are varying accounts of how this took place, and the Dutch play a crucial role in all these versions. There are, for example, indications that a rich planter from Barbados paid a visit to Pernambuco in Brazil, which at that time was still in Dutch hands. According to another account, Dutch merchants supposedly shipped a sugar cane press with all its accoutrements from Brazil to Barbados. And yet another account favours the Sephardic Jews who had fled at the advance of the Portuguese in Brazil and had settled on the English and French islands in the Caribbean region. The real facts of the matter will probably never be known, but it seems self-evident that the Dutch merchants wholeheartedly supported the sugar cane revolution on Barbados. An English historiographer from the period commented on the importance in the economic turnaround in the Caribbean region of the Dutch:

that are great encouragers of plantacions, did at first attempt of makinge sugar give great credit to the most sober inhabitants, and upon the unhappie Civill Warr that brake out in England, they managed the whole trade in our Westerne collonies, and furnished the island with negroes, coppers, stills and all other things appertaining to the ingenios for makinge of sugar and that were any other way necessary for their comfortable subsistence.⁶

The French, too, were impressed by the commercial activities of the Dutch in the Caribbean region. A report written for the French king claimed that the Dutch earned enormous profits in the region; this must be the case, otherwise they would not send between 100 and 120 large ships there every year. In another account the Dutch were said to be born traders. The French settlers on the Caribbean islands certainly made the right choice in trading with the Dutch, who were able to supply everything they needed more cheaply than their own countrymen, even products from France.

⁶ Watts, *The West Indies*, 188.

This is what gave rise to the image of the Dutch as shrewd, profit-driven traders who supposedly tempted the poor, innocent English and French colonists to exchange their simple but honestly earned crust for a quick income from the plantations and slavery. Once the Dutch had set the English and French on this path, the way was clear for the development of the biggest slave economy that the world has ever known.

Would the English and French have stood firm if the Dutch had not brought sugar cane and slaves to the Caribbean? Probably not. There is a wealth of evidence that the French and English would have embraced plantation agriculture and slavery even without the Dutch traders. As has already been said, after 1640 very few contract workers from Europe were willing to migrate to the Caribbean region. There is no question, then, that the arrival of the slaves from Africa could have driven out the 'honest labourers'. Rather, it was the lack of migrants from Europe and not the actions of the Dutch merchants that caused the English and French to resort to slave workers.

Moreover, the Dutch were certainly not in a position to supply all the slaves that actually arrived in the English and French plantations. On Barbados alone the number of slaves rose from 6,000 in 1650 to 20,000 in 1653. It would have been impossible for the WIC to supply this number, especially bearing in mind that in those years the Company was very poor and had invested a lot of money in the defence of Brazil and in the slaves in the colony, who were supplied on credit. After the loss of Brazil, the Dutch slave traders focused mainly on Hispanic America, where buyers paid in cash.⁷

The only credible explanation for the rapid increase in the number of slaves in the English Caribbean is the growth of the English slave trade. All traces of the English slave traders have disappeared from the archives, but they certainly existed, and even in large numbers. The English clearly had their own fleet of slave ships by 1650, since Oliver Cromwell published the first Navigation Act in 1651, denying the Dutch merchants access to the English colonies. This Act must certainly have been infringed, and the colonists on Barbados even revolted against the governor because they did not want to sever their commercial links with the Dutch, but obviously the Act would never have been issued if the English had not had enough merchant and slave ships to ensure the growth in the supply of slaves and in the import and export of products to and from the colonies.

⁷ Vos and Richardson, 'The Dutch in the Atlantic World', 228–49; in particular 235 and 237.

We must conclude that the Dutch influence on the English islands was not as great as was previously assumed. It is much more likely that the Dutch traded heavily with the French islands, but even in that case the extent of the Dutch slave trade is often exaggerated. Until 1670 the planters on the French islands had not yet switched from tobacco to sugar, which meant that until that time there was no great need for slaves. After 1670, the commercial presence of the Dutch in the French Antilles was officially at an end, because, like Cromwell, Colbert also denied Dutch merchants access to the ports in the French colonies. Again, the Dutch ships would not have disappeared immediately, but over time it became increasingly difficult for them to conduct illegal trade with the English and French Caribbean islands.

It is important to realise that, at the beginning of English and French colonisation in the Caribbean, slavery was neither politically acceptable nor commercially attractive. Most slaves were so expensive that the planters could not pay for them straight away in cash; they generally paid in instalments. For illegal slave traders, like the Dutch, this was a risky arrangement. Moreover, many planters bought new slaves with cheques drawn on the trading company that transported and marketed their sugar in England. Buying slaves from a foreign captain was not an option under this system. The exclusion acts of Cromwell and Colbert clearly worked better than one might at first sight suppose.⁸

For the Dutch in the Caribbean area, the one and only solution to the demand for workers was African slaves. The choice of deploying slaves in the region immediately after colonisation was an obvious one. Unlike in England or France, there was only a limited availability of contract workers in the Netherlands, and the few who crossed the Atlantic with an employment contract went to North America and not to the tropics, as the unsuccessful Dutch colonisation of Brazil had shown. The Netherlands skipped the phase of contract employment in the Caribbean region.

The fact that the Netherlands sent hardly any contract workers to the Caribbean or to other Dutch colonies in the Atlantic area shows how sorely mobile, young, unmarried men were needed elsewhere in the Dutch economy. With the relatively large Dutch fishing and merchant fleet, Holland and Zeeland had an almost insatiable need for mariners. Around 15 per cent of the male population of Holland and Zeeland was employed in fishing and on the ships of those fleets. The number of these workers available in the Netherlands was augmented every year with many thousands of foreigners from neighbouring countries, which suggests that the supply of mobile young men who were willing to leave their

⁸ Emmer, 'Les Pays-Bas et le commencement de la traite', 162–73.

homes for at least a year was sparse. It seems likely that, because of the great demand for seamen, it was more expensive for the Netherlands to send contract workers overseas than for England and France. Moreover, by the time of the conquest of Suriname it was no longer common practice for Europeans to carry out fieldwork in the Caribbean region. The fact that the supply in England came to a fairly abrupt end was not felt there immediately, because between 1650 and 1660 large groups of prisoners of war from the Civil War and from the conflict in Ireland were sent to the West Indies as forced contract labourers. But, by 1660, the period of European contract field workers in the Caribbean was at an end.⁹

There were several further reasons why the Dutch did not transport contract workers to the Caribbean region. Firstly, they had no experience of contract workers in Brazil, because this practice was unfamiliar to the Portuguese, who had followed the example of the plantation sector in the south of Spain and Portugal, bringing in slaves from Africa. Secondly, even after the loss of Brazil the Dutch still had a good enough network on the coasts of West Africa to be able to buy slaves. In 1637 Elmina on the Gold Coast was conquered, and in 1641 Angola, and, although this last-mentioned conquest was lost again in 1648, under the 1661 peace treaty with Portugal, the Netherlands was still able to buy slaves on the Angolan coast. With such a strong position in Africa, it was obvious that the Dutch slavers would supply the newly conquered Dutch colony of Suriname with slaves. In the previous decade, Curaçao had grown into a centre for the export of slaves to the nearby Spanish mainland, and the Dutch also supplied the English and French planters from there.

The short-lived slave trade to Dutch Brazil initially operated at least in part from Recife but, after the revolt by the Portuguese colonists, all the slave vessels left from Dutch ports. The Dutch West India Company played an important role here. The trade in slaves was a complex undertaking, and the different chambers of the Company took turns to make slaving trips.

It is interesting to look at how the slave trade actually worked. A slave trip started by fitting out a vessel in one of the Dutch ports. From there the ship sailed to West Africa to offer a range of products from Europe, such as guns, alcohol and tools, and textiles from South Asia in exchange for slaves. After the period of trading, which could take more than a year in the eighteenth century, the ship would set sail for a Dutch colony in the West. There the slaves were sold and the slave ship returned to the home port, either with ballast or with a cargo of sugar and coffee. In total, Dutch

⁹ Beckles and Downes, 'The Economics of Transition', 225–47.

ships transported 550,000 slaves from Africa to the New World, the peak period being between 1750 and 1775, when the Dutch transported more than 130,000 slaves across the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁰

At the start of the eighteenth century, competition in the slave trade was so fierce that the monopolies could no longer be maintained. The WIC monopoly ended in 1730 and that of the Royal African Company in 1698. The support posts of the large companies on the West African coast lost their importance because the slave trade shifted to other parts of the coast. The slave ship itself often operated in place of the fort. The African brokers came in their canoes to the ship, and on many days no more than a few slaves were traded. Sometimes the captain of a slave ship would have a temporary wooden shack built on the shore from which to buy the slaves, but generally the first mate was despatched with a sloop and some barter goods to ply his trade on another part of the coast.

As soon as the captain had bought roughly the number of slaves he needed and had taken on board enough food and water for the captive passengers on the journey, he set course for the Caribbean. The vessel also had food from Europe on board, such as salted meat and beans, but most captains found it more sensible to give the slaves at least some familiar food from their own country. Providing food and water from Africa was just one of the measures taken to keep sickness and death among the valuable cargo to a minimum. In fact, the crossing between Africa and America was a race against the clock for every slave trader. The more slaves that died, the less profitable the trip would be.

In any event, it is clear that the captain and the ship's doctor, and probably also the rest of the crew, breathed a sigh of relief when the slave ship reached harbour in the Dutch West Indies. Whether the slaves were equally relieved is debatable; at that point they had no idea what the future held in store for them. The slaves were sold as quickly as possible, the ship's arrival having been announced as soon as it was sighted. Despite regulations prohibiting private sales, wealthy planters usually tried to avoid public auctions and secured the best slaves from the captain or the shipping company's representative in advance. Once the slaves had changed hands, they were transferred to the plantation of their new owners.¹¹

The Dutch Plantation Colonies

The Netherlands had no plantations of its own. The plantation system originated not from Western Europe but from the eastern part of the

¹⁰ Postma, 'A Reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade', 115–38.

¹¹ Emmer, *The Dutch Slave Trade*, 82–4.

Mediterranean Sea, where first the Arabs and then the Italian colonists produced sugar cane on parcels of land taken from general food cultivation. These plantations were worked by slaves, generally prisoners of war from Slavic Eastern Europe (hence the origin of the word 'slave'). Towards the end of the Middle Ages, plantation agriculture shifted slowly to the centre and west of the Mediterranean Sea, from Malta to Sicily, the Costa del Sol and the Algarve. The arrival of the Ottomans put an end to the flow of Eastern European slaves, and after the fall of Constantinople their place on the plantations was taken by slaves from West Africa, who were originally offered for sale by Arab traders. When sugar cane reached the recently conquered islands in the Atlantic Ocean, only African slaves were used there as field workers; the Spanish and Portuguese followed suit and brought only black slaves to their settlements in the New World to work on the land.¹²

The Portuguese succeeded in a relatively short time in making north-east Brazil the world's most important sugar-exporting region; the region also attracted foreign investment. In Brazil, the plantations looked different from how they would later appear in the Caribbean area. In the early days, sugar cane from different planters was ground and purified by the owners of sugar mills. This changed with the leap of sugar cultivation from Brazil to the Caribbean region, and it became more common for a plantation to have not only cane fields but also a mill. This called for bigger investments, but it proved to be an efficient system, forcing the sugar from Brazil out of the markets in Western Europe. The Caribbean region soon overtook Brazil as a producer of sugar and quickly became the most dynamic economy in the Western world.¹³

It is no wonder that after the debacle in Brazil the Dutch turned their commercial attention to the Caribbean region. Two colonies there were already in Dutch hands, established by the Zeelanders at the start of the seventeenth century at the mouths of the Essequibo, Pomeroon and Berbice Rivers. Initially, these minimal Zeeland settlements were not intended as incipient plantation colonies, but simply as support stations for the trade with the local people. The English, on the other hand, did establish a plantation colony along the Suriname River for the colonists from by now over-populated Barbados. The newly settled plantation colony was captured by the Zeelanders in 1667.

The imported slaves soon created a society in the plantation colonies that was notably different not only from Western Europe society at the time, but also from that in the settlement colonies in North and South

¹² The classic work is Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization*.

¹³ Schwartz, 'A Commonwealth within Itself', 158–200.

America. These plantation communities were places of many contrasts that were not found to the same degree elsewhere. In the first place, the slaves accounted for an exceptionally large proportion of the total population in the Dutch plantation colonies, as much as almost 90 per cent. In contrast, slaves in the settlement colonies in North America generally accounted for much less than 50 per cent of the population. As a result, the plantation colonies were strongly divided in cultural terms, and this continued to be the case for a long time. The free inhabitants of the colonies were mainly from Europe. Unlike in the European settlement colonies, migrants from Europe, rather than those who were born in the colony, constituted the majority of the white population. In the early period, the same applied to the Africans. It was only later that the 'creole' slaves who were born in the colony became the largest contingent.¹⁴

Altogether this meant that two communities coexisted side by side in the plantation colonies: one free and one not free, each with its own institutions, religions, and reward and punishment mechanisms. There was no question of any form of integration: it is even debatable whether the Europeans and Africans in a plantation colony had as much as a basic understanding of one another's society. In fact, the two groups had no desire to get to know one another better; at most they learned to express themselves to some minimal degree in the local lingua franca so that they could communicate with one another in a work context. At the end of the working day, the directors and overseers from Europe withdrew to their houses on the plantation and the slaves did likewise elsewhere on the same plantation in their own 'negro village', in the huts that in many cases they had built themselves.

This division in colonial society was an effect of the unique demographic characteristics of the Dutch plantation colonies: a high death rate and relatively few children who lived to adulthood. This 'demographic deficit' had major cultural and social consequences. A continuous supply of workers from Europe and Africa was needed to maintain the level of both the white and the black populations, and this was even more so when the plantation sector was expanded. This constant immigration meant the Caribbean plantation colonies maintained their close links with Europe and Africa, and there was far less creolisation of the kind that took place in the North and South American colonies.

A further issue was that there were far more men than women in each newly arrived group. This was true not only for the Africans, but even more so for the Europeans. As a result, the Caribbean plantation colonies continued to be perpetual pioneer societies, populated predominantly by

¹⁴ Knight, *The Caribbean*, 366–7.

young unmarried men and typified by rough, heavy-handed manners; women, children and the elderly were in short supply. Workers on these plantations spent long hours in hard and monotonous work on the land; they earned relatively good wages, but had scant opportunities for spending their earnings. Once the percentage of women among both the slaves and the European population in a plantation colony increased, fewer ships made the crossing from Africa and Europe and the percentage of free and unfree inhabitants born in the colony grew, it became clear that the colony was in economic decline and that plantations elsewhere were able to produce sugar and coffee more profitably.¹⁵

The Caribbean Enigma

The crucial issue of the high death rate and the limited number of births among the slaves in the Caribbean region continues to occupy researchers. Poor nutrition could well have been one of the causes. Indeed, the surviving distribution lists from the plantations show that the slave diet high in carbohydrates and with little protein and few vitamins would today be typified as unbalanced. However, further research shows that, fortunately, the slaves were not wholly dependent on what the plantation managers provided for their daily nutrition; after the work on the plantation was done, most of the slaves worked in the vegetable gardens that were allotted to them by the plantation management. These were mostly pieces of land that were not used for cultivating sugar cane, coffee or cotton. The slaves grew all kinds of crops, including cassava, corn and sweet potatoes or yams, some of which were typically African crops. This indicates that the planters did not concern themselves directly with the laying out and upkeep of the slave allotments, but they made sure that the slave ships brought seeds from Africa with them, so that the slaves were able to cultivate crops familiar to them. Clearly, the produce from the slave allotments had to provide them with much-needed vitamins. Some of the slaves were also able to enrich their diet by hunting or fishing.

A further benefit of the allotments was that the slaves often managed to grow much more produce than they needed for their own use, a large part of their basic food needs being provided by the plantation. They sold the rest on slave markets; these were generally held at the weekend and were a meeting place for slaves from far and wide. Besides farm produce, the slaves also sold poultry, pigs, goats and sometimes even cows. The slaves

¹⁵ Van Stipriaan, *Surinaams Contrast*, 128–44.

may well have been forced to carry out long and arduous work on the plantation, but at least they had an adequate supply of food.

The treatment of the slaves could be a further explanation for the demographic deficit in the plantation colonies. The planters would make the slaves work almost day and night. The high mortality rate would not be a problem from an economic perspective, because it was assumed that it was more advantageous for the planters to buy new slaves from Africa than to keep the slaves they had bought alive for a long time. It was not until towards the end of the eighteenth century that it became clear that the planters had little influence on the procreation of their slaves. After 1750 the massive criticism from Europe about the high mortality of slaves while in transit and on the plantations, combined with the rapidly rising prices and the threat of the abolition of the slave trade, induced the planters to improve their slaves' working and living conditions, although this had little or no effect on the birth rate among the slave population.

Pregnant slaves in particular benefited from this policy of improving the circumstances of the slaves. They were given less arduous work, and both before and after giving birth they were exempted from all plantation work. If the baby lived, the mother sometimes received a bonus in the form of extra clothing. Some of the larger plantations engaged doctors to monitor the health of their slaves. However, even with these regulations, births did not outnumber deaths among the slave population. All the data collected to date about births and deaths among the plantation slaves still do not allow any definitive conclusions to be drawn about the demographic decline of the West Indies slave population. This demographic decline remains an enigma.

This raises the question of whether the West Indies were so unique in terms of the level of disease in the region. There is no definitive answer to this. In itself, it was no more dangerous in the West Indies than in West Africa. It even appears that the slaves in the Caribbean were better fed than the Africans. A comparison of the excavated skeletons of Caribbean slaves and West Africans who died in puberty shows that Caribbean slaves were on average taller than their African peers, which would seem to indicate that the Caribbean slaves had a better-quality diet and more regular food than their African counterparts. Even so, this was apparently not enough to stimulate demographic growth. The West African population did have some level of immunity, which meant that demographic growth was in fact possible. In the West Indies, on the other hand, there was no opportunity for the slave population to build up immunity against the mix of European and African diseases prevalent there, because the population in the West Indies had a constant influx of new Europeans and

Africans, each of whom brought with them new pathogens from the parent country. This would explain why both the European contingent and the African section of the population of the isolated Spanish islands probably experienced natural growth; the same applied at the end of the eighteenth century – once the slave trade had declined – for the Netherlands Antilles and English Barbados.

Naturally, this is just one hypothesis, and it is quite possible that there is another explanation for the decline in the slave population. The answer will be found only through comparative research, and for the Spanish islands in the West Indies this kind of research is still at a very early stage. A further point to bear in mind is that the data on births and deaths among slaves from English, French and Dutch regions largely originate from plantation archives. In the Spanish Caribbean area, the number of plantations was very limited until well into the eighteenth century, which could mean that the relevant data are simply not available. Also the – rougher – data about the relationship between the number of slaves and the number actually registered are probably difficult to trace. Let us hope that the Spanish archives contain some still undiscovered treasures.¹⁶

The World Created by the Slaves

How did the slaves on the plantations manage to maintain elements of their own culture when everything had been taken from them that reminded them of Africa, such as clothes, possessions, religion, family, political and social connections, and, not least, their language? It was certainly the case that in the West Indies only submissive slaves who allowed their identity to be determined largely by the plantation managers received preferential treatment. Furthermore, the slaves were required to learn a new language – a kind of child-like variant of English, French, Dutch or Spanish – so that they could communicate with one another and the managers of the plantation. Apparently, extensive family relations were not encouraged by the planters, because the slaves had to be available almost day and night and such relations could complicate the sale of individual slaves. There were different ideas about the religious well-being of the slaves. The planters in the French and Spanish colonies allowed their slaves to be members of the Roman Catholic Church, but the planters from the colonies with Protestant parent countries, such as England, the Netherlands and Denmark, saw little point in spreading Christianity among their workers: this would simply give the slaves the

¹⁶ Engerman and Higman, 'The Demographic Structure of the Caribbean Slave Societies', 45–104.

wrong idea about their place in society. All these factors mean that the plantations have been painted as concentration camps, where the slaves spent almost all their time working for their masters and used their scarce free time to sleep off their exhaustion in one of the poor barracks.

There is very little left today of this image of slaves as 'dozy Sambos' who did the bidding of their masters. Slowly but surely it became clear to historians that, even for purely economic reasons, it was sensible for the masters to give their slaves the freedom to do as they themselves wanted, for at least part of the working week. The slaves were free in the late afternoon and evening as well as Sunday and part of Saturday. They could use the time to go fishing or hunting, tend their allotments or visit the slave market. Trusted slaves were allowed to leave the plantations, and many of them had a friend or partner on another plantation, so they could spend time together at the weekend. Naturally, the slaves had to have a permit outside their own plantation, showing that their owner gave permission for the trip to the market or to another plantation, but this rule was not strictly enforced. Often the plantation director had little idea what his slaves did outside working hours. Of course, this is a generalisation; during harvest time the slaves on many sugar plantations did indeed spend most of the day and night transporting, chopping and grinding sugar cane – and sleeping for short periods. On average, however, the slaves worked no longer than was customary in many occupations in Europe at the time.

What did the slaves do with their spare time? Did they try to revive a number of elements of their African culture or were they forced to develop something new? There is no clear answer to this question, because the slaves incorporated parts of their African culture into their daily lives as well as adding new West Indian elements. And in any event, one might ask what 'African' actually meant. It has been said that the slave ships bought slaves along the whole west coast of Africa and that the different West African regions each had a different culture, with different lineage and marriage customs. In fact, their adaptation to the West Indies would have already started in Africa, in the barracks and forts where the slaves from different parts of Africa waited to be sold on the European slave ships. Even before embarkation, they were forced to master a rudimentary common language so that they could communicate with their fellow slaves and with the sailors.

In practice, the cultural differences between the slaves were not so marked. In the first place, three regions can be identified on the west coast of Africa that more or less formed a unit in cultural and linguistic terms: Upper Guinea (Western Atlantic and Mande languages), Lower

Guinea (the Kwa languages) and Angola (Congo and Angola languages). Most slave ships obtained their slaves from one or at most two of these areas, so that large groups of slaves from the same cultural group made the crossing together. Moreover, this policy meant that the planters were offered slaves from at most two of the African export regions. There were instructions and good advice that encouraged the planters to buy as many slaves as possible from different African regions to avoid the likelihood of conspiracies and rebellions. There was a widespread belief among many planters that taking a large group of African slaves from the same region was more likely to lead to rebellions. However, the planters were not able to pursue a policy of divide and rule, because when they bought the slaves they were dependent on the available supply, which – as has been said – usually consisted of slaves from the same region. Besides, it is questionable to what extent the planters were aware of the differences in origin of the slaves and whether they were able to recognise these differences when buying their slaves.

All this makes it possible that large parts of the cultural baggage of the slaves had a reasonable chance of surviving the crossing and would continue to be part of their lives in the West Indies. During their transportation and on board the ships, the slaves were in a cultural sense less segregated into small groups than has been assumed. This is evident from the fact that a close bond continued to exist between most West Indian slave communities and Africa until well into the nineteenth century as more and more new slaves were imported from Africa. The planters realised that there were irreconcilable differences between their own culture and that of the slaves, and that the two groups on the plantation had to go their own way as much as possible, as long as this did not pose a risk to the economic future of the plantation.

The slaves were in fact free to do whatever they wanted in the slave quarters, which often resembled African villages. The planter and his overseers rarely put in an appearance there unless one or more slaves failed to turn up for work and had not reported to the hospital. First of all, the slaves used their free time to build shelters. As has been said, the planter simply allotted them a piece of land and gave them timber and other building materials, but left the structure and design to the slaves themselves. The same applied to the use of allotments. The planters at times made denigrating remarks about the roughshod way the slaves worked these small gardens, but it did not occur to them to intervene.

Another area where African customs held a lot of sway was healthcare. There was a high level of sickness in the West Indies, which meant that caring for the sick was particularly important. On most plantations there was a hospital where the slaves had to report if they were too sick to work.

They were then either treated in the hospital or on an out-patient basis. The directors and overseers of the plantations sometimes tried to speed up the recovery process by providing their sick slaves with medicines brought from Europe, but generally these were not effective for treating tropical diseases. As a result, on most plantations a slave who had some knowledge of medicinal plants and herbs was appointed to care for the sick.

The large plantations with many slaves will have had more specialists in this field than only the official carer for the sick in the plantation hospital. In the slave quarters, the slaves helped one another with tending wounds and ulcers, which were commonplace because accidents could easily occur in cutting the sugar cane and working the sugar mills. During the course of the eighteenth century, the planters made efforts to improve the 'company healthcare provisions' because the price of slaves from Africa was rising and the criticism of the slave system from Europe was becoming more insistent. These improvements meant that the slaves were regularly visited by a European doctor and that in serious cases they were sent to a hospital in the city. In spite of these 'Western' influences, healthcare in the West Indies largely remained an African issue, which generally proved to be to the advantage of the sick.

All in all, the African influence in the West Indies was much stronger than that of Europe, and the same applied to the social structure of the slaves, their religious world and their culture in a narrower sense, such as their music, dance and wood carvings. Still, it would be wrong to regard the slaves as overseas Africans; there were many elements of their African society that they were unable to preserve in the West Indies. Plantation slaves could not become kings, nobles or commanding officers in the army. The men and women on the plantations who were held in high regard were those who could cure the sick or had a special bond with the gods, who were successful at selling the produce from the allotments on the slave markets and who were able to defend the interests of the slaves against the plantation managers. This meant that the hierarchy among the plantation slaves during working hours often differed considerably from the hierarchy within the slave quarters. A simple fieldworker, for example, could enjoy high prestige among his fellows at religious ceremonies, while a black overseer might not be as well regarded outside working hours. Also, a slave – male or female – who had extensive knowledge of medicinal plants and the attendant rituals enjoyed a great deal of social prestige in the slave community on a plantation.¹⁷

¹⁷ Numerous studies have been made of slave life on the plantations in the Caribbean area. There is one eyewitness account of the slaves on the plantations in Suriname in the nineteenth century: Boekhoudt, *'Uit mijn verleden'*. An excellent overview of the Surinamese slave economy is van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast*. Three plantations, of

Wealth was scarcely an issue, although a number of plantation slaves did manage to save considerable sums of money by selling vegetables and poultry. In principle, the children of a slave could informally inherit the possessions of one or both parents. The plantation management had little or no knowledge of who owned what in the slave quarters. In practice, this was a rare occurrence, since it was unusual for a slave to save enough money to be able to buy his or her freedom. Apart from this, with hardly any shops or pedlars there was little to buy in the world of the plantation. Unsurprisingly, the abolition of slavery was followed by a wave of buying because shops opened and the money that had been saved was no longer needed to buy freedom. It is interesting to note that this wave of selling showed clearly the wishes cherished by many slaves: beautiful clothes, shoes and – very occasionally – horses, all of which had until then been status symbols of white people and slaves who had been freed.¹⁸

There was also a big difference between the number of freed slaves in Suriname and in the Netherlands Antilles. The economy of the Netherlands Antilles was not dependent on the profitable production of export crops. There were no large plantations, and food and housing were expensive. This meant that less productive slaves rapidly turned into a loss-making concern for their owners. Given that on these islands slave ownership was limited to just a few slaves per owner, these losses could not be compensated for by more productive slaves. As a result, it was an attractive option for these slave owners to free unproductive slaves – a practice that was much less frequent in the plantation colonies.

Finally, we should consider the religious world of the slaves. In theory there was a difference between the Caribbean colonies of Catholic Spain and France, on the one hand, and those of Protestant England, the Netherlands and Denmark on the other. In the colonies of the Catholic fatherlands, the slaves were formally members of the Roman Catholic Church, whereas in the other colonies they generally remained outside the church. In the English, Dutch and Danish colonies, many planters refused to allow missionaries on their plantations out of fear that knowledge of Christianity might encourage the slaves to believe that they were equal to their free counterparts.

In practice there were really no major differences between the religious worlds of the slaves in the different Caribbean colonies. The white community had little interest in the religious ideas of the slaves; as long as the slaves did not organise any revolts or hold any offensive heathen services,

which the archives have been partly preserved, are described in van den Boogaart and Emmer, 'Plantation Slavery in Surinam', 205–25; Oostindie, *Roosenburg en Mon Bijou*; Lamur, *The Production of Sugar*.

¹⁸ Green, *British Slave Emancipation*, 99–128.

they could do what they wanted. Consequently, new slave religions arose all over the West Indies that combined Christian and African elements, with the African religion generally having a bigger following than Christianity. Every year many tens of thousands of African slaves arrived in the Caribbean area, and these new inhabitants kept the influence of the West African religion in the West Indies alive. It is unsurprising, then, that in the Dutch plantation areas the religious world of the slaves who had escaped from the plantations and joined the runaway communities in the interior sometimes reproduced a replica of the West African religion prevalent in the region where their ancestors had come from. On Haiti, too, the former French Saint Domingue, where the slaves managed to found their own state after a bloody revolt, the Catholics among the ex-slaves proved to be considerably in the minority compared with the adherents of the West Indian belief in voodoo.¹⁹

Slave Resistance

A great deal has been written about slave revolts, so much so that it would be easy to gain the impression that the slaves were almost continuously involved in organising resistance activities, plotting uprisings, running away and generally rebelling. On closer scrutiny, however, most of the resistance was prompted by problems within the system, rather than the principle of slavery itself, which was not an issue among the rebelling slaves. This, is hardly surprising, since all Africans came from a society in which slavery was commonplace.

Many accounts of slave resistance involve a process of magnification and isolation. What is meant by magnification is that emphasis was placed on the fact that most slaves would have caused significant damage to the plantation slavery system. Treating slave resistance as an isolated issue gives the impression that such resistance was limited to plantation communities. Many authors omit to mention that all societies experience violence at some points in their history and that Western Europe also had its share of uprisings and hunger riots. There were without doubt many more destructive wars in Europe between 1600 and 1800 than in colonial America.

The literature on slave resistance drew up an almost scholastic classification of the acts of resistance.²⁰ The most frequent of these were the daily acts of sabotage such as go-slows, destroying tools and deliberately carrying out orders wrongly. In themselves, these are not specific to the

¹⁹ De Groot, *Surinaamse granmans in Afrika*.

²⁰ The best-known overview of the slave resistance is Craton, *Testing the Chains*.

slave system. Similar acts of sabotage also occurred in those sectors of the job market in Western Europe and North Africa where employers and employees could not immediately part ways through resignation or dismissal. These kinds of working relationships included sailors and soldiers, who were generally engaged for a set number of years and could not be dismissed, but neither could they themselves decide to leave during military campaigns or sea voyages. Land workers in Europe carried out similar acts of resistance – particularly where there was large-scale land ownership – because in this sector too it was not common practice for either the employer or the employee to end the working relationship in the short term.

The slaves also committed more serious acts of resistance – they refused to work, set fire to buildings or to crops, and ran away – although these were rare events. There were many reasons for these acts, but the main cause was generally the poor management of the plantations, such as drunken or sadistic planters who meted out harsh corporal punishments to the slaves, and planters who passed any reduction in the yields on their plantations on to the slaves by giving them less food and poorer quality clothing. Slave rebellions could also have their roots in struggles between different factions among the slaves, a situation that might easily have escaped the planters. Such revolts could even spread to several plantations. In comparison with Europe, the rebellions on the plantations could best be compared to a mutiny on a ship. These, too, were often the result of divergences from the traditional daily practice, and rebellion or mutiny in general did not mean that the rebelling crew wanted a complete overhaul of their working or living conditions, or were opposed to the system of salaried work or against the fact that the living conditions on ships and in the army were governed by a strict hierarchy. In the third category, that of the really major revolts that could create havoc within a whole slave colony, only one such revolt was successful, and this was on Haiti. Such a revolt could only have been successful at a time when the position of the planters was weakened by internal divisions, in this case during the period of the French Revolution. Elsewhere planters always managed to suppress the revolts, even though in some instances the situation seemed catastrophic, such as the major slave revolt in Dutch Berbice in 1763, where the rebels almost managed to take control of the colony.

Given the imbalance in the numbers of white and black people in Suriname, Berbice, Essequibo and Demerara, it is quite remarkable that resistance and revolts were so rare in the Dutch plantation colonies. In any event, the slave owners were evidently not deterred by such revolts, since they continued to pay ever higher prices for the slaves. The revolts by the slaves were an impetus for the owners to spend increasing amounts

of money on the slaves' accommodation, medical care and food, which they could well afford because new types of sugar cane made the production of sugar more efficient. It is certainly not the case that the slave revolts and the rising costs made slavery unprofitable. In tropical America, slave labour was so much cheaper than free labour that the negative consequences of resistance and revolts were simply tolerated. With the exception of Haiti, insurrection, resistance and escapes were never a reason to abolish slavery in the Caribbean. The question of why the slaves appeared so loyal to the slavery system – or at least why they did not constantly put up any sustained resistance – is as interesting as a historical phenomenon as the traditional fascination with the small group of resistance heroes.²¹

The first measure taken to reduce the social and economic contradictions between slaves and plantation directors was to set up a hierarchical professional structure on the plantations, whereby some slaves could acquire a better position than others: apparently, the old Roman principle of 'divide and rule' also worked in the Dutch plantation colonies! It was, for example, possible to progress from field worker (male or female) to artisan slave (generally male) or household slave (generally female). Some slaves even climbed as high as deputy overseer of a plantation. The positions in this hierarchy were partly hereditary, as was also the case in a free society. Every professional group had a different income in kind: a deputy overseer, for example, was allocated more clothes and was entitled to better accommodation than a field worker or an elderly female slave, who looked after children or tended cattle.

In the second place, the sharp contours of the highly regulated pattern of work on the plantations were to some extent blurred by giving the slaves the opportunity to spend some of their time on their own chosen activities. Outside harvest time the working day lasted no longer than from sunrise to about three or four in the afternoon, and the slaves were generally also free part of Saturday and the whole of Sunday. Many slaves used this free time to tend their own gardens, but they could easily choose some other activity.

Thirdly, it has already been said that most planters did not interfere in the cultural and religious life of their slaves. Unsurprisingly, given this and the origin of the large majority of the slaves, there were many African elements in the way men and women treated each other, how they processed joy and sorrow, and how they linked the visible world to the invisible world of gods and spirits. This and the fact that the slaves led a different life in their free time from that during working hours made it

²¹ That the slaves wanted, with their revolts, to put an end to slavery is denied in most contributions in Drescher and Emmer (eds.), *Who Abolished Slavery?*

possible to compensate for defeats in one world, in the form of punishments and conflicts with plantation overseers, with successes in the other world, such as respect for medicinal abilities, amorous successes or commercial skills in the buying and selling of 'slave goods' such as vegetables, clothes or utensils.

Naturally, there are many more arguments for explaining how it was possible that so many slaves could be constrained by so few free people. In effect, the Caribbean plantations were no more than one of the many hierarchical organisations where a small number of individuals in charge were able to control large groups of people. In this respect, the situation in Europe with naval staff and commercial fleets and in the armies and mines was not very different. There, too, there were mutinies and revolts, but these hierarchical organisations had less chance of lasting success if they were not economically viable and if the majority of the workers in subordinate positions were not provided with opportunities to compensate for the disadvantages of their position.

This characterisation of the plantation as an efficient economic and social unit has not yet had its influence on the historiography of the Caribbean in the same way as it has on the history of the plantations in the southern United States. The historiography of slavery in North America has undergone a radical change in the past fifty years. Initially it was assumed that the southern plantation economy was more backward than the economy in the north with its industries and farms staffed by free workers. The slave system was wasteful; the slaves were exploited and worked to the bone, and had a much lower standard of living than the free workers in the north. The family life of the slaves was non-existent, because from one day to the next the owners could sell men, women and children separately from one another to a different planter. Added to this, the poor and primitive housing of the slaves made normal family life almost impossible.

This traditional image of plantation slavery in the south of the United States has been almost completely overturned in the past half century by new research data. This book is not the place to address this reversal issue by issue, but a number of these new insights into the slave system in the southern United States are also important for the way in which the Caribbean plantations in the Dutch colonies should be assessed. It has become clear from research on the plantations in the south of the United States that the cotton plantations were well-managed, profitable businesses. Until the Civil War, the prices of slaves continued to rise, which indicated that the buyers in any event expected to make a profit from their workers. In addition, it was clear that the plantation economy in the south grew rapidly until the abolition of slavery, faster even than the economy in the north of the United States with its free workers. Compared with the

newly arrived migrants from Europe, the slaves in the south often had better living and working conditions. The slaves' living quarters might appear to us to be primitive, but they were in some cases more spacious than the areas in the barracks that were the lot of migrants. The working hours on the plantations were often shorter than those of migrants in the north, and the punishments meted out were also fewer in number. Finally, it can be said that the plantations in the south were so profitable that the planters were able to spend a relatively large sum on the food, clothing and medical care of the slaves. This does indicate that slaves received a relatively large proportion of the fruits of their labour, which is more than can be said for immigrants in the north.²²

It should be borne in mind in these reflections on slavery in the south of the United States that plantation slavery in the Caribbean and especially in the Dutch plantation colonies was very different in many respects. This difference was most apparent in the numbers of slaves involved. In the south the plantations scarcely had more than 10 slaves; in the Caribbean region this number was between 50 and 60, and plantations with more than 200 to 300 slaves were not exceptional. Also, nowhere in the south did the slaves constitute the majority of the population. In the Caribbean region, on the other hand, the slaves often represented 80 to 90 per cent of the population, certainly in the Dutch plantation colonies. The Caribbean slave population, more than that in the southern United States, was often dominated by slaves born in Africa, and particularly by men, who still felt like displaced persons for a long time after arriving. It has already been said that the Caribbean slaves sometimes suffered food shortages, in times of war, for example, and following such natural phenomena as tornadoes. In addition to this, the slave population in the West Indies was affected by sickness and death more than their counterparts in North America, who did not have to contend with the effects of life in the tropics. Resistance, rebellion and running away posed more of a threat to the plantation management in the Caribbean region than in the United States because the proportion of the non-enslaved was so small.

Despite all these differences, the changed image of the North American plantations also seems to have an important bearing on the image of the plantations in the West Indies. Although more research still needs to be done, the indications are that most Caribbean plantations appeared to remain profitable until the slave system came to an end. The working conditions for the slaves were often harder than for their North American counterparts, although this was not because the management policy was

²² The turning point in the historiography of slavery in the United States was Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*.

different in the Caribbean, but because harvesting, transporting and processing sugar cane in the tropics was simply much harder work than picking cotton in a sub-tropical climate. The high death rate among the Caribbean slaves could seem to indicate that their treatment, medical care, food situation and housing were much worse than those of slaves in the United States. To some extent this was certainly the case, but there were evidently also other factors at play. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the planters in the West Indies spent more money improving the living and working conditions of their slaves; even so, unlike in North America, the death rate among their slaves was never lower than the birth rate.

Did the Caribbean plantations have no advantages over the plantations in North America? Economically possibly not, but in a social and cultural sense they did have some benefits. No matter how strange it sounds, in the Caribbean area there was much less racial discrimination due to the simple fact that there were far fewer whites. There was a huge gulf between blacks and whites, but the group of blacks was so big and the group of whites so small and the plantation world so spread out that Caribbean slaves experienced discrimination far less than their North American counterparts. They were left much more to their own devices than slaves in North America; on the large plantations they lived largely in their own world. In a cultural sense they were – within certain limits – their own boss. In North America, the slave master concerned himself more closely with the daily goings on of his slaves, but this also meant that these slaves were forced to adapt more to white norms and values.

There are two sides to every coin, and the question is whether this separate world of slaves on the Caribbean plantations prepared them well enough for the world after the abolition of slavery. This question is generally not addressed in the relevant literature, as many authors hardly question the negative aspects of the Caribbean slave culture in order to show that their heart is with the slaves. This attitude has produced a multitude of studies proudly showing that slaves had their own food production, that they sold the produce on markets, and that they were able to work without supervision and handle money; some of them even amassed large sums of money. What is remarkable is that many ex-slaves did not manage to make a success of their small businesses after the abolition of slavery, which was probably largely due to the low levels of efficiency in small-scale farming in the Caribbean area.²³

²³ A classic example is a travel account by a journalist from the *New York Times* about his journeys in the British colonies in the West Indies after emancipation: Sewell, *The Ordeal of Free Labour*.

The explanation for this failure probably lies in the fact that, although the Caribbean slave world seemed to be autonomous, this was not actually the case. The slaves did not have to worry about their daily livelihood, and the majority of their food, as well as clothing and housing, was provided by the plantation managers. Although the slaves supplemented their food rations, this was not strictly necessary. They may well have engaged in small-scale farming, but this was not to provide for their daily needs, but to earn something extra by selling their produce on the slave markets. These Sunday gatherings were not markets where the slaves needed to do business for their physical survival, but rather an outlet for surplus produce. The markets were also a place of recreation; slaves would sometimes travel for several hours to visit the markets even when they had nothing to sell. The inference from this is that the plantations in the West Indies shielded the slaves from the market economy in all kinds of ways.²⁴

How Dutch Were the Plantation Colonies?

So far, the Dutch colonies in the West Indies have been discussed only in a general sense. Many of the characteristics of the West Indies plantations mentioned here were relevant to the Dutch plantation colonies, but the Dutch plantation sector also had a number of unique elements.

The first thing that stands out is how un-Dutch these plantations were. The majority of the planters were not from the Netherlands, but from neighbouring countries, such as Germany, France, Switzerland and especially England. In Suriname, more than a quarter of the ex-Europeans came from the Jewish communities in Western and Eastern Europe, and in Demerara the English accounted for as much as almost 80 per cent of the planters. All these diverse nationalities will not have added to the cohesion of the elite on the plantations, and there was no question of a united lobby group for the planters always representing their interests to the States-General in The Hague as was the case in the Houses of Parliament in London. After the credit crisis of 1773 there was another factor to take into consideration. Most of the planters went bankrupt because they had excessive mortgages. These bankruptcies meant that the mortgage lenders came into possession of the plantations and the slaves living there. The majority of the mortgages were provided by investment funds with dozens of investors, who, completely out of the blue, suddenly had to make decisions on the management of their property, sometimes based on no more than a hundredth share in one or more

²⁴ Eltis, 'Abolitionist Perceptions', 195–213.

plantations. If a new director or overseer had to be appointed, a new warehouse built or even something as simple as a lock repaired, dozens of part-owners in the Netherlands might have to decide on these issues in an Extraordinary Shareholders' Meeting. Needless to say, this was not a recipe for decisive action.²⁵

What was true for the planters was also true for the structure of the board. The islands, as well as Demerara and Essequibo, were in the hands of the WIC, while Suriname and Berbice were each governed by a society. In addition, the WIC at home was a top-heavy organisation with little authority and little or no financial leeway. This also applied to the Society of Suriname, which together with the planters had to dig deep into their pockets when in the 1770s the attacks on the plantations by runaway slaves became more and more disruptive and extra troops had to be brought in from Europe.²⁶

For the slaves, a divided class of planters and a divided colonial government may have been an incitement to rebel. However, this was not what happened. Of course, there were some rebellions on some plantations in the Dutch plantation area but – with the exception of Berbice – they never posed a serious threat to colonial society. The revolt in Berbice in 1763 again confirmed the image portrayed here of a weak management. When the revolt broke out there were roughly fifteen soldiers to defend the main stronghold of Fort Nassau. The revolt was suppressed only because the governor, who came close to being driven out of his colony, received support from Suriname, from indigenous groups and even from the English on Barbados.

Although it is difficult to calculate, the number of slave revolts in Suriname can be considered relatively limited, because the slaves resisted in another way: they left the plantations. The marronage escape hatch avoided serious conflicts with the planters and the managers of the colony. The numbers on their own seem to support this hypothesis: after the middle of the eighteenth century, about 10 per cent of the 50,000 slaves in Suriname were runaways (Maroons) living in the jungle. What is surprising is that the problem of runaway slaves was much less apparent in the nearby colonies of Berbice, Essequibo and Demerara. One explanation for this could be that the indigenous populations in these small colonies had better relations with the Europeans than in Suriname. This explains why slaves in these areas who ran off were often brought back by the local people, which did not happen in Suriname.

²⁵ Van de Voort, *De Westindische plantages van 1720 tot 1795*.

²⁶ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas*, 404.

How did that running away actually work in practice? First of all, it is important to know that there are two kinds of marronage: petit marronage and grand marronage. Petit marronage was where the slaves absented themselves from the plantation for a brief period of time, something they often did as a reaction against some punishment they regarded as unjustified. Slaves also stayed away from the plantations for one or more nights if they wanted to visit a family member or friend who lived further away, or if they had something to buy or sell on the market in Paramaribo. Officially, they first needed written permission from the plantation manager, but the system was very lax, and the slaves made good use of this. The plantation managers could do little to prevent this kind of absenteeism. If they meted out too harsh a punishment, the slaves would run away for good.

Grand marronage started in the same way as petit marronage. The slaves who decided to leave the plantation initially hid in the forest behind the plantation. Being close at hand, the runaways could stay in contact with their former community. Friends and acquaintances (generally males) would smuggle food to them, and sometimes the runaways managed to steal some farm tools so that they could fish, build a hut and gather food. Often the stay in the forest did not last long, and the runaways would hear that the overseer was prepared to relax the disputed punishment or that the argument with another slave had been resolved.

If a runaway slave was unwilling to return to the plantation, he – they were mainly males – would look for fellow runaways to put him in a stronger position in the struggle for daily existence in the jungle and to be better able to defend himself against the constant searches by the colonial army. The easiest option for a runaway slave was to join one of the groups of runaways who had already built up an independent existence in the jungle. In practice things were not so simple. Many of the already-existing maroon villages were hidden in areas of marshland, and access was known to only a few. In addition, a number of groups of Maroons had over the course of time concluded a treaty with the colonial government in which, in exchange for peace, they had promised, among other things, that they would no longer accept any new runaways into their group. This meant that new runaway villages were constantly being started, initially close to the plantations, so that the Maroons could obtain food and tools by exchanging or stealing them. In time, most of these groups moved further inland to avoid the constant searches by the planters and the army. Even so, most groups of Maroons continued to carry out raids on the plantations to get hold of tools, weapons, gunpowder – and women. These raids were generally not mild affairs. Sometimes the slaves of the plantation under attack joined forces with the Maroons and

all the whites were murdered, but at other times the plantation slaves sided with the director and refused to go off into the jungle with the raiders. Although life on the plantations was hard and highly regulated, it offered at least regular food, housing and some medical care. Life in the jungle may have been freer, but it remained uncertain and filled with many hardships.²⁷

Just as with petit marronage, there was little the planters could do to combat grand marronage. The colonial army was not prepared for long expeditions in the jungle, so initially the planters had to try to find their own runaway slaves. It was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that a number of important measures were taken to combat grand marronage. In about 1770, Governor J. Nepveu decided to construct a 'cordon path' 94 kilometres long, with a number of lookout posts, that was designed to protect a large plantation area against attacks by Maroons from the interior. At the same time, 1,100 men were sent as extra troops from the Republic to hunt the Maroons. The colonial government also bought a number of strong male slaves from the planters who were used as auxiliary soldiers, the *Redi Musu* (red caps). A special tax was levied to finance these extra measures, the proceeds of which were described in the colonial budget as a 'fund against the runaways'.

However, these measures against the runaways were not enough to solve the problem. The guerrilla tactics of the Maroons were too much for the armies from Europe. An extensive description of such a military campaign against the Maroons was published by the half-Dutch, half-Scottish ensign John Stedman in *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*. The book appeared in 1796, and was a huge success, playing an important role in the movement for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in England. However, it had little impact in the Netherlands, where at the end of the eighteenth century few people had any interest in freeing the slaves.²⁸

The Netherlands Antilles

As well as the plantation products from the Guyanas, the transit trade from the Netherlands Antilles ensured that Dutch merchant ships continued to ply the Atlantic Ocean. The Dutch Caribbean islands underwent a socio-economic development that exhibited more differences from than similarities to the history of the Dutch Guyanas. Just as in Suriname,

²⁷ Hoogbergen, *De Bosnegers zijn gekomen!*

²⁸ Stedman, *Narrative*. See also the recent biography by Roelof van Gelder, *Dichter in de jungle*.

in 1750 there were at least 4,000 whites living on the six islands. By the end of the eighteenth century this number had risen to around 8,000. It is true that the number of 'mulattoes' on Curaçao was almost twice the number of whites, but the most important difference in the composition of the population between the Netherlands Antilles and the Dutch Guyanas was the number of slaves. In the Guyanas there were about ten times as many slaves as free men, while the number of slaves on the Antilles was around the same as that of the Europeans and the free 'mulatto' group.²⁹

Why did the Netherlands Antilles develop so differently from the French, English and Dutch plantation areas in the Caribbean? In many regards the Antilles were more like the Spanish islands, where, before 1750, export agriculture and consequently the growth of the slave population were equally limited in size. On the Spanish islands, economic and financial limitations hampered the growth of plantation agriculture, while in the Netherlands Antilles physical factors, such as the soil conditions and the climate, were the limiting factors.

These natural constraints meant that the Antillean economy was divided. Alongside a market-oriented trade sector, an agricultural sector developed that was mainly focused on cultivating food for the workers' own use. It is striking that the farms in the Netherlands Antilles that were aimed at self-sufficiency were referred to as 'plantations', just like elsewhere in the region. The plantation colonies were also similar in that the farm labourers on the Antillean plantations were mostly slaves.

The size of the plantations, the nature of the work and the type of slavery were, however, vastly different from the plantation agriculture elsewhere in the Caribbean. There were generally three parts to an Antillean plantation. In the most fertile areas fruit trees were planted and vegetable gardens were sown. The less fertile areas were used to grow sorghum, beans and peanuts. The vast majority by far of the plantation land consisted of rocky, infertile ground, covered with low-growing brush, where cattle grazed. The buildings of the average plantation on the Netherlands Antilles were very simple. The most distinctive building was the planters' house – on Curaçao these were called *landhuis* or manor house – of which a number have been preserved to this day. None of these houses could be described as 'luxurious', and in terms of appearance they were no match for the country houses in the Republic and in Java. In addition to the plantation owner's house, a corn barn, a wagon barn and a 'punishment shed' were often present on the plantation, as well as some straw huts for the slaves. There were no large business premises, such as

²⁹ Van Welie, 'Patterns of Slave Trading', 215.

a sugar refinery or coffee warehouses, since most Antillean plantations produced only food. Attempts to grow corn, sugar cane and cotton for export were unsuccessful, at least on Curaçao, the biggest island. Sugar cane for export was cultivated only on a small scale on St Eustatius and St Maarten.³⁰

Curaçao and to a lesser extent St Eustatius became the hub of Dutch merchant shipping in the Caribbean area. The Dutch plantation colonies were too far off the beaten track, and the port of Willemstad was ideally located to transfer merchandise from the Netherlands to coasters and vice versa. This took time and manpower, but it seems to have been more than compensated for by the fact that direct sailing from the Netherlands to the non-Dutch areas in the West Indies was a very risky venture. It proved more efficient for the shipping companies in the Netherlands to exploit the expertise of the trading houses on Curaçao. A number of Dutch merchants who settled on the island in about 1670 had first gained experience in Cadiz, where the fleets from Hispanic America landed their cargoes. A third of the European population of the island were Sephardic Jews, who also had a good trade network in the Spanish colonies. The second synagogue in the Western Hemisphere after the one at Recife was built in Willemstad when many Sephardic Jews arrived on the island from the 'neglected Brazil', which again fell into Portuguese hands in 1654.

The Netherlands Antilles had a lively, direct trade with the Netherlands, aiming to supply the islands with products that were very popular in the surrounding colonies. As usual in long-distance trade, European and Asian textiles were an important part of the goods sent from the Republic to the island, with the rest being made up of alcohol, gunpowder, weapons and building materials. Most of the European textiles came not from the Netherlands, but from neighbouring European countries. The Dutch merchants supplied goods to anyone who was able and willing to pay for them, which meant that weapons from the Netherlands fell into the hands of the American Indians, who defied the authority of the Spanish. Weapons shipped via St Eustatius also reached the North Americans, who rebelled against their English colonial oppressors.³¹ The Dutch traders cared little about political and religious contradictions, which led a governor of nearby Jamaica to remark derisively that they had just one motto: 'Jesus Christ is good, but trade is better.'³²

³⁰ Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 131.

³¹ Klooster, 'Curaçao and the Caribbean Transit Trade', 211–13.

³² Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, 369.

The Antilles had very limited means of paying for these imports with their own export products, since hardly any export crops were produced there. The main export product from the Antilles was salt, which was mined on Bonaire and St Maarten. However, the deficit in trade between the Netherlands and the Antilles was compensated for by the proceeds from the transit trade between Curaçao and the ports on the coasts of Venezuela and Central America (Portobello, Veracruz, Coro and Cartagena), and between St Eustatius and the French and Spanish Antilles.

The numerous international conflicts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the impetus for many nations to engage in privateering. This had a disastrous effect on the development of trade, because the insurance premiums for vessels sailing to the West Indies rose in times of war to astronomical levels. Unlike at the start of the seventeenth century, the Republic in the eighteenth century had much more to lose than to win from privateering. There was no money for the proper defence of the Dutch merchant vessels. Instead, the Netherlands had to rely on its status as a neutral power – a strategy that by no means always provided protection against English, French and Spanish privateers.

The Netherlands Antilles owed the growth in its economy to other reasons than those which applied to those regions that had a large agricultural and plantation sector. The Atlantic slave trade quadrupled in size in the eighteenth century, which brought with it a proportional increase in the trade in goods. There was an old saying that the sale of the slaves from one slave ship provided sufficient funds to fill three or four cargo vessels with sugar and coffee. The trade in goods from and via the Netherlands Antilles also increased by around 300 per cent, but without the import of African slaves acting as the driving force. The Netherlands Antilles had hardly any export plantations, and saw their role as a distributor of slaves from Africa decline sharply during the course of the eighteenth century. For Curaçao, the growth in trade was mainly due to the contacts with the nearby Venezuelan regions, and for St Eustatius it was the dramatic growth in the trade with the French islands in times of war, while for the Windward and Leeward Islands trade with British North America remained more or less constant. And, just as in Suriname, the situation changed dramatically after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4): the number of ships entering the ports of the Netherlands Antilles fell sharply, as did the number of ships flying the Dutch flag.³³ The Dutch merchant marine had run out of steam, while the other powers managed to climb out of the economic dip.

³³ Klooster 'Curaçao and the Caribbean Transit Trade', 206.

What is known about the transit trade to and from the Netherlands Antilles? This was largely determined by the neutral position of the Republic during the numerous wars between England on the one hand and Spain and France on the other. In such wars it was almost impossible for the Spanish and French merchant navies to fulfil their normal duties. As a result, there was a surplus of export products in the Spanish and French colonies in and around the Gulf of Mexico and a shortage of imported goods from Europe, including food products. This boosted the transit trade via St Eustatius, especially after the end of the Seven Years' War (1756–63). The island was nicknamed Golden Rock, and the English saw with regret how the North American insurgents were supplied with all kinds of goods and weapons via the Dutch island. London protested strongly when in 1776 the governor of St Eustatius was the first to greet an American merchant vessel with a gun salute. The English were of the opinion that the Republic had infringed its neutrality; they declared war on the Netherlands and in 1781 destroyed the Golden Rock. After the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, St Eustatius was returned to the Netherlands, and the island resumed its role as a transit port, although, like Curaçao, it never again flourished.³⁴

Only scant information is available on the volume of trade. There are indications that in a number of peak years during the eighteenth century there were 1,000 to 1,500 ships calling at the port of Curaçao and the same number at St Eustatius. However, the origin of these ships is difficult to determine, because the registers of incoming ships mention only the last port of call and not the home port. Nor is there any overview of the quantities shipped. The most important export products from the Caribbean region were salt, cocoa, sugar, skins, indigo, brazilwood, rum, coffee and tobacco. For Curaçao, the transit of cocoa and skins from Hispanic America was probably the most important, while the transit through St Eustatius consisted mainly of sugar, originating from the French islands. Sails, linen, pottery, hardware, fat, soap, alcoholic beverages and horses from Europe and North America were transported via the Netherlands Antilles.³⁵

The well-preserved archives of the Middelburg Commercial Company (MCC) give some idea of how the transit trade with Hispanic America operated. The MCC was founded in 1720, and by 1750 it had already undertaken eighty-nine voyages to the West Indies. The correspondence with the representatives of the shipping company in the West gives a good impression of the trading practices in the region. It is striking that the

³⁴ Barka, 'Citizens of St. Eustatius, 1781', 221–38.

³⁵ Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy*, 91–110.

value of the cargo that the ships from the MCC took to the West was very high, sometimes more than 100,000 guilders, which was three times the value of the average exchange cargo with which the same shipping company sent its ships to Africa. The explanation for these high amounts is not difficult to find. The Netherlands wanted to take home not only consumer goods, but also precious metals in the form of gold dust and gold coins (*realen* or *pesos of eight*). Until 1750, in the auctions in Middelburg three-quarters of the proceeds of the shipments brought back by the MCC came from the sale of products originating from Hispanic America.

It was not until after 1750 that the sale of sugar from the Dutch plantation colonies dominated the Middelburg auctions. The correspondence between the representatives of the Middelburg shipping company and the directors shows that the trade in products in the West Indies could change direction very rapidly. If the vessels of the Spanish coast-guard were very active, the MCC ships had to sail to French Saint-Domingue, where the economy was flourishing as never before. The influence of wars was also felt immediately. An MCC correspondent wrote, for example, that in 1745 during the War of the Austrian Succession only one French ship had docked in Guadeloupe, compared with 168 from St Eustatius. The sugar exports to the Republic speak for themselves. Between 1770 and 1790, 5 to 10 per cent of the sugar imported into the Republic came from St Eustatius; in 1779 it was as much as 35 per cent and in 1780 this figure had even risen to 62 per cent. These numbers indicate that the expansion of the French sugar industry had outgrown the capabilities of the French transport and trading sector, while in times of war hardly any French vessels dared to ply the Atlantic Ocean. St Eustatius benefited greatly from this situation, albeit in an irregular way.³⁶

The trade between the Spanish mainland and Curaçao was no less turbulent. Many MCC correspondents pointed out that the price of goods originating from the surrounding Spanish colonies was rather high on the island, while goods imported from Europe were selling at relatively low prices. With this situation in mind, the MCC directors advised their captains to sail their ships directly to the Hispanic American ports and to avoid Curaçao. There were times when the captains from Middelburg had to wait more than fourteen months on Curaçao for a return load. Amsterdam shippers, on the other hand, only traded via Curaçao.

³⁶ Klooster, *Illicit Riches*, 176.

The sugar exports from Curaçao were not very significant; they represented less than 1 per cent of all the sugar that was imported into the Republic between 1770 and 1790. Unfortunately, no data are available about the extensive transit trade in cocoa from the coastal stretch of Venezuela. There are, however, indications that the illegal export of cocoa from Venezuela to the Netherlands in any event amounted to 10 per cent of the export of cocoa to Spain. The founding of the Caracas Company (1728–84) was aimed at exporting the whole of the cocoa harvest from Venezuela to Spain, but the Company was apparently not very successful in preventing smuggling via Curaçao.³⁷ It was not until after the middle of the eighteenth century that the Spanish coast-guard vessels became more effective at combatting the illegal shipping from and to the island.

Slave Trade and Slavery on the Antilles

If there is one issue from the history of the Netherlands Antilles that has been studied at length, it has to be the trade in slaves. Of the six Dutch islands, Curaçao and St Eustatius were most important for the transit trade in slaves, though this role diminished during the course of the eighteenth century. Before 1675 the Dutch slave ships brought more than half of the slaves they transported to the Netherlands Antilles, while in the second half of the eighteenth century this was only 13 per cent. The absolute figures also show that the growth of the international and the Dutch slave trades in the eighteenth century had no effect on the Netherlands Antilles. Before 1675, about 1,500 slaves came to the Netherlands Antilles every year, between 1675 and 1730 about 1,000 per year and after 1730 about 500 per year.³⁸ The last slave ships to sail from Africa arrived at Curaçao in 1775. This raises the question of why the Antilles were not successful in maintaining their transit role in the slave trade, which had been so important in the period before 1675.

A key reason why Curaçao played such an important role in the transport of slaves to Hispanic America was the *asiento*. This was a contract that the Spanish government signed with one or more traders (*asentistas*) for the supply of slaves to Hispanic America. Spain did not take part in the slave trade and had no permanent support bases on the coast of West Africa because at the time of the division of the world outside Europe under the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1496 the Pope gave West Africa and the biggest part of Asia in loan to Portugal, and Spain gained the New World

³⁷ Klooster, *Illicit Riches*, 207–23.

³⁸ Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 45, 48.

and the Philippines, with the exception of Brazil. Hispanic America had to rely on foreign merchants, mainly Italians and Portuguese, particularly for the supply of slaves. No slave contracts were agreed between the Spanish and Portuguese from 1640 to 1662 because in 1640 Portugal had separated from the Spanish crown.

The demand for slaves in Hispanic America was increasing, however, as a result of which the illegal slave trade flourished; part of this trade went via Curaçao. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the Dutch trade in slaves via Curaçao continued to play an important role once *asientos* were issued again, whereby the WIC became the subcontractor of the *asiento* holder, the *asentista*. Between 1684 and 1688, Amsterdam merchant Balthasar Coymans held the *asiento* in spite of the fact that he lived in a 'heretical' country, a country that only twenty-five years previously had become legally independent from Spain. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), the *asiento* came into French and later English hands, and the English were able to supply the agreed numbers of slaves without any need for a Dutch subcontractor. This change largely explains the decline in the slave trade via Curaçao.

The meteoric growth of the slave trade to the English and French plantation areas in the eighteenth century was completely due to the slave shipping companies from these countries themselves. The Netherlands Antilles played an ever smaller role in the flow of slaves across the Atlantic Ocean. Of course, it was still possible to sell slaves illegally to the nearby Spanish areas, but no sugar or coffee was cultivated there, so there was not such an explosive increase in the demand for slaves as in the French and English plantation colonies. For the latter regions, St Eustatius played a modest role as transit port. A short-lived exception to this was the period from 1719 to 1727 when over 6,000 slaves more than the normal number on St Eustatius changed owner. It is not clear what caused this sudden spike.

There is a second explanation for the diminishing share of the Netherlands Antilles in the Atlantic slave trade, namely the costs in the event that the slaves had to remain for an extended period on Curaçao and St Eustatius. Time and again it proved almost impossible to effectively coordinate the different elements in the transit trade in slaves. Sometimes many months could pass between the arrival of slaves from Africa and their despatch to the buyers, the slaves being paid for and finding cargoes for the return trip to Europe. To save time, after 1675 transit ports were used only in exceptional cases in the Atlantic slave trade, so that no valuable time was lost between the arrival of the slaves in the Caribbean area and their sale to the planters. There are indications

in the literature that the transit trade in slaves had a major advantage over direct sale to the planters. It has been argued that the shipping companies were often forced to supply on credit, while cash was the order of day in the case of transit trade. Recent research has shown, however, that the WIC sometimes had to wait years for payment for the sale of slaves on Curaçao. Nonetheless, the Company could not permit itself to delay the transfer of slaves in reprisal against delayed payments; the island was simply not able to produce enough food for the stranded slaves in the short term.³⁹

Not all the slaves were transported via the Netherlands Antilles to other destinations; a small proportion stayed on the islands. Even so, a slave society never developed on the Antilles as it did in the French, English and Dutch plantation colonies. This was largely because the internal economy of the Netherlands Antilles had only limited connections with the world market. The absence of large plantations meant that the composition of the population of the islands was relatively differentiated. On the Antilles less than a third of the population were slaves. The remainder were free colonists or freed slaves and their descendants. A further point is that, unlike on some plantations elsewhere in the Caribbean, there were no large concentrations of slaves, since more than 80 per cent of the slave owners owned fewer than ten slaves. This suggests that the social relations between master and slave on Curaçao were not as anonymous as in areas where the plantations were much larger. Unlike in the Dutch plantation colonies, many of the slave owners came from European families who had lived on the Antilles for generations, while the plantation owners had in many cases lived only for a short while in Suriname and the neighbouring colonies, intending to make their fortune and then return to Europe. Moreover, for many slave owners on the Antilles the main source of income was not the plantation, but trade. Consequently, there was no question of a continuous hard struggle for higher plantation profits on the Netherlands Antilles.

All these factors seem to indicate that the slave regime on the Antilles was more humane than that in the plantation colonies. This image is reinforced by the fact that many Antillean slave owners could not afford to feed and house unproductive slaves, and consequently more slaves were freed on the Antilles than in Suriname, for example. Antillean slavery was described by contemporaries as relatively mild, and modern studies confirm this image. Nonetheless, the position of the slaves at the lower end of Antillean society was far from idyllic. The relatively poor agriculture sector on the Antilles meant that at times slaves suffered real famine.

³⁹ Jordaán, 'The Curaçao Slave Market', 219–58.

The slaves in the plantation colonies received better food, because they could not perform the hard work needed on the plantations unless they were well enough fed. Slave labour on the Netherlands Antilles may have been less arduous than on the coffee and sugar plantations elsewhere in the Caribbean region, but the income of the slaves – in kind – was also lower.

Much more than in the plantation colonies, the slaves on the Netherlands Antilles had to earn their own income independently. The different jobs they did are indicated on a list of runaway slaves (in this case it is probably more appropriate to talk of slaves sailing away). Of the 500 male runaways between 1729 and 1775, 25.8 per cent were field workers, 16.4 per cent were sailors, 9.4 per cent were woodworkers, 6.4 per cent were fishermen and 6 per cent were shoemakers. Of the eighty-five women slaves who escaped, 17.6 per cent were washerwomen, 14.1 per cent were seamstresses, 11.8 per cent were knitters, 10.6 per cent were street sellers and 9.6 per cent were home helps. This variety of professions shows that on the Netherlands Antilles there was no single economic sector where investments in slaves clearly generated the highest income, and that the transport of slaves had almost come to an end in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century many more of the slaves living permanently on Curaçao would have been occupied in looking after their peers who were on the island temporarily.

Further evidence of the relatively low yield of slave labour in the Netherlands Antilles and of the limited financial resources of the owners can be found in the large number of releases in the eighteenth century, especially of slaves who were old or sick. It was the most common thing in the world in the plantation colonies to look after such slaves until the end of their days, but this was not possible for many slave owners on the Antilles. In 1774, when the number of plantation slaves in Suriname reached its peak at over 56,000, the number of slaves released was about 1,500, which was less than 3 per cent of the total number. On Curaçao, the number of slaves in 1789 was almost 13,000 and the number of released slaves was over 3,700, amounting to 28 per cent of the total number.⁴⁰

Finally, it should be noted that the Netherlands Antilles enjoyed an exceptional position in the Caribbean, not only from a socio-economic point of view, but also from a demographic perspective. Although no precise data are known, it is likely that both black and white people on the Dutch islands were able to increase their numbers by autonomous growth without constant immigration, which was an exception in the Caribbean. The exact causes of this demographic difference are not

⁴⁰ Van Welie, 'Patterns of Slave Trading and Slavery', 215, 216, 225, 226.

known. Probably the mortality figures on the Netherlands Antilles were relatively low because the diminishing slave traffic meant that links with Africa had weakened. The less the amount of contact with Africa, the less the Antillean population was exposed to imported infectious diseases from the tropics, and the easier it was to build up immunity against the diseases prevalent in the Caribbean.

This sounds positive, but the drawback was that, without plantation agriculture and with no export production, the Antilles could only provide most of the inhabitants with a very meagre existence. In this respect, the economy of the Netherlands Antilles showed the limitations of the Caribbean economy much earlier than the large plantation areas. In the period between 1600 and 1800, the latter areas proved to have an exceptionally flourishing period due to their sugar and coffee exports, which masked the limited economic opportunities of these areas if the exports declined.

5 New Holland and New Netherland

The only two Dutch settlement colonies in the New World were not a success, particularly in terms of their financial performance. New Netherland in North America and New Holland in Brazil were established to provide income and profit not only for the WIC but also for the Netherlands economy as a whole. However, nothing came of this. As might be expected, a number of merchants, administrators and soldiers in these colonies did make a profit and enjoyed a good income, which would not have been generated without the two colonies, but these amounts were outweighed by the enormous losses faced by the WIC, the States-General and a number of individual traders and settlers. The defence and loss of the colonies cost these parties dearly.

In demographic terms, these two settlement colonies performed only modestly because very few candidates could be found in the Netherlands who were prepared to settle in Brazil or North America as permanent colonists. The figures are very telling. Towards the end of the Netherlands rule in New Netherland, the colony may well have had almost 10,000 colonists, but more than 3,000 of them were English and had lived there for only a few years. Of the remaining 7,000, a large proportion were not from the Republic but from the neighbouring European countries. These figures show that the migration of Dutch people to North America during the fifty-year existence of New Netherland was less than 100 a year. This also roughly matches the extent of Dutch migration to Brazil. After the loss of these colonies, there was no possibility of large-scale colonisation of any part of the New World following the example of Spain, Portugal or England because the remaining Dutch possessions were all in the tropics, where colonisation was impossible due to the high mortality rate among Europeans.

The fact that some 200 Dutch settlers crossed the Atlantic Ocean to all destinations in the New World every year is far from impressive for a population of about 2 million. This number fades into insignificance compared with the VOC's need for staff, which in the heyday of the Company was in the region of 4,000 men every year. This number almost doubles if we include the annual need for staff of the WIC's shipping

company and the private shippers in the Atlantic area. This choice for the sea with its myriad dangers and the tropics with its many fatal diseases now seems unimaginable given that in North America the colonists could count on better living conditions than at home. There were fewer contagious diseases in New Netherland than in the Republic, although this was only because the colonists never lived in close proximity to one another, unlike in parts of the Netherlands, while their resistance to diseases was greater because the colonists in North America were able to feed themselves better than at home, probably with the exception of the difficult early years of the colony.

There is still something incomprehensible about the fact that large groups of poor, young, unmarried men took the decision to make long, dangerous sea journeys rather than choosing to live as settlers in an environment with a relatively high chance of survival. This leads one to the conclusion that it was the plentiful supply of cheap labour that made it possible for Dutch entrepreneurs to develop a relatively broad span of activities in the most deadly niche of European expansion: buying, selling and transporting goods and slaves in the tropics and between Europe and the tropics. Dutch expansion took place without any long-term colonisation, consequently little remained of all their sizeable Dutch activities overseas other than a few ruined forts. In contrast, the English, Portuguese, Spanish and even the French shaped the language and customs of a part of the current population of South and North America, the effects of which can be seen even in the present day.

A final point to mention is that the difference between Dutch expansion in the Atlantic area and that of the other European countries cannot be attributed to local conditions or the indigenous population. In Brazil, the local groups played a role in the balance of power between the Dutch and Portuguese, but their numbers were too small to make a real difference. In North America, too, the indigenous population was not in a position of power. Just like the English and French colonists, the immigrants in the Dutch colony were in part dependent on the food supplies from the American Indians, and those settlers who lived on the edge of the colony had to be constantly aware that the American Indians might steal from them or that there would be arguments about the theft of one another's cattle or the damage to each other's crops. Nonetheless, the indigenous peoples posed no threat at all for the continued existence of the colony.

New Holland

Dutch expansion in the Atlantic region came to a standstill during the twelve years of the Truce (1609–21), but after this period it was

vigorously pursued. This time the Dutch activities were better coordinated and were no longer left to the private initiatives of a number of merchants and investors. The plan was to use the expansion of the Dutch presence in the Atlantic region to end the war with Spain to the benefit of the Republic. The arch enemy used the fabulous wealth of the New World to finance their aggressive military policies in Europe. If this flow of riches were to dry up, it would be followed rapidly by the defeat of Spain in Europe. Furthermore, it would be very welcome if some of the riches from the New World were to find their way to the Netherlands.

To achieve this the Dutch would have had to take control of the Spanish gold and silver mines in Mexico, Peru and Bolivia or the sugar-producing areas in the north-east of Portuguese Brazil. However, the mining regions were impossible to conquer. They were a long way from the coast and were well protected by the Spanish colonial troops. If the Republic wanted to gain ownership of the gold and silver from these mines while the precious metals were being transported to Europe, hijacking had the greatest chance of success. Over the course of the years, hijacking the richly laden Spanish ships had generated considerable income. However, the Spanish had learned well – albeit the hard way – and arranged for their vessels to cross the Atlantic Ocean in two strongly protected convoys a year. This made things more difficult for the Dutch.

An easier option for the Dutch was to cut off the flow of sugar from Portuguese Brazil, as the Portuguese colony was far less well protected by Madrid than the Spanish colonies. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the Dutch were already actively involved in the direct shipping to Brazil, even though most of the ships en route there discharged and collected their cargo in ports in Portugal, North Africa and the Atlantic islands. However, it is unclear how much of the sugar produced was transported to Europe on Dutch vessels. As an example, the Spanish embargoes imposed by Philip II on Dutch ships at that time do not seem to have encouraged Dutch shipping to Brazil, although for many Dutch skippers their shipping documents indicated a German Hanseatic city as their home port. Besides this, the relatively small European population of the colony – around 40,000 in 1600 – had only a limited need for European products. There is little evidence that the Dutch were particularly welcome in Brazil in spite of the fact that they wanted to invest not only in the import and export trade but also in the rapidly emerging, capital-intensive sugar sector. Portuguese merchants became increasingly wealthy in the sixteenth century and were able to provide the Spanish king with sizeable credit facilities, which could be taken as an indication that Portugal had no need for foreign capital. Even so, the Portuguese clearly

preferred to loan their money to a state and not to the owners of sugar mills and sugar cane plantations.

It is quite possible that a number of studies have exaggerated the Dutch role in the trade with Brazil before 1621, when the Twelve-Year Truce ended. This came about because Dutch freighters played an important role in the distribution of Brazilian sugar within Europe. The Portuguese merchants were unable to compete within Europe, which is why Dutch merchants plied their trade back and forth to Portuguese ports, transporting either sugar or salt. During the Truce, the Dutch vessels probably transported more than half the annual sugar harvest to Amsterdam for further refining, either directly or via or from Lisbon. The interests of this refinery sector in the Netherlands were an argument to attack Brazil after the ending of the Truce. The advocates of a Dutch attack on Brazil assumed that the Portuguese would not be overly enthusiastic about defending their colony, because after 1580 they felt browbeaten by the Spanish. And Spain would not leap to the support of the Portuguese because during the period of the Dual Monarchy between 1580 and 1640 the Iberian states each continued to rule their own colonies and in practice there was little mutual help and support.¹

The plans for founding a South American empire became firmer after 1621, when the WIC was established. The local chambers of the Company initially operated more or less separately from one another, with each of the chambers concentrating on a specific part of the West African coast: the Amsterdam chamber focused on the settlement in North America, the Zeeland chamber on the settlements on the Wild Coast and the Northern District chamber (Hoorn and Enkhuizen) on the salt route to the Caribbean area. All the chambers operated privateers, initially the most lucrative activity in the Atlantic area. The attack on Portuguese Brazil was the first major joint project of all the chambers acting together. Moreover, it would be an illusion to think that all the Dutch merchant shipping in the Atlantic Ocean after the foundation of the WIC fell under the auspices of the Company. The illegal slave smuggling outside the Company to West Africa and the Caribbean region continued unabated. There is no reason to believe that the shippers, who had evaded the Spanish and Portuguese monopoly would suddenly respect the monopoly of the WIC after 1621. Unlike the shipping to Asia, the merchant shipping in the Atlantic region was an extension of the shipping within Europe. This meant that the WIC monopoly was evaded more or less from the start and over time became almost a hollow vessel.

¹ Ebert, 'Dutch Trade with Brazil', 49–76; Ebert, *Between Empires*.

Even so, the period between 1625 and 1640 is exceptional, because it was at this time that the grip of the WIC on the activities in the Atlantic was at its peak. No other country had such a powerful instrument to embark on major projects. The conquest and loss of Netherlands Brazil, however, showed that large projects in the Atlantic region were very costly, but never resulted in any dramatic power shifts in the Atlantic region. Small steps were much more effective here. For example, France and England were not able to carry out a large-scale attack on the Spanish–Portuguese Atlantic Empire, and so they conquered a number of weak or unprotected areas in the Caribbean and on the east coast of North America. This was more effective than a large and costly operation. In the eighteenth century, too, there were no major power shifts, at most a small number of adjustments, such as changes in ownership of a number of Caribbean islands and forts on the West Coast of Africa. One exception to this was the English conquest of French Canada in the eighteenth century and, just as with the Portuguese in Netherlands Brazil, the incorporation of colonists with a different language, culture and religion in the English Atlantic Empire proved much more difficult than anticipated. England did manage this because at the end of the eighteenth century it was an established power in North America and was able to finance a large colonial army, while the Netherlands for more than a century before this still had no experience at all with governing, administering and defending large colonies.

The difficulties began immediately after the first attack on Portuguese Brazil in 1624. The Dutch systematically underestimated the opposition and acts of sabotage by the local population. In total, this Portuguese colony had some 100,000 inhabitants, of whom 45 per cent came originally from Europe and 40 per cent from Africa, with just 15 per cent being indigenous. The number of Africans in particular increased by an average of 4,000 each year during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. This did not mean, however, that the Dutch were able to drive a wedge between the three ethnic groups in the colony. Only a small proportion of the indigenous Brazilians turned out to be interested in collaboration with the new invaders, but even then the Dutch colonial administration could not really trust them. The Dutch attack on Bahia in May 1624 may well have resulted in the conquest of a part of this sugar-exporting *capitania*, but in April 1625 the conquered region was lost again as a result of what proved to be a fatal combination for the Dutch: attacks by the Portuguese colonists from the hinterland and an attack from the sea by the Portuguese navy. Moreover, the Dutch did not succeed in forging a close relationship with the important rulers in Angola on the other side of the Ocean, which was essential if the flow of slaves to Brazil was

to continue. All these failures should have been a sign for the Dutch that the Portuguese empire was a much stronger entity than the directors of the WIC had originally imagined. In particular, the alliance between planters, the Roman Catholic church and indigenous support troops proved to be an effective barrier against invaders.

After the loss of Bahia, the WIC continued its lucrative privateering, and in 1628 this brought hitherto unknown success: a fleet captained by Piet Heyn managed to gain possession of the whole of one of the six-monthly convoys from Hispanic America. This was something the English and French had never managed to do. The sale of this 'silver fleet' generated so much money that the directors of the WIC decided to make another attempt to gain control of part of Portuguese Brazil. This brought success in 1630 with the capture of Recife and the hinterland of the captaincy of Pernambuco. In the subsequent years the Dutch troops conquered a larger area, but there was never any real peace. There was always the possibility that the Portuguese population in the Dutch region would rebel, in combination with attacks from that part of Brazil that remained in Portuguese hands. The population of their new colony comprised Portuguese settlers, African slaves and indigenous Brazilians, and the Dutch were powerless to change this. The most obvious strategy was to make allies of the Brazilians, because it proved difficult from the outset to persuade the remaining Portuguese population and their slaves to reconcile themselves to Dutch rule.²

Indigenous Population

Some 9,000 indigenous Brazilians lived in the area conquered by the Dutch. Before 1492, the whole of Brazil probably had as many as 3 million indigenous people. It is worth bearing in mind that every figure should be taken with a pinch of salt because there are also estimates varying from 1.1 to 5.1 million. It is not clear how intensively the indigenous Brazilians engaged in hunting, cattle farming and agriculture. The fact that so many different languages were spoken also indicates that the population was very fragmented. Just as in North America, particular areas became exhausted for agriculture as well as for hunting, and as a result the indigenous groups were constantly migrating; just as in the Dutch colony in North America, the indigenous communities had no more than between 400 and 800 people. There were large differences in the economy of daily life among the indigenous groups: some groups were hunter-gatherers, while others had complex supply systems, using the

² Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 13–54.

slash and burn technique to cultivate and fertilise the land, to cover fields against dehydration, and to cultivate poisonous plants for hunting and fishing. In spite of all these different survival strategies, the indigenous Brazilians in Brazil seem to have come up against an ecological barrier because population growth was limited by infanticide, warfare and cannibalism. These data make it clear that Brazil must have been much less densely populated at the time of Columbus than pre-Columbian Mexico and Peru.

Just as in Hispanic America, European and African diseases were the biggest causes of demographic decline. As early as 1561–4, an epidemic of smallpox and dysentery led to the death of between a third and half of the indigenous populations that had come into direct or indirect contact with the Portuguese colonists and their African slaves. But, unlike in Hispanic America, this did not lead to the population of indigenous Brazilians stabilising or achieving new growth. There were various reasons for this. In Hispanic America they were already incorporated into Spanish colonial society as early as the first century after the conquest, while for the indigenous peoples in Brazil this was to be a process that took centuries. The difference was partly the consequence of the geographical conditions: the jungle in Brazil was much less accessible than the mountains and plains in the area colonised by the Spanish. Even to the present day there are probably still small indigenous communities in the Amazon area that have never had contact with outsiders.

The reason why some indigenous groups in Brazil resisted the infiltrators from Europe was related to their religion. Unlike the Mayas or the Aztecs, the indigenous Brazilians had no organised religion and in the event of mass sickness or death did not feel forsaken by their gods. The Europeans were not gods, nor were they sent by the gods; they were simply invaders like so many other groups before them. And with invaders, you have to either resist them or make an alliance with them so you can divert any potential damage away from yourself and towards other groups. The Spanish government, the Pope and the many religious orders in Hispanic America quickly saw it as their duty to protect the indigenous subjects against the colonists, but the colonial administration of Portuguese Brazil did not react in the same way. This administration did not resist the enslavement of indigenous peoples, arguing that they themselves were doing the same to each other. Unlike in Hispanic America, the colonists and the indigenous Brazilians were not divided into different *repúblicas* with separate laws and administration. Indigenous groups were brought together in *aldeias*, villages like the *reducciones de Indios* (Indian reservations) in Hispanic America, so that

they could be colonised by Portuguese administrators, and by Portuguese clerics such as the Jesuits, Franciscans, Carmelites and Capuchins.³

Portuguese

In sharp contrast to the indigenous population, the Portuguese colonists increased rapidly in numbers, including by intermarrying with the indigenous Brazilians. In around 1585 the white population was estimated at 30,000, the number of African slaves at 20,000 and the number of indigenous inhabitants, including those of mixed blood, at 50,000. The number of colonists and in particular the number of slaves increased rapidly in the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Among the colonists, besides Portuguese, there were also inhabitants of the North and South Netherlands, France, Italy and the German Empire.⁴

Strangely enough, the presence of the Portuguese colonists and their indigenous and African slaves made Brazil more attractive to the Dutch. Until the conquest of Brazil, the exasperatingly slow growth in the number of settlers in North America seemed to indicate that there were not many migrants in the Republic to replace the Portuguese in Brazil. At the height of the struggle with Portugal, the number of militia paid for by the WIC may well have been almost 10,000, but only a small proportion of them remained in the colony – no more than 600 or so in total. The number of Dutch colonists in Netherlands Brazil never amounted to more than about 3,000, far fewer than the more than 20,000 Portuguese who stayed in the area conquered by the Dutch. It should be borne in mind that, as usual, the word ‘Dutch’ was used as a collective name for a mixture of inhabitants of the Low Countries and Germans, Poles, Scandinavians, etc. These numbers indicate that throughout the whole period of Dutch rule the Portuguese comprised the vast majority of the population. In time this proved to be the colony’s Achilles heel. The Portuguese were never really loyal subjects, and when they rebelled, the Dutch colonial administration was not able to resist the combined Portuguese enemy within and outside the colony.

At the time of the Dutch conquest, Brazil was an established colony with a well-developed social structure. The top echelon of society was made up of the owners of the sugar mills. Some members of this elite originated from the wealthy families in Portugal, but probably an even larger part had used their migration to Brazil and the sale of a mill to climb the social ladder by marrying a daughter of the elite born in the colony.⁵

³ Stols, *Brazilië*, 35–40. ⁴ Stols, *Brazilië*, 40; Schulten, *Nederlandse expansie*, 21.

⁵ Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, 264–94.

Further, not all *senhores de engenho* originated from Portugal or the Portuguese Atlantic islands and Angola. There were also a number of Italians, Spanish and Flemish among the first group of owners of these mills. Just as later in the Caribbean area, it was possible to borrow money using the mills or agricultural land as collateral. The elite in Portuguese Brazil included many *christãos-novos*, Jews who had converted to Christianity, who were increasingly persecuted in Portugal as a result of the Inquisition. The Inquisition also gained influence in Portuguese Brazil, which explains why some of the Portuguese colonial elite preferred to remain in the area conquered by the heretical Dutch and did not escape to that part of the colony that was still in Portuguese hands.

In addition to the owners of the sugar mills, there were also many sugar cane growers among the Portuguese settlers. Some of them owned a mill, but most of these *lavradores de cana*, the sugar cane farmers, merely owned or leased agricultural land and sold the cane that was grown on it to the owner of the mill. Some of these sugar cane farmers had rented the land from the owner of the sugar mill and others were independent entrepreneurs who owned the land themselves. The sugar cane farmers usually had no more than ten to twelve slaves to work in the cane fields, while the staff of a sugar mill could number as many as eighty men. Most of the mill workers were slaves, but some were free craftsmen such as carpenters, cartwrights and blacksmiths, who were employed by the owner.

Besides the *lavradores de cana*, Portuguese Brazil also had *lavradores de roca* and *lavradores de fuma*. Cultivating tobacco could be very lucrative, making the growers wealthy men, but the producers of sugar cane and the owners of the sugar mills were generally more highly regarded socially. Food agriculture included the production of manioc and corn, and in this sector, too, the slaves did the fieldwork. Besides mills, cane fields and fields of food crops, there were also villages and towns in Portuguese Brazil where free settlers lived – shopkeepers, craftsmen and soldiers – who wanted to stay in Brazil at the end of their contract, and priests who led the church mass and tended the sick.⁶

Slaves

Before the arrival of the Dutch, the fastest growing population group in Portuguese Brazil was the Africans. The numbers speak for themselves. Between 1550 and 1575, 58,000 slaves were imported; between 1575 and 1600 there were 120,000 and between 1600 and 1625 168,000. It is

⁶ Van den Boogaart, 'De Nederlandse expansie', 115–27.

unclear how many of these slaves remained in Portuguese Brazil. Some of them must have been sold on to Hispanic America.

The shift from indigenous to African slavery in Brazil followed a similar pattern to elsewhere in the New World. In the eyes of the Europeans, the indigenous Brazilians were not such good workers as the Africans, not only because they had no resistance against the diseases imported from Europe and Africa, but also because they had few skills that could be put to good use in export agriculture. Initially, the African slaves were so expensive that only slaves with expertise in the sugar industry were imported. These were slaves from Portugal or from the Atlantic islands who had gained experience with crop cultivation, milling and refining the extracted juice of the sugar cane. The unskilled work on the Brazilian sugar plantations remained in the hands of indigenous slaves, and the poor state of their health made it unattractive for the owners of the sugar mills to invest in their education. Besides, by no means all indigenous Brazilians were slaves; some of them were free and worked for a wage. Their wages amounted to no more than one-fifth of the amount that a slave owner received when renting out a slave. It can be deduced from this that the labour of the indigenous Brazilians was far less productive than that of Africans.

There were two key factors in the transition from indigenous to African labour. Firstly, the low quality of the indigenous workers, who were often ill, drunk and absent, and who were unable to adapt to the rhythm of work that was essential for the profitable exploitation of sugar production. Secondly, the size of the indigenous population fell dramatically, while the sugar industry needed growing numbers of workers. This increased the price of indigenous labour because the supply on the indigenous slave markets was limited and the Portuguese slave hunt in the not-yet-colonised interior caused a great deal of unrest.

The opposite occurred with the supply of slaves from Africa. Despite increasing demand, prices on the African coast rose only slowly. There was sufficient supply, and the demand for slaves for Brazil represented only a very small part of the demand for slaves in Africa and the Middle East. The costs of transport did not increase either. The price of an African slave in Brazil did increase slowly as more and better sugar mills, improved equipment for refining and, in general, more experience of the complex process of sugar production made it possible for more and more sugar to be produced per slave. This increased efficiency more than compensated for any increase in the price of African slaves over time.

Dutch Authority

After 1635, more and more Portuguese planters and their slaves began to come under Dutch authority, and the Dutch also made allies among the indigenous Brazilians. This Dutch strategy was very much a necessity because they remained in the minority throughout the whole history of the colony. The only real loyalty on which they could rely was that of the Dutch colonists, the so-called *vrijburgers* or free citizens. Besides migrants from the Netherlands and neighbouring countries, as well as soldiers who had served out their contract, about a third of this group comprised Sephardic Jews who were already living in Brazil and had kept their religious beliefs hidden from the Portuguese. Netherlands Brazil also received a number of Sephardic Jewish immigrants who had left Portugal and initially sought refuge in the Netherlands. The majority of these colonists worked not in sugar production but in the service sector, as merchants, craftsmen and shopkeepers. But the administration in Netherlands Brazil could not manage with only the support of these colonists. The Dutch authorities also needed the support of at least a good proportion of the more than 20,000 Portuguese in the colony. Most of these settlers worked in the sugar industry, and they constituted the human capital that made Brazil so attractive for the Dutch: all the more reason for the Dutch authorities to stay on friendly terms with this group.

This worked only at the time of the governorship of Johan Maurits van Nassau, a second cousin of the then stadtholder Frederik Hendrik in the Republic. Johan Maurits was a liberal man who accepted the Portuguese colonists as they were; he did not embark on any crusade against the Roman Catholic Church and allowed them to maintain their own trade contacts with the Netherlands. But still the Portuguese did not really trust the Dutch. They were particularly hostile to the WIC because the Company had imposed a fixed price on manioc, the staple food crop.⁷

The Dutch had more success in their contacts with the indigenous groups, mainly due to the fact that their villages were given more autonomy by the Dutch than they had ever had under the Portuguese. This autonomy gave the village chiefs more power, which encouraged them to be loyal to Dutch authority. However, it also often meant worse conditions for the simple indigenous villagers because the village chiefs could make them cultivate manioc and distil alcohol and sell it for their own benefit. The WIC also recruited the indigenous Brazilians as bearers, couriers and cattle drivers, and sometimes also as soldiers to counter attacks by Portuguese guerrilla armies. A small number of indigenous Brazilians even served in

⁷ Van den Boogaart, 'De Nederlandse expansie', 124.

the expeditionary army with which Angola was conquered in 1641 by an expedition from Netherlands Brazil. The indigenous Brazilians were an important ally in the continuing struggle against the Portuguese, and this explains why the WIC made efforts to convert them to Protestantism. To this end the Heidelberg catechism was translated into Portuguese and Tupi, and preachers and schoolmasters visited the indigenous villages in the hope of bringing the true Protestant religion to some of the locals who had already been converted to Christianity by the Portuguese. It is questionable this had very much success. The native people were by no means loyal Calvinists, but the Dutch intervention did result in part of the indigenous population choosing to side with the Dutch in 1645 when the Portuguese in the colony revolted against Dutch authority.⁸

Unlike in North America, the Dutch, in their attempts to win the indigenous population over to their cause, ended up in a classic colonial conflict situation. By giving the village chiefs more power, the Dutch strengthened their grip on the indigenous communities, but at the same time they relinquished the opportunity to intervene when those chiefs exploited their subjects. It would therefore be misguided to assume that the Portuguese treated the indigenous Brazilians badly while the Dutch treated them well. Indeed, some groups of indigenous Brazilians worked together with the Dutch, but yet other groups went south with the Portuguese or by some other means left the area that was taken over by the Dutch. The fact that in Dutch Brazil it was forbidden to enslave indigenous people remained an empty promise. In the outer districts it was not possible to simply expropriate the indigenous slaves of the Portuguese planters.

The Portuguese and the Dutch were also not very different in how they treated the Africans. As a result of the war situation in the early years of the Dutch administration, the supply of slaves from Africa stopped, but with the conquest of the Portuguese fort of São Jorge da Mina (Elmina) on the Gold Coast in 1637, now part of Ghana, the supply increased considerably. In addition to trading through fixed bases, many slaves were bought in the Bight of Benin and along the coast of Biafra (in present-day Nigeria) from brokers who brought their slaves on board Dutch ships by canoe. The supply of slaves increased even further when part of Angola's coast fell into Dutch hands with Luanda, along with the conquest of Elmina planned and carried out from Dutch Brazil. In total, more than 26,000 slaves were brought from Africa to Dutch Brazil, of whom 40 per cent originated in the Gold Coast and 60 per cent in Angola. On average, slaves were sold for 300 to 400 guilders, which was four to five times the cost of buying them. These figures seem to suggest that the WIC

⁸ Van den Boogaart, 'De Nederlandse expansie', 125.

made a lot of money from slave imports, but nothing could be further from the truth. Most of the slaves were sold on credit, and in 1645 the mostly Portuguese settlers owed the Company more than 4.5 million guilders.⁹ The possibility of not paying this debt was attractive, and this must have played a role in the rebellion of the Portuguese colonists against the Dutch authorities.

But there was more to it than that. Johan Maurits had resigned his post in 1644 and returned to Europe. More than anyone else, he had managed to hold things together during his time as governor and to make Dutch authority acceptable to the large Portuguese majority among the settlers. Moreover, he had won a part of the indigenous population over to the Dutch, but the indigenous Brazilians did not automatically transfer their loyalty to his successors. In addition, the Portuguese fugitives in Bahia were ready to support their rebellious compatriots in the Dutch colony if they decided to revolt. The chance of such a rebellion succeeding increased after the large-scale reduction in the number of troops by the WIC in 1644. The time was ripe in 1645. Under João Fernandes Vieira, and with the help of support from Bahia, the insurgents managed to take over almost the entire Dutch territory. Only Recife and a few small enclaves remained in Dutch hands. The last Dutch stronghold fell at the beginning of 1654, whereupon the whole of Brazil was once again in Portuguese hands.

Why did Dutch Brazil fail? The main reason is that the colony could not become profitable without the cooperation of the majority of the settlers. This never happened, although the circumstances were not unfavourable. Because so many settlers had left the Dutch territory, many sugar cane fields and sugar mills were in need of new owners, some of whom came from the remaining Portuguese population. Simple settlers could thus aspire to become owners of a mill or a number of cane fields. A small proportion of the new sugar producers were recruited from among the officers of the Dutch army. For the ordinary soldiers, who did not have the means to buy a mill or sugar cane field that had been confiscated by the Company, this was too big a step. Some stayed on in Brazil once their contract, which was on average for four years, had expired, but they were few in number. The number of *vrijburgers* rose from 1,100 in 1636 to 3,000 in 1645, but most of them settled in the urban areas and did not work in export agriculture. Their numbers were small and the emigration policy of the WIC proved to be a failure.

The Jewish group among the settlers warrants a separate mention in this context. Although the Jews were loyal to the Dutch authorities, who

⁹ Emmer, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy*, 51.

were much more tolerant of the Jewish religion than the Portuguese, they were not usually involved in sugar cultivation, but rather engaged in trade. A minority of the indigenous population, about 3,500, were loyal to the Dutch authorities in the long run. This was not unimportant, but it was not a decisive factor in upholding Dutch authority. The number of loyal indigenous Brazilians might well have been greater if the Dutch authorities had taken a stronger stance against the treatment of indigenous slaves by their Portuguese masters. There are countless horror stories about this abuse to be found in the travel literature about Brazil. However, the Dutch government officers wanted to win over the Portuguese and so kept silent about the treatment of the slaves, just as they silently accepted the injustices of native self-government.

It was to no avail. Sugar exports had increased in the last years of Johan Maurits' rule, but dried up quickly after 1644. The departure of Johan Maurits in that year meant that the glue holding the colony together had disappeared, and more and more Portuguese settlers proved willing to support an uprising against the Dutch authorities. There was also a lot at stake for them. If they succeeded in expelling the Dutch, they would no longer have to pay their debts to the WIC – and those debts were large. Twelve of the Portuguese settlers, for example, who had bought an abandoned sugar mill from the WIC owed no less than 2 million guilders. This explains why the call for an uprising met with immediate success. An aid expedition from the Netherlands under Witte de With in 1648 to rescue the Dutch settlers imprisoned in Recife was unsuccessful.

In the Netherlands, the concerted policy of the management of the WIC on this issue started to show more and more cracks. Amsterdam wanted to give up Brazil as soon as possible, while Zeeland wanted to continue fighting. By giving up Dutch Brazil, Amsterdam hoped to be able to resume the lucrative sailings to the Portuguese ports, since the Republic had concluded a ceasefire with Portugal in 1641, after Lisbon had broken away from Spain. The Zeelanders were not prepared to accept this alternative, because in commercial shipping within Europe they always lost out to their Amsterdam competitors.

A new setback presented itself: some of the native Brazilians who had always supported the Netherlands withdrew from the collaboration. Finally, after almost ten years of struggle, the WIC capitulated. In 1654 the last Dutch stronghold, Recife, was taken over. The victor allowed the Company to repatriate the remaining soldiers. At a late stage of the war, the States-General had attempted to resolve the situation by asking Johan Maurits to take over the governorship of the colony again. However, he declined because neither the WIC nor the States-General were prepared

to provide the money that he considered necessary to defend Dutch Brazil properly.

Despite this Dutch thriftiness, the WIC inadvertently created a legacy that is still impressive today. The appointment of Johan Maurits was an inspired move not only in political and military terms, but – unwittingly – also in cultural terms. He invited numerous painters, sketch artists and scientists to visit his colony and to study the fauna and flora present there. As a result, Dutch Brazil became the best depicted and most studied colony in the New World. The different population groups, the sugar mills and other buildings, the plants and animals – all of them can be found in the books, paintings and drawings of Marcgraf, Piso, Eckhout, Post and Barlaeus. From a financial point of view, Brazil may have been a great failure, which downgraded the Netherlands to a small power in the Atlantic, but from a scientific and artistic point of view, the brief existence of Dutch Brazil was a highly fascinating experiment.¹⁰

The loss of Brazil was not the only setback that the WIC experienced around the middle of the seventeenth century. The Dutch presence in Luanda on the coast of Angola and São Tomé also came to an end after a defeat in battle against the Portuguese in 1648. Once again, the Dutch had underestimated the strong aversion of the Portuguese colonists to Dutch authority. The result was disastrous, because not only had the Republic lost its colonies and bases in Africa and South America, with the exception of Elmina and the tiny settlement on the Essequibo, but also the Dutch ships were no longer welcome in the Portuguese ports in Europe, from where so much raw sugar was transported to the Netherlands. In the struggle against Portugal, the Dutch even blocked the Tagus in 1657, which gave the English the opportunity to position themselves as the new freighters for the Portuguese. The ‘neglected Brazil’ forced the Dutch merchant navy to look for a new field of activity in the Atlantic region and signified the end of the Republic as a great power in the Atlantic region. The Dutch share in the Atlantic economy was to remain relatively modest from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards.

New Netherland

In North America, the main concern of the Dutch was the trade in the only valuable product that the American Indians had to offer: beaver

¹⁰ Van den Boogaart, Hoetink and Palmer Whitehead (eds.), *Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen*.

skins. It was not until much later that the idea of colonising part of North America arose. But neither in North America nor in Brazil was the WIC able to pass on the high overhead costs of colonisation to the parties involved. In Brazil this would have led to even more opposition from the Portuguese in the colony, and in North America, too, it would have resulted in a massive exodus. The only party able to bear such costs was the States-General, but they kept themselves at arm's length. Consequently, both New Netherland and New Holland were lost.

As long as the colony of New Netherland existed, the original inhabitants played an important role. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, there were many more Native Americans living around the Hudson River than in the more northerly regions. The climate was very suitable for food farming, which had resulted in a much higher population density than that among hunter-gatherers in the area north of New Netherland. Secondly, there were no large indigenous empires as in Central and South America, because in the so-called Middle Colonies (now Connecticut, New York, Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) the Native Americans lived together in villages of no more than a few hundred inhabitants. They were highly mobile and were able to build and dismantle their houses quickly, allowing them to move easily to the coast in winter and to the interior in the hunting and farming seasons.

Native Americans and Europeans continued to live in two strictly separate communities within the area colonised by the Dutch. Unlike in New England, the Dutch area was so sparsely populated that there was no need to drive the indigenous population further towards the interior. Nor were the Native Americans involved in the farming of the colonists. Nonetheless, there was friction in New Netherland between colonists and Native Americans, and for some time there was even a full-blown war. But for the majority of the time Native Americans and Europeans coexisted peacefully side by side, with the exception of the initial years when the colonists had to buy food from the Native Americans while awaiting the first harvest of their own crops. And later, too, because there was a chronic shortage of field hands, the Native Americans were paid to help with the bringing in of the harvest. In New Netherland, there was no question of a middle ground where Native Americans and Europeans lived in harmony, hunting and trading. This kind of middle ground was, however, typical of the French colonisation in North America and in particular of those areas where the French *trappeurs* sustained their livelihood by hunting beavers with traps so that their hide showed no trace of bullet or arrow holes. There must certainly have been a number of European beaver hunters in New Netherland, but in the Dutch colonies

agriculture and cattle farming were the main sources of livelihood. The Dutch bought beaver skins from the local inhabitants.¹¹

With the exception of these contacts, the American Indians in New Netherland lived their own lives, and according to the colonists the 'Indian' way of life was very different from their own. Their farming methods were different because the Native Americans had no ploughs and grew all kinds of crops mixed together. The division of work between the sexes was also different from the traditions that the colonists from Europe had brought with them. Men were often away for long periods hunting or fishing, and the women had to work on the land and bring up the children. The Europeans could not understand why the Native Americans failed to fence off their farmland and did not regard their cattle as private property. For the Native Americans, an animal had an owner only at the point when it was killed, because then the hunter claimed the corpse. This last point in particular was the cause of many disputes. The colonists' cattle sometimes trampled the Native Americans' sown fields, whereas the colonists suffered damage when the Native Americans killed or took away their cattle. Ownership of land was less sacrosanct for the very mobile natives than for the Europeans. The Native Americans did not fertilise their land, so after a number of harvests the ground became depleted and new fields had to be found for the crops. Running out of firewood was another reason for the Native Americans to move house.

The American Indians did not find it unusual for Europeans to enter their territory; they assumed that the supply of firewood in the country occupied by these foreigners was exhausted. But it was strange that they did not move any further. Such cultural differences often caused friction between settlers and Native Americans, and there were sometimes armed raids, which in turn provoked acts of revenge. The cause could often be trivial: a drunken brawl, stolen cattle, predatory dogs or a dispute over a woman. Most conflicts were limited in scope, but sometimes they developed into a continuous series of skirmishes and even into war, as with the Algonquin and Esopus nations. But afterwards the relationship between the Native Americans and the settlers always improved again.

The North American First Nations had a demographic reason for their willingness to compromise. Just like elsewhere in the New World, their numbers were decreasing rapidly because they lacked immunity to many of the European diseases. No figures are available, but one Dutch author estimates that by the end of the Dutch period the size of the indigenous population in the area claimed by the Netherlands had fallen to

¹¹ White, *The Middle Ground*.

10 per cent of the original number! This dramatic demographic decline overshadowed the fact that the American Indians, like the European settlers, also benefited from many of the advantages of the exchange of fauna, flora and technology between the Old and New Worlds, known as the Columbian Exchange. Guns enabled the American Indians to hunt much more effectively than before, while Europe's agricultural implements, plants and animals, such as ploughs, harrows, grain, rye, wheat, horses, donkeys and chickens, significantly enriched the diet.

Unlike the Portuguese and the Spanish, but like the French and the English, the Dutch did not enslave the indigenous population en masse in the New World. The demand for slaves in this colony was of course also much smaller than in the Dutch plantation colonies. The farms in the Dutch part of North America could not afford slaves, because their use did not reduce the costs of food production sufficiently to recoup the cost of buying a slave, as was the case on the West Indian plantations and especially on the sugar plantations. Moreover, enslaving the Native Americans would undoubtedly have led to war. The colonists were able to buy prisoners of war from their indigenous allies, although this was a rare occurrence. A small group of Native Americans made prisoners of war by the Dutch were transported to Curaçao as slaves rather than being sold in New Netherland.¹²

The fact that the English, French and Dutch did not enslave the indigenous population does not seem to be related to the absence of slavery in the respective mother countries. Claims are sometimes made that the Portuguese and Spanish had fewer moral objections than the colonists from North-West Europe to making other people into slaves because slavery on the Iberian Peninsula was such a familiar institution both for Muslims and for Christians. In itself this is correct, but this different tradition did not prevent the English, French and Dutch from buying African slaves when this suited them overseas. The fact that the Dutch did not enslave the Native Americans may also be related to the fact that the Iroquois and other small indigenous groups near to the Dutch settlements were not large-scale farmers. The men spent their time hunting, fishing and warring while the work in the fields was left to the women, who mostly grew corn, from which they made a kind of porridge, and beans. indigenous agriculture in South America was much more varied, and the work on the farms and plantations of the Spanish and Portuguese colonists was more in line with indigenous practices.

Adriaen van der Donk, landowner, legal adviser to the governor and propagandist of the colonisation of the colony, in his *Beschryvinge van*

¹² Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 333.

Nieuw-Nederlant could not imagine that the Native Americans would ever be made into slaves: 'They are completely unwilling to engage in heavy, long work that has the appearance of slavery.' It may well be that this message was intended to reassure future colonists. In his writings, van der Donck depicted New Netherland as a land of milk and honey, very similar to the Netherlands but without some of the disadvantages of the motherland. Slavery did not fit with this image; it would only lead to alienation.¹³

However, the Dutch settlers did appreciate the way in which the Native Americans managed to get through life. It was strange that Native Americans built up virtually no stocks of supplies for the harsh winter months, apart from burying corn in hollows in the ground, but during these periods they seemed to be able to do without food for days on end. It may well have gone against the grain that native women had to do all the hard work on the land, but it did serve to toughen them up. Even just a few hours after giving birth, Native American women were already at work again. This earned them the approval of the Dutch, who were used to their wives spending sometimes weeks recovering from childbirth. However, this Dutch approval of the Native Americans waned over time. They had no clear central authority with whom the Dutch could make agreements. Johannes de Laet, an administrator and the first historiographer of the WIC, summed up the opinion of many Dutch people when he described the indigenous population in New Netherland as 'definitely not hardworking' and 'very cunning thieves' – in short as 'bad people'. De Laet had himself never been in the New World, although he undoubtedly had contact with returning colonists and WIC employees.¹⁴

Colonists

Even though the advantages of the Columbian Exchange generally benefited the colonists, the number of immigrants remained limited. Unlike in England or France, the Netherlands did not send prisoners or religious minorities to North America. Moreover, for a long time it was unclear whether New Netherland would become a settlement colony or whether it would remain a trading post. When the WIC included the colony in its monopoly in 1621, there was hope that this would give an impetus to colonisation. However, this did not happen, and the directors of the Company therefore decided to issue *patroonschappen* or monopoly rights, which allowed wealthy investors in the Netherlands to gain possession of a considerable stretch of land on the condition that they would found a colony there. The best known of these was Nijkerk-born Killiaen van

¹³ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 55. ¹⁴ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 54.

Rensselaer, a diamond trader in Amsterdam, who had invested large sums in the WIC. Together with a number of other Amsterdam merchants, he bought land from the Native American around present-day Albany in the state of New York, and named the area Rensselaerswijck. He hoped to exploit the cultivation of food crops for export to the Netherlands or to the other Dutch colonies in the New World. Although he managed to recruit eighty colonists, mostly from his own home area, ultimately this agricultural project was not a success.

This was in any event not due to the physical conditions. New Netherland had so much fertile land that the prince among the Dutch poets, Vondel, even envisaged the construction of a new granary: 'Nieu Nederlant, bezaeit, belooft ons maght van koren / Een ander Polen schijnt voor Hollant daer geboren', which would translate as 'New Netherland, cultivated, holds promise of much grain / A second Poland for Holland seems born there.' Many estimates have indeed been made about the amount of grain that New Netherland could export, but in practice little came of this because of the high transport costs. The Netherlands continued to be dependent on grain from the Baltic region, and the Dutch Caribbean and Brazil relied on grain imports from the Netherlands. New Netherland did later export food as part of the English Middle Colonies, but this was because the markets for food in the English colonial empire were much closer. It was the 'tyranny of distance' that limited the economic possibilities of the Dutch colony. The production of silk, the cultivation of tobacco and the export of fish also came to nothing. The main export products continued to be beaver hides, while agriculture in the region was mainly focused on self-sufficiency.¹⁵

Given these limitations, the lack of enthusiasm for migrating to New Netherland is hardly surprising. Migration was of interest only for those people who had money and who could start a farm or a company. Without a services or export sector, there was virtually no need in the colony for poor immigrants. Apart from a small number of patrons, the colony had few wealthy colonists who could permit themselves to hire contract workers and pay the costs of the crossing in advance. A pamphlet dating from the time calculated that an emigrant would need to invest at least 1,800 guilders in the crossing, constructing a farm and buying cattle. And all this for an annual income of no more than 30 guilders.

There were additional reasons to explain the lack of enthusiasm among the Dutch to migrate to North America. Most studies about New

¹⁵ For a comparison with the neighbouring English colonies, see McCusker and Menard, *The Economy of British America*, 189–210.

Netherland point more or less incidentally to the fact that the inhabitants of the Republic had what was for that time a high average income, a good degree of religious freedom and an effective system for caring for the poor. The poor, unmarried young men who were drawn in their hundreds of thousands to the Dutch cities were sorely needed in the urban craft enterprises and merchant shipping. Not many left for New Netherland. In the seventeenth century, as a result of the Thirty Years' War, the Germans were still too poor to cross the Atlantic Ocean, and apparently neither the financiers in the Netherlands nor the colonists in New Netherland were willing to invest in the migration of contract workers. Migration from Germany got under way only in the eighteenth century, and the crossing took place with Dutch ships partly via Rotterdam, but by then New Netherland was already in the hands of the English.

The migrants who did leave for New Netherland included merchants, soldiers, sailors, farmers and craftsmen, contract workers, orphans and also representatives of religious and ethnic minorities such as Jews, Swedish Lutherans and Huguenots. The soldiers and sailors among the WIC staff were not true migrants. They were only in the colony temporarily for a stay that could last between a few months and a couple of years, although some did settle there permanently. As was common on the Dutch job market at that time, some of this group came not from the Netherlands but from neighbouring countries, with the foreigners mainly being put to work in the lower positions. The general policy was the higher the rank, the more Dutch workers, with the highest positions in the WIC, which required workers to have some commercial and political insight besides being able to read and write, being reserved for members of the well-to-do Dutch bourgeoisie. Governor Willem Kieft, for example, was a merchant who had lived in France for a time before being appointed, while Petrus Stuijvesant, his successor, was the son of a Protestant vicar, and had also attended university.

The WIC did not pursue an active colonisation policy. Only the Company soldiers were encouraged after some time to convert their temporary stay in New Netherland into permanent residence. Those who chose to do this were joined by their wives and children, and after a number of years of service the WIC offered them a large plot of land, on the condition that they remained in the colony rather than returning home. One point to note here is that the soldiers and seafarers in the service of the WIC often more or less coincidentally ended up in New Netherland, because the Company could just have easily have sent them to Brazil, the Antilles or the coast of Africa. Over time, private shipping

companies were also allowed to sail to New Netherland, but there are no indications that this measure promoted colonisation.¹⁶

While the private shipping companies recruited soldiers and seafarers on an open market, the WIC often appeared to choose its personnel for the higher positions through patronage. Many directors of the WIC chambers helped relatives and acquaintances to find a job in the New World. This policy of preferential treatment for family members sometimes meant that the administrators appointed to important positions lacked the skills needed for the job. According to a number of critics, the VOC did this better: 'In the East Indies, commanders of forts were appointed only after they had some experience in the country, and if the persons had sufficient knowledge, but people were often sent here [to New Netherland], competent or not.' Even an idealist like Adriaen van der Donck, who in his writings presented New Netherland as the promised land, was gloomy, believing that the WIC's appointment policy was flawed and that 'here officers were more often appointed for reasons of favours and gestures of friendship than on the basis of merit, which does not make the situation any better'. It should, however, be borne in mind that the numbers involved were relatively small. When the colony passed into English hands, there were just 180 soldiers, and the number of WIC employees in the colony must have been less than half that number.¹⁷

The question that arises is why the WIC did not have a more active colonisation policy. Surely more farmhands were needed than sailors, soldiers and administrators? Comparison with colonisation in the neighbouring English colonies shows that contract workers made an important contribution to the population of the colonies. In exchange for a free crossing and working for a number of years just for food and income, many poor English people managed to build a new life for themselves overseas. France applied the same system, but to a more limited degree, while Spain and Portugal did not have a system of contract work at all.

How did England manage to recruit so many migrants at home who were prepared to surrender their freedom for a number of years for a passage to the New World? It was mainly down to demographics. The population of England underwent rapid growth until the middle of the seventeenth century, after which it slowed down. This meant that up to 1650 wages in England were relatively low, which made migration to the New World an attractive proposition. In the New World, access to land was almost unlimited; the plantation owners therefore paid high wages to

¹⁶ For a comparison with English policies on colonisation, see Menard, 'Migration, Ethnicity', 58–77.

¹⁷ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 83.

their workers, who otherwise had the alternative of starting their own farms. This also explains why employers in the New World opted for contract work. To make this attractive to workers, the conditions in the contract had to be better than those on the job market at home. However, the period of European contract work in the Caribbean lasted barely twenty-five years because after this time the contract workers made such high demands – having learned from reports of the disastrous working conditions in the West Indies – that it was economically more advantageous to buy slaves from Africa.

There was no such dramatic transition from contract work to slave labour in North America. In certain regions, such as Maryland and Virginia with their tobacco exports, the import of slaves became increasingly important, but this started only after 1690 and was never as extensive as in the Caribbean area. In the neighbouring English colonies of New Netherland, the contract workers continued to make up half of the European immigrants. There were different categories of contractors. In the first place there were the labour migrants who had signed contracts before leaving their home country. The contracts stated the number of years they would work in return for just food and accommodation to pay for the crossing. Another category of contract workers was those who were attached to an employer without a written contract and without a clear end date. There were also contract workers in the job market in the English colonies who had exchanged a prison sentence for a period of contract work in order to avoid a long-term gaol sentence in the home country. Finally, in the eighteenth century, it was also possible for shipping companies to advance the cost of the passage for migrants who were allowed to disembark in one of the North American ports only once an employer had paid the passage price and had thus bought the migrant's labour for a number of years.¹⁸

Many of these arrangements were unknown in the Netherlands, which is remarkable given that there was no shortage of poor, unmarried, mobile young men. The job market in the Republic was flooded with hundreds of thousands of these types of migrants from the neighbouring countries. However, they were deployed not in the colonisation of New Netherland, but in other branches of the economy. Neither did migration to New Netherland benefit from the colonists who had fled from Netherlands Brazil, which was conquered in 1654 by the Portuguese. Hardly any independent Dutch colonists – and certainly no farm workers – had settled in that colony.

¹⁸ McCusker and Menard, 'The Economy of British America', 238–44.

Unlike in England, the demographic development of the Republic had no influence on emigration; also, the religious tolerance in the Republic explains the absence of religious minorities whose belief drove them to seek refuge elsewhere. Neither did the Netherlands offer prisoners the choice between a prison sentence and contract work overseas. The WIC did send some orphans to New Netherland, but they numbered just a few dozen.

The number of available migrants may have been small, but the question is also whether there was any great demand for immigrants in New Netherland. England sent far more migrants to the New World, but this was largely because the country had more colonies in temperate zones; the distribution of the migrants over these colonies was very unequal. Until 1680 most English migrants went to New England (30,000) and to the tobacco colonies of Maryland and Virginia (80,000). The Middle Colonies, including New Netherland, attracted 2,000 immigrants up to 1659 and in the subsequent ten years a further 5,000. In comparison with the English Middle Colonies, the number of around 7,000 migrants in New Netherland was not so disproportionate.¹⁹ The number of contract workers in New Netherland did not differ greatly from the percentage of migrants of this type in comparable English colonies. Around 35 per cent of the colonists in New Netherland had an employment contract with the WIC, the city of Amsterdam or one of the major employers in the colony, the patrons.²⁰ Although contract workers must certainly have been recruited on the job market in the big cities, in particular Amsterdam, and although there were almost certainly foreigners among these contractors, a proportion of the contract workers in New Netherland seem to have come from the area whence the patrons also originated.

The term of the contracts varied: some contractees had to work three years, others six. Apart from food and accommodation, an annual sum of money was paid during the contract period. Just as in the English colonies, the administration of New Netherland had to issue ordinances against running away. Once in the colony, it was very tempting for the contract workers not to honour the contract but to hire themselves out to another employer at a wage that was higher than the wage in kind promised in their contract. Female contract migrants who married during the period of the contract also had to pay their master an indemnity. It is unclear how many contract migrants stayed in the colony after their contracts had expired and how many left for a neighbouring English colony to set themselves up there as independent farmers or tenant

¹⁹ Menard, 'Migration, Ethnicity' 61; Kruijtzter, 'European Migration', 105.

²⁰ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 118–32.

farmers. The figures indicate that very few Dutch people took the opportunity to build a better life for themselves in the New World. The colony fell too rapidly into English hands to serve as a safety net for the migrants from the countries around the Netherlands.

The final aspect of the different categories of migrants that should be mentioned in this overview concerns the merchants and traders. They were an important group, given the quantities of goods that were imported and exported. Initially, some of the WIC directors believed that New Netherland should remain a trading colony and that colonisation would be costly, while the benefits would be few. Merchants often started their stay in New Netherland as agents for a trading house in the Netherlands. In time they traded at their own risk. They were among the elite of the colony and set themselves up in New Amsterdam. Just as in the Netherlands, not all merchants came from the fatherland, and over the course of time the number of English merchants in the city increased once the English navigation laws stipulating that imports and exports to and from English colonies had to be via English ships and could only be intended for or originate from English ports ceased to apply there.

The migrant traders enjoyed less prestige; they came to the colony for only one season (always the summer) to offload onto the colonists the products they had brought from the home country. A number of them must have stayed, but most of these traders travelled back and forth. This form of trade came about because the WIC had relinquished some parts of its monopoly on trade and shipping with New Netherland. Private individuals who were willing to pay the necessary taxes were permitted to export beaver skins from New Netherland and to sail to the colony using a privately owned vessel, albeit that there also had to be a WIC representative on board.²¹ Many of these merchants appear in the archives of the Amsterdam notaries from the period, because they could not always pay for the purchase of the goods themselves and entered into agreements with financiers, which meant that a contract was needed. Often several of these traders hired a vessel together to transport themselves and their goods to the colony.

It has already been said that attempts to populate New Netherland with orphans and the unemployed as well as with 'other non-working individuals, who were a burden here [in Amsterdam] and who could pay for their keep there' came to nothing. In the last decade before the colony passed into English hands, a few dozen orphans were sent to New Netherland, but no more than that. These were not orphans of Amsterdam citizens who lived in the civilian orphanage, but foundlings

²¹ Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 84.

and orphans of the poor who were placed with a foster mother (*houmoeder*) at the expense of the city of Amsterdam. Most of the orphans sent to New Netherland were also placed with a foster family. It is worth noting that the orphans had to be older than fourteen when they left and had to agree to their migration to New Netherland.²²

In fact, the number of colonists in New Netherland, at about 7,000, was by no means so small in comparison with the numbers in the neighbouring English colonies, and it is unlikely that a larger number of colonists would have saved New Netherland from being conquered by the English. A hundred years later, French Canada, which had some 60,000 inhabitants, was also taken over by the English. New Netherland acted as a kind of wedge between the English regions, and the cost of defending it against invasion by the English would have been enormous – a cost that the WIC was not prepared to pay, particularly not after the costly debacle in Brazil. Defence remained a point of contention throughout the colony's entire existence. The question was who should pay, the Company or the colonists? The Amsterdam Chamber of the WIC, which was responsible for administering New Netherland, complained that the defence and administration costs were always increasing and that the colony's taxes therefore had to be raised.

Slaves

One possible solution for the shortage of manpower in New Netherland was to import slaves. However, this strategy never really got off the ground, because slaves were expensive. Only the most prosperous colonists could afford to buy slaves, so their number remained limited, and at the time of the surrender to the English New Netherland had at most a few hundred slaves. The same applied in the surrounding English colonies. Unlike on the sugar and tobacco plantations, in New Netherland there were no highly profitable export crops that could have funded the high costs of buying and maintaining slaves. Those that were present in New Netherland were used to build and maintain houses and defence works, and for farm work, herding cattle and housekeeping. The biggest owner of slaves was the WIC, followed closely by the last governor and landowner Petrus Stuyvesant. The limited demand for slaves meant that it was not commercially attractive to import slaves directly from Africa, and most of the slaves in New Netherland reached the region via Curaçao.²³

²² Jacobs, *Een zegenrijk gewest*, 96–100. ²³ Emmer, 'De slavenhandel', 94–148.

It is clear from the large number of slaves who were given their freedom that slaves in New Netherland were treated differently from those in plantation colonies. The inference that can be drawn from this is that the work done by slaves generated little income for the owners and that the costs and benefits were about equal. It is striking that eleven slaves, all owned by the WIC, asked to be released because they had worked for the Company for almost twenty years and would no longer be able to support their families if they continued as slaves. The governor and council agreed, but stipulated that the freed slaves had to pay the Company an amount of grain or corn and a pig every year, that they could occasionally be called on to carry out work for the Company, against payment, and that their children would be regarded as the Company's slaves.

This freeing of slaves and the conditions attached to it show just how different slavery in New Netherland was from slavery in the plantation colonies. That a slave owner would maintain only the male slaves and not their wives and children was incomprehensible in a plantation colony, and the same applied to the demand that the freed slaves and their children could be forced to work for the former owner, even if they were to be paid for their work. It also highlights the fact that slave labour was profitable in New Netherland for only part of the year. By freeing itself from the obligation of maintenance, but still securing the labour of the ex-slaves during certain peak periods, the Company aimed to reduce labour costs. The relatively small increase in the number of slaves in the Middle Colonies in the second half of the seventeenth century shows clearly that slave labour, unlike in the regions with a large export sector, was never a significant factor.²⁴

New Netherland held no benefits for the WIC, which goes a long way towards explaining why the Company did not put up any strong resistance against the conquest by the English. The last governor, Petrus Stuyvesant, had to defend himself in the Republic against complaints that he had relinquished the colony too easily, but he was not condemned by the directors of the WIC. At the same time, the Zeelanders had conquered Suriname from the English, a situation that the Republic's negotiators legalised in the Treaty of Breda (1667). The new colony in Guyana was far more promising than New Netherland, because Suriname had the potential to generate much more trade, both in goods and in slaves. The prospects for trade from and to New Netherland, on the other hand, looked very sombre. The trade in beaver skins could only decrease because the beaver population had been decimated and because of the competition from the English and French. Moreover, the transport

²⁴ Rink, *Holland on the Hudson*, 160–4.

of tobacco from the English colonies via New Amsterdam to the Netherlands contravened the Navigation Laws, which stipulated that export products from the colonies had to be shipped to ports in England.

With its decision to relinquish New Netherland, the WIC was ahead of its time. The Company realised that a settlement in North America had no need of an exclusive relationship with a European mother country. The English and French came to understand this only during the second half of the eighteenth century. Incidentally, New Netherland returned to Dutch hands for a brief period in 1672 during the Third Anglo-Dutch War, but this occupation was only of strategic significance. In exchange for the return of New Netherland, the British were prepared to recognise the borders of the Dutch colonial empire in the Caribbean.

6 Africa

The first maritime contacts between the Republic and the Atlantic region outside Europe were with Africa, although this contact had little significance because of the many barriers to trade with the continent; geographical location, maritime currents and the direction of the wind were just a few of them. The last two of these meant that it was not difficult to sail along the African coast to the south, but returning to Europe was a different matter. It had taken the Portuguese a long time to discover how best to do this. The Dutch made grateful use of this knowledge, and in 1594 Captain Barend Erikszoon from Enkhuizen managed to trade in gold on the Guinea coast. These trading contacts expanded in the following years, but did not amount to an intensive exchange of goods and people. Portugal keenly defended its monopoly on shipping to Africa, which had been granted by the Pope, and the Dutch ships therefore had to be on the lookout for Portuguese war vessels.

It also became apparent that, apart from gold, ivory and wild pepper, the West Africans had few interesting goods to trade. The Dutch were offered slaves, a standard part of the African export package, but there was no demand for slaves in the Netherlands and at that time the Republic – unlike Spain and Portugal – had no overseas colonies where slaves could be sold. The first Dutch merchants may have bought slaves to sell them elsewhere on the coast, and the Portuguese initially did the same. It was the Europeans' maritime superiority that allowed them to tap into the internal African slave trade. The West Africans had no large seaworthy ships, and all the trade with the region, including the slave trade, therefore had to be over land. This entailed many more risks, including attacks by the local population, the escape of the slaves and above all a high death rate, all of which raised the selling prices. The risks of maritime transport were much less, so the Dutch and Portuguese were able to sell their slaves at lower prices.

Initially, Africa offered little more than trade in gold, ivory and a few other products, as well as the slaves in the coastal areas. The 'Dark Continent' proved to be much less accessible than Asia and the New

World, which was a factor not only of the sea currents and the winds constantly blowing to the south, but also of the geographical shape of Africa, which presented further difficulties. Unlike in Asia, with its long, indented coasts, it was not easy to penetrate into the interior of Africa via the sea. There were, for example, no deep rivers that a sea-going vessel could navigate to reach the interior. And as soon as the Dutch left their vessels, they were dependent on the goodwill of the Africans, without whose permission they could not set foot on the land. In Africa, it was the Africans themselves who called the tune; they determined the range and quantity of trade goods and the number, age and sex of the slaves. This was something the Dutch were not used to. In Asia they were able to influence the range of goods and slaves by using their precious metals as leverage and by setting up production enclaves where coffee, sugar and cinnamon were produced and mines were exploited under European leadership. In the New World, the Dutch had to do everything themselves, but this had the advantage that they got what they wanted. In Africa, the Dutch and other Europeans were virtually powerless.

These circumstances explain why most of Africa remained an isolated continent until well into the nineteenth century. The Arabs in North Africa and the Africans in West and Central Africa were so powerful that they managed to keep the Europeans out for many centuries. Only the Khoi and the San in South Africa were unable to do this and had to stand idly by as over the course of time the Dutch claimed more and more of their territory. Fortunately for the Africans, they had an effective ally: the pathogens that caused malaria, yellow fever and intestinal infections. These illnesses were responsible for a death rate among the Europeans during the first year of their stay on the west coast of Africa of over 50 per cent. With such a high mortality rate, no European power dared to make a stand there with its own soldiers. It did not make sense to hire African troops unless the European officers were able to survive, and that was not the case for centuries. It was only when quinine was discovered to be an effective preventative for malaria that the Europeans were able to enter Africa, but this was not until the second half of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the dangerous health environment in Africa also played into the hands of the Dutch, because their relatively important position in the continent would never have lasted so long if the power relations in Europe could also have been mirrored in Africa. In Africa, however, the Europeans were too weak to pose any threat to one another, and every state, no matter how small, was able to agree trade contracts with the Africans, and, where appropriate, also build forts. As a result, countries that hardly participated in international long-distance trade and had little standing in Europe, such as Denmark, Sweden, Brandenburg

and even Courland (part of present-day Latvia), were able to try their luck on the African coast.

Moreover, tropical diseases were no obstacle to surviving in North Africa. In this region it was the strong political power of Arab states that prevented territorial conquests by foreigners. The Portuguese had conquered part of the west coast of Morocco in the fifteenth century, and the Spanish the north coast, but both countries were defeated and the only remaining traces of this expansion are the present-day Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The African slaves who came to North Africa via the caravan routes were not sold to the Europeans, but were intended for Arab owners. Still, the European powers from time to time sent ships to a number of North African ports to buy slaves, although these were not African but European slaves who had been captured as prisoners of war by North African pirates. Funds were raised in the parent country to buy these slaves their freedom, and as soon as they boarded the European 'slave ship', they ceased to be slaves. The numbers were certainly smaller than those of the Atlantic slave trade but by 1640 North Africa still had more English slaves than the English colonies in the New World had African slaves.¹

The Africans' ability to prevent the Europeans penetrating their continent also applied to West and Central Africa. Even if the Europeans had no problems with tropical diseases, they would not have got very far, since West and Central Africa had a number of well-organised states with large armies. And just as in Europe, there was a continual political power struggle between the different states. The Dutch who had settled in a number of forts on the Gold Coast witnessed considerable political changes over the course of time. The village of Elmina, near to the main Dutch fort, increased in size and became a more or less independent political entity. The Dutch paid an annual sum to rent the land on which the fort was built and relied on military support from the people of Elmina in the event of attack. The English at the nearby Cape Coast Castle had a similar relationship with the Fante. If the Fante and the Elminese people waged war on one another, the English and Dutch fort commanders often acted as intermediaries, their aim being to avoid the import of products and the supply of slaves being cut off.²

Further inland, all kinds of political changes occurred, about which the residents of the forts on the coast were unaware. It was clear that towards the end of the seventeenth century a new state named Asante, the capital of which was Kumasi, had grown up in the hinterland of the Gold Coast. The Dutch built up a long-standing friendly relationship with this polity.

¹ Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery*, 57. ² Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch*.

Keeping the peace, resolving internal conflicts, and handing out gifts at regular intervals: this was about as much as the Dutch could do. It was no wonder, then, that on their return the staff of the WIC on the Coast had to keep on explaining that Dutch authority in West Africa stretched no further than the range of the cannon balls of the coastal forts.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the Dutch presence on the Gold Coast also meant that most trade was conducted with this region; the fluctuations in the goods available were too great for this. After the conquest of a part of Brazil, the demand for slaves increased. These were initially offered – the name says it all – on the Slave Coast, where all kinds of political changes took place over the course of time. During the first half of the eighteenth century, a large and powerful state developed in the hinterland of the Slave Coast – Dahomey – while, just as on the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast underwent a kind of political Balkanisation.³ One of these small coastal states was Ouida (also known as Fida or Wydah), where the ruler maintained a policy of strict neutrality towards the European traders. The Europeans were not permitted to build forts in the state. From Elmina the WIC sent a representative, a factor, to Ouida to buy slaves there, who were then transported to Elmina before being embarked for the crossing. One of these merchants, Willem Bosman, who was living on the African coast in about 1700, wrote a book about his experiences. He was very impressed by the king of Ouida, whom he called ‘the most polite and bountiful’ of all the African chiefs. This positive attitude was probably the consequence of the fact that during Bosman’s stay the buying of slaves was highly successful. The traders in Ouida with whom Bosman dealt could do mental arithmetic ‘faster than we can work things out with pen and ink [...] which also makes it easy to do business with them and not half as much work as with other stupid pigs of Niggers’.⁴

Finally, we will turn to the coast of Central Africa, where the Dutch had bought many slaves in the period when the WIC had seized Luanda from the Portuguese, between 1640 and 1648. The peace treaty of 1661 with Portugal stated that Portuguese (viz. Brazilian) slave vessels could trade along the Gold Coast and that the Dutch slave ships could also trade along the coasts of Loango, Congo and Ndongo. More slaves were generally available along this part of the coast than on the Gold or Slave Coast, and in the mid-1600s about 25 to 30 per cent of the slaves transported to the New World on Dutch vessels came from the coastal regions of present-day Congo and Angola. The sharp fluctuations in the

³ Den Heijer (ed.), *Naar de koning van Dahomey*.

⁴ Van Dantzig, *Het Nederlandse aandeel in de slavenhandel*, 66.

number of slaves available for sale caused the WIC to decide to close the trading posts. This made the coast of Angola very attractive for Dutch interlopers, and in 1695 a captain of one of these *lorrendraaijers* kidnapped an African, who turned out to be a member of the royal family of the coastal state of Sonho. The slave trade with the Dutch was halted immediately and it was only once the kidnapped African had been tracked down – he had been sold as a slave to a Surinamese planter – and returned that the slave trade was able to resume.⁵

Bosman's description shows that, like the Europeans, the African rulers wanted to regulate long-distance trade in the hope of extracting more income for their governments than they would receive from free trade. The Europeans achieved this by setting up companies and giving them a monopoly; in some cases, the African kings reserved the monopoly on the slave trade exclusively for themselves, and appointed one or more brokers to act on their behalf. And, just as in Europe, these monopolies largely disappeared in the eighteenth century, when the slave trade really took off.

This last point raises the question of whether and how Dutch trade with Africa changed the continent. It is not possible to give a clear answer to this question insofar as the specifically Dutch share in the contacts with Africa was concerned. The Netherlands was just a small player in the trade with Africa in comparison with Portugal, England and France. The combined trade of all the European trading nations undoubtedly had consequences for state formation in Africa. Many coastal states such as Elmina that had intensive overseas trading contacts were able to maintain their independence or could distance themselves from the major powers in the interior. One question is whether the weapons imported from Europe played a role here. In response to this, it can be said that the number of imported weapons available per person was much lower than in the New World, and for that part of the world it has never been demonstrated that there was any connection between the import of weapons and state formation. It seems obvious that the Atlantic slave trade had an impact on Africa, although the effects varied widely by region and time. It is difficult to say whether this exodus was harmful, because between 1500 and 1900 no region in Africa had let as many people leave as Portugal and Great Britain, and in those European countries emigration actually alleviated the pressure on the population.

The effects of the slave trade may be difficult to identify, and it is also not clear whether the goods from Europe for which the slaves were exchanged brought about many changes. Recent studies demonstrate

⁵ Postma, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade*, 102, 103.

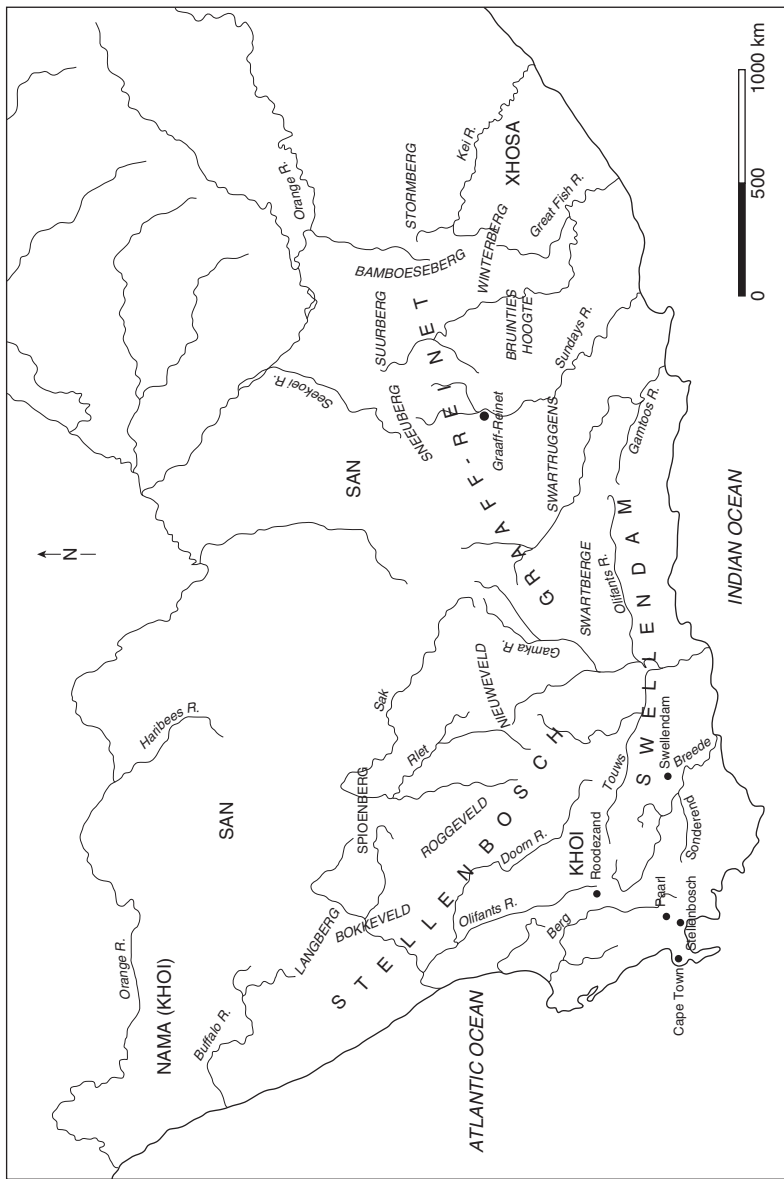
that the quantities of imported goods were relatively low and that there also remains the question of how much the imports from Europe impacted on the traditional African production of textiles and metals. It is possible only to make some rough assumptions on this issue because there are no archives in Africa that hold a store of information on the past. We have to make do with the observations made by the Europeans on the coast, supplemented with information from ships' logs and a few travel diaries and archaeological evidence. We also have to bear in mind that most of the information from the Dutch sources related solely to the daily activities of the WIC staff and how trade was progressing. Most Dutch people were not really interested in what was going on in Africa. At the start of the nineteenth century the commander of the main Dutch fort at Elmina bemoaned the fact that most of his subordinates showed every sign of

that incomprehensible indifference, so that they did not consider the country, the whole coast of Guinea with all the peculiarities of this part of the world, as a subject worthy of any reflection, so much so, in fact, that various of them on their return from their stay on the coast only report the name of the fort, or the forts where they had been, the name of the temporary chief; that it was exceptionally hot and that the Negroes are black.⁶

The Cape Colony

All these constraints and the reservations about the effect of Dutch contacts in West and Central Africa are superfluous in terms of Dutch penetration into South Africa. The effects of Dutch expansion there are similar in almost all respects to those in the indigenous states of America. In comparison with the other parts of Africa, the Cape was particularly easy to penetrate, largely due to the fact that there were no tropical diseases in the region against which the Dutch lacked immunity. Moreover, part of the local population at the Cape, the Khoi (*Hottentotten*), lived from cattle farming, and the San (*Bosjesmannen*) were hunter gatherers, which meant that they did not live together in a close community, but in small groups of a few families. The Khoi spent all their time looking for new pastures for their cattle to graze, and had no experience of warfare, which would have been a means of keeping the Dutch from penetrating further inland. The Khoi were very few in number, probably about 50,000.

⁶ Emmer, *Engeland, Nederland, Afrika*, 56.



Map 2 The Cape of Good Hope

The number of Khoi fell sharply as they came into contact with the diseases that the Europeans brought with them when they settled permanently in the Cape. Before this, contacts with the Khoi were more incidental and were limited to exchanging cattle for tobacco and metal objects. The demand for meat at the Cape grew after the start of colonisation in 1652, which led to a number of conflicts with the Khoi. The VOC and the *vrijburgers* or 'free citizens' formerly employed by the VOC who had stayed in the colony after their contracts expired sowed fields, which were often destroyed by the Khoi cattle. The Khoi sometimes stole VOC cattle once the Company had started breeding its own herds to meet the increased demand for meat. In addition, the *vrijburgers* in their turn stole cattle from the Khoi. This caused a conflict to erupt in 1659. The Khoi, led by a former interpreter, destroyed almost all the fields, and the Europeans were forced to retreat to their fort. The result was a stalemate. Peace was restored in 1660 with the signing of a truce in which the Khoi recognised the rights of the VOC and the *vrijburgers* over the cultivated land, but were not forced to pay compensation or to return the cattle that had been stolen. This was because the VOC directors in the Netherlands had issued strict orders to treat the Khoi well and above all not to take them as slaves. Given the already delicate state of relations in the region, the local governor made sure these instructions were adhered to.

A further war brought to an end the autonomy of the Khoi, at least that of the clans that lived in or close to the area where the VOC and the free citizens were located. Slowly but surely they were drawn into colonial society. More and more Khoi became shepherds, servants and field workers on the farms owned by the Europeans. In legal cases between the Khoi and the Europeans, the Khoi were not treated as slaves but as free persons, but for cases of murder or manslaughter, the judge would apply double standards: a Khoi was always sentenced to death, while a European was expelled from the colony and forfeited his property. By this time there was very little left of tribal cohesion among the Khoi at the Cape.⁷

Establishing even a small victualling station was in practice more difficult than it might appear. Both the VOC employees at the new post and the passing ships needed extensive supplies of food, which the local population was unable to provide. Importing food from the Netherlands or Java was costly, and the VOC therefore reluctantly allowed more and more migrants to settle in the colony, either as farmers or as craftsmen. Most of these were in the service of the VOC, having remained in the

⁷ Elphick, 'The Koisian to c. 1770', 3–41.

colony as free citizens once their contracts had expired. The migration of whole families from Europe was an exception; the one-time arrival of the 200 Huguenots from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 was one such case. The migration may have taken place gradually, but by about 1800, at the time of the surrender to the English, there were no fewer than 20,000 settlers living in the Cape Colony. That is almost twice as many as in New Netherland at the time of the English conquest.

Besides the colonists, towards the end of the Dutch period there were more and more slaves in the colony – in total some 26,000 – and around 1,700 freed slaves. Moreover, in the area claimed by the VOC in 1795 there were around 15,000 Khoi, the original inhabitants of the Cape, as well as offspring of relationships between the Khoi and the Europeans. In recent decades, new information has come to light on each of these groups.⁸

The colonists from Europe were mainly former employees of the VOC, who had settled at the Cape after working for the VOC for several years. They were almost all men from the Netherlands and neighbouring countries, particularly Germany and France. Many of these men had started to work for the VOC because they were poor and they wanted to escape the abject poverty that was their lot in their home country. They must have been in dire straits because the VOC was by no means a generous employer: the Company paid low wages, and the death rate among VOC staff was high, in particular among the European employees of the Company in tropical Asia. This does not mean that all the VOC's workers and soldiers were poorly educated. In Germany, in particular, the Thirty Years' War and its aftermath resulted in such an economic depression that even young men with a good education or a craft were willing to work for the VOC.

In a demographic sense, the Cape met all the wishes of the colonists, and, just as in North America, there was an unprecedented growth of the white population. The availability of an almost unlimited amount of land, the good nutrition and the effective resistance against disease that this brought with it made it possible to marry early and produce many children, and also to see these children grow up.⁹ The shortage of marriageable females was partly compensated for by allowing women from the slave population from Asia who had been freed and who subsequently married a colonist to become members of the white colonist population.

The colonists engaged in cattle rearing, wine growing and the cultivation of grain. Large-scale cattle rearing in particular required large areas

⁸ Giliomee and Elphick 'An Overview', 360.

⁹ Elphick and Shell, 'Intergroup Relations', 128–9.

of pasture land, which in time caused numerous conflicts with the native Khoi people and eventually also with the Bantu-speaking Xhosa. The colonised area at the Cape increased tenfold in the eighteenth century, while the number of colonists increased sevenfold.

Also, the contacts between the native Khoi at the Cape and the Europeans dated from as early as the end of the sixteenth century. The Cape provided the passing ships with everything that a weary and exhausted ship's crew needed, namely a pleasant climate, clean water and fertile land for growing vegetables, while the Khoi were prepared to exchange cows and sheep for tobacco, iron and copper.¹⁰ Sometimes the Europeans stole cattle from the Khoi because they would soon be continuing on their way and were untroubled by the long-term consequences of their actions. This changed in 1652, when the VOC decided to set up a victualling station at the Cape. From 1638, attempts had been made to build such a facility on the uninhabited island of Mauritius. Although the Dutch introduced sugar cultivation and all kinds of new mammals to the island, following a devastating tornado in 1695 they halted all their efforts and returned to the Cape. The role of the Dutch in the extinction of the unique native dodo will remain an enigma for eternity. In 1715 the French started to take an interest in the island, which they named Île de France. Ships also sailed regularly from the Cape to Madagascar to trade in slaves, but there was no question of a territorial conquest there. This phenomenon was limited to the mainland of Africa.

Dutch expansion on the southern tip of Africa took place in three stages. Initially the VOC settlement at the Cape was intended only for trade, but very quickly the VOC staff started farming, together with a few free farmers. In the eighteenth century, more and more colonists became nomadic pastoralists, engaged in extensive cattle farming. This expansion was possible only because the Khoi were forced to relinquish more and more land – a practice that the VOC directors in the Netherlands were well aware of. The continuing expansion of the land used for farming and cattle rearing could potentially have led to a permanent war, and the Company directors therefore commanded the colonists at the Cape to treat the Khoi with respect, instructing them to honour the agreements made with this group and not make slaves of them. This policy continued until the end of the Dutch period, but it did not prevent countless conflicts breaking out between the Europeans and the Khoi over the course of the years.

Just like the indigenous peoples in the New World, the Khoi had no other choice than to accept the consequences of European expansion on their land. They had no central authority that might have made it possible

¹⁰ Elphick, 'The Koisan to c. 1770', 9.

to organise a concerted resistance against the European infiltrators. And just like the American Indians, they had no immunity against a number of European and Asian diseases. Eventually they separated into two groups: one group tried to keep the Europeans at a distance by retreating increasingly further into the hinterland while the other group accepted their defeat, remained in the colonised area and no longer herded their own cattle but helped the colonists with their cattle rearing and farming.

European Workers

Over the course of time most of the colonists with a farm at the Cape could use some extra manpower. In principle this could be Europeans, but there was no large-scale migration of contract workers from the Republic. From 1650 onwards, potential migrants in Western Europe had little interest in going as contract workers to those parts of the New World where African slaves were deployed on a large scale to work in the fields, and this will certainly have applied also to the Cape Colony.¹¹

European workers at the Cape had to be hired from the VOC. This was an expensive business, and there was also the fact that the Company sometimes unexpectedly needed the hired workers itself. There were few such workers available, so their wages were high, but they left a lot to be desired. Just as in North America, at the end of their contract the workers received between one and three years' salary, which was sometimes paid in kind, probably in sheep. This seems to indicate that the VOC workers wanted to remain in the colony and hoped ultimately to be able to work their own livestock farm.¹²

Khoi Workers

The native population of the Cape was mainly made up of the Khoi, plus a smaller group, called the San. Since the availability of European workers was too limited for the livestock, wine and grain farmers, they tried to put native people to work on their farms. This proved difficult because initially these groups responded with hostility towards the infiltrators. Just like the American Indians, the Khoi could not be forced to work as slaves for the colonists, but after a number of decades some of the Khoi had no alternative, having lost their pasture land and cattle.¹³ It was mainly the colonists who lived in the newly colonised areas who made use of the Khoi

¹¹ Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 8.

¹² Biewenga, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, 99–105.

¹³ Biewenga, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, 105–8.

workers, because they did not yet have enough capital to buy African slaves. The Khoi hired themselves out as day workers and also as workers on an annual contract, the men to work in the field and herding cattle, the Khoi women as washerwomen and to take care of the colonists' children. Groups of Khoi also moved from farm to farm, helping with harvesting. Estimates indicate that towards the end of the Dutch rule of the Cape, some 20,000 Khoi and 3,000 San were living in the area colonised by the Europeans, 20 to 30 per cent of whom worked for the colonists either temporarily or on a regular basis.¹⁴ The original population of the Cape was much greater before 1651, but an epidemic of childhood smallpox wiped out about 90 per cent of the Khoi population.¹⁵

Slaves

The Cape was never a slave colony in the same way as Suriname. There may be several reasons for this, such as that the work done by the free migrants from Europe in combination with that of the Khoi and San was enough to meet the needs at the Cape, which kept the import of slaves to a minimum. Another possibility is that it was not financially viable to use slaves because the price of buying them and the cost of their maintenance, accommodation and medical care outweighed the benefits. However, the growth of the slave population should not be underestimated. Until 1700, the number of slaves was less than 1,000, one half of whom belonged to the VOC and the other half to the colonists. By the end of the eighteenth century, the slaves numbered about 15,000, the large majority of whom were owned by the colonists. There were slightly more slaves than freemen in the colony. The question is, why did the number of slaves at the Cape increase strongly but not as much as on the plantation colonies in the West Indies?

The increase in the number of slaves at the Cape in the eighteenth century shows that slave work was profitable, although not as much so as in the West Indies. Most slaves who were taken to the Cape came not from West Africa but from regions around the Indian Ocean. Some were of African origin and came from Mozambique or Madagascar; others were from South and Southeast Asia. The European slave traders did the same on the coast of the Indian Ocean as on the Atlantic coast of Africa: they profited from the already existing trade in slaves and diverted part of this trade elsewhere.

Unlike in the Netherlands, no private shipping companies were set up at the Cape to run the slave trade from a local base. It was the VOC that

¹⁴ Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 11, 35.

¹⁵ Biewenga, *De Kaap de Goede Hoop*, 107.

operated the slave ships, and they sailed only sporadically. Slaves were also offered for sale by French and Portuguese slave ships that had taken part in the slave trade in the Indian Ocean and probably had not sold all their slaves to the French and Portuguese settlements in Asia. It was only the Portuguese slave trade in Mozambique that was intended to take the slaves to the New World, and apparently the sale of slaves for these ships at the Cape was at times more advantageous than selling them in Brazil. Finally, there was also a regular supply of slaves from Batavia, the headquarters of the VOC. A number of senior officials indicated their preference for not selling their slaves on the spot but instead, when they left for home, they would take their slaves with them to the Cape, where the prices for slaves were higher. Although these three areas of supply greatly increased the number of slaves shipped to the Cape, there was a discrepancy between the supply and demand for slaves at the Cape.

In addition, there were more deaths than births among the slave population in the Cape during the VOC period. This is surprising, because the Cape Colony is not located in the tropics, and in the New World it was only in the tropical regions that the population of slaves decreased in number, while the demographic growth of slaves in non-tropical North America was exceptional. The question is why this was not the case in southern Africa. Unfortunately, there is no good answer to this question, although a number of factors that influenced the demographic growth of the Cape slave population can be cited.

In the first place, the proportion of adult females among the slave population was only half that in the West Indies. Such a level of demographic imbalance cannot easily be redressed. In the West Indies the lack of growth of the slave population is often attributed to the strenuous work on the sugar plantations there; the work in the vineyards and in grain cultivation was equally arduous. Another curious factor is that the number of children born to female slaves who were themselves not born in the colony but were brought in from elsewhere was about half that in the West Indies. This may indicate that either relatively old or relatively weak female slaves were taken to the Cape; these were women who were no longer of childbearing age, or whose fertility was impaired due to poor health. For the female slaves who were the property of the Company and who lived in the central slave house, venereal diseases could be another cause of the low birth rate. Incidentally, the central slave lodge of the VOC was often referred to as the biggest brothel in the colony. A further issue was that the slaves lived in small groups on isolated farms, which made it difficult for them to find a partner, and this may consequently have contributed to the low number of births.

Most slaves were deployed in the cultivation of grapes and grain, as craftsmen or to help with household activities. More than half of the slave owners at the Cape had fewer than five slaves, a similar number to that pertaining for the farms in the Stellenbosch and Drakenstein areas. An interesting point to note is that the number of owners who did not have their slaves work in agriculture but rather, as in Batavia, in small businesses or in housekeeping rose slowly during the eighteenth century.¹⁶

Major slave revolts were not an issue at the Cape. Just as in Suriname, runaway slaves were a familiar phenomenon. Although the runaways formed maroon communities, they did not carry out any large-scale attacks on the colonists' farms, as happened on the plantations in Suriname. The farmers at the Cape had more to fear from the Khoi than from their former slaves. There is one more difference between the Cape and the West. The rebelliousness and the resistance of the slaves in the New World is often explained by the fact that large groups of slaves came from the same region of Africa and therefore spoke the same language, which made it easy for them to organise revolts. This was not the case with the slaves at the Cape, who came from the most diverse parts of Africa and Asia. What was a disadvantage for the demographic growth of the slaves – the isolated location of the farms with slaves and the small number of slaves per owner – proved to be an advantage in limiting slave resistance.¹⁷

The abolition of slavery was not a topic of discussion among the free population in the Cape Colony, although towards the end of the eighteenth century some of the colonists proved to be adherents of the Patriots' movement in the Netherlands, calling for more democracy and equality. This probably gave rise to all kinds of grievances, but these were mainly about the hierarchical nature of the colonial management rather than about the continuance of slavery. One thing that was surprising was that the official slave imports decreased sharply in about 1790, just as in the West, although the demand for slaves remained at a high level. The price of slaves rose, but more slaves were brought in only once the English had taken over the colony.¹⁸

West Africa

West Africa was the first region in the Atlantic with which the Dutch merchants had trading relations. Initially the Dutch sailed to the west coast of Africa to exchange goods: European and Asian textiles, weapons

¹⁶ Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 35; Armstrong, 'The Slaves', 97, table 3.7.

¹⁷ Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 120.

¹⁸ Giliomee and Elphick, 'An Overview', 378–9.

and gunpowder were bartered for ivory, pepper, wax, brazilwood, hides, lime juice, rubber, wild cotton and gold. Gold was not supplied in volume, but in terms of value it was by far the most significant item. It was not until well into the eighteenth century – after 1740 – that slaves would be worth more than African export goods.¹⁹ This about turn in the English trade relations with Africa took place earlier – in about 1700.²⁰

Unlike the slave trade, there were no dynamic developments in the trade in goods with Africa. One reason for this was that the production of export goods in West Africa was firmly in the hands of the Africans, and – unlike the Asians – they were neither prepared nor able to increase production. There was a more or less fixed amount of goods that could be exported every year from Africa, and the only way the Dutch merchants could increase their own share was by reducing the proportion exported by the other European powers. From 1590, the Dutch sailed regularly to West Africa and they rapidly succeeded in excluding the Portuguese on some parts of the coast. The Portuguese then shifted their focus to the Atlantic slave trade, in which the Dutch as yet had no interest. In 1612 the Dutch acquired a fixed support post on the coast: Fort Nassau. Back in the Republic, several small companies were set up for the trade with Africa, but there was little cooperation between them. In total, fifteen to twenty ships a year sailed from Dutch ports to West Africa.

After the WIC had been set up, initially very little changed, but when a Dutch colony was conquered in Brazil and privateering did not produce enough slaves, the directors of the Company decided to focus their attention on the transatlantic slave trade. Portuguese Elmina was conquered in 1637 and until 1872 remained the centre of the Dutch presence on the west coast of Africa. From Elmina, a series of forts and trading posts were set up, a number of which remained in Dutch hands until they were sold to Great Britain, although some of them were lost over the course of time.

The limited scale of the goods trade meant that the different chambers of the WIC alternated with one another in sending ships to the west coast of Africa. However, it is unlikely that the only vessels trading on the coast of Africa were WIC ships; of all the trade areas in the Atlantic, the threshold for trading with West Africa was the lowest, this area being a continuation of the trade with southern Europe and the Atlantic islands. There was no way of checking whether a Dutch ship with a southern European destination was trading on the coast of West Africa, and

¹⁹ Den Heijer, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, 134–5.

²⁰ Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery*, 150.

consequently violating the WIC's monopoly. The Company was not sufficiently wealthy to take adequate measures to safeguard the monopoly, and it was a long time before they invested in adequate control measures. Their policy of 'costs go before earnings' is evident from the fact that between 1674 and 1740 the WIC had thirty-three warships patrolling along the coast of Africa, where they caught ninety-eight Dutch, mainly Zeeland, vessels and seventy-six Brazilian vessels that were engaged in privateering.²¹

This last point needs some explanation. The fact that Brazilian merchants could trade on parts of the African west coast where Dutch forts were located was a result of the peace treaty that the Netherlands and Portugal had concluded in 1661. Under the terms of this treaty, not only did the Dutch waive their claims in the South Atlantic (Brazil and Angola) and the Portuguese relinquish their claims in the Indian Ocean, but at the same time ships from Brazil were permitted to trade on the Gold Coast on condition that the Brazilians paid the first 10 per cent of the value of their exchange cargo to the commander of the fort at Elmina. The WIC confiscated numerous Brazilian vessels, from which it can be concluded that these terms were not always honoured. The Brazilians were not the only offenders; the English, French, Swedes, Danes and Brandenburgers also traded on the Gold Coast without Dutch permission.

The Brazilian trade contacts, together with the slave trade, were the most dynamic element in the Dutch trade contacts with Africa. The trade in goods became less important during the course of the eighteenth century. On average, between 1674 and 1740, five WIC ships sailed back and forth between Africa and the Republic every year, although the numbers varied from year to year. Between 1674 and 1680 the number of ships was about fifteen a year, but by the 1736–40 period there were fewer than two. Over the years, the number of Brazilian ships calling at Elmina remained constant at between thirteen and fifteen a year.²² The Brazilians generated about 15,000 to 16,000 guilders a year, an amount that was paid not in cash, but in gold and tobacco. The Dutch, like the Brazilians themselves, used Brazilian tobacco to buy slaves. The gold was shipped to the Netherlands. Between 1675 and 1731, goods valued at more than 24 million guilders were transported to the Netherlands, of which gold accounted for 87 per cent of the value. This gold from Brazil explains why the turning point from trading in goods to the slave trade with Africa came much later for the Netherlands than for England and France. Without the gold, the Dutch

²¹ Den Heijer 'The West African Trade', 147–8.

²² Schwartz and Postma, 'The Dutch Republic and Brazil', 181.

slave trade would have outperformed the trade in goods with Africa in terms of value much sooner.²³

In the long term, the slave trade began to dominate trade relations with Africa. Until 1730 the slave trade was officially in the hands of the WIC. There is little doubt that Dutch privateers also participated in the slave trade, although it is impossible to say for certain just how many were involved; in the eighteenth century the number of illegal sailings was estimated at five per year.²⁴ This trade made very different demands on ships and crews from the demands on those sailing directly to West Africa from the Netherlands. To be successful in the slave trade, it was essential to have the right goods for the exchange cargo. Without a good mix of textiles, rifles, gunpowder, iron bars, alcohol, utensils and sometimes cowrie shells – which came from the Maldives in the Indian Ocean – there would have been no hope of becoming an attractive trading partner for the African slave traders. This was important because, in the course of the eighteenth century, competition among Europeans became fierce. Initially, each country conducted its business more or less on its own part of the west coast of Africa. It has already been mentioned that the Dutch and Portuguese had signed a treaty allowing Portuguese and Brazilian ships to trade on the Gold Coast. In the long run, this demarcation became less and less relevant, because the locus of the slave trade was constantly changing. There were times when far fewer slaves were offered than before on certain stretches of the African coast, while on other parts the slave trade expanded. This meant that the other European trading nations also traded on ever larger parts of the coast.

The supply of slaves in Africa was able to respond much more quickly to changes in demand than the supply of export goods, which was largely due to the fact that there was little or no innovation in the way goods were produced in Africa. European observers commented, for example, that mining techniques in particular were very primitive, and, having once been a gold-exporting area, West Africa soon became instead a gold-importing area. But these limitations on the trade in goods did not apply at all to the slave trade. The Africans were able to supply more and more slaves to meet the increasing demand from Europe.

This flexibility in the slave trade can be explained in several ways. First of all, slaves made up a large part of the population in West Africa. Calculations from the nineteenth century suggest that in some coastal areas more than 30 per cent of the population were slaves. These slaves usually did not produce more than was needed for their own upkeep and they were not indispensable: unlike in Europe and the West Indian

²³ Den Heijer, 'The West African Trade', 157. ²⁴ Paesie, *Lorrendrayen op Africa*, 85.

plantation areas, there were no major projects in tropical Africa that stood or fell according to the availability of landless workers. This meant that with rising prices, in times of drought and food scarcity, it became increasingly attractive for the slave owners in Africa to sell their slaves. The rise in prices also made it possible to obtain slaves further and further inland, with the distance to the coast changing from days of walking to weeks. At such distances, the cost of food and water along the way increased dramatically, as did the death rate of the slaves, but these disadvantages were more than compensated for by the ever-higher prices that the captains of the European slave ships were prepared to pay.

The rising prices also meant that the number of women and child slaves increased steadily, although neither of these two groups was initially very popular with plantation owners in the New World, where young, male slaves were preferred. But the increase in selling prices made it profitable for the captains of the slave ships to buy and sell these groups as well. This turnaround resulted in a considerable increase in the Atlantic slave trade.

There was a further development that contributed to the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade, namely the way in which Africans were enslaved. Instead of slaves being prisoners of war, lawbreakers and debtors, gangs emerged in the eighteenth century that raided villages and took members of the population as slaves. This also contributed to the growth of the transatlantic slave trade, although a vigorous internal slave trade continued to exist in Africa alongside the Atlantic trade as well as an Arab-dominated slave trade in the east and north.

The role played by Dutch merchant shipping in the slave trade may well have increased considerably during the course of the eighteenth century, but this was even more the case for the other European slave trading nations. This goes some way towards explaining why the increase in the Dutch slave trade during the eighteenth century did not translate into a higher share of the total slave trade between Africa and the New World; the Dutch share never exceeded 5 per cent. There are various reasons for this.

First of all, the transit slave trade diminished in importance. Until the eighteenth century, the Dutch sold more African slaves to buyers in foreign countries than in their own colonies. After this, sales to third parties declined because the Dutch slave trade apparently lost its competitiveness on foreign markets and because the English slave traders in particular asked for lower prices and offered better conditions. This development can clearly be observed in the transit trade to Hispanic America, where the slave owners had traditionally relied on supplies from foreign merchants.

The transit trade in slaves to Hispanic America decreased in importance because during the course of the eighteenth century the slave trade to the French, English and Dutch export colonies grew much more rapidly than that to the Spanish regions. Hispanic America was far less specialised in the labour-intensive cultivation of sugar and coffee than the English, French and Dutch plantation colonies and therefore also had far less need for slaves than these colonies, and the slaves they needed were largely supplied by slave traders of various nationalities. Just as in Hispanic America, the English, French and Dutch colonial legislation prohibited the supply of slaves via foreign ships, but unlike in Hispanic America they adhered more or less to this aspect of protectionism, at least in peace time. This was due to the fact that the expensive slaves were often bought on credit and it was not attractive for foreign slave-traders to set up a debt collection system in foreign colonies and wait years to be paid for illegally landed slaves.

Another possible explanation for the slow growth of the Dutch slave trade during the eighteenth century could be that the WIC had a monopoly on the slave trade, the productivity of which left much to be desired. After the abolition of the monopoly, the Dutch slave trade grew faster than ever before. This suggests that the WIC operated less efficiently than the private shipping companies, which would have slowed down the growth of the Dutch slave trade. All restrictions on private shipping companies in the Dutch slave trade were eventually lifted in 1738.

But even this late and unprecedented growth of the Dutch slave trade was more modest and less long-lived than in England, France or Portugal. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the Dutch were the only nation whose slave trade was in decline. The States-General were obliged to reduce the taxation on the slave trade, but this did not remedy the situation. Even before the French invasion in 1796, the Dutch slave trade was reduced to a few ships a year. Many of the Dutch forts on the Gold Coast were no longer properly maintained, and during the final years of the WIC the staff of the forts sometimes received no salary.

With the decline in the slave trade, the question of whether the Dutch forts on the African coast could be used as bridgeheads for further colonisation of the surrounding area arose. If the Africans did not want to produce export crops, then the Dutch had to do this themselves. This idea was not new. The Dutch had long questioned whether it would not be better to replace exports from the West Indies with exports from Africa. After all, the purchase and transportation of slaves involved enormous risks, while the Dutch had not had a happy experience in setting up plantation colonies in the New World. In the seventeenth century, there

was the debacle in Brazil, but also during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, after the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War, it was only with the support of foreign planters and investors that the Dutch plantation colonies in the Caribbean were able to develop. The number of English plantation owners grew rapidly both in Suriname and Demerara.

The Dutch strategists seemed to have forgotten that it was not the Europeans but the Africans who from the outset had resisted the exploitation of West Africa and that the natural outcome of this refusal to allow Europeans access to their continent was that plantations were established on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and not in Africa. Over the course of the centuries, the Europeans devised numerous projects to make more use of Africa than just as a supplier of slaves, gold and ostrich feathers. Attempts were made to set up cotton, sugar and indigo plantations, but one by one these projects all failed due to opposition from the Africans. European power was limited by the range of their cannon balls and the Europeans had to accept that they could not defeat the Africans.

These were not always the same Africans. Over the course of time the Dutch entered into trade relations with more and different nations in West Africa. The most important of these were the Elminese, who lived near to the main Dutch fort of São Jorge da Mina (Elmina), and the kingdom of Asante, with its capital city Kumasi. In the South Atlantic area, the official contacts were short-lived because the Dutch presence in Angola started with the conquest of Luanda in 1641 and ended with the reconquest of the city by the Portuguese in 1648. The same applied to a large number of contacts between Dutch WIC employees and several West African polities on the Slave and Grain Coasts. Sometimes the Dutch had frequent contacts with these regions, and at other times little or no contact at all. They did not manage to acquire a monopoly position anywhere and they always had to be alert to threats of European competitors.

In West Africa, the closest relations were those between the Dutch and the Elminese. Most of the WIC workers lived in the main fort, and a number of the men had relationships with Elminese women. The children from these relationships were almost always brought up by the mother and her family. In time, the resulting 'mulatto' families became essential to the good functioning of the fort. They provided food and slaves to the fort, and after the WIC monopoly had ended they were also in a position to supply the private shipping companies with slaves. These shipping companies often used Elmina as a last resort to buy slaves before crossing to the New World, where they bought the slaves they still needed. The slave traders had often been sailing along the coast for many months

and before arriving at Elmina had not managed to acquire a sufficient number of slaves to make their voyage profitable.

But the forts did not merely serve as the centre for the slave trade. At the request of the Africans living in the area, the Dutch were often arbiters in disputes among the Elminese themselves. In exchange, the Elminese acted as rowers for the Dutch, shuttling back and forth between the beach and the European ships lying off the coast. It took highly experienced rowers (known locally as *rimadores*) to guide their fully loaded canoes through the surf without mishap. The Elminese also offered water, wood and African food for sale both to the forts and to the ships. In the latter case, this food was intended for the slaves on board, to supplement the peas and beans that had been brought from Europe.

To the north and south of Elmina the contacts were much less institutionalised. In some coastal areas there were no European settlements at all, and the Dutch traded from their ships with the Africans who approached their vessels by canoes. Sometimes the African rulers allowed a *legger* – a floating trading post – to be moored off the coast or a temporary warehouse to be built on the beach. The Africans also sometimes allowed a number of European traders in an important trading post to rent accommodation and warehouse space.

The Europeans had absolutely no formal power in Africa except within the walls of their forts. And even then they could not simply do what they wanted; they had to bear in mind the need to build and maintain a good relationship with the neighbouring Africans. Otherwise there was the danger that the Europeans in their forts could be cut off from the outside world and become completely dependent on the erratic supply of food from Europe. In order for the supply of African products and slaves to work effectively, it was essential to establish good relations with several African traders and nations. Over the years, the African state system continued to shift, and the Dutch were keen to establish good relations with the winning parties. The Asante Empire in the hinterland of Elmina was one such new state, which had been created in about 1700 by the conquest of other states and had since then controlled the supply routes to Elmina. Eventually, the Asante became the most powerful ally of the Dutch in Africa. Elmina also came under the authority of the Asante. In 1740, the Dutch helped the Elminese to ward off an attack by the Fante, the traditional allies of the English on the Gold Coast, thus preventing the Elminese, including their wives and children, from being sold as slaves, which was the usual fate of the conquered. In turn, the Elminese helped the Dutch by providing soldiers when the WIC needed to repel an attack by the English and the Fante.

Soon after the rise of the Asante, the director-general at Elmina sent an emissary to Kumasi, the capital city of the Asante, and in time the king of the Asante had a residence in Elmina. After 1750, the Dutch paid an annual fee in the form of gifts to the king of the Asante as a means of strengthening their relationship. This close alliance brought the Dutch many advantages, one of the most important of which was that the Asante preserved the political peace – a vital necessity in order to maintain the regular supply of gold and slaves to the coast.²⁵

But trade in the African world did not stand still. By the end of the seventeenth century, not only new states, but also individual African merchants became so important that they were no longer in the service of an African monarch; some even had their own armies. Once again, the various European powers on the West Coast tried to keep on the right side of these free and powerful merchants. Indeed, the African merchants were so powerful that they could play off the European trade representatives against each other, and were able to wage war without having to worry about reprisals.

One such potentate was John Cabes – or Jan Kabes as the Dutch called him – who, operating on the Gold Coast, caused many headaches both for the WIC and for the representative of the English Royal African Company. The Dutch suspected that it was Cabes who, in 1694, had been responsible for the murder of the miners that the WIC had brought in from Europe to finally construct and exploit a promising gold mine under the direction of the Company. This was something the Africans themselves were unable to do, and it represented the first attempt by the Dutch on the coast to put their own house in order. However, they had not anticipated so much opposition from Cabes, and they responded by attempting to assassinate him during a meeting; the attempt failed. Cabes also put an end to the Dutch plans to build a fort near to a promising trading place on the coast, although the director-general of Elmina, following a great deal of intrigue and the application of many gifts and large sums of money, had helped put on the throne a ruler who was favourably disposed towards the Dutch. Eventually, the Dutch and the English simply gave Cabes what he wanted, because he could supply them with everything they needed – corn, ivory and salt as well as slaves and gold – and he even hired out the rowers and canoes needed to load and unload the Dutch ships.

A more difficult case was the merchant John Conny, who grew up in the shadow of Fort Groß-Friedrichsburg, the principal castle of the Brandenburgische Afrikanische Compagnie (BAC). The Elector of

²⁵ Yarak, *Asante and the Dutch*.

Brandenbug also wanted to enjoy the benefits of the slave and gold trade with Africa and, learning from the Dutch example, resolved to set up the BAC, assisted by Dutch sailors and Dutch ships. This newly founded Company and its fort allowed the Africans to play off the different European powers along the coast against one another, and John Conny was no exception. Whenever things got too hot for him, he fled to the German fort, where he could stand his ground, even though both the Dutch and the English were keen to eliminate him. The English even evacuated one of their forts when they learned that Conny and his army were approaching. The Dutch eventually managed to convince the Brandenburgers to relinquish their African aspirations; they bought the BAC, but then they had to deal with the intransigent Conny themselves. The Dutch may have bought the Groß-Friederichsburg Fort from the BAC, but actually taking possession of it was a completely different matter. Conny was lord and master of the fort, even proudly parading in a Prussian ceremonial uniform. He supplied whoever he wanted with his slaves, goods and services – a practice he managed to keep up for years. An artillery bombardment from a military vessel, an attack with mortars specially supplied from the Netherlands and a delegation of envoys were all to no avail; one of the envoys was even murdered. It took the deployment of the troops of the African allies of the WIC to eventually put an end to John Conny's rule.

The Dutch slave trade increased in size during the course of the eighteenth century, but the role of the forts diminished. More and more Dutch slave ships traded on those parts of the coast where there were no Dutch settlements. This development meant that the suspension of the Dutch slave trade during the French period and the subsequent legal abolition of the Dutch slave trade had no dramatic effect on the position of the Dutch forts in Africa. In fact, from 1784 onwards, when the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War ended, it was clear that hardly any Dutch slave ships were being deployed to these settlements. After 1795 vessels came only sporadically from the Netherlands, and for a number of years the connections with the Netherlands were even completely severed.

The Dutch forts on the Gold Coast were never conquered. Between 1795 and 1815 they, together with the artificial island of Deshima in the port of Nagasaki in Japan, were the Netherland's only remaining colonial possessions. On the African coast, the warring Europeans were just too weak to 'inflict damage on one another', as the then director-general reported to The Hague. Although, in keeping with tradition, some Brazilian slave ships did pass by, absolutely nothing else happened. The staff of the fort compensated for their inaction by inundating The Hague

with countless suggestions as to how to prevent the 'Dutch possessions on the coast of Guinea' from being disposed of in the future. They were responding to hints from The Hague that the pointless forts were expensive to maintain: the staffing costs alone were estimated at 150,000 guilders a year.

Most officials on the African coast were convinced that the Dutch forts would ultimately play a role again in the slave trade when peace was restored in Europe. However, they were also well aware that England had banned its subjects from engaging in slaving as of 1 March 1808. Most of the Dutch colonists on the coast thought this was strange. The secretary of Fort Elmina informed his superiors in The Hague that if the Netherlands, like England, were to abolish the slave trade, this would represent 'an irreparable disadvantage for the richest source of trade'. The English ban was the result of persistent humanitarian objections. The secretary was of the opinion that the slave trade was 'a humane practice', because otherwise many more prisoners of war in Africa would be put to death. It was not the slaves in Guinea who complained about the slave trade, but those in the West Indies. When they left for the West, the African slaves were under the illusion that they would live there with the runaway Maroons and be able to lead an 'unashamedly lazy and indolent' life, earning their livelihoods from plundering and looting. Slaves were slaves in Africa, and in the West and on the Surinamese plantations they were at least taught something useful. After the war in Europe, the slave trade – 'which Africa has been happy about for many years and which people will want to keep alive by whatever means it takes' – should be vigorously promoted. The Dutch government had no reason to fear revolts such as those on Haiti. The problem of the rebellious slaves in Suriname could be completely 'averted by their own self-destruction and devastation, without this inciting further revolts in the colony'. It was important that every civilised human being should condemn the independence of the 'negro republic' of Haiti in no uncertain terms: 'We must ensure that we do not strengthen these crazy ideas by paying any attention to them whatsoever.' In essence, the secretary concluded his advice, the position of the whole of Europe was at stake.

These ideas did not completely reflect the assumptions of the highest Dutch official on the coast, Director-General R. Linthorst. He wondered whether the Africans really could only be made to work once they had been brought to the West Indies as slaves. Would that not be possible at home, and could Africa not become a producer of export crops instead of the West Indies? Cotton, coffee and rice could easily be grown there. If

only the Africans had more needs, they would be driven to ‘useful labour’, he sighed. After all, they were

owners of a country that fulfils all their needs and lulls them into peacefully following their inclinations and laughing at the follies of the white people who abandon their own country, where, so they say, everything they could desire is available, in order to serve the Africans and to bring to Africa those luxury goods that have turned into primary needs for the Africans.²⁶

Incidentally, it was not only the Africans who had to change their attitude, but also the Dutch, who measured the importance of their forts in Africa solely in terms of trade turnover. Perhaps it was possible to establish a Dutch settlement along the river that flowed into the sea near the Dutch main fortress of Elmina:

When you think of this river with its built-on banks, the villas on the water under the remaining trees, the buildings, with all the crops and the necessary buildings, in the midst of the land divisions and the plantations, that provide a living for the working Negroes, and besides the allotments for the colonist at the rear, then one can see the best scene that could be painted of human industry located in a place so advantaged by nature.

Of course, the author of this recommendation had no intention of revealing the exceptionally high mortality rate among Europeans in Africa, especially among the newly arrived. But he also had a solution for this: the immigration of Dutch orphans and foundlings between the ages of six and eight years. After all, these children owed their existence to ‘the state’ and were therefore ideally suited to serve the motherland. Perhaps the authorities in The Hague could already send a group of fifty boys and girls on a trial basis under the guidance of a ‘father’ and a ‘mother’ as well as two ‘teachers’ and four ‘carers’. No more adults were needed; there were enough slaves, male and female, in Elmina to assist them.

Plans can be committed to paper, but that is no guarantee that anything will come of them. In The Hague these plans were regarded with some scepticism and Realpolitik was the order of the day. It was impossible to build plantations in Africa because of the ‘restless nature of the Negro nation’, as the Minister for Trade and the Colonies wrote to King Louis Napoleon, ruler of the Netherlands between 1806 and 1810. The Africans simply had no ‘inclination’ for farming and were constantly at war with one another. Dutch authority in Africa stretched not far beyond the walls of the forts’ cannon balls. ‘The location and atmospheric conditions of these possessions, along with the morality and the mindset of

²⁶ Emmer, *Engeland, Nederland, Afrika*, 53–4.

the natives, are all obstacles to colonisation.' Any proposals in this direction were dismissed by the minister as 'delusions', 'which had led people to regard these possessions as the gateway to the promised land, when in fact they had been nothing more than a costly mistake'. All these issues were good reason to bide one's time and do nothing.

Conclusion

Between 1600 and 1800, in terms of quantitative criteria, the Netherlands was deemed to be the fifth-largest Atlantic power after England, Spain, Portugal and France. The Dutch Republic played an important role in a number of events in the Atlantic region that outweighed the country's modest presence in the region. Moreover, there were a number of elements to Dutch expansion that were missing from the Atlantic history of the other European powers.

The Dutch Atlantic Compared

In the first place, Dutch merchant shipping played an important role in the transport of products and slaves to non-Dutch colonies. The presence of Dutch merchants in many Atlantic ports was due to the fact that the Netherlands had been a centre for trade within Europe since the Middle Ages and had an efficient transport sector, which made it possible to offer lower prices than those charged by the merchant shippers from neighbouring countries.

Secondly, the Netherlands played an exceptional role at the very start of its expansion by immediately having a major impact in tropical America and playing all its chips on the conquest of part of Portuguese Brazil populated by hostile Roman Catholic colonists. England and France also conquered tropical areas from the Iberians, but their first colonies there were modest: a number of small islands in the Caribbean that were almost uninhabited. The Netherlands thought it could make a killing by conquering a ready-made export colony, because in about 1625 it was the only power in the Atlantic region that had a large organisation with its own warships that thought it could afford the large investments needed for a military adventure on another continent. However, this advantage soon proved to be a disadvantage.

Thirdly, it is noteworthy that the WIC never succeeded in persuading significant numbers of free and non-free Dutch migrants to emigrate to the other side of the Atlantic, certainly nowhere near the level of the

emigration from England or Portugal. At that time, the migrants were largely young, unmarried mobile men, whom the Dutch shipping companies recruited in large numbers as mariners or soldiers. The young men who sailed on the Dutch ships came from a large catchment area, having managed to find their way to the Companies' recruitment offices from the whole of Scandinavia and West and Central Europe. However, the WIC was never as successful as the VOC, even though in some of the areas where the WIC operated the mortality rate for Europeans was lower than at home. And what applied to free migrants turned out in the long run to apply to the transport of slaves, too. While the slave trade continued to grow, during the last quarter of the eighteenth century the Dutch share in it fell sharply, both in percentage and in absolute terms. This cannot be attributed to the WIC because by the end of the eighteenth century the Company had long since ceased most of its trading activities.

It was only in Africa that the Netherlands managed to hold its position, maintaining its forts on the Gold Coast until well into the nineteenth century. The Dutch traders were helped in this by a treaty with Portugal in 1661 that enabled them to conduct trade on the coast of Angola on a reciprocal basis. On the west coast of Africa, the Netherlands benefited from the fact that none of the European powers was strong enough to drive out the others. The death rate among the Europeans there was so high that, including the European soldiers, there were generally just a few hundred men stationed on the coast, and many of these were sick. Only Portugal had a small settlement in Angola, most of the Portuguese in tropical Africa having been born locally, often from mixed European-African families, which meant they were able to build up immunity to the tropical diseases. The European staff of the Dutch fort had no such immunity, and almost half the newly arrived merchants and soldiers died within a year of arriving.

A fourth point on which the Dutch were able to distinguish themselves from the other European powers was in the development of the Caribbean plantation economy. The role of the Dutch in the region's transition from tobacco to sugar may often have been exaggerated, but they certainly did play a facilitating role, supplying slaves to the English and French planters, and buying sugar from them, which they shipped to the Netherlands. Although it has recently become clear that after 1640 the English, like the Dutch, were able to bring slaves to their colonies, and although part of the structure of the sugar industry was financed locally, the Dutch and Zeeland traders on the French islands had an important commercial function. Moreover, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Dutch brought coffee cultivation from Java to the Caribbean, introducing some diversification of plantation agriculture in the region.

The pioneering role of the Netherlands had almost come to an end even before the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672–4). England and France had more money, more manpower and more ships, thus relegating the Republic definitively to the role of a minor power in the Atlantic region. Only in the illegal trade with Hispanic America did the Netherlands continue to play an important role, but there too the French and particularly the English were always more important players. During the second half of the eighteenth century it became clear that the Netherlands could no longer keep up with the explosive growth of the plantation agriculture in the Caribbean area. The Dutch colonial possessions even proved to be too much for the economy of the motherland. The writing was on the wall when, after 1750, English investors and planters almost annexed the fastest-growing Dutch plantation colony of Demerara.

Dutch Impact

If we now want to assess the Dutch economic influence on the Atlantic world, we first of all have to note that the effects of European expansion were, generally speaking, dramatic in the New World. Millions of American Indians paid with their lives for the arrival of the Europeans, sometimes in wars, but mostly as a result of the diseases against which they had no immunity. The Europeans benefited directly from these American Indian victims, particularly in the moderate zones of North and South America. The two to three million immigrants who moved from Europe to the non-tropical parts of the New World lived longer because of the absence of dangerous epidemic diseases and owned considerably more land, which meant they were able to marry earlier and produce larger families than would have been possible in Europe; the child mortality rate was also low. Dutch migrants to the New World amounted to about 3 per cent of the total number of European immigrants. It is remarkable that more Dutch migrants did not benefit from the many advantages of the New World, but it has to be borne in mind that, after the loss of New Netherland, the Republic no longer owned any colonies in the moderate zones of the Atlantic area. This will certainly not have encouraged migration.

Nonetheless, no real explanation has been found for the low rate of migration from the Netherlands. Religious tolerance in the country is usually mentioned as one of the causes, as well as the relatively high per capita income, the absence of major natural disasters or invasions and occupations, and the good care taken of the poor. English citizens for the most part enjoyed more or less the same advantages as their counterparts

in the Republic, and yet, in percentage terms, many more Englishmen migrated than Dutchmen. There was even a large contingent of German migrants, and they did not even have their own colony.

The New World may have provided Europeans with many demographic benefits, but the Caribbean region was an exception. There, the First Nations' revenge was sweet. It is true that by 1700 almost all the original inhabitants of this region had died out, but neither the European immigrants nor the African slaves managed to survive demographically without a new influx of migrants from Europe and Africa. As a result of this constant immigration, Caribbean society remained a tough pioneering society with a large male surplus, many deadly diseases and wide-ranging social contrasts. It is no wonder that the voluntary immigrants, the Europeans, went to the Caribbean only if they expected their income to be not only much higher than at home, but also higher than in those parts of the New World where the demographic disadvantages of the Caribbean were absent. This explains why the Caribbean attracted different migrants from those going to mainland North and South America. Migration to the Caribbean was in some ways similar to the manning of a ship: those involved were mainly men, who left for the West as planters, plantation managers, administrators or overseers; the stay was temporary, the risk of not returning was high, and only if everything went well could they earn a lot of money.

There is no precise information on the volume of trade and migration in the Atlantic area between 1600 and 1800 and the share of the various European powers in the region, but it is unlikely that the Dutch share of trade and shipping in the Atlantic region in peacetime was much greater than that of the slave trade – namely about 5 per cent. After 1674, the Republic no longer had any settlement colonies with an extensive trade in goods and free migrants in which slaves did not play a role. Had the Netherlands, like England, retained its colony in North America, the scope of the slave trade would have been a poor indicator of Dutch economic activity in the Atlantic region, but it does give a reliable indication of the growth and shrinkage of the Dutch plantation colonies and of the Antilles. If we add importing and smuggling coffee and sugar from foreign plantation colonies and the transport of migrants to North America, the estimate of the Dutch share would be 6 to 7 per cent. In short, the Netherlands was a minor player in the Atlantic economy.

Did Europeans as a whole turn the Atlantic upside down for the sake of some slaves, sugar, coffee and tobacco? This is certainly the case with the New World, but in Africa – with the exception of the Cape – the effects of European expansion, including the Dutch activities, were more limited. The forced emigration of slaves between 1500 and 1850 did not have

a dramatic impact on the economy and demographics of the continent. The fact that the effects of migration were so small can be explained by the fact that, during those centuries, most Africans – like Europeans – barely produced more than was necessary for their own livelihoods, and that there were as yet very few specialised professions. Migration caused the economy of the early modern age to shrink proportionately, not disproportionately, and no specialised knowledge or skills were lost, as with the brain drain from the more recent Third World. In times of famine, emigration even benefited those who stayed behind, given that they had more land and therefore more food at their disposal. This applied both to migration from Europe and to forced migration from Africa.

And what applied to the people, also applied to the goods that were traded. Neither Africa nor Europe would have been very different without this trade. In exchange for the slaves, Africa received mainly textiles, weapons and gunpowder, alcohol, iron bars and household utensils from outside. This may seem like an impressive list, but the amounts were negligible in comparison with the production of most of these goods within Africa itself. And if the effects of the total slave trade on Africa were not very visible, this certainly applied to the relatively small Dutch share in them.

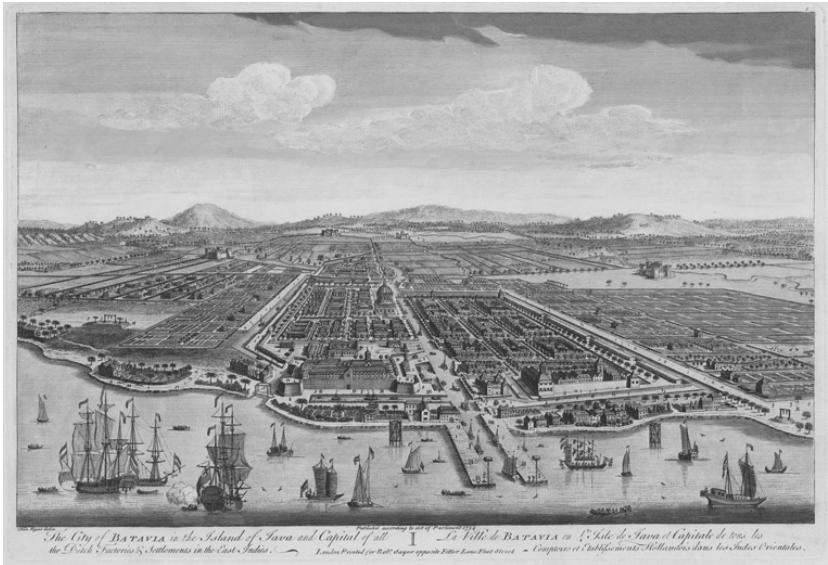
Moreover, there is another reason why the impact of European expansion on Africa outside the Cape was so limited: there were hardly any Europeans living in Africa. Europeans were not able to withstand the many tropical diseases in Africa, so their presence was limited to a few thousand in total. Their presence did lead to a number of relationships with African women and to the emergence of a small group of ‘mulattoes’ on the coast, but their number fell far short of the total West African population. Here, too, the Dutch pattern is no different from that of the other European countries.

The Cape Colony was an exception to the developments described here, because the Dutch did change this part of Africa significantly. By 1800, the area governed by this VOC settlement may still have been small, but, as in North America, the demographic consequences for the indigenous population were disastrous and far greater than the geographical extent of the Cape Colony would suggest.

Was the Dutch presence in the Atlantic area a failure in economic terms? The answer to this question depends on what it is being compared with. In the Atlantic area the expansion of the Netherlands was indeed minimal compared with that of Portugal, Spain and Great Britain. The Netherlands never managed to establish an extensive Dutch-speaking settlement colony there. And even in terms of plantation colonies, the Netherlands had only moderate success. It was only the Dutch plantation

colonies, or parts of them, and the Dutch slave trade that stagnated at the end of the eighteenth century, while the Spanish, Portuguese, English and French slave trade and plantation areas flourished. In terms of politics, the Netherlands and France were in a certain sense the losers, whereas the minuscule contributions of Denmark, Sweden, Brandenburg and Courland (in present-day Latvia) were negligible.

This explains why there is so little public interest in the Netherlands and France in the early history of the Atlantic area. For England, Portugal and Spain, the situation is different because their colonial expansion is an essential element of the national history of a large number of states in North and South America, while the Dutch roots in the United States are no more than a minor footnote in the country's history. Still, the Atlantic past has gained in popularity in the Netherlands in recent years as a result of the presence of large groups of migrants from the Caribbean region.



Figs. 4 and 5 At the top, the city of Batavia, published by Robert Sayer after a drawing by I. van Ryne (1754). Its rigid city pattern contrasts with an anonymous drawing of a bustling market street in Batavia with a Chinese theatre on the left and female vendors on the right (c. 1700).

Part III Monsoon Asia

Na aldus eenige tijd in Djakarta te hebben doorgebracht, vroeg Moer Djang Koeng eene streek gronds langs het zeestrand om een loods te bouwen [. . .]. Dat had ik niet gedacht, dat het verblijf der Hollanders te Djakarta zulken gevolgen hebben zou! Hoe heb ik mij laten misleiden! . . . Zoo moet ik dan voortaan op het gebergte wonen, en verdwenen is mijn aanzien!

After spending some time in Jakarta, Moer Djang Koeng asked for a stretch of land along the sea coast to build a warehouse [. . .]. I never imagined that the presence of the Dutch in Jakarta would have such consequences! How mistaken I was! . . . For me, that means in future living in the mountains, and the loss of my reputation.

From *Serat Baron Sakènder* (early eighteenth century)¹

¹ Cited in du Perron, *De muze van Jan Compagnie*, 203–15.

Introduction

Any analysis of Dutch expansion under the VOC would be impossible without first properly sketching out the geographical conditions to the east of the Cape of Good Hope. Modern classifications of ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’ are hardly suited for this purpose. Similar terms such as ‘the West’ or ‘the Orient’ are equally inadequate as a reference framework for a historical treatment of early Dutch expansion history after Vasco da Gama’s revolutionary discovery of the Cape route. It was not until the nineteenth century that such sharp dichotomies gained the upper hand in the explanatory models for colonial dominance and the economic rise of Western Europe. Besides the objection that these terms are something of an anachronism, the categories ‘Europe’ and ‘Asia’ are far too general, and they fail to do justice to both the diversity within and the continuity between these two regions. To start with the latter point: Vasco da Gama’s arrival in the south of India bore little evidence of a dramatic ‘first contact’ between two completely different civilisations, but was rather a return to a world that had long been known to merchants, and where it was possible to make oneself understood in Arabic, or in one of the other languages common in the Mediterranean area. Vasco da Gama’s revolution, unlike that of Columbus, was not the discovery of a new *world*: it was merely the discovery of a new *route*, back to a world that had been connected for centuries.

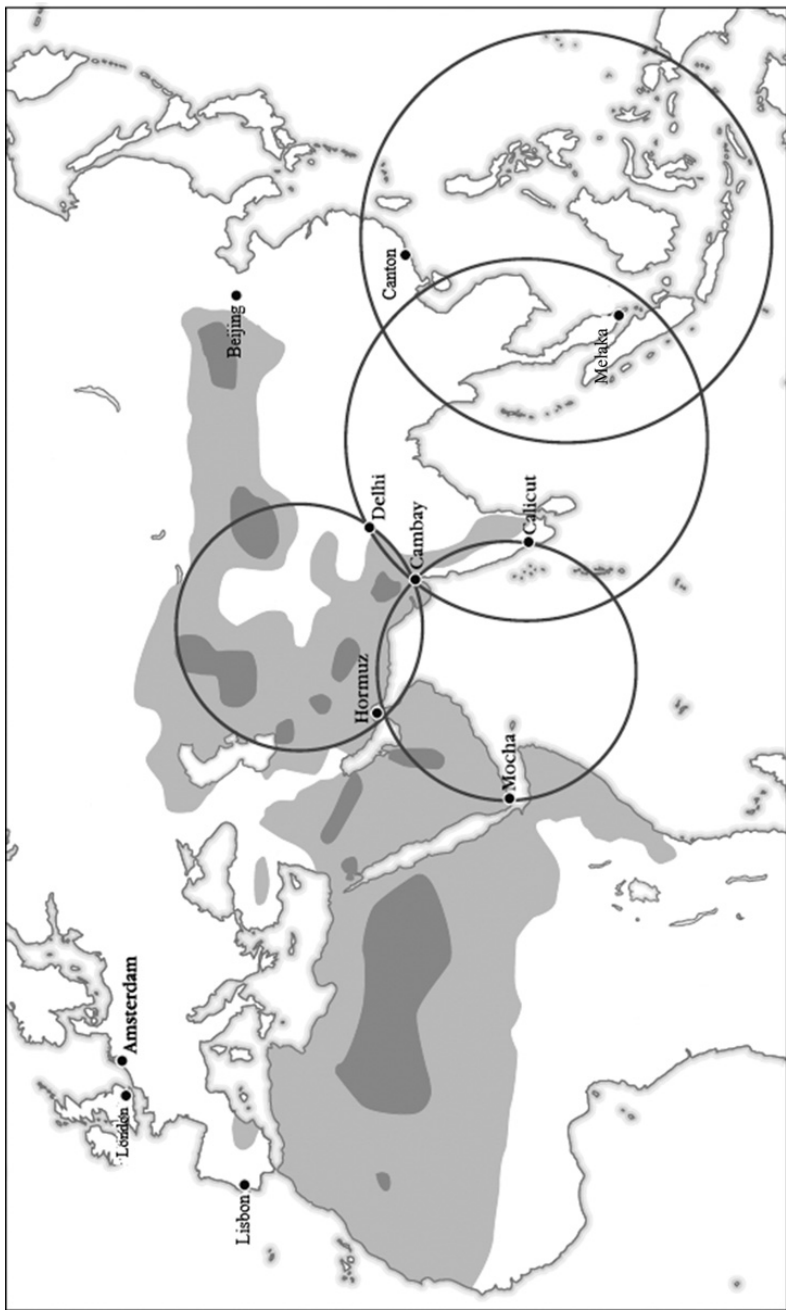
How should we imagine this world? It was in any event a geographical area of which Europe was a part, albeit on the furthest western periphery. In this sense it could be regarded as one vast Eurasian continuum that owed its unity to two connecting geographical configurations: the sea and the desert. Thanks to French historian Fernand Braudel in particular, historians have become much more aware of the unifying characteristic of seas and oceans, which means it has become possible to talk not only of a Mediterranean world, but also of an Atlantic, a Baltic and – yes – even of an Indian Ocean world. Their logistical advantages in terms of transport and trade made these seas the most important routes, and we have to realise that, even during the centuries before the Christian era, there were

already intensive commercial and cultural contacts between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian subcontinent. As early as in Roman times there were complaints about the permanent efflux of precious metals to India, and in the third century some Roman elites may even have experienced a period of veritable Indomania – of which Neoplatonism's enchantment with Indian wisdom is perhaps the most prominent example. In that sense there was nothing new about the VOC period, although we can agree with Adam Smith that, just a century before, there were indeed two important innovations: the development of the Cape route was one of these, and the European discovery – or rediscovery – of America was the second. In fact, as we will see in this part of the book, the latter also turned out to be relevant for the areas surrounding the Indian Ocean.

Even these two new factors initially signified a merely quantitative alteration to the ages-old trade relations between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, with precious metals flowing eastwards in return for spices and textiles flowing westwards. This is, of course, only part of the story, and we should avoid making the same mistake as Dutch historian Jacob van Leur, namely wanting to deny the occurrence of changes in rather static, pre-modern Asian economies.¹ Nonetheless, it remains imperative to briefly sketch what Braudel referred to as *la longue durée*: the climatological and geographical characteristics which, in spite of the dynamics of historical events in the short term and all manner of developments in the intermediate term, remain relatively stable.

In the framework of this long duration, we have to bear in mind the importance of the natural counterpart of the Indian Ocean, namely the desert, savannah and steppe region that stretches from Morocco in the extreme west to the Chinese Wall in the furthest east. Just like the oceans, this so-called Arid Zone constituted an important route connecting the continents of Africa, Europe and Asia, where the logistical possibilities were exceptionally well suited for long-distance trade. These dry areas were traditionally the habitat of cattle-rearing and trading nomads, with their endless caravans of camels and horses. The warring tradition of many of these peoples, with their widely admired and feared proficiency as mounted archers, also gave the Arid Zone an enormous potential for military power. Like the coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, it was primarily the transitional frontier zones between this dry nomadic zone and the wetter agricultural regions that typically developed as centres of great economic and political vitality and dynamism.

¹ Van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society*.



Map 3 The Arid Zone and the Indian Ocean

It is no coincidence that the capitals of the most extensive empires in Eurasia were on the sea coasts (Lisbon, Amsterdam, London) or at the very edge of the Arid Zone (Delhi, Beijing). These empires proved capable of exploiting the dynamics of both maritime and continental frontier regions. Indeed, they depended for their existence and continuity on the ability to connect these two lifelines. In the case of the Mughals in Delhi, for example, it was the connection both with the sea trade via Surat to the Indian Ocean and with the caravan trade via Kabul to Central Asia which immediately highlights the crucial importance of permanent control of the road network. Hence these empires should not be regarded as large, closed geographical blocks, but rather as extended open networks of highways and trading routes from where, through the agency of a military–fiscal elite supported by agents and bankers, the surrounding region was exploited and controlled. The administrative apparatus of these empires bore no similarity whatsoever to the rigid and closed hierarchical model of an ‘oriental despotism’ imagined for so long by the West. It was rather a highly flexible, diffuse assembly of overlapping political and fiscal rights that were managed as well as possible by an itinerant court. This far-reaching open configuration also gave the Dutch East India Company the opportunity to simply plug into the system and play an active role in the region, a situation that represented no mean advantage for the Company. What was important for the VOC was to build – and then to maintain – good linkages to these imperial networks. All this shows that the fluctuating history of the Dutch presence in the Indian Ocean can be properly understood only if Asia’s internal geopolitics are borne in mind.

The continuity of the seas and the deserts emphasised here does not detract from the fact that there were certainly a number of more or less separate sub-areas within this Eurasian continuum. Indeed, one of these corresponded approximately to the modern category of ‘Europe’ and was the result of the fact that the north-western corner of Eurasia – the French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry described Europe as a small *cap d’Asie* – experienced little or no influence from the forces of the Arid Zone from about 1000 CE onwards. It was not mobile, nomadic warfare on horseback, but the combined development of artillery and infantry with firearms that, from the late-medieval period onwards, was to dominate state formation in this part of the world. Even so, ‘Europe’ is inadequate as a concept here because both Russia and the Ottoman Empire, two increasingly ‘European’ powers, continued to have one foot in the nomadic world. In the rest of Europe, outside the natural reach of the nomadic hordes, the coastal areas had more or less free rein; traditionally, they were able to distance themselves more easily from the continental powers.

The successful Dutch uprising against the Spanish branch of the Habsburg dynasty in this sense marks a new conquest of the land from the sea – which was by no means self-evident, as the disastrous history of the ‘maritime’ Huguenots in France shows.² It is this Dutch (and also Portuguese and English) success of the coast against the imperial hinterland that was replicated by the VOC in the relatively wet littorals of the Indian Ocean region.³ In contrast, the coastal areas of Iran, India and China that lay within the reach of the imperial cavalry were much less susceptible to such an autonomous coastal development, irrespective of whether it was encouraged by the trading activities of the Europeans. Thus, it was not only the commercial considerations of the Lords XVII but also the geopolitical circumstances in Eurasia that explain why the VOC was able to become such a commanding coastal power, particularly in the Indonesian archipelago, in Ceylon and, to a lesser extent, also along the Malabar Coast. In most other parts of Asia, however, it progressed no further than establishing trading stations.

In short, Eurasia can be divided from a geographical perspective into, on the one hand, relatively dry, predominantly continental areas, and on the other hand relatively wet maritime regions. It was the large empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals and Manchus that succeeded in uniting areas of both types under their authority, with the last two empires in particular benefiting from the highly productive, intensive rice cultivation in the coastal areas within the reach of the wet monsoons. Wet rice cultivation also played a key role in the politics of Southeast Asia, but in this region the interior was made up not of the open, dry transitional areas of the Arid Zone, but of dense tropical rainforests with – in a logistical sense – much more limited military and political scope. As an overall consequence of this long-term geopolitical situation, the VOC was able to embed itself relatively easily in the tropical islands and coasts of the most southern parts of the Indian Ocean, which were also the more or less exclusive production areas for cloves, nutmeg, mace and cinnamon – in short, the fine spices for which the Company was able to impose a commercial monopoly relatively rapidly, using mainly military means based on superior shipping against both its Asian and its European competitors.

Japan was a different matter, because an export monopoly was established there by the shogunate itself, which actually allowed the VOC to obtain significant advantages in intra-Asian trade without having to fight for them. Just like in Japan, in the continental empires the Dutch

² Whiting Fox, *History in Geographic Perspective*, 1–53.

³ Heesterman, ‘Littoral et intérieur de l’Inde’, 87–92.

continued to function mainly as 'humble merchants', benefiting incidentally from the spice monopoly that they had gained in other areas. Besides, being situated at the various maritime gateways, they profited from the excellent economic infrastructure that linked these gateways to the interiors of these empires. There was from the outset a strong dependence on the cooperation of the local authorities and particularly of an influential group of indigenous agents and financiers. Finally, the coastal areas that neither had lucrative products of their own nor gave access to lucrative markets in their hinterlands, such as East Africa or mainland Southeast Asia, were considerably less attractive as a location for the VOC and were of only temporary or marginal importance for its trade.

With regard to the actual charter area of the VOC in Asia as a whole, a different, but possibly even more relevant division can be made on the basis of the prevailing rhythm of the monsoon. According to K. N. Chaudhuri, Indian historian and follower of Braudel, there are three major trade circuits: (1) the Arabian Sea, (2) the Bay of Bengal and (3) the Chinese Seas.⁴ These overlapping trade zones were the natural result of the annual rhythm of the monsoon: south-westerly winds from April to August, north-easterly winds from December to March. These winds determined the rhythm of the maritime – and largely also the continental – commercial traffic. The optimal annual operating radius of shipping under these conditions meant that the coastal areas around these three seas were in more intensive contact with each other than with any other area, sometimes even including their immediate hinterlands. Unsurprisingly, the most important entrepôts were to be found in the regions where these circuits overlapped. These were the natural trans-shipment ports that could connect two of these maritime zones with one another. Good examples are Cambay (later Surat, both in Gujarat), Calicut, Goa and Melaka. The Portuguese traveller Tomé Pires spoke as early as the sixteenth century of the 'two arms' of Cambay, one leading westwards towards Aden, and the other eastwards to Melaka. A third can be added to these: the highly important caravan trade with northern and central India, Iran and Central Asia. This clearly demonstrates the exceptional position of Gujarat as the most prominent commercial hub in the Indian Ocean region.

Obviously, the VOC too had to adapt to the rhythm of the monsoon in the Indian Ocean region, but, more than the Portuguese before them, the Dutch tried to deny the segmentation into three trading circuits that had been in existence since at least the eighth century CE. From 1611 Dutch

⁴ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, 9–33; see also Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe*.

ships were able to avoid this whole system by making use of the constant winds along the fortieth parallel from the Cape and, subsequently to use the south-east passage to gain direct access to the Sunda Strait. Furthermore, the development of Batavia into the central meeting place for Dutch shipping implied that it was initially forced to enter the existing trading system of the Indian Ocean from the periphery, Batavia not being one of the natural intersections. From Batavia, a new trading pattern developed based on long-distance, bilateral relations that had a considerable impact on important aspects of the existing pattern. Japanese copper was marketed in Surat and fine spices in Iran, both via Batavia. It was not so much the trading pattern itself that was subject to change: the VOC simply made use of the existing intra-Asian market relations. What was unusual in the Indian Ocean was the fact that now a single trading company wanted to take control of the whole process from production to marketing, in more than two circuits. It would be going too far to categorise this as innovative, because even before 1600 this was common practice among some Asian trading communities, albeit on a smaller scale and within a less rigorous system of control. Obviously, the other European countries were also capable of breaking through this triple segmentation. However, it was ultimately mainly the VOC that managed to claim important parts of the direct long-distance trade between the Netherlands and Asia entirely for itself. This applied both to specific products – Japanese precious metals and fine spices – and to the territories that produced these monopoly items.

In summary, one could say that the VOC largely had to adapt to the existing trading pattern in the Indian Ocean, but that, for European and intra-Asian trade in monopoly products, it was also to some extent able to evade this pattern. The VOC developed an inter-regional circuit of its own in parallel with the existing routes, with Batavia as a new entrepôt and an alternative for the more ‘natural’ trading centres in the region, such as Melaka and Banten. During the second half of the seventeenth century, the VOC even managed to exclude the traditional trading circuits from access to the Spice Islands. The important shifts in trade with and within the Indonesian archipelago that this brought about have been interpreted by Anthony Reid, another Braudelien historian, as the end of a long ‘Age of Commerce’.⁵ On closer examination, we can actually see a pattern everywhere in Asia in which, as early as the fourteenth century, the countries in the interior began to focus increasing attention on the coastal trading areas. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries this process had progressed so far that some coastal areas were able to free themselves politically from the interior, as in India (in Gujarat and Bengal) and Burma (in Pegu). By

⁵ Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*.

restricting maritime trade more rigorously, the government was able to avoid a similar process in China up until the seventeenth century. It was at this time in particular, when the south coast of China also threatened to 'break out' of the empire, that attempts were made by continental political centres everywhere to re-integrate the coast and interior with one another, as happened, for example, early on in India under the Mughals, and somewhat later in China under the Manchus. Similar attempts in Mataram in Java and Kandy in Ceylon failed, following interventions by the VOC, a maritime power that, with its distant home base in Europe, proved unassailable for these inland powers. The arrival of the Dutch in Asia in about 1600 thus disrupted this new drive towards the integration of the tropical littorals, and in time even reversed it. During the eighteenth century, the process of integration was revived *from* the coast, a process which engendered the making of the more centralised colonial empires and nation states of the modern era.

In the regions to the north of the tropical islands the effects of the VOC's presence were relatively limited. In spite of the VOC's spice monopoly and the growing market for these commodities in Europe, the existing trade network in the region continued more or less unchanged. The role of the VOC remained relatively marginal to the end, and ultimately it was the English private country traders who managed to attract an important part of the trade that had hitherto been run by others in the region. Nonetheless, even the English continued to play second fiddle for a long time; the traditional Arab, Armenian, Indian, Chinese, Malay and Buginese trade networks continued to predominate until well into the eighteenth century and in some places even later.

7 The Dutch Tropics

It was in the island world of the tropics that the Dutch East India Company was ultimately able to acquire the greatest influence in Asia. The climate and ecosystem may well have been radically different from North-West Europe, nonetheless for the Dutch it was a relatively accessible and attractive region. The Dutch found there a familiar maritime world that, thanks to the discoveries by the Portuguese, coincided well with the existing trade routes in the Atlantic Ocean. Having passed the Cape of Good Hope, the explorers encountered the tropical islands of the Indian Ocean, either to the north via the east coast of Africa to Ceylon, or to the east via the oceanic route first discovered by Henrick Brouwer in 1610, both to Ceylon and directly to Java. Overshooting the mark and continuing slightly too far to the east could mean an accidental landing in Australia.

The great attraction of the tropical islands was, of course, the range of fine spices produced there: cinnamon in Ceylon; cloves, nutmeg and mace in the Maluku Islands. The geographical aspect was crucial for the success of the Dutch East India Company: in contrast to pepper, for example, which was in high demand in Europe, the centres of production of the spice crops were concentrated within a compact area, which allowed the Company, with the help of its sophisticated fleet, to achieve a *de facto* monopoly on these commodities. It may seem obvious, but it is no coincidence at all that it was precisely here, in the tropical, maritime periphery of Asia, beyond the great continental empires, that the Dutch were able to portray themselves as true colonisers. About a century before the British did the same in India, this is where the Dutch developed from a trading company into a territorial power.

However, this process had its ups and downs. The tropical island world of the Indian Ocean, too, was able to look back on a long history of highly advanced state-building and dynamic economic development, based mainly on the larger islands, namely Ceylon, Java and to a lesser extent Sumatra, particularly where it was possible to combine the excellent commercial possibilities of the coast with the agrarian resources of the

interior. There was no need for the Company to reinvent the wheel: they were able to build on long-standing networks of mainly Arab, Armenian, Indian, Chinese and Malay merchants. Closer to home in Europe, all they needed to do was to follow in the footsteps of the Portuguese, who had already begun to exploit this Asian trading network a century before. Like it or not, anyone wanting to successfully acquire the lucrative spice monopoly would first have to force these European and Asian competitors out of the relevant centres of production. All this means that, in contrast to the next two chapters, which look at how the Dutch responded to circumstances beyond their control, the present chapter will concentrate on the VOC as an organisation that focused on expansion and in some instances became a true colonial power that was able to impose its will on sizeable sections of the local population. The three regions where the Company was successful in acquiring political and economic dominance will be discussed: the Indonesian archipelago, Ceylon and Malabar. But, even under true political control, most kings in Asia maintained a sacred aura of superiority vis-à-vis the Company. In fact, the words of indigenous kings often proved as powerful as the deeds of the Company. Although the Company regarded such kings as decadent – ‘kings of words, of mere language and titles’, as Jane Drakard calls them – for the kings themselves the very same words were seen as signs of divine power with real substance. Indeed, the language itself was part of the relationship of the king with his realm.¹ Although Drakard uses these terms for the rule by words of the so-called ‘emperor of Minangkabau’, as we will see, the same phenomenon holds true for the kings of Mataram, Kandy and Cochin, apparently all under Dutch colonial control.

The Indonesian Archipelago

The traditional geographical term ‘the East Indies’ for the Indonesian archipelago suggests a close civilisational link between this region and the Indian subcontinent. The same can be said about the nineteenth-century term Indonesia, literally meaning ‘Indian island’. Just as with the comparable English ‘Further India’, the French *Insulinde* or the Dutch *Achter-Indië*, there seems to be an assumption that there was a single Indian civilisation. In the wake of mainly Dutch indologists who worked on the region, some nationalist Indian historians regarded this as a rationale for the idea of a Greater India, where there could be no misunderstanding whatsoever about the hierarchical relationship of an ‘Indian’ centre to an ‘Indonesian’ periphery. It was from this perspective that, through

¹ Drakard, *A Kingdom of Words*, 261.

a generally peaceful process of 'Indianisation', civilisation was brought from the subcontinent to the islands. Although it is obviously very one-sided, it would be going too far to consign this idea completely to the realm of fiction. The whole region to the east of the Indus had traditionally been referred to by the Arab world and Europe as one: as *al-Hind*, India, or, in the plural, the Indies. In the most recent historiography, this is dismissed as an external, colonial-indological (i.e., India-centric) perspective and instead emphasis is placed on the individuality of the different autonomous regions that make up Southeast Asia.² A shortcoming of these so-called 'autonomous histories' is that they imply relatively closed geographical constructions that quite neatly overlap with the modern nation states of the region and thus cloud our view of the pre-modern inter-regional relationships. Even the now well-established term Southeast Asia suggests a degree of cohesiveness that does little justice to the many intensive contacts that this region had with the areas on the opposite side of the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea. Although the direction of change and migration points mainly towards the south-east and south, in all these contacts there was evidence of reciprocal influence, with the inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago at all times claiming a substantial share of this influence.

From as early as the seventh century, the Indonesian archipelago evolved to become a flourishing commercial and cultural crossroads of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. As a result of geographical circumstances – the rhythm of the monsoon, the outward-facing volcanic mountain ridges, the narrow sailing channels of the Straits of Melaka and the Sunda Straits – even at that time an entrepôt was needed for the expanding shipping traffic between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. A thousand years ago, the city-state of Srivijaya, close to present-day Palembang, succeeded in securing this role for a long period and can therefore be regarded as the earliest predecessor of the later inter-regional polities of Melaka and Singapore. It was during this time that the so-called Indianisation process reached its peak. Further to the east, a number of Buddhist and Hindu principalities developed in central and south-east Java. These centres of population were located in the upper reaches of rivers, some distance from the swampy and disease-ridden coastal regions that were so difficult to cultivate. From early on, the more trade-oriented Sumatra and the more agriculture-oriented Java represented two different worlds. This did not mean that the two regions were sharply divided, but it was rather an expression of different gradations of integration between the coast and the inland region. For example,

² The key influence here is Smail, 'On the Possibility of an Autonomous History', 72–102.

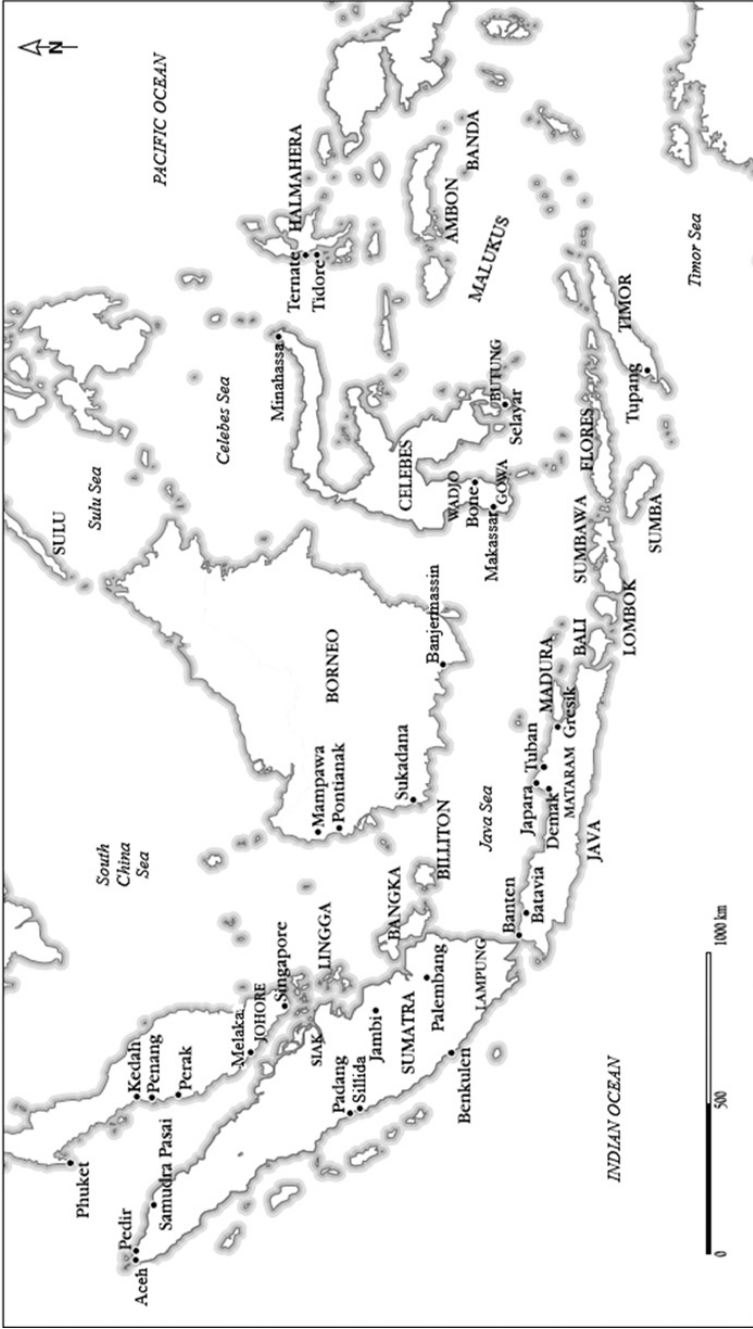
Srivijaya and the later coastal trading centres in Sumatra were not directly on the coast, but rather occupied the middle ground between coast and interior. Java, too, had an early maritime orientation. Nonetheless, the Sumatran interior – unlike the interior of Central Java – never managed to develop into a strongly agrarian kingdom able to dominate the coast with its demographic and economic supremacy.

From about the fourteenth century, the balance between coast and interior changed: in Sumatra as a result of growing pepper cultivation in its interior, and in Java following the rise of the maritime trade along its north coast, the Pasisir, in particular with the spice islands of Maluku. The rise of the Javanese empire of Majapahit, upstream along the Brantas River with good access both to the sea and to the rice fields in the south, can be regarded as the high point of this new phase of integration between coast and interior. It is not by chance that it was in this particular period that Reid detected something of an Age of Commerce.

Over the course of time, mainly in the sixteenth century, this flourishing trading era offered the coastal regions opportunities for new prosperity and the chance to distance themselves from the ‘old’ interior. We see, for example, the rise of Javanese coastal states such as Banten, Demak, Japara, Tuban and Gresik, which, like the Malay coastal polities of Palembang, Jambi, Samudra Pasai, Pedir (later also Aceh) and Melaka, were keen to exploit the lucrative opportunities offered them to join an expanding maritime trading network, in which Muslim merchants, sometimes under Ottoman protection, played a leading role. Certainly, in the light of the ongoing struggle for emancipation from the interior, it was to be expected that the coastal inhabitants would convert to Islam to become part of that religion’s religious and political momentum.

Contrary to what this process of Islamicisation suggests, it was not only Muslims from West and South Asia who played a key role in the region, but also Chinese Muslims, who came to the archipelago in increasing numbers, together with numerous other Chinese traders. The famous maritime expeditions led by Zheng He are generally regarded as the onset of this Chinese wave of migration. At the start of the fifteenth century, this Chinese Muslim admiral had to remind the rulers along the shores of the Indian Ocean of their duty to pay tribute to the Middle Kingdom. As a result of all these developments, on the eve of the European discovery of the Cape route, the Indonesian archipelago was more closely integrated than ever with the surrounding regions of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.

At the start of the sixteenth century, the arrival of the Portuguese in the region signified nothing more than the presence of yet another new maritime player. The Portuguese discovery of the Cape route introduced a new, direct link with Europe that served only to increase the demand for



Map 4 The Indonesian archipelago

spices. Given their initial military supremacy of the seas, it proved relatively easy for the Portuguese to break into the existing trading network by making a number of strategic conquests. But neither the seizure of Melaka in 1511, nor the military interventions in the Maluku from 1522, caused any lasting disruption to the existing trading patterns. The sultanate of Melaka was simply transferred to the nearby Johore, where part of the area's former staple function was continued, albeit now shared with Portuguese Melaka and the new trading centres of Aceh and Banten. In the Maluku they did manage to acquire control over Ambon, subsequently converting a large proportion of the population to Catholicism. At the same time, the Portuguese never really managed to control the spice trade. It is clear that the arrival of the Portuguese in the region did not cause any sudden hiatus in the history of the archipelago.

Even though the influence of the Portuguese and also, following in their footsteps, of the Spanish, who came mainly from their base in the Philippines, was relatively limited, this does not mean that no significant political changes took place in the archipelago during this period. On the contrary, at the time when the first Dutch ships reached the archipelago, a new turning point had been reached in the dynamics between coast and interior, whereby decisive rulers who favoured reform, such as Iskandar Muda of Aceh (r. 1607–36) and Sultan Agung of Mataram (r. 1613–45), gained greater control of the regional economy through enforced cultivation and by imposing taxation and market surveillance. Mataram was a new kingdom that aimed to follow the example of the major Javanese empire of Majapahit by 'recapturing' the Pasisir region. Both Aceh and Mataram fitted well within the seemingly much broader process of increasing political integration that followed on from the rise of the coastal areas at the start of the Age of Commerce.³ As indicated earlier, the activities of the VOC interrupted this process of integration, causing a new split between a more maritime Malay and a more agrarian Javanese world.

As early history shows, the archipelago was typically a very open environment. Owing to the west- and south-facing mountain ridges of Sumatra and Java, it was the east coast of Sumatra and the north coast of Java in particular that absorbed outside influences most strongly. For Sumatra's west coast it was difficult, for Java's south coast almost impossible, to function as a convenient transit route between the coast and the interior. Partly as a result of geographical factors, state formation in the archipelago also had an open character. In this respect, the region did not differ greatly from the other more westerly Indian world, as the so-called *mandala* concept illustrates. This term from Sanskrit was used by

³ For this global phenomenon of integration, see Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*.

O. W. Wolters to characterise the classical state in Southeast Asia.⁴ Just like other influential concepts applied to the Southeast Asian state – like the *theatre state* of Clifford Geertz or the *galactic state* of Stanley Tambiah – a *mandala* (literally a ‘circle’ or ‘belt’) is essentially open, diffuse and pluriform. The cohesion of the *mandala* is primarily ritual; the ruler himself had limited power and always had to negotiate with stakeholders in sovereignty who were permanently in conflict with one another in their efforts to gain control not so much over land as over people. Unlike what some Dutch sources would like us to believe, the prevailing culture here was anything but that of eastern despotism over a strictly delineated territory with a rigid ethnic identity. This idea was often wishful thinking by the Company, obsessed as it was with political stability; in practice there was only a ceremonial court that was connected via an – in principle – unrestricted network of rivers and roadways with a patchwork of constantly shifting and broadly dispersed agricultural areas and port cities. Managing this open and fragile network mainly came down to permanently creating and arbitrating local conflicts by means of diplomacy, intrigue, bribery, espionage and, often as a last resort, violence. The *mandala* concept illustrates beautifully that it was relatively easy for Europeans to gain access to this political game, that in principle made no rigid distinction between insiders and outsiders, and where sedition was the rule rather than the exception.

The question of whether this classic image of the *mandala* state may have been undermined by the expanding commercial opportunities in the region does arise here. As has already been mentioned, the royal court had at its disposal increasing resources – including financial resources – to control the interior. Roughly at the same time as the VOC headquarters were established in Batavia in 1619, the new Javanese sultanate of Mataram under Sultan Agung managed to gain control over a large part of the Pasisir. The conquest of Surabaya in 1625 was the final step in an impressive series of conquests where, besides the Javanese port cities of Pasuruan (1616) and Tuban (1619), the sultan made himself master of Sukadana on Borneo (1622) and of the island of Madura (1624). Sultan Agung wanted to strengthen both the ideological and the cultural ties with the coast. As a political newcomer, he was all too keen to get closer to the mystical traditions of the so-called Wali Songo, the nine sacred Islamic pioneers of the Pasisir. As part of this strategy, he married his sister to a descendent of the *wali* dynasty of Pangeran Pekik from Surabaya; he also took care of the important *wali* burial tombs of Tembayat, and awarded himself the *wali* title of *sunan*, or *susuhunan*. Indeed, Agung employed

⁴ Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region*, 16–34.

various means to emphasise his Islamic legitimacy, such as initiating a new Islamic calendar and, like his colleague from Banten, adopting the title of sultan in 1641. In fact, he was following a much broader tendency towards increasing Islamic profiling that will have been encouraged earlier in the sixteenth century by the successes of the Catholic mission, particularly in southern India and the eastern archipelago.

Although they were increasingly seen as faithless foreigners, it was still relatively easy for the Dutch, even in the seventeenth century, to work their way into the regional political system. In Java, the Company was time and again brought in by all kinds of pretenders to the throne to share power and crush rebellions, and, if successful, to assist with the political (re)unification of the state. *Mandala* or not, this was generally still regarded not as a form of foreign intervention, but rather as a desirable support for central authority. But, as the examples of Java and the Malukus were to show, involving the Company was like bringing in the Trojan horse. The overall result of Dutch intervention was that the indigenous process of integration between coast and hinterland was nipped in the bud.

Just to facilitate our presentation of the main political developments, the following paragraphs will examine Dutch expansion in what may be perceived as three widening circles of operation. We will start with the VOC *kraton* of Batavia and move gradually via the first circle of coffee and sugar plantations in the Ommelanden and Priangan to the second circle, comprising the Pasisir region and Java's interior. After this there is the outer or third circle that we will follow in two directions, eastwards towards the early and intensively colonised Spice Islands, westwards towards the more autonomous Malay polities. Finally, particular attention will be paid to the cement that held the different circles together: the political and economic intermediaries between the Company administration and the local production areas, in other words, the ever-growing group of Chinese entrepreneurs, tradesmen, artisans and workers. It is evident that Dutch expansion in the archipelago was made possible primarily by the cooperation of these intermediaries in an otherwise open and fluid political system rather than by the over-emphasised institutional and/or technological advantages of the Company.

*Batavia*⁵

We have already established that the primary Dutch interest in the Indonesian archipelago was the procurement of spices: pepper, cloves,

⁵ This section is to a large extent based on the excellent studies of Niemeijer, *Batavia* and Raben, 'Batavia and Colombo'.

mace and nutmeg. Initially, there were two possible ways they could achieve this: through free trade in the main regional staple markets such as Banten and Aceh, or through the forced takeover of the key Portuguese trading establishments in the archipelago, with Melaka as the star prize. Because of the enormous distance from the metropolis, the Lords XVII focused on founding a suitable venue not only for the direct shipping from and to the archipelago, but also for the intra-Asian trade in India, China and Japan. Unlike the redistributive character of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, where people were content to outsource and tax the trade to and from its subjects, the VOC preferred to conduct trading itself and maximise its profit through a range of monopolies. This left little room for private trading by its subjects, which only served to make it more tempting for them to look for extra income via illegal means. It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that VOC staff were given some opportunity to engage in trade within Asia.⁶ Just like the Company staff, the Dutch *vrijburgers* or free citizens in Batavia and other VOC locations were not able to enjoy the liberal trading conditions of the so-called *casados*, the citizens of the Luso-Asian cities who were mostly of mixed Portuguese origin. Private English country traders were not allowed to travel on the European route, but they had more room for manoeuvre in Asia than their Dutch colleagues. Given these trade restrictions, any VOC establishment had an enormous staffing problem.

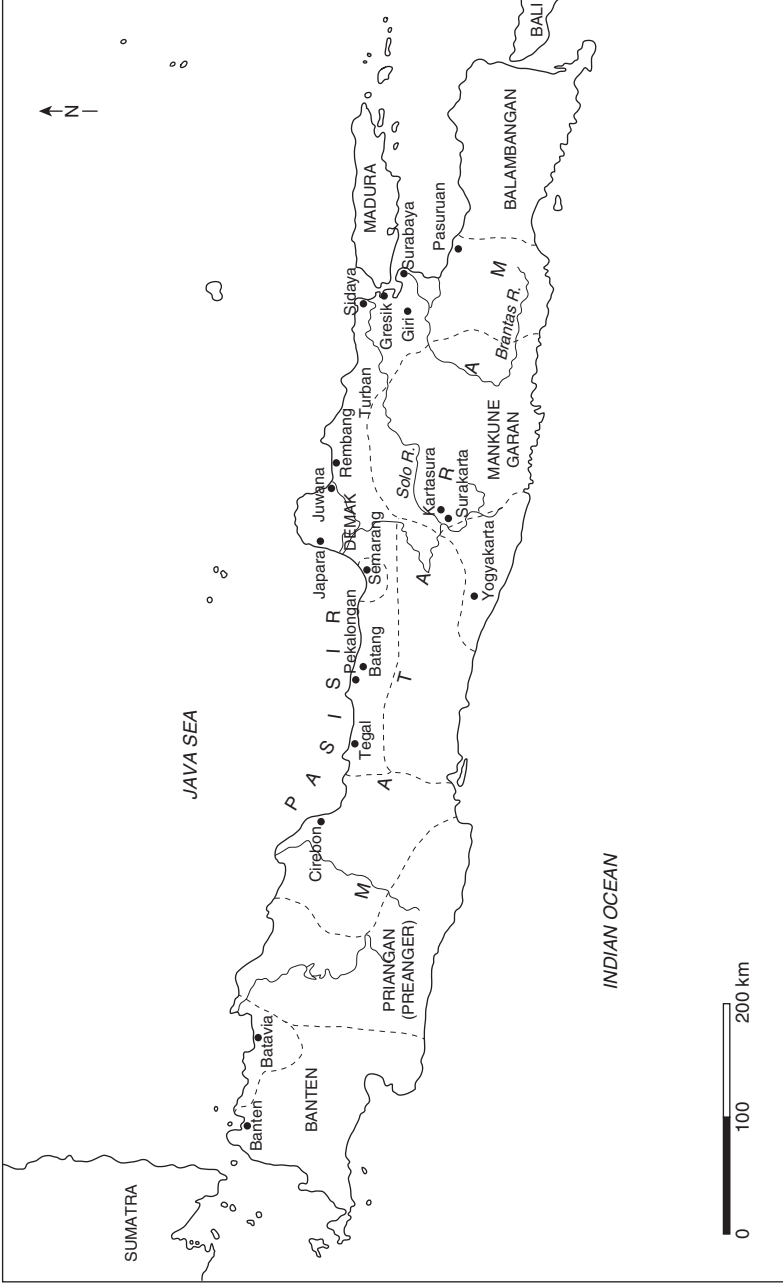
The first expeditions led by de Houtman (1595) and van Neck (1599) focused mainly on Aceh, Banten and the Malukus. The question was whether it would be possible to establish a Dutch distribution centre there. Although they were strategically located, the first two sites were not suitable, because of the at times unfriendly control by the local rulers who, just like the VOC, demanded monopolies and engaged in trade themselves. Besides this, there was the strong competition with the Indian, Chinese and now also English merchants. But what were the alternatives? Melaka was in Portuguese hands and seemed for the time being impregnable. In the later expeditions of the *Voorcompagnieën*, the predecessors of the VOC, and the early VOC, the key focus was initially on Patani on the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. The factories established there, like those on Banda in the Malukus (1605), proved too peripheral for international shipping traffic. A reasonable option was the relatively small Banten satellite harbour of Jakatra (Sunda Kelapa) in West Java, where the VOC had already established a trading post in 1610. This location was within a reasonable distance of the Sunda Strait and was in a favourable position on the Chiliwung River that

⁶ Nierstrasz, 'Reguleren of corrumperen?', 165–76.

connected the city with the hinterland. There were no trade competitors and, following the Banten take-over of the last important Javanese Hindu principality of Pajajaran in 1579, neither was there any strong, competing political infrastructure. It was in this relative vacuum that the VOC decided to establish its rendezvous point and headquarters. After the conquest of Jakarta by Jan Pieterszoon Coen, in 1619, the local population was expelled, and the new city of Batavia was built almost from scratch. This feat lived on in local memory, in which the Dutch Governor-General was perceived as the charismatic *wali* Moer Djang Koeng, a relative of the great Sakender, the Javanese version of Alexander the Great – another instance that shows how easily such events of foreign conquest became Javanised (see also the citation at the beginning of this part of the book). Apart from being the centre of administration and the nucleus of the trading empire, initially Batavia developed mainly as a garrison town located at an extremely hostile frontier of unexplored jungle inhabited by tigers and other dangerous predators.

Given that Sultan Agung was at that time engaged in extending his power towards the coast, an armed conflict between the Company and Mataram was inevitable. Sultan Agung's siege of the city in 1628 and again in 1629 ended in failure, partly because Mataram was weakened by a number of serious epidemics that had decimated the local population in the immediately preceding years and partly because the wilderness around Batavia exposed the sultan's armies to insuperable logistical problems. While Batavia was able to receive supplies by sea, Mataram had to manage with long and arduous supply lines over land. After 1629 the struggle for Batavia was settled, and it was clear that even a powerful sultanate like Mataram would never be able to capture Batavia without maritime support. Neither was there any consolation to be gained from cooperation between the sultan and the Portuguese, simply because at that point in time the Dutch had by far the most maritime resources, which meant that not only could they protect their own trading network, but also they were able to blockade Melaka at regular intervals. Banten had not yet accepted the loss of Jakarta and continued to press Batavia; the VOC in its turn continued to obstruct Banten with maritime blockades. Raids from Banten and Mataram would continue to make the region around Batavia unsafe until well into the seventeenth century.

Persistent sentiments of fear and insecurity will have been an added impetus for the inhabitants of Batavia to create a protected and safe environment in the city. As the name suggests, what was in essence a Dutch city was constructed there, albeit very gradually and with some reliance on improvisation: a grid of streets and canals, probably inspired by the ideas of Simon Stevin, of blocks of stone houses with tiled roofs, all



Map 5 Java

enclosed by city walls and fortifications. Indeed, not only in terms of design and architecture but also in terms of its institutions, Batavia seemed a typical Dutch town, with a Board of Aldermen housed in the town hall and a civic militia. However, this architectural and institutional façade harboured a completely different world from that of a city and its citizens in the Dutch Republic. In the first place, the people of Batavia had hardly any political power and had to dance completely to the tune of the Company management. Only 7 per cent of the population, that grew between 1632 and 1679 from about 8,000 to 32,000, was made up of whites, most of whom were in the service of the Company. A small group of free citizens were permitted to engage in trading activities only outside the Company's trading monopolies, which meant they were also in an economic sense bound to the Company. In a city where about half the population were slaves, the notion of urban civil rights was a very distant prospect.

Initially it was mainly Coen who had tried – albeit in vain – to establish a Dutch settlement in Batavia. It proved impossible to bring enough Dutch women of 'the right calibre' to the region, and very soon the attention turned to mestizo and other foreign groups. Following the example of the Portuguese, marriages between European men and mestiza women were encouraged, and a class of citizens developed made up of mestizos. But, as mentioned already, this group was prevented by the Company monopolies from developing into confident, entrepreneurial citizens. Furthermore, the European immigrants also had to cope with extremely high rates of mortality, which meant that the group of free citizens remained inferior in numerical terms.

The upper stratum of Batavian society was 100 per cent white, with Europeans enjoying an array of advantages, from official emoluments to poor relief. This group was held together by the European provenance of its members and their loyalty to the Company, and was easily recognisable because of such shared social attributes as the Dutch language, European dress and, of course, the Christian religion and customs. Skin colour, being the most difficult to engineer, was the least suspect of this group's characteristics. It should come as no surprise that the VOC correspondence is liberally peppered with all kinds of racial descriptives for black and other non-white skin colours. Obviously, these kinds of prejudices were not yet 'rationally' substantiated by nineteenth-century racial sciences, but were mechanisms used by the 'in-group' to define themselves in an environment with a majority of people with a different skin colour, who were not trusted and whom the elite needed to keep under control. Nonetheless, skin colour was not an absolute criterion. If the ruling class wanted to avoid becoming dangerously marginal in

number, the ranks would have to be opened up to mestizos and other ethnic groups. What we see is that the definition of the European 'in-group' was subject to change and was determined pragmatically, depending on the changing demographic circumstances.

Protestantism was considered an appropriate political instrument to bind together a somewhat larger group of inhabitants beyond the white elite. Within the city, the church, education and poor relief were useful means of enforcing the loyalty and discipline of a large group of white and mestizo believers. The importance of religion in this context can be seen from the ban on marriages where one of the partners remained non-Christian, or on non-Christians keeping Christian slaves. The degree to which particular groups were excluded socially and physically depended largely on the local security situation. In the case of Batavia, the continuing threat from Banten and Mataram meant that the Javanese were regarded with suspicion and were therefore kept as much as possible outside the city walls. Within the walls, on the other hand, all kinds of ethnic groups were tolerated; those who converted to Protestantism were preferred, but in any event minorities like the Chinese without deep local roots, were considered allies and so became more easily accepted.

In all the harbour towns in the archipelago, at least in part to facilitate administrative control, immigrant groups were categorised on the basis of their ethnicity, with each group retaining its own legal system and religion – at least in principle. The towns themselves had no autonomous status and, unlike in medieval Europe, there was no clear physical and legal division between the towns and the rural areas. Most towns in the archipelago were concentrated around the residence of the prince or regent (*dalem*), this being a relatively large complex of buildings surrounded by walls with palisades or stone walls. Both the harbour towns and the royal residences were made up of a heterogeneous conglomerate of ethnic districts or *kampongs* more or less separate from one another. To the outside world, they appeared to be rather open settlements, merging only very gradually with the surrounding countryside. The dense vegetation and the use of wood and bamboo for the building of dwellings gave them an agrarian and somewhat transitory impression. 'Disposable towns' of this kind, where the residents invested very little in durable real estate, could be adapted in no time to any new demands or, in extreme cases, could even be moved lock, stock and barrel to a different location. Nonetheless, even before the arrival of the Company, a number of coastal towns in East Java had city walls, although most of them were destroyed following their conquest by Mataram. These walls had originally been intended to keep out enemies from outside – the walls of Japara were built mainly in response to the

destruction wrought by the VOC between 1618 and 1619 – but they also served as means for royal surveillance of the spreading urban development.

If we look beyond the initial physical impression to how society was organised in Batavia, we see that it reflects that of other Javanese cities. Within the city walls, the castle, like the *dalem*, represented the enclosed administrative centre of the city. The High Government, that is the Governor and Councils and the Court of Justice, established here amounted to the highest political and legal bodies within the VOC. The city council, located in the town hall, was completely subordinate to these bodies, and during the course of the seventeenth century it retreated further into the background. Just as with a *dalem*, but also comparable to the role of a citadel in some Dutch cities under Spanish rule, the castle was the embodiment of control by the central government – in this case the Company – over the city. Outside the city, the standard image of ethnic segregation prevailed, with Europeans, the Luso-Indian *Mardijkers* and Chinese living in more or less separate areas. The Europeans, *Mardijkers* and other mestizos fell under the jurisdiction of the Company, as was laid down in 1642 in the Statutes of Batavia (see Part I), whereas the Chinese and other ethnic groups generally came under the control of their own leaders and their own laws.

The city walls themselves were not so much a symbol of urban as opposed to rural identity, but rather marked the Company's expanding sphere of influence. Just like the outer ring of fortifications built after 1660 and comprising the forts of Soutelande, Jakatra, Rijswijk, de Vijfhoek, Batenburg and Noordwijk (see Figure 4), these walls served both to protect the inhabitants against enemies from outside and to control the very same inhabitants. At the end of the seventeenth century, the city, with its scattered, enclosed *kampongs* constructed of wood and bamboo, was expanding ever further outwards. By about 1700, with about 70,000 inhabitants, Batavia's outer areas increasingly evolved into a Javanese city.

In terms of the composition of the population, the city was initially more Luso-Indian than Javanese. As has already been mentioned, after the capture of Jakatra the Javanese were immediately driven out. The South Asian flavour of the city was attributable partly to the large group of slaves, who came mainly from the Indian subcontinent, and partly by the large, free group of *Mardijkers*, who in 1679 made up no less than 17 per cent of the population. These *orang merdeka* (literally, free people) were slaves who had been freed and converted to Christianity; during this early period, they were mainly from the coastal areas of South Asia and communicated in Portuguese, the lingua franca of the South Asian

littoral. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the proportion of what we would now call Indonesians increased among the enslaved and the free people. Most slaves were at that time still brought in from outside, mainly from Bali and Sulawesi.

The Mardijkers fulfilled an important function as a civil militia, and by the end of the seventeenth century there were no fewer than seven such companies. Some of the Mardijkers also built up considerable urban dynasties, such as the Michiels family that was descended from one Titus van Bengalen. In about 1660, when they were banned from the city along with the Javanese, the Mardijkers left en masse for the cheaper Oostervoorstad, where they had more space to cultivate crops and keep cattle. Many also bought small market gardens and paddy fields in the Ommelanden and, together with the Chinese, played a crucial role in developing this mostly uncultivated countryside outside Batavia. Besides the Mardijkers, the Company recognised a separate and much smaller group of mestizos (*mestiezen*), the descendants of a white father and an Asian mother. Together with the Mardijkers, as an inland Christian civic group they constituted the most important stabilising factor in Batavian society.

Whereas the Mardijkers were happy to settle just outside the city walls, a large group of Chinese, together with white Europeans, lived inside the walls. By bringing in the Chinese, the Company killed two birds with one stone. Firstly, it allowed them to acquire an entrepreneurial urban middle class that, in the absence of sufficient European free citizens, could set about developing the city and the Ommelanden. This strategy was also reflected in the increase in the number of Chinese in the city, who made up about 20 per cent of the population in the years before the notorious pogrom of 1740. Secondly, the contact with the Chinese allowed the Company to benefit from an extensive overseas trading network, which could be used to tempt a significant portion of the private China trade to Batavia. The result was what became known as the *jonkenhandel* or 'junk trade' with the south coast of China that, in spite of the difficult access to the Chinese market, ensured that the Company in Batavia had access to Chinese tea. In exchange for tea and other Chinese products, the Chinese bought goods offered by the Company, such as pepper, tin, spices, areca nuts, ivory, sandalwood and sapan wood.

After 1733, the demographic development of Batavia underwent a radical change. In that year large fisheries were constructed on the coast, and, wholly unexpectedly, they became breeding grounds for malaria parasites. Newcomers in particular fell victim to the parasites. Up to 1733, between 5 and 10 per cent of new officials died within a year of arriving in Batavia; after 1733 this number increased to 40 to

50 per cent, even reaching 60 to 70 per cent in 1775! This had dire consequences for staffing in Batavia, leading to a structural shortage of personnel, as a result of which there were not enough soldiers for the defence works or for the expeditionary forces. The same was true of the maritime staff for the return fleets, which consequently faced frequent delays and even cancellations. The effects were also felt in the area of finance, where malaria contributed to the enormous debt that the Company faced at the end of the eighteenth century.⁷ From a flourishing urban community, Batavia had now deteriorated to become a gruesome mortuary. Fortunately, Batavia's Ommelanden had already started to develop in the seventeenth century, and the wealthier Dutch population were able to move to the various manors and plantations that had been springing up there.

Ommelanden and Priangan

Outside Batavia's city walls, separate settlements had developed for Chinese and Mardijkers. It is in these Ommelanden of Batavia that we also find several colonial indigenous settlements: groups of Ambonese, Buginese, Makassarese, Butonese and Balinese settlers were assigned *kampongs* belonging to the militia. Many of these *kampongs* originally comprised uncultivated land that was given in fief by the Company to the captains of military companies, who also recruited armed warbands that were circulating in the Ommelanden. In this way, these garrison-townships played a key role in cultivating and pacifying the still wild and unruly Ommelanden.

Initially, recording the ethnicity of these groups served the purpose of military recruitment. As this was in practice an open, conscriptive process, the *kampongs* portrayed a more heterogeneous image than the ethnic label suggested. Nonetheless, these categories continued to be useful in both controlling and mobilising these groups. The Company dealt exclusively with the captains, who were further responsible for the internal administration of the *kampongs*. Many of these companies would prove to be important in the successful 'Dutch' campaigns later that century against Banten, Mataram and Makassar. As the revolts by the Balinese under Surapati in 1685 and the Ambonese under Kapitein Jonker in 1689 show, there was always the danger that dissatisfied captains would turn against the Company and start up for themselves. One of them, Surapati, even managed to form his own principality in East Java that survived until 1768! Such developments were more of a threat because these 'rebels'

⁷ Van der Brug, *Malaria en malaise*.

had extensive experience with Dutch methods of combat as well as access to Dutch weapons.

The military colonisation of the Ommelanden was rapidly followed by agrarian colonisation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the establishment of manors by Batavian aristocrats such as Joan van Hoorn and Isaac de Saint-Martin played a key role in the development of Batavia's hinterland. At the same time, they were engaged in supervising the area as chairmen of the *Commissie tot en over de zaken van de inlander* (Committee on the Affairs of the Indigenous People) that had replaced the *Heemraden* in 1680. Since 1651, public order in the Ommelanden had been in the hands of two bailiffs (*landdrosten*). The manors of the Ommelanden, much more than the *buitenplaatsen* in the Republic, were true exploitation sites, where experiments were carried out with new crops. It was via these botanical laboratories to the south of the Ommelanden, in the Bovenlanden and Priangan, that coffee cultivation was introduced.

The exploitation of the hinterland started earlier, in the middle of the seventeenth century, along the Chiliwung and Krukut rivers, and at that time it focused primarily on timber and rice. The best ecological conditions for intensive rice fields were found not in the Batavian hinterland, but in the south of Central Java, Kedjawen: the heart of the old Javanese kingdoms. Batavia continued to rely on imports for the provision of food. Mainly after 1670, sugar was cultivated on a large scale, although the European sugar market was extremely volatile because of the highly variable supply from the Atlantic region. The Company also had to take into account the competition from Bengali and Chinese sugar on the markets of Iran, India and Japan.

The cultivation of sugar cane in plantations and its processing in mills and distilleries was dominated by Chinese entrepreneurs, who employed Chinese and Javanese workers, both freemen and slaves.⁸ Many of these Chinese entrepreneurs rented the fields and mills from Batavian Company officers or *vrijburgers*. The Dutch elite in Batavia consequently had a considerable interest in the sugar trade, and it is therefore not surprising that the High Government was keen to provide a buffer against the volatility of the market in the form of a relatively stable purchasing pattern. Just like the timber and rice trade, the VOC also left sugar cultivation to private initiatives, on the understanding that the Company could command the right to purchase a set amount at a fixed price. Moreover, as the Company controlled the export monopoly after 1678, it also levied a tax on exports.

⁸ Xu, *Monsoon Plantation*.

In the 1720s and 1730s the sugar sector was in crisis. This was partly due to the increase in production in the West Indies and, as a result, a sharp reduction in European demand for more expensive Asian sugar. To make matters worse, demand also dropped in Iran. To some extent, sugar cultivation had reached the end of a natural cycle as a consequence of the continuous erosion, deforestation and exhaustion of the land. This resulted in a general malaise in the rural areas, particularly among the Chinese, who, faced with unemployment, resorted to banditry. In 1740 the Company seriously considered the option of deporting a large proportion of this now vagrant and redundant population to Ceylon. However, when the rumour that they were actually planning to dump the Chinese at sea started to circulate, the fat was in the fire, and the Chinese rural population suddenly turned against the Company administrators in Batavia. The resulting panic in the city led to what became known as the *Chinezenmoord* or the Chinese Massacre, where no fewer than 10,000 Chinese were put to the sword. Even after this pogrom, Chinese gangs still caused major unrest in Java for a further three years, aided by many dissatisfied Javanese who joined them. After these terrible events, sugar production was soon resumed, albeit somewhat further from Batavia, and now, more than previously, under the control of senior Company officers. In 1756, eight sugar mills were owned by Governor-General Jacob Mossel and nine by Commissioner Pieter van de Velde. Although the role of the Chinese in the economy of Batavia was undermined for a while, after 1750 immigration rose and new Chinese workers were again employed in the sugar production.

Besides dry rice production, timber felling and sugar cultivation, directly south of the circle of the Ommelanden a start was made with coffee cultivation. More than with sugar, here it was first and foremost European demand that determined the rhythm of the market. As we will see later, Mocha was the biggest world producer, although after 1730 it was outstripped by the Caribbean. Coffee thrived best in Priangan (*Preanger* in Dutch), an area claimed by Mataram and Banten, that was transferred relatively smoothly to the Dutch in the middle of the seventeenth century. The first step in coffee production was to transport cultivated coffee plants to the inland regents in the outlying areas. It was then the job of the regents to have their subjects plant the coffee. Some time later, the coffee was collected directly by a Company commissioner; and from 1723, once a monopoly had been imposed, even the whole harvest was collected. Over-production in the Caribbean meant that the sales price came under increasing pressure and the Company began to pay less and less for Javanese coffee. To limit production, in 1740 contingencies were set whereby twelve years later the purchase price

would be linked to the amount of indigo, cotton yarn or pepper that could be supplied along with the coffee. After 1760, the decision was suddenly taken to stabilise the coffee production; the system of linked buying was abolished and planters were obliged to cultivate a fixed number of coffee plants under close supervision. This so-called Preanger System, where regents were required to supply annual quotas of coffee in lieu of taxes, was to be maintained until the 1830s, when it became more elaborate under the so-called Cultivation System.

Java

In the course of the seventeenth century, the Company's position as a new regional power increasingly became recognised throughout the archipelago. As a result, different parties approached the VOC for assistance with all manner of internal conflicts. Outside those regions that the Company wanted to have directly under its own control for strategic reasons, such as the Batavian Ommelanden and the Spice Islands of Maluku, the VOC preferred to maintain the existing authority structures where possible, and, if the opportunity arose, even to further strengthen them. Obviously, a stable political order was good for VOC trade; on the other hand, as we have discussed already, internal conflict was endemically inherent in the *mandala* states. In its efforts to promote greater stability, the VOC was constantly being sucked into these local conflicts, in some instances out of free will as a means of increasing its own power, as in Banten, and in other instances because there was no other option and this was the only way to avoid a worse alternative, as in Mataram. Anthropologists have hypothesised that it is also quite likely that Dutch interventions were a consequence of the power of attraction of charismatic foreign arbitrators or 'stranger kings'.⁹ A further important consideration is that the conquests by the VOC further inland were always prompted by the fear that other outside powers – the Iberians and the British – might outmanoeuvre them. The conquest of Java's eastern salient came about only after 1765 when there appeared to be a threat of the British settling there. The same pattern had occurred much earlier in the Maluku Islands and would later be repeated in Sumatra and Ceylon.

The Company's most influential competitors in the archipelago, however, were not the other Europeans, but networks of 'Arabs' from West Asia, who had been establishing themselves as charismatic leaders in Java and elsewhere in the archipelago since the fourteenth century.¹⁰ By the

⁹ Henley, 'Conflict, Justice and the Stranger-king', 85–144.

¹⁰ Kathirithamby-Wells, 'Ahmad Shah Ibn Iskandar', 48–63; Kathirithamby-Wells, "'Strangers" and "Stranger-kings"', 567–91.

sixteenth century they had built up an enormous trading network stretching from the Hadramaut, via Gujarat, Malabar and Coromandel, to Aceh, Banten, Mataram and Makassar. Unlike the Europeans, Arabs and other Muslims from West and South Asia had been embedding themselves in the local political system through marriage with the elite. In the seventeenth century a puritan Islamic reform movement started to spread throughout these networks, increasingly turning against European 'non-believers'. In its resistance against the Company, this Arab-oriented movement of legal scholars and pilgrims could go hand in hand with the apparently more local, mystical traditions of charismatic Sufi saints, partly because within Sufism, both in Java and elsewhere in the Muslim world, there was also an increasing drive for puritanical reform. A high point in this revivalist movement was the period from 1670 to 1690, when the Company took new military action on several different fronts. It is quite possible that these revolts, often under charismatic, messianic leadership – in Sumatra under Ahmad Shah Ibn Iskandar, in Banten under Sultan Ageng, on eastern Java under Trunajaya and Surapati, and in Ternate under Kaicili Sibori (also referred to as *Sultan Amsterdam*) – should be seen as elements of a much broader resistance to Dutch aggression that gradually threatened to close the archipelago off from the Islamic outside world. The final conquest of the recently Islamicised environment of Makassar in 1669 – to which we will come back later – was the spark that ignited all this discord, especially because it had triggered an enormous migration of frustrated, partly unemployed Makassar and Buginese warriors, which was to cause problems for the Company and the other established states in Java and Sumatra for decades to come.

It is no coincidence that during this particular period of increasing polarisation the Company intervened both in Mataram (1676–9) and in Banten (1682–3), building forts to provide 'protection' for the local rulers. Before these interventions, the rulers supported by the Company, Sultan Haji (r. 1682–7), ruler of Banten, and Amangkurat I (r. 1645–77) and Amangkurat II (r. 1677–1703), rulers of Mataram, had already rejected the more pronounced Islamic convictions of their predecessors Sultan Ageng (r. 1651–83) and Sultan Agung (r. 1613–46) sanctioned by Mecca. After a failed coup by his brother, Amangkurat I even had about 5,000 Islamic law scholars murdered. Amangkurat II was able to persuade the Company to wage a military campaign against the so-called priest-kings (*priestervorsten*), descendants of the early *wali* pioneers, including one charismatic 'mad mullah' from Giri, who tried in vain to repel the Dutch with magic spells and talismans.

While the Mataram court focused increasing attention on newly discovered, indigenous-Javanese religious traditions, a more Arabocentric

Islam was able to regain influence in the eighteenth century in Banten, mainly thanks to the ongoing contacts, via Palembang, with the polities of Perak and Siak. Moreover, it is clear that not all Arabs were regarded as anti-Dutch, as is demonstrated by the fact that in 1748 the Company even supported a coup by a new Arab dynasty in Banten. Although Banten had been annexed by the VOC in 1683, it remained formally in the hands of a local dynasty tolerated by the Company. The Arab coup led to the major Banten uprising against – surprisingly enough – a coalition of an Arab regent and the VOC. But this uprising, too, was led by a charismatic cleric (Kjai Tapa), who favoured the rhetoric of jihad.

As a consequence of the VOC interventions in the 1670s and 1680s, Mataram permanently lost its grip on the Pasisir, and the Company broadened its network of trading posts from Japara to other locations, mainly Surabaya, Rembang and Semarang. In 1708, the last of these took the place of Japara as the headquarters of Java's east coast. In Rembang the Company organised the whole of timber production itself, making this – along with the Spice Islands – one of the earliest examples of direct colonial exploitation. Mataram and Banten definitively relinquished their claims on Cirebon in the 1680s, after which the region became part of the sugar and coffee economy of the Ommelanden and Priangan. At the same time, the VOC acquired the sales monopoly on Indian textiles and opium. High-quality Indian textiles were used not only for clothing but also for gift giving as well as for saving wealth.

During the eighteenth century, imported Indian chintz and other high-value textiles increasingly gave way to locally produced batik. Meanwhile, the VOC stepped up its imports of the coarser Guinee varieties from the Coromandel Coast, primarily from Bimlipatam.¹¹ With the capture of Banten in 1683, most Indian and Arab traders disappeared from the eastern part of the archipelago. The indigenous coastal trade nonetheless managed to survive, but was increasingly conducted via VOC channels through Batavia, which during the eighteenth century became the central entrepôt for the archipelago.

During the Javanese Wars of Succession (1704–8, 1719–23 and 1746–57) and the Chinese War (1740–3), the pattern that had taken hold during the seventeenth century was seen to repeat itself: in exchange for military support for a pretender to the throne, the VOC was ceded control over more and more Javanese territory, including from 1707 eastern Madura and from 1743 the whole northern coastal strip and the *Oosthoek* to the east of Pasuruan. Mataram was also forced to supply

¹¹ Laarhoven, 'The Power of Cloth'; Prabu, 'The Dutch East India Company's Textile Trade'.

Batavia with a set quantity of rice, and the domestic tolls were transferred to the VOC for a fixed sum. At the end of the last war of succession, the Treaty of Giyanti (1755) divided Mataram between the Sunan of Yogyakarta and the Sultan of Surakarta; two years later the sultan had to cede a further area to the Prince of Mangkunegaran. With the emergence of these new principalities that in theory belonged to the Company and that were also clearly demarcated, some degree of stability was achieved in Java for the first time in a century, which was to endure until the Java War of the late 1820s. Agricultural production and the local population increased spectacularly after 1750, both in the Javanese principalities and in the coastal areas that were now under the control of the VOC. The historian Merle Ricklefs even refers to a doubling or threefold increase in the population between 1755 and 1795.¹² Although the Company arranged to have the first compendia of Javanese laws and Islamic family law produced in preparation for direct management, in practice the Company continued to do business via the local regents (*bupatis*). This situation continued until after the dissolution of the VOC, when reformers such as Governor-General Herman Willem Daendels (1808–11) and the English Lieutenant-Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles (1811–16) – the latter having a Dutch mother – considered it was time to intervene much more directly in Javanese society.

The continuing interventions by the VOC do not detract from the fact that the Company had already functioned since 1680 as the military arm of Mataram. In exchange for economic privileges, the VOC strengthened the grip of the *susuhunan* on the coastal regents that until 1743 by law fell under his jurisdiction. In the eyes of the Company, the Mataram prince was the natural, prime ruler over Java, and anyone who thought differently posed a threat. This approach meant that the *susuhunan* gained the legitimacy that he had lacked at the start of the seventeenth century. Many of the coastal regents had equivalent or even better documents supporting their claim to supreme authority over Java, as became apparent during the uprising of the Madurese prince Trunajaya (1676), who built a *kraton* of his own in old Majapahit and claimed to be a direct descendant of the rulers of that ancient empire. Between 1767 and 1772, the VOC managed to bring the kingdom of Balambangan in eastern Java under its control. Aiming to keep this area out of Hindu – or, in other words, Balinese – hands, the Company even went so far as to encourage the Islamicisation of that region.¹³

In any event, the final conquests by the VOC and its military support for the court of Mataram created a paradox of Javanese fragmentation

¹² Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 109. ¹³ Margana, 'The Contested Frontier'.

and, within these fragments, internal consolidation, first in Mataram, and after 1755 also in the two successor states of Yogyakarta and Surakarta. As we will discuss later, a similar process occurred also in Ceylon, and to some extent in the sultanates surrounding the Spice Islands.

The Spice Islands

Far to the north-east of Java the Maluku Islands had only recently been integrated into the trading network of the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, and in a cultural sense the islands exhibited many common characteristics with the Austronesian world of the Pacific Ocean. Islamicisation had scarcely gained a hold on this furthestmost periphery of the Old World, and at the start of the seventeenth century the VOC had already managed to establish a plantation colony there. Although in all other VOC territories in Asia the cultivation of crops remained in the hands of the indigenous people, on the Banda Islands by 1621 Coen had driven away and massacred the local people and replaced them with a colony of settlers, the so-called *perkeniers*. The islands were subsequently leased in a chessboard pattern of seventy plots to a small number of – in the words of historian H. J. de Graaf – ‘happy and carefree’ (*vrolijke en onbezorgde*) white freemen, who cultivated the nutmeg crops by employing between twenty and thirty slaves per unit.¹⁴ Nutmeg and mace were not grown anywhere other than on the Banda Islands, and Coen’s very effective extermination policy had assured the VOC of the monopoly on these spices in one fell swoop. To safeguard this monopoly, two forts were constructed (Belgica and Nassau) on Banda Neira, and here and there a number of earthworks were raised on the atolls to the south of the Spice Islands. The macabre tranquility of the islands was regularly disrupted in the eighteenth century by hurricanes, earthquakes and eruptions of the Gunung Api volcano. In 1778, in the space of a single hour, a hurricane uprooted all the nutmeg plants, leaving the Republic with enormous shortages of nutmeg and mace for decades.

Before they were colonised by the Dutch, the Banda Islands – not at all unlike the Dutch Republic – were governed by an oligarchy of *orang kaya*, wealthy individuals, who operated an extensive maritime trading network. Unsurprisingly, they were far from inclined to entrust the sales of their spices completely to the VOC. The VOC officially regarded this arrangement as a form of tribute to be paid in return for its protection. The monopoly contracts agreed with Wolfert Harmenszoon and Steven van der Haghen in 1602 and 1605 soon proved worthless. In 1609, in an

¹⁴ De Graaf, *Geschiedenis van Indonesië*, 196.

attempt to enforce the monopoly, Pieter Willemszoon Verhoeff decided to construct a fort there. He and his followers were assassinated, which prompted the remaining Dutch colonisers to embark on a campaign of destruction, leaving little standing in Banda Neira. The result of this first armed conflict was a new contract of 'peace and friendship'. The events of 1621 were in fact a repetition of 1609. For Coen it was clear: once again the Banda people were ignoring the terms of the contract, and were instead doing business with other traders, including the Portuguese and the English, the latter of these having already landed on the island of Ai in 1615, even claiming sovereignty in the name of the King of England. It was primarily this European competition that must have driven Coen to commit that infamous slaughter of the Bandanese.¹⁵

The first plantation colony may have been established on the Banda Islands, but it was on Ambon just north of that colony that the Company acquired the first sovereign rights. This was in 1605, following the conquest by Steven van der Haghen of the Portuguese fort named Forte de Nossa Senhora da Anunciada, constructed in 1576, which also gave the Company possession of the settlement of Kota Ambon that had grown up around the fort. In 1614, the Portuguese fort was renamed Fort Victoria. Acquiring control over the surrounding islands was a gradual process, and the local population continued to resist the authority of the Company until well into the 1650s. Partly as a result of this continuing resistance, the early history of Kota Ambon followed a similar pattern to that of Batavia. Although Kota Ambon was much smaller than Batavia and initially had no ramparts, both settlements evolved to become male-dominated garrison towns where military security was the prime concern. Both were typical immigration towns with few or no local inhabitants. As in the case of Batavia, a façade of urban institutions could not disguise the Company's dominance. The relatively flexible ethnic composition of the inhabitants was based on local traditions, on the one hand, and military recruitment of militias on the other. If there was a shortage of Europeans, this was supplemented by non-whites, in Kota Ambon these being Mardijkers and Makassarese. In the absence of an established indigenous central core and in the event of a shortage of free citizens, the economic vacuum was filled mainly by imported Chinese workers. Roughly half the population of both places was made up of slaves.¹⁶

The production of cloves meant that Ambon was initially much more important economically than Java. To ensure the supply of cloves, the

¹⁵ For an enlightening fresh analysis of the events, see Clulow, 'The Art of Claiming', 17–38 and van Ittersum, 'Debating Natural Law in the Banda Islands', 459–501.

¹⁶ Knaap, 'Kota Ambon at the End of the Seventeenth Century', 105–28.

Company had to get involved with the agrarian hinterland here much earlier than in Batavia. Just as with nutmeg and mace, the Company policy was aimed at using violent means to restrict production rigorously to the Company areas – a more efficient strategy than trying to prevent smuggling. Unlike on Banda, production on Ambon was left to farmers who supplied cloves to the Company through village leaders and at a fixed price. Outside the areas selected by the VOC, the cultivation of cloves was eliminated as far as possible. In the immediate environment of their own islands, this was achieved by means of so-called *honggi* tours: inspection tours where a fleet of Maluku outrigger canoes, manned by Ambonese and Dutch soldiers, destroyed the ‘illegal’ clove plants. Thus the VOC conveniently exploited an already-existing tradition of seasonal raids to achieve its spice monopoly in the wider region.

In a somewhat larger sweep around the clove islands, the Company attempted to maintain its monopoly on cloves through the incumbent rulers. From the fifteenth century, the cloves trade was dominated by Javanese and Malay traders who operated via the four North Maluku principalities of Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo and Bacan. After Islamicisation, the first two developed into by far the two most important sultanates in the region. Although the conflict between the two states had become endemic, it was also idealised as an element of a dualistic order. From the start of the sixteenth century, both the Portuguese and the Spanish exploited this rivalry. The Portuguese settled first in Ternate (1522–75) and on Ambon (1525–1605), and later also in Tidore (1578–1605); the Spanish, after a brief intervention in Tidore in the 1520s, also settled in Ternate (1606–63). However, both the competition for cloves and the initially highly successful Catholic mission under Francis Xavier, as early as the late 1540s, led to growing polarisation. Under Sultan Babullah (r. 1570–83), Ternate turned increasingly to inter-regional trade and the political institutions of the external Islamic world. Thus Ternate managed to repel the Portuguese and succeeded in gaining a more direct grip on the provinces. However, this did not mean the end of the Portuguese threat. After the merger of the Portuguese and Spanish royal houses in 1580, the Spanish managed in 1606 to force their way into Ternate again from the Philippines.

The Dutch had already come into contact with Ternate in 1599. In spite of incidental setbacks, the Company policy in the northern Maluku Islands was a prime example of government from a distance, in this case by supporting the indigenous former regime comprising the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. This was made possible in part by the renewed presence of the Iberians, who drove the sultans into the arms of the VOC. Instead of seeking direct confrontation with the Spanish and the

local population, the Company opted to build forts throughout the region, with these forts acting as magnets, attracting the local population who were fleeing from the Spanish. At the same time, attempts were made to lure the Ternatan sultan into the Dutch camp by recognising his sovereignty over a region, including Ambon, that was much bigger than he had ever previously occupied. On top of this, he was promised fixed sums of money equal to his regular income from the trade in cloves. In exchange for this guaranteed income, the sultan was required to help the VOC uproot the clove plants in his newly expanded empire. This scorched-earth policy naturally brought the Company into conflict with the local elites, both on Ambon and in the northern Malukus, against whom the Company continued to wage bloody wars until well into the seventeenth century, all the more so because the VOC's adversaries kept retreating to nearly impregnable inland mountain tops. It is estimated that no fewer than three-quarters of the Maluku population lost their lives in these guerilla wars.

With the exception of the uprising by Kaicili Sibori, which was once again cloaked in jihadi rhetoric, in 1679–81 the sultans of Ternate and Tidore appear to have accepted their lot, placing themselves under the protection of 'Father Company'. This was made possible by the departure of the Spanish from the region in 1663. While Ternate had now become a fief of the Company, Tidore remained *de jure* autonomous. The VOC particularly continued to monitor the policy of extirpation, and for this reason also exercised increasing pressure on the sultans to maintain control over their borders. Just as in Java, in the eighteenth century there was an increasing need to define the political borders and restrict the flow of migrants. The latter was particularly important on the eastern side of the island of Halmahera. Here, the Maluku Islands claimed by Tidore flowed quite naturally into the islands inhabited by the Papuans, who carried out raids from there on an annual basis. In 1716–28, these groups revolted, turned away from Tidore en masse, seeking instead the patronage of Ternate and the Company, and settling in the areas controlled by them. However, by this time the Company was mainly interested in maintaining the status quo and so returned these 'unregulated' maritime people as much as possible to the authority of Tidore.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the VOC was no longer able to maintain control over the escalating maritime dynamics in the region. Apart from the much-feared British country traders, there were also the Iranun seamen, who succeeded in penetrating ever further into the Maluku waters from the southern Philippines and the Sulu Islands. In this context, after 1775 a situation arose that strongly resembled the previously mentioned uprising around the Halmahera Sea from

1716–28, this time under the leadership not of the Papuan people, but of a descendant of the Tidorean dynasty, Kaicili Nuku. As the Company was unable to capture him, his prestige among the Maluku people rose, and he was the first in Maluku history to claim the restoration of the old order, as well as leadership over the four traditional Maluku kingdoms of Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo and Bacan. Although he did not succeed, he did reach the elevated position of sultan of Tidore. Much of his success was thanks to the French take-over of the Netherlands, which instigated the British to annex Ambon and Banda in 1796, to be followed by Ternate in 1801. The Malukus were returned to the Netherlands in 1802 under the Treaty of Amiens.

Let us now return to the seventeenth century to see what effect the increasing VOC control over the production areas had on the Company's main competitors. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the VOC had been intensively engaged in intercepting the lucrative galleon trade from Spanish Manila with China and across the Pacific to Acapulco in Mexico. Although this freebooting had no structural effect in the Philippines, in 1663 the Spanish cut their losses and left the Maluku Islands. The role of the English East India Company was ambivalent. To some extent, it meant that the Company had allies in the fight against Spain. This is reflected, among other things, in the agreement with the East India Company of 1619 in which there was a mutual commitment to fight the enemy together at the end of the twelve-year armistice between the Republic and Spain. In addition, each company would acquire half of the available pepper, while two-thirds of the Maluku spices would belong to the VOC and one-third to the EIC. Unfortunately, the Company officers operating locally were not inclined to take this treaty seriously, even more so because the English were barely able to play their part in the conflict in the Maluku Islands. The notorious Amboyna Massacre of 1623, in which ten or so Englishmen were executed on suspicion of a conspiracy against the Company, dashed any hope of collaboration. The English subsequently continued to make efforts to break into the spice monopoly via Makassar. The Portuguese did likewise, after the fall of Melaka in 1641 focusing their attention more on Makassar. Moreover, they were also able to conduct business with the Maluku Islands via their settlements on Timor (Kupang) and Flores (Ende). To protect this southern flank, the Company drove the Portuguese out of their mission post in Kupang and themselves established a fortress (Concordia) there in 1653, from which they continued to trade in such products as sandalwood, beeswax and slaves on a small scale until the end of the eighteenth century. Although competing white and mestizo 'black' Portuguese people still

played an important economic role on Timor, they were unable to acquire any meaningful role in the spice trade.

Much more than their European competitors, the VOC had to contend with the Makassarese and Buginese traders from South Sulawesi. Makassar, located on Sulawesi, was part of Gowa, a maritime regency that extended over parts of Minahassa and the islands of Buton and Sumbawa. Gowa was also the driving 'foreign' force behind the continuing resistance in the Maluku Islands in the 1630s, 1640s and 1650s on Hitu and Halmahera. Just as in the northern Maluku Islands, the Company again used the internal conflicts to defeat a powerful rival. This time the Company had the benefit of an uprising in the neighbouring kingdom of Bone, under its ambitious ruler Arun Palakka. After quashing this revolt in 1660, this Buginese warlord moved at the invitation of the VOC in 1663 to Batavia, where he and his Buginese followers were given a *kampong* and were incorporated into the Company army. Thanks to the support of Arun Palakka, who was set on revenge, Cornelis Speelman was the person who, after a tough three-year campaign, managed to subjugate Gowa in 1669. Southern Sulawesi was now governed from Bone by Arun Palakka, with all the inherent consequences for the immense trading network that until then had been concentrated in Makassar.

From having been a free cosmopolitan trading metropolis, Makassar changed into a regional trading post for the VOC, relying mainly on the import of textiles and the export of rice and slaves. More than trade, the levies on the rice harvest as well as revenue farming became increasingly important sources of income. In the eighteenth century the Indian trade in textiles declined, but a growing number of forestry and marine products – in particular tripang or sea cucumber – were traded with China. To control the spice monopoly, posts were also set up outside Makassar, including on Minahasa (1654), Sumbawa (1673) and Selayar (1675). In all these outlying areas the VOC was able to maintain its position with a very small number of employees, partly because in these very conflict-prone areas the Dutch were often welcomed as stranger-kings who could arbitrate between the warring parties. In South Sulawesi, however, the VOC had to contend with increasing competition from the Buginese. Continuing military campaigns against the Buginese leader Arung Singkang of Wajo (1736–40) among others could not prevent the Buginese spreading further over the western archipelago, with all the attendant consequences for the balance of power in the region. In spite of the official Dutch control, but thanks to the Buginese and Chinese trading network, Makassar itself was able to focus increasing attention on China.

The result of all these bloody spice wars was that in around 1670 the VOC managed to close off the partly depopulated islands on this outer periphery of the world from the rest of Asia, to become a kind of remote Dutch 'heart of darkness'. The spice trade with Europe and Asia may have continued, but it was now almost completely in the hands of the VOC. After the occupation of Banten in 1683, non-spice-producing Java was increasingly incorporated into this system. The indigenous trading network of Malays, Buginese, South Asians, Arabs and Chinese persisted in the western part of the archipelago and in the eighteenth century even experienced a new period of prosperity. The strict separation between a more outwardly focused Islamic-Malay world in the west and a more inwardly oriented 'traditional' Javanese and Maluku world in the east was a Dutch product from the eighteenth century that would endure into the nineteenth century with the development of Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies.

The Malay World

On most islands in the archipelago the move towards political and economic integration between coast and interior was driven by the port cities. This can partly be attributed to the fact that on islands such as Borneo, Sulawesi and the Malukus, but also along the Malaysian Peninsula, the inland territories lacked the densely populated agricultural areas that were to be found in Java or mainland Southeast Asia. In Sumatra, however, the situation was again different. Thanks to a short but steady dry season from June to August, the domestic highlands had a demographic predominance over the coast, but at the same time there was never any strong state formation in the interior. Anthony Reid even refers to the inland communities of Sumatra as 'miracles of statelessness' that were dependent on the political centres along the coast for exporting their products.¹⁷ These port cities were not located at the midst of the coastal marshland, but were somewhat further inland, at the mouth of the widespread river deltas or some other logistical interchange between the upstream (*hulu*) and downstream (*hilir*) river areas. The steep slopes of the Bukit Barisan as well as the natural course of the rivers meant there was a strong orientation towards the ports on the east coast. This applied particularly in the south, where Jambi and Palembang were permanent rivals for access to the upstream rice and pepper areas. Further to the south, Banten in Java controlled the pepper-growing areas of the Lampung region. In the north it was mainly Aceh that had control of the northern access areas during the sixteenth

¹⁷ Anthony Reid, 'Inside-out', 20.

century, both from the east coast and from the logistically difficult west coast.¹⁸

The importance of the VOC in the region was initially primarily due to the pepper production, which was concentrated along the slopes of the Barison Mountains. The pepper was transported to the coast via numerous forest paths and streams, which meant there was no real possibility of a single, natural entrepôt in this area. The VOC was keen to control the pepper trade, and had no option but to open trading posts in the main ports. The Dutch presence in Aceh was short-lived, in 1607 and in 1666–7, but the Company had a much longer engagement in the other pepper locations: in Banten from 1603, in Jambi from 1615, in Palembang from 1619, in Padang and other places along Sumatra's west coast from 1659. Besides pepper, the west coast gained in importance from 1670 to 1737 due to the gold mining in Sillida, where Saxon and Bohemian engineers working for the VOC themselves managed the gold mines and where the harsh conditions resulted in a high loss of life among the miners. Initially many of these workers were Europeans, but during the eighteenth century they were mainly slaves from Madagascar.¹⁹

On the other side of the Strait of Melaka, Portuguese Melaka was obviously not an option for the Dutch to trade in pepper, and the Patani trading post also had difficulty obtaining pepper. The Company made a number of voyages to Borneo for pepper. In the period from 1617 to 1622 there was even a trading post at Sukadana (1617–22) and later again there was one at Pontianak (from 1778), but mainly for the diamond and gold trade. In 1747 the Company opened a trading post in Banjarmasin, on Borneo's south coast, primarily to keep the English from trading there. Having been driven out of Banten in 1684, the English established a settlement in Benkulen in Sumatra's west coast, which gave them the possibility of still participating in the pepper trade via a back door.

The Company understood that, with the production regions being so spread out, imposing a world monopoly in pepper would be an unrealistic aim. Outside the archipelago, the Malabar Coast in India was a leading producer of pepper. The Company policy therefore focused mainly on striking the most favourable possible monopoly agreements with the indigenous rulers. In addition, every effort had to be made to exclude competitors. In this sense, the attention of the Company's High Government in Batavia was focused mainly on Melaka. For the Dutch, the Portuguese *casados* were by far the most important competitors in the spice trade: they had the advantage of direct access to the European

¹⁸ Colombijn, 'The Volatile State in Southeast Asia', 497–529.

¹⁹ Rueb, 'Une mine d'or à Sumatra', 13–33.

markets, and between 1580 and 1640, they fell under the sovereignty of Spain, a country with which the Republic was at war. Governor-General van Diemen (r. 1636–45) declared that the Company would have to intervene before there could be peace between Portugal and the Republic, fearing that otherwise the Portuguese *casados* would kill off the VOC monopoly, at least within the archipelago.

The Dutch conquest of Melaka in 1641 was a heavy blow for the Portuguese, but for the western archipelago it was far from being a decisive turning point. Melaka itself was incorporated into the Batavia-oriented trading circuit of the VOC by means of a system of sailing permits and thus lost its entrepôt function, which transferred to Banten, Makassar and – the new site of the former Melaka dynasty – Johore. The fall of Makassar and Banten meant that trade that was not under VOC control concentrated increasingly on the western archipelago, which was now overrun by Buginese, Chinese, Arab and South Asian traders, some of whom emerged as important local political entrepreneurs and advisers. The Buginese thus not only gained a great deal of influence in Riau and other Malay states but also established independent principalities, in such places as Borneo (Mampawa) and in Selangor. As we have already seen, the influence of Arab traders increased at the same time in polities such as Siak, Perak and Pontianak. The Malay contacts with the Indian Ocean, in particular those with the Hadramaut and the southern coastal areas of India, were again revived.

The most important development in the eighteenth century was, however, the expansion of the China trade, which meant that the export package from the western archipelago underwent a drastic change. The emphasis on pepper shifted to tin, a metal that was mined mainly in an arc along the Malaysian Peninsula; in the north around the island of Phuket, which belonged to Siam, to the south of this, to various Malay states such as Kedah, Perak and especially Palembang and the islands of Bangka and Billiton. The increasing Chinese demand for tin made it an important product for the Company that they could make good use of in the tea trade with Canton.

To guarantee the supply of pepper and tin, the VOC tried to draw up contracts with the different Malay principalities, building a good relationship in particular with Palembang. Although agreeing these contracts was generally relatively easy, complying with them was a different matter altogether. During the second half of the eighteenth century, in these states the Company was increasingly crowded out by British country traders operating from India, who used opium as an important instrument for breaking into the market. In addition, there were the other competitors already mentioned, from Chinese to Arabs, and at the end

of the century an increasing number of Malay and Iranun *orang laut*, or sea people, operating from Borneo and Sulu. The strong resurgence of international trade may not have been good news in terms of compliance with the Company's exclusive tin and pepper contracts with various Malay monarchs, but for Dutch Melaka it meant higher revenues both from the tin trade and from tolls.

As the sieges in 1756 and 1784 showed, the Buginese continued to be a plague for Melaka. In that last year, the Company flexed its muscles one more time in the region. A sea squadron led by Jacob Pieter van Braam relieved Melaka and razed Riau to the ground. In subsequent years, operating from the new trading post in Pontianak, the Company destroyed also the Buginese settlements in Borneo, Mampawa and Sukadana. Defeated, Johore's sultan fled and, with the help of the Iranun on Lingga, at the southern entrance to the Strait of Melaka, tried to set up a new emporium, taking up the successful Dutch model by combining trade with piracy. It was, however, the British who proved to be most successful in this area, first by developing a 'new Riau' in Penang (1786) and then in Singapore (1819).

The extent to which the balance of power had changed at the end of the eighteenth century was evidenced by the dramatic course of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4), in which, as already mentioned in the Conclusion of Part I, the VOC suffered enormous financial losses and the British were rapidly able to conquer Sumatra's west coast. After the Netherlands had been overrun by French revolutionary forces in 1795, the British took possession of Melaka and the other Malay branches, possibly aided by the so-called Kew Letters, in which the refugee stadtholder William V of Orange ordered the administration of the Dutch colonies to place themselves under British authority.

The Chinese

Everywhere in the archipelago there were intermediaries – apart from merchants, there were also harbour masters, tax farmers and land developers – who were able to connect courts, international trade and production areas. In some states, such as Aceh, there was a relatively small, wealthy middle class of *orang kaya*, who combined political, commercial and fiscal–agrarian activities. The ruling prince had to make strong efforts to keep this Malay middle class from becoming too powerful. In order not to lose all his power, Sultan Iskandar Muda of Aceh felt compelled at the start of the seventeenth century to subdue this influential group of civil servants-cum-merchants-cum-landed gentry, who were a kind of political entrepreneur class whom we will meet later in India under the term 'portfolio capitalists'. In almost all

the courts in the archipelago, and certainly also elsewhere in Asia, rulers preferred to use minority groups as intermediaries as a means of self-protection. The best minorities were immigrants as they had weaker local roots and so were easy to replace. In the archipelago their role was played largely by South Asians and Arabs, but increasingly also and overwhelmingly so by the Chinese.

The success of the Dutch in Batavia, in the Ommelanden and along the Pasisir was made possible by the Chinese. One could even use the term co-colonisation to show that the Chinese played a crucial intermediary role between the Company primarily as administrator-merchants and the local communities as producers.²⁰ Most Javanese also regarded the VOC and the Chinese as partners, as is apparent from the general amazement when the two clashed in 1740. What also surfaced from this Chinese rebellion, though, was the realisation that the Chinese by no means formed a united front, but rather there were major socio-economic differences among them.

In the first place there were the *peranakan* Chinese, who had been in Java for longer, were more integrated into the local society and were often of mixed Chinese–Javanese descent. In the eighteenth century, the *peranakan* in West and Central Java were outstripped by the so-called *totok*, the migrant Chinese who did not settle permanently in Java but maintained strong links with their country of origin, in this case the South Chinese province of Fujian. Particularly after the opening up of Chinese trade by the Kangxi Emperor in 1684, they spread en masse throughout the Ommelanden in the footsteps of the Company, perhaps even vice versa, the Company following them. The *totoks* looked down on the *peranakans*; they also made up the urban elite from which the so-called captains were selected, the representatives of the Chinese community with whom the Company wanted to do business. Apart from this moneyed top layer of important entrepreneurs who acted as intermediaries for the Company, there was a growing group of Chinese artisans and agricultural labourers in the rural areas who were actively engaged primarily in sugar cultivation and sugar refining and who operated increasingly outside the authority of the Chinese captains recognised by the Company. This group suffered heavily under the sugar malaise of the thirties. Partly because of the lack of central authority in rural areas, it was this impoverished group that engaged in the revolts of the 1740s. Although the Company was built on the support of the Chinese elite of contractors, traders and captains, the massiveness of Chinese migration was ultimately also an existential threat. There was an ever-present fear

²⁰ See Andrade, *Lost Colony*.

that the Chinese would jeopardise the Dutch trading revenues, which explains why they were also excluded from the coffee countries of Priangan. Whatever the High Government thought of immigration quotas and other restrictive measures, the Chinese wave of immigration was unstoppable. Even the slaughter of 10,000 Chinese in the 1740s resulted in no more than a brief hiatus in their influx.

For the VOC, a somewhat cumbersome trading organisation that was mainly interested in conducting trade on a large scale, the Chinese were the ideal trading partners. Given their numbers, connections and entrepreneurial spirit, they found it relatively easy to forge direct contacts with the local producers. Apart from the retail trade and the regional transportation of trade goods, the Chinese obviously also had an important role as traders to China. The first Chinese merchants in Batavia came from Banten (1619–29), encouraged by the offer of exemption from tariffs (1626). What was probably more important was the fact that in the 1630s the VOC had allowed Chinese businessman Jan Con the privilege of being able to manufacture lead coins (*picis*) that were highly desirable as a means of exchange for the retail trade and that attracted many Chinese to Batavia. Batavia evolved to become a new hub in the extensive Chinese trade network and, in spite of the lock on the Chinese market by the Chinese emperor, the Company was given access to desirable Chinese products such as tea, silk and porcelain.

Besides their role in trade, from the start entrepreneurs such as Ben Con, Jan Con and Lim Lacco were extremely important for the Company as tax farmers, contractors and land developers. After the peace with Mataram and Banten, and certainly after the loss of Taiwan, which until then had been the largest producer of sugar for the VOC, the Chinese applied themselves to producing sugar in the Ommelanden. Of the eighty-four sugar traders in 1710, seventy-nine were Chinese! Unlike the *Mardijkers*, the Chinese did not have to provide military services, but instead had to pay tax. With the capitation raised by and on the Chinese, the Company was able to construct local fortifications, which were in part built by Chinese contractors. Also the licence fees paid mainly by the Chinese for markets, shops, inns, bars and betting centres generated considerable revenues. The extent to which the VOC relied on the Chinese is apparent, for example, from the fact that they were allowed to live within the town walls, unlike the situation in Manila, and until 1666 they even had an advisory role in the city council (*College van Schepenen*). In the absence of adequate numbers of *vrijburgers* and *Mardijkers*, the Chinese were the most entrepreneurial middle class in Batavian society, and as such they formed the economic and financial backbone of the local colonial government.

During the second half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch–Chinese partnership expanded not only over the Ommelanden, but also along the Pasisir. This influx reached its peak in the periods from 1679 to 1680 and from 1695 to 1710. Although the emphasis was initially still on Japara because of the sugar production there, by about the turn of the century most Chinese were living in Semarang. Just as in Batavia, they lived both together in relatively open family groups and in separate villages, in some cases headed by a captain. Indeed, the captain families developed to become true entrepreneurial dynasties, as did the Oey family in Japara, the Que family in Semarang and the Tan family in East Java. In spite of the import monopoly of Indian commodities held by the VOC, the Chinese mainly traded in textiles, and increasingly in opium from India. Having access to *picis* and opium, the Chinese were able to penetrate further and further into the countryside and once again, just as in the Ommelanden, the Chinese popped up everywhere as holders of tolls, markets and lands. These Chinese tycoons often controlled a broad portfolio of trading activities. One of them was Oey-Pinko in Japara, who not only owned numerous sugar mills and traded with China and India, but also became an important source of local finance for the Company.

The Chinese managed to acquire increasingly powerful positions as harbour masters and tax farmers. In Demak, Gresik, Pasuruan and Juwana, Chinese *syahbandars* or harbour masters had been given the monopoly on the sale of rice, salt, wood and other important products by the local regents. Although the Javanese princes and regents increasingly regarded the Chinese as their counterparts in economic terms, they were equally concerned that they might acquire too autonomous a position or could serve as a bridge for the VOC. An interesting figure in this respect was a certain Jayadinigrat, an army commander with Chinese ancestors who managed to ensconce himself as regent of Pekalongan and *wedana kilen* (i.e. the Great Governor of the western Pasisir) in the hierarchy of upper-class Javanese *priyayi* (nobility) and *bupatis* (regents). Having supported the winning faction in Mataram, his star rose rapidly after 1703. Jayadinigrat became a true political entrepreneur with an impressive array of business activities. Just like his father, he leased the tolls between Semarang and Kartasura. He was a trader in rice, pepper and sugar and even a pioneer in the cultivation of coffee and indigo in his district. The last two of these were at the special request of the Company, which, besides coffee, wanted to introduce in Java the ‘dry’ indigo production common in India, but had discovered that this was not possible without the cooperation of the regents and their workers. By buying positions for his family members, Jayadinigrat was able to

extend his authority further: his son Tirtanata became regent of Tegal and his brothers Puspanagara and Tirtawijaya regents of Batang and Sidayu, respectively. He consolidated his new status as a minor autonomous ruler by recruiting his own native clients such as Makassar and other mercenary soldiers, as well as the inevitable Arab legal scholars who afforded him the stature of a good Muslim.

Given the above, we can only conclude that it was solely due to the Chinese that the Dutch were able to develop their colonial settlement in Java. The whispered plan from 1740 to deport the redundant Chinese to Ceylon may suggest that the VOC government in Batavia was well aware that the Chinese contribution could have both a constructive and an undermining effect. In Ceylon the Company had to manage without the Chinese and thus had to develop other ways to exploit that colony.

Ceylon

Just like the islands of the Indonesian archipelago, the early history of Ceylon – or Lanka in the ancient sources – is closely interwoven with that of the Indian subcontinent. Ancient epic poems from the island tell of the Buddhist mission in the form of visits by the Buddha and Mahinda, the son of the famous Indian emperor Ashoka, as well as of the wondrous return of the Sinhalese patriarch Vijaya, son of an Indian prince and princess born of a lion (*sinha*). Lanka thus identified with the founding myths of Indian dynasties, which in one way or another often claim a history of exile and/or migration from the north. This close relationship with India continues to be important in the history of the island.²¹ In another sense the thirteenth century constituted an important break. Probably as a result of malaria, the irrigated semi-arid areas in the north-east, with the old capital cities of Anuradhapura and Pulonnaruwa, were abandoned and the political and economic emphasis shifted to the rainier south-western coastal area, a region of wet rice cultivation and rainforests where cinnamon and other spices were produced.

Just as along the Javanese Pasisir, in the fifteenth century new little kingdoms developed along the Ceylonese coast, including Sinhalese Kotte in the south-west and Tamil Jaffna in the north. With the weakening of the position of Kotte in about 1450, the kingdom of Kandy established itself as an independent domain in the central mountain area. In the sixteenth century the arrival of the Portuguese (in 1505) led first to the disintegration of the coastal kingdoms, and later to their annexation by Portugal. The Portuguese were still under fire from the

²¹ Strathern, 'The Vijaya Origin Myth of Sri Lanka', 3–29.

new Sinhalese kingdom of Sitawaka until 1592, but thanks to their maritime dominance, the strengthening of the port of Colombo and, above all, the internal struggle between Sitawaka and Kandy, they were able to take full control of the northern and south-western coasts before the end of the century.

Before this, in 1602 the Dutch had succeeded in establishing contact with the King of Kandy, Vimala Dharma Surya (r. 1591–1604), via the east coast. Through the mediation of Dutch envoy Joris van Spilbergen, who at the time was still in the service of the *Veerse* trading company owned by Balthazar de Moucheron, a treaty was concluded against the Portuguese, and the Dutch were invited to build a fort somewhere on the coast. The following year the new VOC endeavoured to extend the contacts, but, because of the undiplomatic conduct of the envoy Sebald de Weert, little came of this, and he himself was assassinated by the Sinhalese along with dozens of other Dutch people. After this fiasco, sporadic attempts were made under the envoys Carolus de Lannoy (in 1610) and Marcellus Boshouwer (in 1612). While the VOC gave up in Ceylon, the Portuguese succeeded in occupying the east coast. This gave the Portuguese control over Ceylon, a position that the VOC would not achieve until after the Kandyan War of 1761–6.

It was not until 1637 under Governor-General van Diemen that the VOC, together with the new Kandyan prince Rajasingha II (r. 1635–87), decided to make a serious attempt to remove the Portuguese from Ceylon. After the occupation of Batticaloa, located on the east coast, in 1638 a treaty was concluded between the king and the Dutch admiral Adam Westerwold. It essentially stipulated that the Company would provide the king with military assistance in completely expelling the Portuguese from Ceylon and that in exchange the king would bear the costs of supplying cinnamon and other goods. The VOC was granted the exclusive right to foreign trade, free of taxes and tolls, and the country would be closed to Roman Catholic missionaries. Finally, at the king's expense, the Dutch could occupy the captured forts 'if the king deemed it necessary'. The final addition was in the Portuguese version intended for Kandy, but not in the Dutch version of the treaty intended for the VOC, which immediately led to a disagreement about how the treaty should be interpreted. In 1640, the treaty was therefore amended: the VOC would withdraw at the point when the king paid the cost of recapture of the coastal towns, but they would also be allowed to retain one port of their choosing. In any event, in the subsequent years the Company considered that it was fully entitled to acquire the Portuguese cities, so long as Rajasingha had not yet paid the costs of the reconquest.

In the meantime, a ten-year armistice was agreed between Portugal – again independent from Spain in 1640 – and the Republic. However, this treaty was ratified only after four years of persistent warfare. The Portuguese kept Colombo, the VOC retained Galle and Negombo; Trincomalee (in 1640) and Batticaloa (in 1643) had since been transferred by the VOC to Kandy. After the end of the armistice in 1652, Colombo was occupied in 1656 and Mannar, Tuticorin and Jaffna two years later. In the following years, this large-scale campaign of conquests led by Rijcklof van Goens concluded with the occupation first of Negapatnam (1658) on the Coromandel Coast and subsequently also of the Portuguese settlements along the Malabar Coast (1661–3). Under the governorship of father (1662–3; 1665–75) and son (1675–80) van Goens, the VOC pursued an aggressive policy towards Kandy: in 1665 large parts of the south-western lowlands that had previously been held by the Portuguese were occupied. Trincomalee (in 1665) and Batticaloa (in 1668) were occupied again, and new forts were built there. During this period, attempts were made to turn the island into a full Dutch colony, with the VOC demanding monopolies on almost all export and import products. Like Batavia, Ceylon was intended to become an entrepôt for intra-Asian trade, with direct lines both to Europe and to the other Dutch trading posts in the western parts of the Indian Ocean.

The belligerent policy of the ‘war generation’ of van Diemen and van Goens was unable to withstand the climate of reforms that prevailed in the Republic and in the Company in the 1680s. It proved much too costly, and the proceeds were disappointing. The unrest within Kandy made the peeling of the cinnamon difficult, most of which took place on Kandyan ground. Moreover, a side-effect of the trading monopolies was that the Indian traders stayed away, which meant that the island was under threat of isolation. Under the watchful eye of van Goens’ old rival and the new Commissioner-General appointed for the South Asian establishments, Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein (1684–91), much more attention began to be paid to the sensitivities and traditions of the Sinhalese court. As a consequence, a new generation of more moderate and diplomatic governors – such individuals as Laurens Pijl (1680–92), Thomas van Rhee (1692–7), Gerrit de Heere (1697–1702) and Cornelis Jan Simonsz (1703–7) – implemented a thorough review of policy, which included showing greater respect for the wishes of the king. For example, the Company implicitly acknowledged the theoretical supremacy of the Kandyan monarch over the entire island through annual missions and gifts, which the Kandyans took as a tribute. In exchange, the king recognised the monopolies on cinnamon and elephants, and allowed the VOC to have cinnamon peeled in his kingdom and elephants transported to the

ports. In the 1690s, with the exception of these two monopoly products, trade became more liberalised by opening the ports in any event for Kandyan trade with India. As a result, around the turn of the century, relations with Kandy became normalised, and the extraction of cinnamon proceeded uninterrupted. At this time there was also a revival in the trading relations with the Indian subcontinent, which traditionally relied on Indian rice and textiles and on elephants and areca nuts from Ceylon. In 1703, fearing too strong competition and the undermining of their own profits and the cinnamon monopoly, the Dutch again closed the ports for indigenous trade.

So after the aggressive initial period, towards the turn of the century a policy of indirect management was implemented. This was the moderate VOC policy advocated by the Camphuys–van Reede tot Drakenstein generation and applied in Ceylon, Java and the Malabar Coast. Under this policy direct intervention was avoided, communication was channelled as far as possible along traditional lines and, where necessary, indigenous *anciens régimes* were bolstered, as much as possible under indirect Dutch tutelage. In other words, just as in Java, the VOC in Ceylon respected the existing social and ritual structure and thus could continue to benefit from earmarked *corvée* services (*rajakarya*) provided by castes such as the Salagama for peeling or the Goyigama for farming. If there was any social change, it was mainly due to the further rise of these groups up the administrative ladder, i.e. all steps down to just below the *dissave*, the highest provincial administrator, who remained a Dutchman. The increasing influence of the Buddhist Sangha in the lowlands probably reflects this image of a growing agricultural elite, which could also demonstrate its increased status in cultural and religious terms.

The First Modern Colony

In the course of the eighteenth century the Company began to focus increasingly on exploiting the cinnamon production to the maximum, with all the attendant consequences for the cinnamon peelers, who protested strongly against the minimal payment and the way in which their traditional services were misused. In addition, the local people complained about the restrictions imposed by the Company on land reclamation in order to safeguard the natural cinnamon forests. The strong focus on cinnamon extraction was thus at the expense of rice cultivation and regularly led to food shortages, all the more so as population numbers in the south-western lowlands increased during this period. Following a mass uprising in the south-western coastal areas in 1734, the enlightened, that is reform-oriented, Governor Gustaaf Willem Baron van

Imhoff (r. 1736–40) decided to tighten up the regulation of cinnamon extraction, including by updating the existing land registers and systematically measuring and mapping the territory controlled by the Company.

The Company's guiding principle was to reduce to a minimum its dependence on the unreliable production method in the Kandyan regions. In addition, the Company tried to get a better grip on their production centres from the top down by expanding their own knowledge and at the same time registering all the workers. In Kandy, unlike in Java, the Company could conveniently use the so-called *tombos*, the island's unique, long-standing land registers, going back at least until the Portuguese period but possibly even earlier. Despite the fact that the registers were not maintained consistently, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards the Dutch paid increasing attention to keeping the data up to date. At the same time, the interior of the country became better mapped than ever before, with part of the region even being reclaimed by the Company itself.

At the same time as the *tombos* were updated, in 1740 country councils (*landraden*) came into operation, comprising European and indigenous judges whose job was to settle disputes about land ownership. The customary law of Jaffna (*Tesavalamai*) had already been recorded in 1707, and in the 1760s, on the orders of Governor Falck, a start was made on recording Sinhalese *landsrecht* or customary law. Something similar could be seen happening simultaneously in Java (Cirebon), albeit on a much smaller scale. Although the judicial authorities could thus rely on specific customary law, they could also, as in other parts of the Dutch empire both at home and abroad, apply so-called Roman-Dutch law, a mixture of Roman law and the law of the Province of Holland. Even today, Roman-Dutch private law is still in force in Sri Lanka.²²

Van Imhoff's reform policies were continued by his successors Johan Gideon Loten (r. 1752–7) and Jan Schreuder (r. 1757–62). In the lowlands the situation remained tense as more and more regulations restricted the traditional rights of peasants and peelers. In 1760 large-scale food shortages ultimately led to a mass uprising against the Company's rule. In no time at all the Dutch were driven out of the lowlands and were barely able to maintain their position in their remaining strongholds. The south-western lowlands were recaptured in 1762 and 1763, with the help of reinforcements sent posthaste from the Indian factories. Under the leadership of the new governor Lubbert

²² For a fascinating recent analysis of the practical consequences of this system, see Seneviratne-Rupasinghe's 'Negotiating Custom'.

Jan Baron van Eck (1762–5) the situation remained precarious because the king was now trying to form an alliance with the British. Was this not reminiscent of the way in which the Dutch had driven the Portuguese from the island?

To escape this fate, the Dutch decided on an immediate military intervention in Kandy. After an initial failed attempt in 1764, in the following year van Eck succeeded in occupying Kandy. The Kandyan palace and temple were plundered and burned down, and the inhabitants were murdered or driven out. To the dismay of the Company, King Kirthi Sri Rajasingha (r. 1747–82) himself, as well as the holy reliquary of the Tooth of the Buddha, did not fall into Dutch hands. In the same year the Dutch returned to the lowlands and van Eck died of an infection contracted during an expedition. It was now up to his successor Iman Willem Falck to translate this victory into a new agreement. Under the treaty of 1766, the whole coastal strip came under the control of the Company, and the area was even *de jure* separated from Kandy.

The interventionist land policy initiated by van Imhoff was continued under Governor Falck (r. 1765–85). Falck's experiments with the cinnamon tree in his own garden were put into practice in the first real cinnamon plantations under the full control of the Dutch. With the expansion of these plantations, the pressure on the farmland and thereby on the local population was eased somewhat. Falck also guided Ceylon more or less unscathed through the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4). Trincomalee, which had been occupied successively by the British and the French, was returned to the Dutch at the Peace of Paris (1784). Falck's policies were continued by the reformist governor Willem Jacob van de Graaff (r. 1785–94). The construction of irrigation and drainage works and canals improved the infrastructure, made cinnamon production more self-sufficient, and gave a strong impetus to the cultivation of rice and other crops such as areca, pepper, coffee and cardamom. Unlike Falck, however, van de Graaff favoured an aggressive policy towards Kandy, which, as a result of opposition from the Galle Commander Pieter Sluysken and the VOC government in Batavia, led to his ultimate removal in 1794. In 1796, after the Dutch had been forced to ally with revolutionary France, his successor van Angelbeek (1794–6) was forced to transfer Ceylon to the British, a move that met with very little opposition.

In short, quite differently from the situation in Java at this time, where the focus was on more indirect forms of exploitation, the directors in Ceylon were driven by a strong sense of regulation and reform. They gave the impression of seeking information through direct contact with the immediate producers. For them it was not the arbitrariness of all kinds of

'corrupt' intermediaries but the 'objective' view of land registers and law courts that would benefit the administration and the population alike. The belief in a bureaucratic fix for colonial society meant that the Dutch governors of Ceylon were much ahead of their time. Hence, late-eighteenth-century Ceylon makes a surprisingly enlightened, if not modern impression, certainly more modern than the Dutch Republic itself. Indeed, it would not be until much later, after the Napoleonic reforms, that the Dutch would try something similar at home. The British too started to implement such policies in their Indian possessions only at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Supremacy of Kandy

Meanwhile, the king of Kandy lived in his own sublime world. As a universal Buddhist world ruler or *chakravartin*, he lived at the centre of the island (Senkadagala) and saw that all was good. From his perspective – and probably that of almost all Sinhalese – his authority extended across the island in concentric circles. In the eighteenth century, the central mountain region, the original five empires above the mountains (Kanda Uda Rata), was divided into nine so-called *ratas*, which in turn were surrounded by twelve *disavanis* located in the transitional area between mountain and lowland. The outer ring contained the areas that the Company, as one of his vassals, governed 'for the king of Lanka'. After about 1680, this Sinhalese perspective was even publicly recognised by the VOC, for example in titles, gifts and the ritual of the annual court trips. In this sense, Kandy actually reached the height of its power in the eighteenth century: the Portuguese 'rebels' had been driven out and the rival kingdoms of the lowlands had been annexed. In other words, the island of Lanka was united thanks to the loyal deeds of 'my Dutch people'. It now even included Jaffna in the north, dominated by Tamils, which had for a long time claimed its own status as an independent region; also the VOC itself did not consider this area subordinate to Kandy.

As has been said, from about 1680 onwards, the Ceylonese Company regime implicitly endorsed the Kandyan view of the island's sovereignty. Against the wishes of the Lords XVII and Batavia, and especially of the local ministers, they were prepared to tolerate Buddhism in the lowlands. Just a stone's throw from Colombo, pilgrims were permitted to use the temple of Kelaniye, one of the holy places visited by the Buddha and destroyed by the Portuguese. In 1782, the king was allowed to restore the temple. Just how far this acceptance of Buddhism had gone can be seen in the closure of a Dutch Christian school when problems arose between the

schoolmaster and the *bhikkus*. A private crusade, such as that of the fanatical missionary Fabricius, in 1741, in which he personally destroyed all kinds of temples, was no more than an incident and shows above all that Buddhism was also flourishing along the south-west coast and that the Company generally did nothing to counter this. In fact, the VOC even facilitated a Buddhist revival by making its ships available for the transfer of Buddhist monks from Arakan and Siam to ensure the proper course of the *upasampada*, the ritual ordination from novice to monk.²³ The same was done with the Nayaka brides who were brought for the king from Madurai in India.

It would be anachronistic to describe this Sinhalese world view as an early form of nationalism. Far more important than the communal or ethnic cohesion of a bounded, 'national' state was the cosmic harmony represented by the king at the axis of the universe, ritually delegating power to various co-sharers of an open-ended realm, thereby making it altogether irrelevant whether the latter were Buddhist, Hindu or Christian, Sinhalese, Tamil or European. Remarkably enough, the geography of Sri Lanka fits extremely well with this cosmic world view. Unlike Kotte or Sitavakaka, for example, Kandy was situated at the very centre of the island, and even the furthest periphery remained within easy reach. This remarkable overlap of cosmography and geography contributed to a strong sense of a common identity on the island, which was further emphasised by the close, complementary relationship between Sinhalese kingship and Buddhist monasticism (*Sangha*). It is important to stress, though, that this identity was not at all closed but opened up in all directions towards the outside world.

From this cosmic perspective, ethnic or religious diversity was not an issue and, just as in the Indonesian archipelago, the very idea of a stranger-king could play an important role, as was the case in the eighteenth century, when in 1739 South Indian Nayakas from Madurai managed to occupy the Kandyan kingship for themselves. This led to a renewed association of the island with the great South Indian empire of Vijayanagara, which for a brief period had extended over Jaffna, and of which these Nayakas saw themselves as successors. Entirely in the style of Sinhalese patriarch Vijaya, the Nayaka stranger-king was able to take his seat at the centre, but at the same time maintain his ritual distance, and even more so than his Sinhalese predecessors. Although this may have been a typical pattern for the Indian world, from a contemporary

²³ Van Goor, *Kooplieden, predikanten en bestuurders overzee*, 109–35; Wagenaar, 'Knielen of buigen?', 441–66; Wagenaar, 'Looking for Monks from Arakan', 91–110; Wagenaar, 'Met eer en respect', 227–51.

perspective it created a somewhat strange figure of a Hindu, Telugu Nayaka king who, as patron of the Sinhalese people and the Buddhist Sangha, called his Protestant Dutch governors to order. This is probably what happened in the eyes of the Sinhalese people in the so-called Kandyan War of 1761–6: it was not the Sinhalese who rebelled against the Dutch, but rather the Dutch who, as obstreperous vassals at the coast, rebelled against the legitimate supremacy of the *chakravartin* at Kandy.²⁴ Even after the ‘defeat’ of 1766, there was still scope for this interpretation because also in the new treaty the king was mentioned as the ruler of Lanka.

Burghers

There are several different ways of describing a century and a half of Dutch government in Ceylon.²⁵ In terms of the Company’s central trading motive, Ceylon was a success story. In the middle of the eighteenth century, European revenues from the cinnamon monopoly accounted for approximately 13 per cent of the VOC’s total auction revenues. Before and after this peak, the percentage fluctuated between 5 per cent at the beginning of the century and 10 per cent at the end. The lucrative trade in cinnamon did not benefit the economy of the island itself, but did have other effects. In order to preserve the cinnamon monopoly, tight political and military control had to be maintained. At the same time, the monopoly also meant controlling the external contacts of the island in general and of the kingdom of Kandy in particular, while keeping foreign competitors at bay. This involved high expenditures on fortifications, which were built in a ring around the island. Added to this were the costly military campaigns of the first conquest and then the Kandyan War. At the same time, rice transport continued to depend heavily on indigenous traders, especially those with extensive trade networks with South India. The role of these mostly Tamil-speaking intermediaries in Ceylon cannot be ignored: while the VOC focused on the cinnamon trade in Europe, the rest of the Ceylon economy was almost entirely in the hands of Muslim Chulia and Marakayyar as well as Hindu Chetti traders. These groups concentrated their efforts both on the domestic retail trade and on South India. They exchanged rice and textiles for Ceylonese goods, such as areca nuts and cardamom, and also played a similar role for the political elites in Kandy. As a result, during the eighteenth century a natural

²⁴ Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness*, 70–85.

²⁵ The information on the VOC in Ceylon relies largely on the following three works: Raben, ‘Batavia and Colombo’; Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention*; and van der Belt, *Het VOC-bedrijf op Ceylon*.

alliance emerged between the political authorities – the VOC and Kandy – and these trading communities.

All of this was further facilitated by the close political links with the Pearl Fishery Coast: the VOC with its office in Tuticorin, which fell under the jurisdiction of Colombo, and Kandy by virtue of its new Nayaka relationship with Madurai. It would therefore be wrong to regard Ceylon as a colony strictly guarded and isolated by the Company, an idea that may well take hold if the focus is exclusively on the VOC. On the contrary, the Ceylonese economy remained closely intertwined with that of the southern Indian coastal areas, and remarkably enough, also with the Maldives, the atoll sultanate from which large quantities of cowry shells were transported to Ceylon in the eighteenth century. These shells were traditionally used as small change in the South Asian economy, but the Dutch and other European traders also used them as a method of exchange in the trade with Africa.²⁶ This resulted in the strange paradox that the VOC was able to concentrate on the cinnamon precisely because the indigenous, mainly Tamil traders were taking care of the India trade and the more basic needs of the island's economy.

Was the role of the Tamil traffickers comparable to that of the Chinese in Java? There may well have been similarities in terms of the retail trade chain, but not insofar as the domestic operations were concerned. While the Dutch mainly had to cultivate new land in the Batavian Ommelanden, in the Colombo hinterland they were simply able to build on the administrative and agricultural infrastructure created under the kingdom of Kotte and the Portuguese. In the south-western regions, the role of the Chetti-Tamils was thus limited mainly to Colombo and to trade. Just as in Batavia, roughly half the population consisted of slaves and a quarter of European and mestizo *vrijburgers*, simply called *burghers* in Ceylon: these were mostly Protestants, wearing European dress and speaking either Dutch or Portuguese. The latter category had a hierarchy of so-called *mixties*, *casties* and *poesties*, whose rank and status were determined by their degree of European blood. It was largely religion that determined who was allowed both inside and outside the walls. On passing from the fortress to the old city and then to the suburbs, there was a discernible increase in religious and ethnic diversity. The centre was home to predominantly European and Eurasian Christians. The majority of non-Sinhalese groups, thus primarily Chetties and Muslims, lived in the border area, which was segregated into districts. The segregation was not imposed by force, but came about as a result of the government's preference for communicating with relatively autonomous, private

²⁶ Raben, 'European Periphery at the Heart of the Ocean', 45–61.

groups with their own legal and administrative status. This was no different from in Batavia.

One development peculiar to Ceylon was the VOC's attempts to train a group of their own intermediaries outside the existing social structures, their aim being to develop a loyal intermediate class. As early as the end of the seventeenth century, two seminaries were set up on the initiative of Hendrik van Reede tot Drakenstein, one in Jaffna (1690–1723) and one in Colombo (1696–1796). These two seminaries served in particular for the training of catechists, interpreters and ministers, and their mission was to fight Roman Catholicism, which had many supporters, especially in Jaffna. Even with his cultivation of a new elite, van Reede did not want to break into the existing social structures. The students had to be recruited from the best indigenous families. In contrast to, for example, van Goens senior and overzealous ministers like Fabricius, van Reede's intention was not actually to attack the traditional religions, but rather to counter the Roman Catholics, who might otherwise serve as a kind of fifth column for Portuguese and French power aspirations. Over the next few decades, more and more mestizos and even Christian Chetties were admitted, and Colombo evolved into an influential training institute for a growing number of loyal intermediaries with knowledge of Dutch and the Gospel as well as of local languages and customs. Although no more than 100 people in total were involved, the overall image of the group, via their families, friends and pupils, extended beyond their individual careers. Apart from the fact that Ceylon itself was able to meet the demand for ministers, Melaka, Batavia and Cochin also benefited from the seminary.

A number of important changes can be seen in the seminary under van Imhoff. The catechism, prayer and biblical exegesis lost in importance, and more attention was focused on a secular European education. This meant not only the introduction of Latin and Greek, but also less cramming and more understanding of texts. This qualified the seminary as a preliminary course for European universities – and indeed a number of students would continue their studies in the Republic. The study of Ceylonese languages also developed around the seminary, not so much out of scientific interest but primarily to stimulate religious instruction. Therefore, only linguistic and religious texts were translated into Tamil and Sinhalese at the seminaries. The introduction of a printing press (1734–96) extended the circulation of these documents. In addition to religious works, multilingual posters and even a novel (*Den wandelenden Jode*, literally *The Wandering Jew*) were printed. Although the Portuguese had previously used a printing press in Asia, this was quite unique for such a VOC settlement. Despite the fact that Colombo remained a small

Company city and was certainly less cosmopolitan than Batavia, nonetheless an intellectual climate developed around the seminary, in which a small circle of both Europeans and mestizos could participate.²⁷

The people who benefited most from the seminary were the Chetties of Colombo, including the Ondaatjes: a mixed Tamil–European family of medical doctors, interpreters and traders originally from southern India. At the end of the eighteenth century, a descendant of the family, Pieter Philip Quint Ondaatje (1758–1818), even managed to establish himself as one of the prominent figures of the so-called Patriot reform movement in the Republic – one of the earliest examples of an Asian revolutionary educated by Europeans with European ideas of the Enlightenment!²⁸ Much of Ceylon’s history comes together in the fortunes of the Ondaatjes: trade relations with South India, the influential role of surgeons and interpreters, and the training at the seminar. Some of their recently discovered correspondence is written in an extraordinary hybrid language and once again shows the extent to which this family was involved in an inter-regional patronage network connecting the Dutch Republic with the Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon and Batavia.²⁹ And even though it is a relatively small group, the example of the Ondaatjes again illustrates the special position held by Ceylon. Of course, the Company did not have a real cultural policy, but nowhere else in Asia other than in Ceylon did the Company succeed in transferring something of the Dutch language and culture on a lasting basis to part of the indigenous population. The fact that in Sri Lanka a small Eurasian group under the revealing label of *Dutch Burghers* cherishes this Dutch heritage to this day is primarily a nineteenth-century British story, but it also epitomises the relative success of the Company’s regime in Ceylon.

Malabar

Although Malabar is obviously part of the Indian subcontinent, it makes sense to treat this region in the same context as the Indonesian archipelago and Ceylon. The main reason is the relatively long and direct influence that the VOC was able to exert there. Unlike the trade offices in all the other Indian regions, there the VOC followed in the footsteps of the Portuguese and exercised direct management over Cochin (Kochi), a relatively small port city whose character is strongly reminiscent of other cities annexed by the Portuguese, such as Colombo and Melaka.

²⁷ Diehl, ‘The Dutch Press in Ceylon’, 329–44.

²⁸ Bosma and Raben, *De oude Indische wereld*, 82–4.

²⁹ Tiekens, *Between Colombo and the Cape*.

The influence of the VOC was also greater in the other cities and areas along the Malabar Coast than anywhere on the Asian mainland. Although this was partly due to the large amounts of pepper that were produced there, it was the geographical circumstances that gave the VOC its relatively dominant position and that had always given Malabar an exceptional position on the subcontinent.

The Western Ghats, the mountain range that runs parallel to the west coast, form a sharp dividing line between the relatively narrow, wet coastal strip of Malabar and the much dryer, savannah-like inland region on the lee side of this mountain range in the Deccan region and in Karnataka. The Western Ghats increase steadily in height from north to south, reaching approximately 2,500 metres. With the increase in height, there is a corresponding relative isolation of the area in a southerly direction. This does not apply to the area to the west of the Palghat Gap, a fairly wide opening in the mountain ridge that allowed relatively easy access for traders via Palghat and Coimbatore to the interior and the Coromandel Coast. North of Malabar are the lower and broader coastal areas of the Konkan and Kanara, the latter of which was traditionally important as an area for the production and export of rice that could be sold all along the coasts of the Arabian Sea.

The heavy rainfall in the region meant that large quantities of rice could be cultivated in Malabar. In pre-colonial and early colonial times, the rice was mainly used for consumption by the indigenous population and very little was exported. Malabar was a very fertile area, which meant that it was densely populated, with a widespread pattern of settlements that merged almost imperceptibly into one another. Owing to the broadening of the coastal strip of Malabar towards the south, the largest population concentrations are traditionally found near the harbour towns and temple areas in the south. Aside from rice, the most important crops were coconut trees (for pulp, rope, palm wine and building materials), cardamom, areca or betel nuts, cinnamon, ginger, sandalwood and – of course – the most desirable of all: pepper. It was this spice in particular, grown on the mountain slopes, which had attracted traders from afar for centuries: Arabs, Jews, Armenians and, more recently, the Portuguese.

The ecological constellation on the dry leeward side of the Ghats was entirely different. Like the other, more arid parts of the subcontinent, the Deccan was also dominated by often short-lived, but relatively large conquering states that acquired their power by deploying large squadrons of cavalry along the many inland marching routes. The sultanates of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda – and further to the south the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara – were among such states. During the early period, from the port city of Vengurla, just north of Portuguese Goa

among other places, the VOC tried to do business with the sultanate of Bijapur, where they expected to be able to buy pepper mainly via the domestic market of Raybag. South of Bijapur, somewhat in the shelter of the great marching routes, was another trading partner of the VOC: Ikkeri, one of the so-called Nayaka successor states of Vijayanagara, with which the VOC maintained relations from Barcelore. Besides pepper, rice was also an important commodity here. The actual Malabar Coast lay to the south of Barcelore. Protected behind the Ghats, and partly due to a climate that was much too humid for horses, Malabar also managed to stay outside the direct sphere of influence of the interior of the country during the seventeenth-century Mughal conquests and remained strongly oriented towards the sea.

This relative seclusion resulted in a political order formed by about fifty small, extremely diffuse yet intertwined principalities that were governed by ever-changing coalitions between and within rival – mostly matriarchal – family networks (*swarupams*) of princes, nobles, warriors, traders and temple servants. This is not the place to reflect on the political situation in detail, but in all these alliances four major dynastic centres could be distinguished from north to south, around which new political coalitions were continuously forming: Chirakkal, Calicut, Cochin and Venad (later Travancore). These four principalities derived their legitimacy largely from a variety of handed-down traditions around Cheraman Perumal, the mythical ninth-century founder of classical Malabar.

Modern historians have found it difficult to understand the complex political system of Malabar; their interpretations of the regional, social and political models vary from ‘little kingdoms’ to ‘segmentary states’. One of the first to ponder this was Hendrik van Reede, whom we have already encountered in many other contexts. He was commander of Malabar from 1670 to 1677, and his both idiosyncratic and comprehensive perception of local society has dominated the European image of this area for a long time and, in this sense, is also essential for us to understand the operation of the Company on the Coast.³⁰

Van Reede believed that good governance was impossible without in-depth knowledge of the ‘manners, weaknesses and powers’ of the local area. Despite all the political dynamics – he compared these to the Hook and Cod Wars of his own fatherland – he felt there was a striking harmony and ‘neat order’ in Malabar’s political system. It was certainly neither a one-man monarchy nor a republic, and not a democracy either, for

³⁰ See van Reede’s ‘Memorie’ and his introduction to the third part of the *Hortus Mallabaricus* in Heniger, ‘Van Rheede’s Preface’, 35–69. Van Reede’s assumptions can be seen in many later discourses; an early influence is visible in the summary of his Memorandum by Kaempfer, in Gaur (ed.), *Notitiae Malabaricae*.

'neither the king, the nobility nor the mass of the public exercise supreme power, but all of these together'. What is striking is that, although van Reede was convinced of the importance of understanding the Malabar system from the inside out, nonetheless his administration was strongly influenced by his own experience of the seventeenth-century Republic. In his interpretations and his political operations one can clearly recognise the nobleman from Utrecht who was averse to imperial centralisation and defended the freedoms of his own estate, the nobility. At first sight, the power of the Malabar kings may appear absolute, but according to van Reede this was simply an illusion, since on taking office the king had to solemnly foreswear the 'privileges of the land', after which, in the presence of the brahmins, the nobles paid tribute to him. The nobles were mainly liegemen, who, like Dutch *graven* or *vrijheeren*, could be compelled by the monarch to take part in military campaigns, but were not required to pay any land tax. The king and the nobility derived their income mainly from the proceeds from tolls. In addition, there were separate areas for peasants and merchants that were run by the king's 'sheriffs' (*schouten*), as well as temple lands: religious and economic centres that, according to van Reede, were situated in the most fertile areas and should be regarded as 'free towns'. What remained was the crown domain that was ruled by viceroys, although these governors also had to observe local political customs. The king himself was aided by advisers, but the day-to-day administration was in the hands of an official whom the Portuguese referred to as the *Regedore Maior* and whom van Reede equated to a stadtholder, a function that he himself had held in Cochin (1663–5) and that was later held by other Dutchmen. Van Reede's Dutch-Republican approach was also explicit in the so-called Union of Mouton, a kind of Malabar 'Union of Utrecht', drawn up during his commandership (1673), in which the nobility, assembled in a diet, joined forces *against* the rising power of the court's Brahmin merchant-bureaucrats and *for* the preservation of liberties. To anyone who is educated in Dutch history, all this must sound very familiar. Unlike the Spanish king, however, the sovereign of Cochin did decide to join this Union, consolidating the region's collective sovereignty and thus preventing early political centralisation from Cochin, as happened later in Calicut and Travancore. In the literature, the actions of the commander are mainly regarded as a policy of divide and rule, but for van Reede himself the political paradigm of the Republic served above all as a shining example to be applied in Malabar.

A detailed explanation of van Reede's views shows why the Malabar Coast falls into the same category as the archipelago and Ceylon. Just as in these regions, but entirely differently from in Gujarat, Coromandel or

Bengal, the VOC in Malabar was willing to dominate the region's politics. Here the Company protested less about the arbitrariness of 'oriental despots' but rather went some way towards understanding their position. The VOC tried early on to adapt the ritual of traditional Malabar kingship, adding recognisable European elements and symbols. In 1663, Vira Kerala Varma was crowned by Rijklof van Goens as King of Cochin, the crown even bearing the VOC symbol! Van Reede was subsequently appointed as the king's stadtholder. The new relationships were laid down in a contract and an 'enduring alliance', where the king had to recognise the Company as his 'patron'.

The Conquest of Malabar

The VOC campaigns in Malabar were not aimed primarily at the lucrative pepper trade, but were prompted by strategic considerations during the final stage of the battle with the Portuguese for Ceylon, led by Commissioner-General and Chief Executive Officer of the Company's expedition army and fleet Rijklof van Goens. Van Goens, Governor of Ceylon with a few interruptions from 1660 to 1675 and then Governor-General in Batavia from 1678 to 1681, was one of the last representatives of a war generation of self-made military commanders in the Company's service. They favoured an aggressive policy towards the Spaniards and the Portuguese, and, in their trading policy too, by no means shied away from using radical methods. Whatever rational motives were given for their conduct, it is hard to avoid the impression that for those involved it was mainly a matter of their outlook on life and a personal commitment to a heroic fight against the enemy, with commercial considerations often being of secondary importance. This certainly applies to van Goens' operations in Malabar. After the conquests of the Portuguese bases of Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Galle and Negombo in 1638–44, and subsequently Kalutara, Colombo, Mannar and Jaffnapatnam in 1655–85, it was important for van Goens to secure the flanks of these new locations and possessions in Ceylon. This had to be done before any final peace was concluded with Portugal, which was already under negotiation at that time. In the course of five separate campaigns, the Portuguese were expelled from Quilon (Kollam) in 1661, from Cranganore in 1662 and from Cochin and Cannanore in 1663. Six years later these newly acquired branches and subsidiary offices in Malabar were withdrawn from the government of Ceylon and united under their own directorate with its headquarters in Cochin.

The High Government in Batavia soon began to be concerned about the costly consequences of this drive for conquest. Van Goens had promised his superiors the pepper monopoly on the Malabar Coast, but this

promise proved impossible for this war champion to deliver. Despite the Company's subsequent efforts – offering exclusive contracts, a pass system, intensive patrols and checkpoints – it proved impossible to prevent large amounts of pepper being 'smuggled' all along the coast, either by sea via Calicut and other independent ports, or by land through the various mountain passes to Mysore and Madurai. According to the Company, the problem was partly due to the trafficking by the numerous pirates on the Malabar Coast, but in reality these 'pirates' were larger and smaller maritime trading polities such as those of the Ali Rajas of Cannanore, the Sidis of Janjira and the Angrians of Kolaba that, just like the VOC, operated an armed sea trade. The VOC could do little or nothing about the smaller ships that sailed close to the coast, while the numerous atolls of the Laccadives and Maldives offered them endless possibilities to hide and circumvent the VOC controls. Despite the Company's heavy military investments in the local area, trade in Malabar became increasingly dominated by Arab and Indian vessels from Cannanore, Calicut and the Maldives, at the expense of shipping to Cochin and other VOC sites.

The Dutch also met with strong competition from other European powers. Aside from the Portuguese in Goa, these were mostly the English in Tellichery (from 1682), Anjengo (1684) and Attingal (1694), and after 1725, the French from Mahé. Except for a few good years, the VOC settlements on Malabar, apart from Quilon, Cranganore, Cochin and Cannanore along with Tengapatnam, Kayamkulam, Purakkad and Chetwaye, would prove to be a structural loss up to the end of the eighteenth century, especially since the revenues from goods from the Indonesian archipelago remained minimal and the Company had no intention of buying export goods funded by advances of imported cash. The ever-increasing staffing costs for the occupation of many Malabar forts and guard posts – eighteenth-century Malabar had an average garrison of around 1,000 men (even rising to 1,395 in 1753), compared with fewer than 200 in Surat, fewer than 300 in Bengal and just under 700 in Coromandel – were always a thorn in the side of the directors in the Netherlands. In addition, the package of Malabar export goods was in itself not particularly attractive to the Company, which could source its pepper more cheaply from the archipelago and its cinnamon and areca nuts of better quality from Ceylon.

Malabar Middlemen

As in virtually all the other trading posts in Asia, the VOC in Malabar also depended on middlemen for the supply and sale of goods. Even during the Portuguese period, several groups of traders had emerged who

fulfilled an important role as mediators between the long-distance trade of the Portuguese and immigrant (*pardesi*) Muslims and the local distribution networks. The three most important were the indigenous Mappila Muslims and two Brahmin groups, the Konkani (or Canarians, in Dutch *Canarijns*) from the northern coastal areas of the Konkan and Kanara, and the Tamil Pattars from Coromandel. In addition, there were all sorts of other regional trading communities, usually referred to by the umbrella term Chettiars or, as we met them in Ceylon, Chetties. These groups worked closely together with the minor noblemen consisting of so-called Nayars, local warrior chiefs who, with their widespread family networks, controlled the production of pepper and other crops. In exchange for tolls and other levies, the traders were able to acquire distribution and sales rights, while the Pattars concentrated on transport by oxen over the Ghats. Thanks to this key role in the regional economy, the Brahmin Konkans and the Pattars acquired influential financial positions at the Malabar courts, although they never claimed political power themselves. This contrasts strongly with the more maritime-oriented Mappilas, such as the Ali Rajas of Cannanore, who formed a true South Asian thalassocracy with their vast maritime trading network. The VOC could only look on with suspicion.³¹

Given this context, the aggressive trade policy advocated by van Goens proved ineffective; for the indigenous traders and producers there were countless alternative channels outside the Company, which simply could not be monitored from Cochin. Although the Company claimed considerable political and military responsibility in Malabar, it was never able to dominate local economic traffic. Unlike in its other settlements in India, initially the VOC in Malabar did attempt to impose an overall production and export monopoly, concluding contracts with the various Nayar princes. However, the Dutch always lacked adequate practical means for forcing partners to comply with the contracts, and the indigenous partners had little interest in complying. After the conquest by the Dutch and the establishment of monopolies, many Indian traders began to avoid Cochin and the branch factories because there were few good deals to be had. For example, the lucrative sale of opium was banned, and there was a relatively small market for other imported goods, while pepper and other spices could easily be bought elsewhere.

The somewhat isolated position of the VOC in Malabar is reflected in the morphology of its headquarters, the city of Cochin.³² In order to save costs in the long run, the Company had – incidentally just as in Melaka –

³¹ Mailaparambil, *Lords of the Sea*.

³² What is still the most recent study of Cochin is offered by Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala*.

switched completely to a policy of reconstructing and downsizing the old Portuguese fort (1664–74). The adjacent districts were demolished, creating a clearer, open division between the Dutch fort and Matancheri, the Indian district where the palace of the raja was located and beyond it the bazaar districts of the merchants. One can see here a recognisable pattern based on the ethnic and religious segregation typical of Dutch colonial urbanism, as had manifested itself previously in Batavia and Colombo, albeit with some local variations. In comparison with the more integrated trading posts elsewhere in India, the Company's claims to political power in Malabar appear to have coincided with the emergence of a wider gap between themselves and the local society. This may go some way towards explaining why fewer significant VOC corruption scandals are known from Malabar; the smaller number of middlemen and the relatively larger social distance between them and the VOC officials limited the practical opportunities for corrupt practices.

The gap between the Company management and the local producers was initially bridged in Cochin mainly by Konkani traders such as the brothers Babba and Baboeca Prabhu.³³ During the eighteenth century, in addition to the Prabhus, this role was largely played by the local Jewish community, where there was a distinction between indigenous (Meyuchasim), 'black' and immigrant Sephardic (Paradesi), 'white' families. Under VOC rule, the Jewish population in Cochin flourished, which was reflected in such developments as the construction of new synagogues and a revival of Hebrew. This minor Jewish renaissance was facilitated by the complete freedom of religion in the region and came about through new inter-regional contacts, such as with the Jewish communities in Surat, Mocha and Amsterdam. Under Dutch rule, the Jews were able to work their way up to become the most important brokers and bankers of the VOC in Malabar. The most imposing personality in this circle was undoubtedly Ezekiel Rahabi, a descendant of a family originally from Aleppo, who provided invaluable services to the Company for almost half a century, from 1723 to 1771. As a representative diplomat-trader, Rahabi was charged with such tasks as ensuring that the more than forty local princes observed the conditions of their monopoly contracts with the Company, but in this role he also negotiated with external powers such as Mysore, Calicut and Travancore. The Rahabis, too, maintained their own widespread trade network that extended from Cochin to Aceh and Mocha. Other Jewish merchants acted as intermediaries for the VOC, such as Isaac Surgun in Calicut and the Rothenburg

³³ s'Jacob, 'Babba Prabhu', 135–50; s'Jacob, 'State-formation and the Role of Portfolio Investors', 65–85.

and Cohen families, the latter acting as important traders both for the Company and for the Cochin raja.³⁴ Most families of Jewish intermediaries were able to maintain themselves reasonably well over the generations. For them, their golden years were shortly after about 1730, when they were able to take advantage of the increasing demand from the emerging economies of Oman, Kutch and Sind, which also caused a sharp rise in the price of pepper. The arrival of the 'northern' traders suddenly opened up a larger market for the Company's products that were traded via the Jewish network in Malabar: fine spices, Japanese copper and – increasingly – Javanese sugar.

This economic upturn was strengthened in the middle of the century under Governor-General van Imhoff by the introduction of reforms favouring greater freedom for private trade. However, the position of commercial intermediaries was seriously undermined at the end of the eighteenth century when, in a period of downturn, the Company introduced a policy of compulsory purchasing. From then on, indigenous merchants were obliged to sign a contract with the VOC, in which the total imports of Company goods had to be bought for a lump sum. This assured the Company of a fixed income and allowed them to shift the uncertainties of the market completely onto private traders. Those who signed the contract stood no chance at all in a collapsing market; those who refused jeopardised their relationship with the VOC and had no prospect of making any profit at all. This was a bitter pill, especially for the VOC's regular trading partners, such as the Rahabis. It is therefore not surprising that the VOC finally achieved some positive results in Malabar in this period, while local traders were increasingly forced to rely on their former assets. In the 1780s, many of them – ultimately together with the Company – succumbed as a result of the strongly diminishing pepper and sugar trade.

Travancore

In the meantime, the political situation in Malabar had changed drastically. After 1740, Cochin was increasingly confronted with the expanding new polities of Travancore in the south and, after 1761, Mysore in the east. In contrast to the traditional Malabar principalities based on diffuse partnerships between Nayars and traders, these were more rigidly structured states that had managed to separate themselves from the local communities by the application of new external financial and military resources. In the new constellation, traders and Nayar warriors were

³⁴ Fischel, 'Cochin in Jewish History', 37–59; Fischel, 'The Jewish Merchant-Diplomat Isaac Surgun', 27–53; Fischel, 'The Rotherburg Family', 32–44.

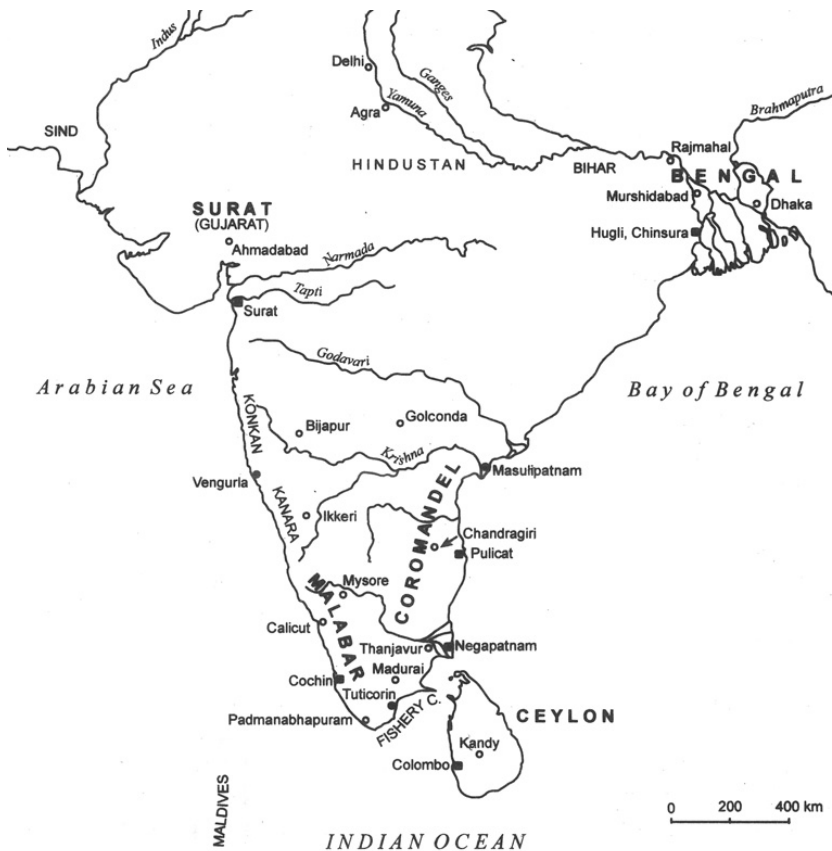
either superfluous or incorporated as agents and mercenary soldiers in a now highly centralised state system, a development that was made possible by increasing revenues from land taxes and by new trade monopolies. This military fiscalism was in itself nothing new in India, but a number of specific elements also made it a formula for success in Malabar. The breakthrough was brought about by the ruler of Travancore, Martanda Varma (1729–58), and followed a number of military victories over the VOC in the period from 1739 to 1743, victories that were partly due to the help of Marawar warriors, from Madurai and Ramnad, and European VOC deserters from Cochin. As a result, Martanda Varma was able to extend the territory of Travancore considerably during these years and – more importantly – impose increasingly effective controls and taxes, including ultimately a production and export monopoly on pepper.

Although initially under pressure themselves, in later years the VOC also enjoyed the benefits of this broadening of Martanda Varma's power. In 1753, at the second Mavelikara Convention, an agreement was signed under which the annual supply of 2.5 million pounds of pepper through Travancore was exchanged for 15,000 guilders of arms and ammunition. Some of the pepper would have to come from areas yet to be annexed, where the VOC committed itself to remaining neutral. This indirect participation in the expansion of Travancore allowed the Company to reduce costs, while being assured of a steady supply of pepper at a relatively low price. In adopting this approach, the VOC relinquished its own political ambitions in the region, and reneged on the military assistance promised to the other Malabar princes under previous treaties.

A crucial aspect of this development was the formation of a disciplined Travancore mercenary army, traditionally consisting mainly of Nayar warriors, both Hindus and Syrian Christians. This army now became a permanent military force and was equipped with European uniforms and modern flint muskets and artillery. It was effectively drilled and disciplined by two ambitious VOC deserters, the originally German Carl August Duijvenschot and the Francophone Dutchman Eustache de Lannoy.³⁵ The latter married a Syrian Christian woman and settled in the south of Travancore, in Fort Udayagiri, where he built several gunpowder mills and modernised the fortifications. In 1738 he also designed the Aramboli Lines, a modern, stone defensive line intended to protect Travancore against the Maratha raids from Madurai. In 1761 a similar line was constructed in the north, now known as the Travancore Line, which mainly served as a defence against Calicut and Mysore. Both

³⁵ For the latter, see in particular de Lannoy, *The Kulasekhara Perumals of Travancore*.

lines emphasised the importance that was suddenly attached to strictly delineated state territories, a novelty in the then heavily intertwined and overlapping political structure of Malabar. The combination of strictly drilled military units made up of indigenous recruits (*sepoys*) with modern weapons suddenly had an enormous impact in India and proclaimed a new era of infantry warfare, which would also benefit the British in the formation of their colonial army. In Malabar it was the British who, after the French invasion of the Republic in 1795, took over the declining Cochin and Quilon. All the other settlements on this coast had already been sold to native princes in earlier years.



Map 6 South Asia

8 The Indian Ocean

The VOC factories in South and West Asia were also referred to by the Company as the *Westerkwartieren* (Western Quarters). Although this region was made up of several different areas, the presence of three great Muslim empires – the Ottoman Empire in West Asia, the Safavid Empire in Iran and the Mughal Empire in India – afforded it a certain cohesiveness. Following a sensational expansion during the sixteenth century, in the seventeenth century the Ottoman Empire again had to relinquish its direct control over a part of the Arab coastal region (Mocha in 1635 under the Zaydi imams, Basra in 1612 under the Afrasiyab Pashas). This was a period when the Safavids and Mughals flourished, successfully forging a route to the sea (via Bandar Abbas in 1622; via Surat in 1573, respectively). Given the importance of India in particular both as a market for spices and Japanese copper and as an important textile production area, the period of VOC prosperity in India more or less coincided with that of the Mughal Empire. In spite of a number of incidents, we can safely say the VOC and the Mughal authorities enjoyed a rather good, mutually beneficial relationship. The same was true, albeit to a lesser extent, for the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda in the Indian Deccan and for the Safavid Empire in Iran. The Mughals mainly offered a stable, transparent and well-organised market in the northern Indian interior, while the VOC established the safe supply and transport of goods across the seas. Nor should it be forgotten that, despite their considerable cultural differences, the Dutch and Mughal empires had a similar background as mobile, military operators of an extensive road network: the first was a pirate legitimised as a Company, the second was a warband whose chief was declared a sultan. On the seas or on land, both ruled by exercising military control and imposing taxes on the trade routes. It is this neglected socio-cultural, buccaneering affinity between the Dutch and Mughal empires – the first starting from the seas, the latter from the steppes – that explains much of their success stories.

With these more general observations in mind, let us take a closer look at the various regional settlements of the Company, the order of which is

roughly determined by the chronology of the VOC's expansion. The role of the Mughal and Safavid empires will mainly be considered in relation to the trading posts in Surat, Bengal and Iran. It was also at the Coromandel Coast that the Mughals started to play a greater role, albeit only after the annexation of Bijapur and Golconda by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1686–7.

Coromandel

The activities of the VOC in the region started on India's east coast, or Coromandel Coast. This former Chola mandalam had maintained close trading relations with the Indonesian archipelago at least since the Pallava dynasty (seventh and eighth centuries). These relations were largely based on the barter trade in Indian textiles in exchange for spices. Although the textile industry was also concentrated in and around the northern Krishna–Godavari and southern Kaveri deltas, during the seventeenth century the coloured and patterned cottons came primarily from the Tondaimandalam area around Pulicat. These cottons in particular were in high demand in the archipelago. In order to prevent the expensive shipment of cash from Europe to buy spices in the archipelago, the VOC tapped into the already-existing trade circuit by using Indian textiles as barter goods in what was their prime objective, the spice trade. Coromandel thus became the VOC's first trading settlement in India. In Tondaimandalam, the VOC mainly dealt with the small successor states of the once-so-powerful empire of Vijayanagara (1346–1565), which in theory remained under the Aravidu dynasty until well into the seventeenth century (although in varying capital cities: Penugonda, Chandragiri, Vellore), but in practice had fallen apart under the Nayaka principalities of Senji (also Gingee), Thanjavur and Madurai in the east, and Mysore and Ikkeri in the west. Just as in the final days of Majapahit in Java, in southern India too, we see the emergence of new coastal states. With the decline of Vijayanagara, Portugal's position in Goa, one of the empire's main supply ports, came under mounting pressure, but at the same time there was also an increase in the trade opportunities for their main European competitors, the Dutch.

In the Krishna–Godavari delta, the port of Masulipatnam immediately attracted the attention of the VOC, possibly less as a textile producer than as an interesting selling market for the fine spices traded by the Company. Part of the reason for this was that Masulipatnam gave access both to the two main sultanates of the Deccan – Golconda and Bijapur – and to the northern markets of Hindustan, which were under the control of the Mughals. At that time, much of the trading between the Bay of Bengal

and the Arabian Sea was still taking place via the land routes to Dabhol and Surat. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, Masulipatnam was more than just a regional port; it was an extremely important inter-regional centre for trade with Arakan, Pegu, Mergui-Tenasserim and Siam in the east, as well as with the areas around the Red Sea and, increasingly, around the Persian Gulf in the west. It also became one of the main hubs in a vast and influential network of Iranian merchants, administrators and soldiers. This Iranian diaspora was able to build on an older anti-Portuguese alliance which as early as the sixteenth century had linked Golconda with the Ottoman Empire and – via Pegu and Arakan – with Aceh.¹

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, following agreements with the princes of Golconda (Masulipatnam in 1605), Senji (Teganapatam and Thiruppapulyar in 1608) and Chandragiri (Pulicat in 1610), the VOC acquired its first trading locations on Indian soil. The almost-permanent southern campaigns by successive Deccan sultanates, the Marathas and Mughals, together with the extremely volatile relations between the Nayaka regional courts, made the political situation in southern India extremely fluid. For the VOC it meant that it was necessary time and again to have trade privileges reconfirmed by yet another new regime, based in yet another capital city. From this perspective, Commissioner-General van Reede's disputed decision of 1690 to move the VOC headquarters from Pulicat to the more southerly Negapatnam becomes quite understandable. Far from the more northerly routes, it was possible to enjoy the benefits of the lull in military activities. It was also a particularly fertile rice-growing region, which made it less susceptible to the famines that were a regular occurrence in the region. Finally, they were less dependent on the cooperation of local rulers, because in 1658 they had themselves annexed the region from the Portuguese. This area was also very close to recently conquered Ceylon, as well as to Tuticorin, the port at the furthest point on the south coast of the subcontinent, from which, in a somewhat difficult coalition with the new principality of Ramnad, it was possible to exercise control over the shipping passing through the Pamban Canal. Significant income was also generated from the pearl-fishing activities of the Paravas, a local community that had converted to Roman Catholicism in the previous century.

Perceptive Indian historians such as Tapan Raychaudhuri and Sinnappah Arasaratnam have repeatedly pointed out that the position of the VOC on the Coromandel Coast became increasingly difficult.

¹ Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad', 340–63; Subrahmanyam, *From the Tagus to the Ganges*, 45–79.

Indeed, recent overviews by Om Prakash and Els Jacobs show the relative decline of Coromandel trade in relation both to Bengal's trade and to English private trade. Om Prakash, however, prefers the term stagnation rather than downright decay.² In view of the increasing lack of political stability in the region, a more interesting question may be why trade continued, rather than why it declined. Is it not striking, for example, that right from the very beginning the VOC's employees – and thus many historians – complained about the problematic political climate in the region? In relation to Surat, James Tracy pointed out that the Dutch were only too keen to attribute disappointing trading results to external circumstances, as a result of which an almost orientalist discourse naturally emerges, emphasising the arbitrariness of ruthless oriental despots.³ The repeated reference to domestic unrest on the Coromandel Coast may have played a similar role. As has been said, the Dutch complaints about this are so commonplace as to be almost meaningless. Taking a more objective approach, we can ascertain that the Coromandel Coast was more plagued by political instability and El Niño-related crop failures during the eighteenth century than it was during the seventeenth century. The latter factor in particular may have had very far-reaching consequences for trade, something that is suggested by the enormous fluctuations in trading revenues after 1740.⁴

The Coromandel Miracle

How can we explain why the VOC was able to maintain itself reasonably well on the Coromandel Coast in the midst of the political chaos? One important aspect is perhaps the VOC's almost immediate control of the local production process. In the north, the VOC was engaged in leasing and even taking full ownership (*inam*) of textile processing villages such as Palicol (Palakollu), Katira (Contera), Drakshavaram (Drakasharama), Golepalam and Godavaram, all located north of Masulipatnam. In the south, there were a few weaving villages, mainly around Negapatnam, where the VOC took direct control of the production process. Here, too, as in Pulicat, they also acquired the right to mint coins – a totally unthinkable privilege in the provinces governed by the Mughals. Later, during the eighteenth century, the VOC lost some of its grip in northern Coromandel, but its control of production in the extreme south (partly under the government of Ceylon) continued or even increased, largely as

² Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, 90–2; Prakash, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 297–300.

³ Tracy, 'Asian Despotism?', 256–80.

⁴ For a recent study, see Chaudhuri, 'From Camp to Port'.

a result of the rivalry between the local rulers of Thanjavur, Madurai and Ramnad. Indeed, political conflicts in this southernmost part of the subcontinent were no less frequent. But, because of the relative fertility of the area and its distance from the main marching routes of the northern Rayalaseema, these conflicts in the deep south of the subcontinent were far less disruptive than those around Masulipatnam or Pulicat. The VOC's rootedness in the south was perhaps most evident in the investment of no less than 1.5 million guilders in *De Vijf Sinnen*: the fortress of Negapatnam, built in 1687 by engineers Pieter van Ommen and Hendrick van Boecken and inspired by the defence works surrounding the city of Naarden. Perhaps even more significant, however, is the fact that almost a century later (in 1777), the VOC made a substantial financial contribution to the restoration of a local Hindu temple at the same location. These two examples show that the role of the Company in this area went somewhat further than that of a trader. And it was not only the VOC that started to focus increasingly on the south. As witnessed by the steady growth of other southern trading places such as Porto Novo and Nagore, also many Indian traders migrated to the more stable south, including the Maraikkayars, a local Muslim trading community that traded both with Southeast Asia and in the Arabian Sea. Interestingly, from the late seventeenth century onwards, it was via Malabar and this southern part of India that contacts between the Hadramaut and the Indonesian archipelago were strengthened, with all the consequences that this entailed for the spread of legal texts and a more Sharia-minded Islam in those regions.⁵

A second aspect of what could be referred to as a Coromandel miracle of continuity is relevant not only for the Coromandel Coast, but also for the subcontinent as a whole. This is the often intimate relationship between the VOC, and in particular its employees, on the one hand, and the numerous Indian brokers on the other. Indian brokers were crucial to the success of the VOC almost everywhere in the Indian Ocean and in almost all of the VOC's activities, but the position of brokers on the Coromandel Coast may have been particularly important, because, even more so than elsewhere, they not only had extensive knowledge of commercial and financial affairs, but also wielded a great deal of political and even military influence. It is precisely due to the fluid political system of the Deccan that politics and the economy were so closely integrated. More so than in the north under the Mughals, political influence in the Deccan was for sale. Also more than in the north, revenue

⁵ For a recent study of the eastward spread of these texts from South India, see Kooriadathodi, 'Cosmopolis of Law'.

farming was the prevalent fiscal means for the state to gather income. In this sense, the Deccan and the Coromandel Coast were the ideal environment for the so-called portfolio capitalists: entrepreneurs with a multitude of closely intertwined economic and military-political interests.⁶ Although they seemed to have more political room for manoeuvre, in many respects these individuals were quite similar to the *orang kaya* in the Malay world, whom we met earlier, not to mention the Dutch merchant-administrators of the Company themselves. In South India, in order to properly understand how the VOC functioned, we should pay attention not so much to the formal political organisational structure as to this extremely important group of political and economic intermediaries who had a finger in almost every pie.

The most powerful Indian portfolio capitalists were indeed found on the Coromandel Coast, holding such positions as army leaders, advisers to the king, revenue farmers, bankers, interpreters and, of course, textile brokers. Insofar as the surprising continuity of the VOC in this turbulent political arena is concerned, it is striking that VOC employees (whether or not sanctioned by Batavia) were always able to build fairly stable and relatively close – albeit always tense – relationships with these indigenous groups. These contacts made it possible for the VOC to penetrate deeply into the local power structure. Compared with the north of India, it is striking that people had relatively close bonds with the southern monarchs and/or their principal ministers. A good example is the honouring of Abul Hasan (r. 1672–87), the sultan of Golconda, when he twice (in 1676 and 1678) visited the VOC trading post in Masulipatnam; during his second visit he even attended a Protestant religious service. During these visits, the VOC earned not only great honour and friendship, but also exemption from tolls and other trade concessions. As can be gathered from an anecdote by the Italian adventurer Nicolao Manucci, Abul Hasan's predecessor, Abdulla Qutb Shah (r. 1626–72), also seemed to be favourably disposed towards the Dutch. As a test, he had an English, Dutch, Portuguese and French artilleryman share a slaughtered deer. The Englishman took his share without delay, thus indicating that the English preferred to act at their own risk. The Portuguese rejected his part, after which the sultan concluded that this was a representative of a very proud people. The Frenchman took his sword, cut his share in half and then walked away. He made a brave and generous impression on the sultan, who consequently appointed the Frenchman as commander of his artillery. And the Dutchman? He modestly extended his hand and accepted his part as a gift from the sultan. Yes, this was a nation of traders

⁶ Bayly and Subrahmanyam, 'Portfolio Capitalists', 401–24.

who had become rich because of their modesty. The Company's frugal Lords XVII at home could not but hope that the sultan was right!⁷

In the midst of the political turmoil, it was the portfolio capitalists who were able to offer the VOC the stability they needed; all the more so as they, too, with their interests in maritime trade, had much to gain from good relations. Of course, during the seventeenth century, as already mentioned, the Iranians played a prominent role as intermediaries between the Deccan sultans and the Company. Among these were Mir Kamal al-Din Haji Jamal in Golconda and Mirza Muhammad Amin Lari alias Mustafa Khan in Bijapur, both of whom were well disposed towards the Dutch.⁸ The most famous 'friend' of the Company was Muhammad Saiyid Ardestani, alias Mir Jumla, who was employed in Golconda and stood to gain much more than the VOC from this liaison. In addition to economic advantages, he also benefited from the military expertise of the Dutch, with whom he was successful in his later Bengali campaigns when he was serving the Mughal emperor. Although these Iranian and Dutch portfolio capitalists competed with each other in overseas trade, they also needed one another. The Iranians were able to exert influence on the political decision-making process, and the Dutch could provide the much-needed maritime protection by means of passes, pilots and gunners. Despite the animosity between the two groups, as evidenced from the sources, they held one another in a stifling grip – all for their mutual benefit. It is therefore not surprising that the Dutch often gave the impression in the Deccan that they were better able to deal with the 'Moors' than with the – in their eyes – more exotic, more detached Hindu merchants who preferred to avoid the sordid *gezelligheid* with drinks, meals and smoking that the Dutch appreciated so much.

To the great annoyance of the other Europeans, the Dutch in Golconda proved to be highly successful at forming lucrative coalitions. Perhaps the most important example is the joint military operation of Golconda and the VOC against the French, which led to the conquest of São Tomé in 1674. When the Iranians gradually disappeared from the scene after about 1655, the Dutch, through their agent Chirum Chodenda (probably Sri Ram Shaudanda), immediately entered into close contact with the two new ministers Madanna and Akanna. Just like the Iranians, these two distinguished Brahmin brothers were also very keen to do business with the Dutch.⁹ Further to the south, we see the rise of a number of Telugu merchant families, such as the Chetti brothers Malaya, Chinnana and

⁷ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, volume 4, 87–8.

⁸ For Mustafa Khan, see Flores, *Unwanted Neighbours*, 186–202.

⁹ Kruijtzter, 'Madanna, Akanna and the Brahmin Revolution', 231–67.

Sesadra: 'friends' of the VOC, but also respectively revenue farmer, general and adviser to the king of Senji. Some of these brokers were encouraged by the VOC to use their capital to buy shares of a single organisation. This was a means for the Company to avoid price competition while at the same time not having to pay any advances. It was also a way of creating more certainty and transparency in a rather erratic investment climate.

Even further to the south, in Ramnad, we see how at about the turn of the century the VOC had to operate through yet another strongly commercially oriented political entrepreneur, this time the Maraikkayar patron Shaykh Abd al-Qadir. Although he and his family, as traders and managers of the pearl fisheries, engaged in strong competition with the VOC, they also played a crucial role as brokers for the VOC in the acquisition of textiles and ray skins. Despite the fierce competition, the VOC could not afford to permanently alienate this Maraikkayar community. Thus, in addition to the negative rhetoric in official correspondence, we also find mention of Dutch patronage of the tomb of the saint Shahul Hamid Qadir (1491–1570), a prominent Maraikkayar place of pilgrimage in Nagore, just eight kilometres north of Negapatnam.¹⁰

Golconda Cosmopolitanism

Although not mentioned in the countless official contracts and orders, it was mainly the private interests of VOC officials that perpetuated relations with Indian peers, merchants and ministers. Obviously, this did not apply only in Coromandel, but it was specifically here that there emerged during the first decades of the seventeenth century a *gezellige* cliquish culture of Dutch families with vested interests and influential friendships that penetrated deep into the indigenous court circles. The pivot of this deeply rooted and integrated society of 'White Mughals' in Golconda was Willem Carel Hartsinck (1638–89).¹¹ Willem Carel was the son of Carel Hartsinck, former chief of Hirado, and a Japanese concubine. The career of the Hartsincks was most probably stimulated by the marriage of Esther de Solemne, the sister of Carel's wife Sara de Solemne, to Governor General Rijcklof van Goens (1678–81). Like many others, Willem Carel was surrounded in Coromandel by many family members, including his brother Joris and his half-brother Willem, who in 1675 married Maria, the daughter of the Governor of Coromandel, Laurens Pit

¹⁰ Shulman and Subrahmanyam, 'Prince of Poets and Ports', 497–535; Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 218.

¹¹ Derived from *White Mughals* (2002) by William Dalrymple.

(1652–63). Willem Carel's deputy in Golconda, Jan van Nijendaal, was the father of his foster daughter Anna, who married Daniël Havart, a local cashier and warehouse keeper. The members of the clique around Hartsinck were far from being outsiders in India. They often had a good knowledge of the languages relevant to the Deccan – Urdu, Telugu and Persian – and strong interests in the local culture. Carel Hartsinck himself had made sure that his children had received a cosmopolitan upbringing with the help of a basic grounding in Hinduism given by the Protestant minister Phillipus Baldaeus. Havart is mainly known to us from the fascinating gossip and rumour in his *Op- en ondergang van Cormandel* (1693), but, at the instigation of Hartsinck, he also mastered Persian, the language of the court in northern and central India. He lovingly translated Saadi's famous *Bustan* (*Den Persiaanschen bogaard*, 1688) and an introduction to Persian epistolography (*De Persiaanse secretaris*, 1689). Another person present on the Coromandel Coast at the same time (1669–80) was Herbert de Jager. In addition to being a genuine enthusiast or *liefhebber* like Havart and an important informant of Nicolaes Witsen, he was a true polyhistor trained by Golius, thus endowed with in-depth knowledge of mathematics, botany and astronomy, as well as the main oriental languages (Arabic, Persian, Malay, Javanese, Telugu, Tamil and probably Sanskrit). As his contribution to Havarts' treatise on the most important local statesmen shows, as a diplomat he was also a firm insider at the Golconda court. Finally, we also need to look for the origins of the portraits of historical and political characters collected by Nicolaes Witsen, mentioned in Part I, in this Indo-Dutch circle around Hartsinck.¹²

The interest of Hartsinck and his counterparts in the local community was not limited to the cultural sphere. There was obviously also a lively trade interaction with Indian partners. For example, Jan van Nijendaal and Theunisz Castensz, on their own account and via VOC broker Chodenda, ran a lucrative illegal trade in Japanese copper and – perhaps a somewhat conspicuous item of smuggling, if not for the VOC – Ceylonese elephants. In exchange for the lucrative VOC contracts, Chodenda had to provide a Mughal mandate for the exemption of tolls. He was also a leaseholder of the Golconda currency and was an important link in the private Dutch copper trade. When Chodenda was caught and imprisoned by Akanna in 1685, the Company was left holding his unpaid bills. The VOC people who had participated in the conspiracy with him could say little else than that Akanna had acted out of pure financial

¹² Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 65–83; Leupe, 'Herbert de Jager', 17–22, 67–97; Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'Het Witsenalbum', 167–270.

greed, and the VOC then moved on to the occupation of Masulipatnam. The affair shows how, for the sake of private interests, the Company was drawn into a nasty military conflict. Just before all this happened, Hartsinck and Havart had left for Batavia.

Women played a prominent role in Golconda's local networks, with marriages cementing friendships and married couples often overseeing private trade. Havarts' colourful *Op- en ondergang van Coromandel* offers both an insight into and a passionate plea for these networks, at exactly the time when they came under severe pressure as a result of austerity measures imposed by Commissioner-General van Reede – who was by no means a fan of the van Goens' clique. In 1690 van Reede took the serious decision to send to Batavia 'all surplus and unnecessary persons', in other words, married women and widows with their families, with the exception of those related to the establishment's directors.¹³ Van Reede's main intention was to prevent VOC agents putting down roots and consequently losing sight of the Company's interests. Van Reede's interventions were in line with a policy that had previously been initiated by the Company directors, aimed at combating corruption and cutting overheads. It is therefore not surprising that in 1691, a few years after the Mughal occupation of Golconda, the area's once lively and cosmopolitan trading post was closed down.

In summary, we can conclude that the VOC's business activities on the Coromandel Coast were quite successful. In spite of the setbacks of wars and frequent failed harvests, it was possible to maintain good relations with the interior, thanks to intensive and often personal contacts. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, as a result of the Company's efficiency measures against financial waste and corruption, the politics of acculturation and integration that had flourished in Golconda, particularly under Hartsinck, came to an end. At the same time, the core of the VOC's trade gradually shifted to the relatively safer and more fruitful south around Negapatnam and Tuticorin, where, with its expensive fortifications and inter-religious patronage, the Company seemed to have put down firmer roots. In spite of various increases in textile prices, investments and profits were maintained at a somewhat reduced level during the eighteenth century.

Surat and the Arabian Sea

There is good reason to consider the development of the VOC settlements in Gujarat and Hindustan together with that of the settlements

¹³ Peters, 'VOC-vrouwen op de Kust van Coromandel', 75–8.

around the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea. As we have already seen, the VOC's main emporium, Surat, was located at the natural crossroads of three Indian Ocean circuits – one of those going not overseas but overland into the Indian interior, either to Delhi in the north or to Burhanpur in the east. Although the eastern maritime circuit became increasingly dominated by the Europeans during the seventeenth century, trade also continued to be subject to the magnetic force of this trading metropolis, as was the VOC spice trade. From the outset, trade flowed via Banten and Masulipatnam, across the busy land routes in the Deccan, to this natural transshipment point in north-west India. For the VOC there was no choice: if they wanted to survive in the Indian Ocean, they had to have a trading post in Surat. Like Coromandel, Surat was also important as a place to acquire textiles used in barter for spices in the archipelago. In addition, the blue dye indigo was a desirable export product for Europe. The most important factor, however, was that Surat gave access to a huge sales market for the VOC's fine spices. This market not only encompassed the millions of people of Gujarat and Hindustan, but also extended towards the areas around the Arabian Sea: the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and the African east coast.

After some unfortunate initial attempts, it was Jan Gillisz van Ravenstein who in 1618 obtained permission from the Mughal authorities for the VOC to establish a trading post in Surat. From Surat, a network of inland offices rapidly developed: Broach, Ahmadabad, Vadodara, Cambay, Burhanpur and Agra. A smaller place such as Broach was mainly a regional textile production centre, while metropolises like Ahmadabad and Agra were also important markets and administrative centres. But overseas contacts were also beginning to develop with those areas with which Surat already had a long-standing and intensive trade relationship: initially mainly Mocha on the Arabian Peninsula and Bandar Abbas in Iran. Mocha soon proved to be of little interest, partly because of its limited hinterland and partly due to the prevailing political unrest. Of course, there were sea connections from Mocha to the African east coast and to the Red Sea, and thus to the lucrative pilgrimage trade with Mecca and Medina, and perhaps, via Saylac or Beylul, with the mythical Christian Prester Johnsland, *Paepjanslant* in Dutch, present-day Ethiopia.

The Red Sea trade, however, was mainly in plainer textiles, where, due to the Company's enormous overheads, it was virtually impossible to compete with the Indian traders, most of them from Surat and other places in Gujarat, who were able to operate at much lower profit margins. This actually applied to all VOC settlements in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, which meant that the Company mainly had to make do

with the sale of spices. Bandar Abbas, in particular, was interesting in that sense, because it had a fairly large and stable hinterland. Just like the Mughals at the end of the sixteenth century, the Safavid government made strong efforts early in the seventeenth century to forge a connection with the sea. In 1622, with the help of the English, the Portuguese were indeed expelled from the island of Hormuz, and trade was transferred to the opposite mainland of Bandar Abbas. Immediately afterwards, Huybert Visnich opened an office there for the VOC. Branches were later to be set up in the inland political centres, Isfahan and Lar. As a major producer of silk, Iran was from the outset more than just a sales office. After 1660, however, the VOC's interest in Iranian silk waned, and again the Company's main interest was the proceeds from sales. It was after this period that there was a strong revival of interest in Mocha as a regional producer of coffee. We will come back to this in more detail later in this chapter.

Gujarat and Hindustan

If we now compare the VOC activities in Gujarat with those in Coromandel, it is immediately apparent that large-scale economic shifts were much less of an issue. Surat remained an important economic centre for almost the whole of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, despite important political changes taking place in the immediate hinterland, especially in the eighteenth century. Because of this relative economic stability, the Company tended to intervene less in the actual production process in Surat than it did on the east coast. More than in Coromandel, Surat was able to rely on an economy with a relatively transparent, monetised market. Although initially attempts were made to infiltrate deeply into the Hindustani indigo production, the Company soon distanced itself from the production process and relied completely on the local brokers. In this regard, they were following the trend of the Mughal government, which, after initial investments in shipping and direct control of production, also distanced itself from the economy. In both cases, one could say that the more integrated and well-functioning market forces in Gujarat and Hindustan made political control of the production process increasingly superfluous. Generally speaking, the motto in Surat was *laissez faire*: let the free market operate as far as possible, because this will give the same result without the need for any drastic intervention, and at a much lower cost. Indeed, Surat was a highly sophisticated market, which, unlike Coromandel and the Malay world, was dominated less by portfolio capitalists than by more specialised bankers, brokers and merchants. The regional political figures also intervened less directly in the

economic process and, due to the size of the flows of money and goods, could limit themselves to protection and remote control. This specialisation in no way meant that the different elements of the economy and politics were not closely interwoven; it did mean a much more complex interplay of very different players on the economic and political playing field. In short, more than anywhere else in the Indian Ocean, the VOC in Surat most closely approximated its image of the 'pure' merchant – that cherished ideal of the thrifty Lords XVII back home in the Netherlands. But as we will see, even in Surat, this was never practised in full.

How can we explain the excellent functioning of the market and the related, relatively detached attitude of the Mughal government in Surat? The key element in this was the almost uninterrupted flow of money into Surat. This influx was the result of the Indian economy's almost structural trade surplus, particularly in relation to Europe and West Asia. Many of these flows of money converged in Surat, because it was Surat that, with its favourable connections to the hinterland, was able to establish itself as the natural entrepôt for India. Once all the precious metals had been minted or converted into standard coins that were known and accepted by everyone – the golden *mohur*, the silver *rupee* and the copper *dam* – there was almost always a large supply of cash. The latter was needed for such purposes as paying advances to the numerous brokers, who often channelled this money to the textile and indigo producers in the hinterlands through sub-brokers. Interest rates were generally low, and in the seventeenth century were not that different from those in Amsterdam. The VOC was also able to reap the benefits of this, if they were willing to use the extensive network of bankers and brokers in northern India, just like all other foreign and Indian traders. The government's strong interest in tax revenues was also dependent on this monetary impetus. It meant not only that they could collect import duties and coins in Surat, but also that farmers could borrow quite easily and that they had no difficulty converting their harvest into cash. The direction of the financial flow, from coast to inland, also facilitated the passage of these taxes to the political centres in Delhi and Agra. From there it was possible to transfer money to Surat and the other coastal regions relatively cheaply via bills of exchange (*hundis*).

With a relatively well-functioning monetary market economy, it is not surprising that the success of the VOC's operations in Gujarat and Hindustan was founded on two main pillars: (a) the Mughal governments that protected this market; and (b) the large group of highly sophisticated Indian merchants, brokers, shroffs (money-changers) and bankers that operated this market so well. Both elements therefore play a major role in what we can consider to be a typical product of the Surat trading post: the

remonstrantie. These ‘remonstrances’ were very transparent macro- and micro-economic surveys of the northern Indian market in the period from 1620 to 1630. The most well-known *remonstranties* are those of Wollebrant Geleynsen de Jongh and Francisco Pelsaert, both of whom were most probably commissioned by the first commander in Surat, Pieter van den Broecke, who himself also wrote highly analytical reports on trade and customs in this period. Geleynsen de Jongh’s *Remonstrantie* is a market survey of Gujarat, written from Broach, which includes a discussion of local customs, paying particular attention to the Hindu and Parsi groups among the Gujarati merchants. Pelsaert, who was mainly based in Agra, basically did the same for the entire Mughal Empire, but added a chronicle of the Mughal dynasty, partly based on indigenous informants and sources in Persian. The three elements of market, traders and government that were so essential to the VOC once again came together here. These reports were in principle confidential and intended only for internal use, but, via van den Broecke himself, a large part of the work soon ended up with Johannes de Laet. This Amsterdam-based armchair geographer translated part of Pelsaert’s *remonstrantie* and even the entire chronicle into Latin in his *De Imperio Magni Mogolis*, published in Leiden in 1631, one of the first European attempts to systematically describe the Mughal Empire.¹⁴ Let us now focus on the two pillars of the VOC’s presence in Surat: the indigenous broker and the Mughal government.

Merchants in Surat

First of all, it is important to emphasise once again that the VOC was only one of the many traders in Surat. In addition to the other Europeans – especially the English and French companies and private traders in England and Portugal – there was a small but highly influential group of foreign and indigenous Muslims, and a very large group of larger and smaller Banians (i.e. Hindu and Jain traders), as well as numerous Parsis and Armenians. The main competition faced by the VOC came from traders operating their own vessels in the same waters. These were certainly not small market traders, but rather enormous family businesses that had access to a vast network of brokers and agents along almost every coast of the Indian Ocean. In Surat, this group consisted mainly of Muslims: the indigenous Bohras, but also Arabs, Iranians and Turks, who, each within a highly diversified portfolio, often also had a particular

¹⁴ By far the best work on the VOC in Surat is van Santen, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Gujarat en Hindustan*.

regional specialisation related to their ethnic background. These groups in particular had suffered most both from the monopoly politics of the VOC in the archipelago and from Dutch privateering in the Arabian Sea. They were also the first to call upon the authorities to hold the VOC and other companies to account if there were any signs of 'piracy' recurring. In the interest of sales, they too – like the VOC, incidentally – benefited from a rapid solution to these problems. In this context, it is striking how all these traders relied on the decisiveness of the Mughal administration. Although they all had close contacts with the Mughal court, and some of them far beyond, with the Safavid and Ottoman courts too, Surat's portfolio capitalism was different from that on the Coromandel Coast. These people could not and did not want to have larger militias, and their ships were generally only moderately armed. Surat's portfolio capitalism was less about merchants investing in politics, and more about a few Mughal officials investing in overseas trade. It was not until later in the eighteenth century, in a shrinking market and with a failing central government, that merchants increasingly tended to take on political power themselves. This was most spectacular in the case of the Bohra merchant Mulla Muhammad Ali in about 1730 and, of course, during the so-called Castle Revolution of 1759, when the English East India Company imposed its political power over the city. Of all the merchants in Surat, the EIC and the VOC in particular were from the outset by far the most aggressive portfolio capitalists.

Surat's Hindu, Jain and Parsi traders generally represented a different segment of the market. Among them were also large traders who had access to ships which, like the Muslim traffickers, sailed along almost all of the coastlines of the Indian Ocean. In the VOC sources, however, they are encountered mainly as important inland brokers, remarkably enough not only in Hindustan, but also in far-off places like Iran and Arabia.¹⁵ With the exception of the early attempts to make direct contact with the indigo farmers, the Company actually operated exclusively with the help of one or two brokers, who in turn had dozens of agents in the country for placing contracts with producers. As well as supplying export goods, brokers could also play an important role in selling VOC imports. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Company even subcontracted the sale of its monopoly products to consortia made up of indigenous bankers and merchants. The same people – Virji Vohra and the Jain brokers Nan Parekh and Mohan Das Parekh – acted as the major lenders for the VOC, so that the Dutch already had sufficient cash for

¹⁵ For the ongoing role of Indian traders in contemporary Iran, see the recent study by Daito, 'Sugar Trade'.

their purchases before the sales. A VOC broker was far from being a pawn of the Dutch, but was an independent entrepreneur who could even have his own vessels. He promoted his major private interests through various correspondents at the local, regional and central level. In short, by hiring such an intermediary, the European companies were able to make use of an extensive network for buying and selling its wares while at the same time ensuring the necessary political coverage. With regard to the latter, we see Parsi brokers occupying an increasingly prominent position, particularly later in the century, highlighting the careers of Rustumji Makanakji, broker for the EIC, and, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Mancherji Kurshedji, broker for the VOC.¹⁶

Equal in importance to the brokers were the Surat bankers. They lent credit, exchanged bills of exchange, took out freight insurance and – crucially – were the only people able to determine the alloy of the coinage. The important position held by the brokers in Surat gave those parties who provided services to the VOC a golden opportunity to fill their own coffers by making private agreements on prices. The fact that Surat – and as we will see shortly Bengal – had such a corrupt reputation among the VOC administrators has everything to do with the dominant role of the Indian agents, without whom it was impossible to do business in the region.

All of the indigenous mercantile groups were family businesses. Besides this, flexible partnerships could be created with other families, often with a different religious and/or ethnic background. The most typical was an association of different trading houses each with its own specialisation that could connect all the necessary stages, from production to sale, with one another. In short, Surat was typically a segmented and specialist market economy, with no single group having a clearly dominant position, even in particular sub-areas. Naturally, the VOC was a relatively large player, but neither in the hinterland nor in Surat itself was the Company able to embark on any activity without the cooperation of the indigenous brokers and bankers.

The commercial partnerships often operated completely separately from the social organisations that were based on ethnic, religious and social categories. The Muslims, for example, had their own *jamaats*, the Hindus their own *mahajans* or *jatis* and the Parsis their *anjumans*: more cultural-religious organisations of like-minded people who shared group activities related to religious rituals or caste. The Europeans were also part of this picture: although they competed strongly with each other

¹⁶ Nadri, 'Maritime Merchants of Surat', 235–58; Nadri, 'The Commercial World of Mancherji Khurshedji', 315–42.

politically and commercially, the European inhabitants of Surat together formed a so-called 'nation', which manifested itself mainly in social gatherings like weddings, baptisms and funeral ceremonies.¹⁷

Mughal Authorities

In spite of the almost permanent complaints by VOC officials in Surat about the arbitrariness of utterly corrupt governments, we have to conclude objectively that during the first 100 years of its presence in Gujarat and Hindustan the VOC placed a lot of trust in amicable relations and good diplomatic agreements with the Mughals. As has been said earlier, the rhetoric in the correspondence with Batavia served primarily to substantiate the Company's own conduct. If the local administration was really so unreliable, how can we explain the fact that the Company spared neither effort nor expense in organising very costly visits over and over again? Thanks to the enormous pomp and ceremony of these missions, the VOC had built up a broad reputation for its generosity. To keep up with the European competitors, the Company was prepared to invest a great deal in obtaining favourable royal mandates, particularly guaranteeing tax exemptions. During the eighteenth century it became apparent that the commands issued centrally were increasingly being ignored in the provinces, so the Dutch decided to focus more on the local, now more autonomous authorities. But, even at the start of the century, the main focus was on maintaining good relations with the court. It is also important to remember that a lot of money was invested in maintaining amicable relations with nobles and ministers. Sometimes, the latter were also involved in trade, some of them even being ship owners themselves. In fact, all political parties at the port and the court needed agents who could open doors that would otherwise remain closed. Controlling the actions of these brokers, and in particular their expenditure, could be problematic, so they often chose to use several brokers who could keep an eye on each other.

Why did the Company attach so much importance to good relations with the Mughal authorities? Probably because it worked! Of course, the effective reach of the empire under the Mughals should not be exaggerated; it actually may have been less than in China under the Manchus, maybe comparable to Central Europe under the Habsburgs. According to Pelsaert, Mughal control did not extend beyond the roads and the plains.¹⁸ This was more than enough for the VOC: particularly during

¹⁷ Kolff and van Santen (eds.), *De geschriften van Francisco Pelsaert*, 18–22.

¹⁸ Kolff and van Santen (eds.), *De geschriften van Francisco Pelsaert*, 56.

the seventeenth century, maintaining a relatively well-functioning road network guaranteed good relations with the all-important sales and production areas in the interior. Money, bills of exchange and brokers did the rest. This also applied to such practices as the paying of bribes to avoid possible looting by gangs of robbers on difficult parts of the route. The Company was also familiar with this practice and used it in selling passes on the overseas routes it controlled. For the traders in Surat, it made little difference which route they chose. If they had to pass through the northern desert to Agra, they had to strike a deal with principal Rajput tribes en route; if they had to cross the ocean, for example to Mocha, then the same applied to the VOC and the other companies. Arrangements of this kind were particularly important for routes through the so-called *mawas*, the relatively wild desert and sea areas which were outside the direct control of the Mughal authorities.

All in all, the main transport arteries of the Mughal Empire were relatively safe. In any case, for the VOC, poor relations with the Mughal government meant either that they were unable to make use of the existing trading network or that they had to pay dearly for the privilege. This network consisted not only of the most important national highways, but also of sophisticated financial facilities such as a strong standard currency, good credit rates and smooth-running exchange transactions. Under the terms of their agreements with different Mughal emperors, the system cost the VOC between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent in import duties – less than with the Hindus (5 per cent), but slightly more than with the Muslim traders (2.5 per cent) in Surat. They were generally exempt from paying Mughal transit duties, although this concession was often difficult to enforce at local level.

Of course, there were incidents, especially at those times when free trade was under threat. Both the VOC and the Mughal authorities would then threaten a boycott: the former by blocking the port from the sea, the latter by withdrawing trade concessions. At these times, pressure from other concerned merchants would usually result in a compromise. In 1648–9 it was mainly the VOC's cutting off of trade with the Indonesian archipelago that caused a furor, followed by the blockage of Surat by the VOC. At other times, it was the escalating piracy, often carried out by expelled Europeans, such as Hubert Hugo and William Kidd, that jeopardised free navigation to Mocha and consequently also the Hajj. At that time (1699), a so-called *muchalka* was imposed on Europeans: this was an agreement that obliged each company to compensate for any damage caused by piracy in a particular zone. In principle, it actually turned the VOC into a regular Mughal police force like the many *thanadars* and *faujdar*s in the interior, who were also responsible for

public order and compensating for any looting. The VOC's refusal to honour this agreement when a number of ships were hijacked led to another extended conflict, with the VOC once again resorting to blocking the port (1704–6). As might be expected, this crisis strategy of the VOC was not unique to Surat; the same policy was applied in other areas. The big difference with Surat, however, was the presence of a rich and powerful group of merchants with widespread overseas interests, who were very keen to achieve stable trade relations. Obviously, the same goes for those few Mughal officials who participated in maritime trade, either themselves or through the merchants.¹⁹ The VOC was well aware of all this and also considered it to be one of Surat's important advantages over a place like Bandar Abbas, where they ultimately had to contend with a far less compliant government.

In general, we can say that the Mughal authorities were very eager to keep the trade channels open, largely because this was likely to encourage exports and hence the flow of precious metals to India. Only for a very short period, during the term of Shah Jahan's government (1628–57), were attempts made, probably inspired by the Iranian example, to intervene directly by imposing monopolies on indigo production (1633–5) and cargo shipping to Iran, Mocha and Basra (1652–62). Under Aurangzeb, however, the imperial government returned to a policy of *laissez faire* in the region, certainly not out of lack of interest, but probably because they began to focus more and more on conquering the southern Deccan and because the money economy, stimulated by more imports of precious metals, actually continued to function quite adequately until well into the eighteenth century. The fact that India's trade remained as open as possible was, of course, also in the interests of the VOC, and it is therefore not surprising that the Mughals and the Dutch, despite regular tensions and conflicts, time and again managed to reach a compromise.

What was the importance of the VOC for the Mughal state? Of course there was the protection of the sea routes by the VOC, via passes, cargo space and convoys. In the event of piracy or conflict with other naval powers, the Mughal authorities, usually at the insistence of other merchants, often called on the VOC to help or simply to take responsibility for any damage suffered. The Mughal chronicles hardly ever mention the Dutch, or any other European, or other semi-nomadic protectors along the borders of the imperial domain and the verges of the national highways, most probably because this kind of 'banditry' did not fit in with the ideal of universal world peace claimed by the Mughals. The court historian Abul Fazl, for example, saw Europe as a distant Frankish archipelago,

¹⁹ For some seventeenth-century examples, see Flores, *Unwanted Neighbours*, 128–50.

a *jaza'ir-i firang*, where ships were used as 'houses and camels'. Another Mughal historian, Khafi Khan, also talks about seafarers 'bearing their house on their back' – in short, like Abul Fazl, he seems to be talking about nomads of the sea. Bhimsen, yet another Mughal historian, dismisses the European trading posts as shops for people who do not own any land. Other sources confirm the image of a rather marginal, magical and exotic Europe surrounded by the most fantastic flora and fauna. Indeed, it is precisely these outlandish associations that made the VOC interesting as a national supplier of all kinds of exotic goods, including – for example, curiosities such as timepieces and other automata, organs and music boxes, paintings and atlases, but also new animal species such as the turkey that originated from America. At the Rajput court of Udaipur we even see the advent of the stereotypical Dutchman, a type that was based on VOC envoy Ketelaar who had visited the court in 1711 on his way to the Mughal emperor at Lahore, and made such a splash that he became a source of inspiration for the so-called *frangi* or Frankish theme in the visual arts in the region. The presence of Europeans could therefore, on the one hand, seriously disrupt the image of the Pax Mongolica and on the other confirm its global, universal character. The latter is particularly evident in the miniatures of the Mughals, where, unlike the Mughal chronicles, we are confronted with Europeans, albeit in all cases as modest subjects of the Mughal Emperor. At this point, it is important to stress that, despite its relative silence and prevailing exoticism, the Mughal court was far from ignorant about events in Europe. Actually, most emperors were keen to know as much as possible about the political and religious backgrounds of the various European nations that they encountered.

More even than maritime protection and exotic decorum, it was the supply of precious metals that made the presence of the VOC, in Gujarat but more particularly in Bengal, so interesting for the Mughals. In Surat it was primarily the Indian merchants who supplied most of the precious metals from Arabia and Iran. For the VOC, until about 1650 the most important precious metals were silver from Japan and South America, and to a lesser extent copper and gold. As a consequence of the successful sales of the spices and Japanese copper that fell under the VOC monopoly, the supply of silver declined after this date. The largest part of the cash revenue from these sales was subsequently used for purchases from the other Indian offices and so remained in circulation within the subcontinent. These precious metals transferred by the VOC will have gone some way towards financing the Mughal campaigns in East Bengal and the Deccan. After 1680, Japan disappeared completely as a supplier of silver, but the VOC was happy with the increased sales in Iran, paid for largely in silver. After

1680, however, the total cash payments to the VOC from Surat fell sharply, and once again the influx of American silver to northern India, which was supplied directly via Europe and Batavia, increased. It should be stressed, though, that since the VOC used Surat quite successfully for the sale of its other Asian commodities – mainly spices – the bulk of ‘Dutch’ bullion reached the Mughal Empire via Bengal. In any event, the total volume of precious metals shipped to Mughal India grew sharply between 1600 and 1750, with a substantial and growing share being accounted for by the VOC.

As has been noted earlier, the easy availability of funds facilitated both the economy and governance in Mughal India. This was certainly the case as long as the influx of money did not lead to the overheating of the economy – in short, as long as inflation was not too high. Most historians have observed that until well into the eighteenth century there were no strong indications of inflation or of increasing imports and that the influx of money must have accompanied the simultaneous growth of the economy, at least in the northern part of the subcontinent. The same historians are right to reject the well-known bias that India was more than averagely guilty of the useless hoarding of precious metals, for example in palaces, and in the form of jewellery and temple statues. By far the vast majority of precious metals in Mughal India were monetised by reminting and regular destocking.

In short, the importance of the VOC for Mughal India lay first and foremost in the precious metals the Company supplied. More than, for example, the introduction of new gunpowder weaponry, the increase in Japanese and American imports of silver contributed significantly to the stability of the Mughal monetary system and thus to the Empire as a whole. The question therefore remains of why the empire started to decline in the eighteenth century. Revisionist historians have pointed out in recent decades that ongoing economic growth and political disintegration could go hand in hand. Indeed, it seems that the eighteenth-century economic growth increasingly benefited new regional successor states such as those in Awadh and Hyderabad, those of the Marathas, the Sikhs and the Afghan Rohillas, and, of course, the British East India Company around its regional capitals in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The VOC is missing from this list. In fact, the Dutch Company in India followed the decline of the Mughal Empire fairly closely. Could things have gone differently? To answer this question, let us briefly review the main developments of the VOC in Gujarat and Hindustan.

Eighteenth-Century Decline?

Compared with the fluctuating political situation along the Coromandel Coast, the history of the VOC in Surat is relatively monotonous. For the

first 100 years in particular, the Company and all other traders in the city benefited from a stable, relatively transparent market and – for the time – relatively reliable administration. Surat's main interest was the sales market – at the end of the seventeenth century about half of the VOC's Asian sales were achieved in Surat. Sales of the fine spices remained steady even during the eighteenth-century unrest in the hinterland. After an initial policy of dumping, pricing was very quickly determined by the logic of monopoly: not too low to avoid further transit by competitors, not too high to avoid a drop in demand and deterioration of the monopoly. The main market for the spices was limited to the elite classes and thus relatively fixed. As well as being a sales office, Surat was also important as a producer of indigo and textiles. Initially it was mainly indigo, both from Gujarat itself (Sarkey) and from Hindustan (Bayana) that called the tune. With the advent of the cheaper and better indigo from the New World, things started to deteriorate, although the period from 1685 to 1700 showed a slight upturn. Indian textiles, of course, had always been important as a key to almost all trade in the Indian Ocean region, but now, slowly but surely, people in Europe and Africa acquired a taste for them. Already by the end of the seventeenth century, it was not so much the spices from the Indonesian archipelago as the processed cotton and silk cloths from India that were in high demand on the European markets. As we will see in the last part of this chapter, this new fashion for textiles gave an enormous impetus to the textile industry, particularly in Bengal, but also in Coromandel. In Africa, too, all types of Indian textiles played an increasingly important role in the explosively developing slave trade. Although to a lesser extent, Gujarat also benefited from this change in European and African consumption patterns and, besides cotton, also produced more and finer fabrics, using silk transported both by land and by sea from Bengal.

During the eighteenth century, developments in the interior caused increasing unrest in Surat. Twice before (in 1664 and 1670), the Marathas from the Deccan had carried out plundering raids, but at that time they did not succeed in substantially undermining the stability of the Mughal regime. However, intensive battles between Mughal and Maratha warlords for control over Gujarat during the first decades of the eighteenth century did have this effect. When, during the course of the eighteenth century, the Marathas were victorious, and, as a result, greater economic and political stability emerged from their headquarters in Baroda, the core Mughal regions around Lahore, Delhi and Agra were plagued by destructive invasions from the north-west: first under the new Iranian ruler Nadir Shah (in 1739), and then repeatedly under his Afghan successor Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747–73). This led to an overall

contraction of the economy in Surat, with textile production increasingly moving to the relatively safe environment of the city. The VOC also followed this trend when it decided in the 1740s to close down its branches in Ahmadabad and Cambay.

The period from 1745 to 1760 suddenly showed signs of a miraculous resurrection. In terms of the volume of exports, it even reached the level of the peak years of the seventeenth century. This was partly the result of the reforms under director Jan Schreuder (1740–50). As a consequence of changes in the pattern of shipping – for example, direct shipping from Surat to Canton and even to Vietnam – there was a diversification both in the supply of goods and in the sales areas, which suddenly generated much better results in terms of both exports and sales. However, the causes of this spectacular change must also have been related to the return to stability in Gujarat. The increasingly difficult contact with the Mughal heartlands was offset to some extent by the emergence of new supply and marketing regions to the north and south of Surat. The newly revived Company not only reopened Ahmadabad and Cambay, but also invested in new offices in Mandvi in the north, and in Bassein and Dandarajapuri in the south. Even Sind was considered as the possible location of a new office and might have been a catalyst for new impulses, together with Basra in the Persian Gulf. In short, years of contraction were suddenly followed by a considerable expansion both of the trade network and of the range of goods traded by the VOC in Surat.

Perhaps even more remarkable were the efforts of the VOC to gain greater political influence in Surat. Especially during the early 1750s, due to all kinds of local coalitions, it actually became possible to influence the local government. The so-called Castle Revolution in Surat in 1759, in which the British managed to occupy the city's Mughal citadel, may have been prompted in part by the renewed vitality of the VOC, which may have stimulated the British to intervene. However, due to the dual political structure in Surat so carefully crafted by the Mughals, the occupation of the castle did not immediately mean that political control transferred entirely to the British. The most important position of governor (*muttasaddi*) remained in the hands of relatively autonomous local regents. Thanks to stable sales of copper, but above all due to a spectacular increase in sugar sales, the VOC was able to maintain its position reasonably well, although its branches in the surrounding countryside were closed once again and people had to dance more and more to the tune of the British. Despite the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, Surat remained a leading commercial trading centre throughout the eighteenth century. The traditional relations with Iran and the core Mughal countries may have been impacted, but there were also new

opportunities, such as the growing cotton trade in China and the increasing sales of Javanese sugar. However, the new contacts with the South China Sea area were mainly exploited by British country traders. Although the VOC was able to maintain its commercial strength, there was a decline in relative terms. After 1760, the Company could only stand by and watch while Surat became increasingly dominated by the British.

*The Arabian Sea: An Indian Mediterranean?*²⁰

As has already been noted, the VOC's activities to the west of Surat in the Arabian Sea were closely related to the colossal economy of the Mughal Empire and as a result also to Surat as the most important gateway to this economy. The size of this population alone, which is estimated at 100 million people compared with a mere 6 million in Iran, explains the strong Indian orientation in the region. Of course, Iran had the reputation of its centuries-old imperial civilisation, of its language and literature that dominated the refined cultural life at the royal courts far beyond the borders of the Safavid Empire. Naturally, too, Arabia was able to rely on its status as the holy land of the Prophet, the destination of the Hajj, and the cradle of theological scholarship. Even so, Mughal India was the economic powerhouse in the region and functioned in this sense as an important magnet for Iranian and Arab migrants. In the eyes of the Iranians and the Arabs, India may well have been less refined by Iranian standards and/or less pure by Islamic standards, but in this pretty vulgar India it was possible as an intellectual, artist, merchant or warrior to amass an enormous fortune in a very short space of time. And, obviously, what applied to the Iranians and the Arabs also applied to the Dutch and to other Europeans in India. Clearly, European expansion fitted flawlessly into the already existing motto of 'young men go East'.

Parallel to the virtually permanent eastward flow of fortune hunters, there was also the almost never-ending flow of precious metal from Europe, via the Levant, Arabia and Iran, to Mughal India. Whether or not motivated by a consciously mercantile objective, the governments of these regions tried, with all their might, if not to stop this flow to India, then to exploit it to the maximum by means of indirect taxes. When speaking of Iran in 1660, the Capuchin monk Raphaël du Mans rightly observed that it resembled a huge caravanserai with one gateway to

²⁰ For a detailed survey of the developments in the Arabian Sea, see the extensive works of Floor: *The Persian Gulf. A Political and Economic History* and *The Persian Gulf. The Rise of the Gulf Arabs*. See also Barendse, *The Arabian Seas. The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* and his four-volume *Arabian Seas 1700–1763*.

Turkey and one to India.²¹ This stream of precious metals was closely related to the Indian economy's almost unending appetite for cash. India itself possessed hardly any precious metals, but as a result of the strong export position, particularly in textiles, the country was remarkably successful in attracting an important part of the world's precious metal production. As we have seen in the case of Surat, and will see in the case of Bengal, the VOC played an important supporting role here. Nevertheless, about a quarter to a half of the flows of precious metals destined for Asia as a whole were organised outside the direct sphere of influence of the companies: that is, via the Levant, the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and, to a lesser extent, also via the Philippines.

A second aspect that made the VOC's trade in Iran and Arabia dependent on the Indian economy was the network of Indian Bania brokers with which the VOC also had to operate in these areas. Is the word 'network' entirely justified here? We know that the intermediaries concerned had local expertise and experience at their disposal, but, unfortunately, we know much less about precisely how they were connected across regions through caste, kinship or any other relationships. What is clear is that Indian traders managed to penetrate deep into Iran, Central Asia and even Russia. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both in Bandar Abbas and in Mocha, it was Gujarati merchants, remarkably Hindus, who made contacts on behalf of the VOC with the silk- and coffee-producing areas in this Islamic hinterland. The same traders had the upper hand in the sale and distribution of Indian textiles, so we should not be surprised that the VOC was unable to make large profits in this area. Together with other minorities such as Armenians and Jews, it was these Bania merchants from Gujarat who dominated trade in these regions. In the case of Mocha, there was even brief consideration of the idea of outsourcing the VOC's trade with Surat to one of these traders. In short, it is likely that the VOC was able to operate both in Iran and Arabia thanks to the already-existing close trade relations with Surat. Finally, there was a third phenomenon that made these areas so dependent on Surat, namely ship-building: new maritime powers such as Oman and Iran under Nadir Shah had their warships built in and around Surat. The trade fleet was also largely constructed and maintained by the shipyards of Gujarat.

For the VOC, Iran and Arabia were mainly important for the sale of spices, and at a later stage also sugar, and for exploiting the flow of precious metals to India. It was not possible to compete with the traders on this front, so Indian textiles played only a subordinate role. The hope

²¹ Matthee, *The Politics of Trade*, 3.

was that a large proportion of the Indian purchases could be funded with the precious metals from Iran and Arabia. The VOC had only limited success in this endeavour, and then mainly during the seventeenth century. Before and after this period, other interests caused the Company to set different priorities: at the start of the seventeenth century, raw silk from Iran; at the end of the seventeenth century and the start of the eighteenth century, coffee from Mocha. Attempts to finance the silk and coffee from local sales of Asian products failed, which meant that cash often had to be provided again, although some of this could be in the form of local credits. The Company also obtained income from cargo shipping from Surat, which was more or less facilitated by the VOC's convoy obligation towards the Red Sea trade. After the fall of the Safavid Empire and the rise of Javanese coffee in the 1720s, interest in both regions of the Arabian Sea diminished, possibly with, as in Surat, a short-lived revival in the 1750s, when there was a serious focus on revitalising the Persian Gulf trade through Sind, Bahrain and Kharg. However, this proved unsuccessful, partly due to the ongoing tribal unrest in the coastal regions, but mainly because it was not possible to compete with emerging Arab and private British shipping in the area.

The Persian Gulf

If we now turn more specifically to Iran and the Persian Gulf, we see that the VOC was initially primarily interested in purchasing raw silk, which commanded a good price in Europe during the first decades of the seventeenth century. Benefiting from the Safavid expansion to the coast and the English occupation of Hormuz (1622), after 1623 the VOC initiated regular trade relations with Iran, with trading offices in Bandar Abbas (Gamron, Gombroon), the capital Isfahan and also en route to Lar, where many caravans exchanged their dromedaries. Lar also served as a relatively cool summer residence for the Company's employees in Bandar Abbas, but its main interest was that it was the home of the Evaz Beg family. From 1640 to 1720, albeit intermittently, this family of harbour masters (*shahbandars*) and revenue farmers controlled trade both in Bandar Abbas and in Bandar Kong.

Unlike in Surat, the VOC in Bandar Abbas did not have a well-oiled market system that almost automatically transported the silk from the northern provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran to the coast. Indeed, since 1619 the silk had been subject to a state monopoly – that is, there were no private traders bringing the silk to Bandar Abbas; rather it was not possible to buy the silk except through the agents of the Shah in the capital city. This demonstrates clearly the crucial importance of good

diplomatic relations. Shah Abbas I (r. 1586–1628), who established the monopoly, preferred to do business on the basis of reciprocity, and specifically with partners of equal royal status. As a result, he had difficulty with the rather unusual figure of the VOC as a trading company, neither did he regard the impersonal States-General as a worthy diplomatic alternative to a proper king. The Safavids had a strong preference for direct and bilateral diplomatic relations with the Republic, much to the displeasure of the VOC's directors. Musa Beg's embassy to the Republic in 1626 was little short of a disaster, mainly because of his excessive interest in drink and women, as well as the enormous costs these interests incurred. A further issue was that the Armenian merchants in Amsterdam, many of whom came originally from Iran, were not able to benefit from the trade agreements agreed with the Safavids, although on paper they had been granted the same privileges as the VOC in Iran. It is clear from all this that Safavid Iran, like the Ottoman Empire, was in a sense part of a European diplomatic system and that Iran did not automatically fall under the charter of the VOC but had in addition a direct diplomatic relationship with the Dutch Republic, especially since private Dutch traders were also active in Iran. For the Iranians themselves, the Dutch Republic was an exotic corner of the civilised world: the Dutch should be happy that they were allowed to participate at all in Iran's prosperity and civilisation.²²

Unfortunately, we know little about the social life of the VOC's employees in Iran. However, we do know that, just as in the Indian offices, corruption was common practice in Iran. An early example of this can be seen in the governor of Bandar Abbas, Huybert Visnich, who managed to make maximum use of his long stay (1623–30) in an area that was quite remote from the VOC's headquarters in Batavia. Visnich enjoyed excellent relationships with Shah Abbas and had a long-standing trading operation with both the Levant and India; furthermore, through his Armenian wife in Julfa, he also had a vast network of friends and relatives. Visnich, like his contemporary van den Broecke in Surat, had many achievements to his name as a pioneering market explorer. However, like Hartsinck in Golconda, he was also someone who, in the eyes of the regime, probably operated somewhat too autonomously; in all probability he had simply become too strongly rooted in the region. Ultimately, he was dismissed on charges of corruption. When he fled to the Ottoman Empire, he was imprisoned there as an Iranian spy and eventually executed.²³

²² For the correspondence between Iran and the Dutch Republic, see Fekete, *Einführung*, 489–97.

²³ Floor, 'Dutch Persian Relations', 603–13.

Unlike Surat, Bandar Abbas was not a truly supra-regional entrepôt with a densely populated hinterland. Although it was the most important maritime access to the Iranian heartlands, unlike Gujarat, Bengal or Coromandel, the surrounding coastal area itself was far too infertile and sparsely populated to provide an economic dynamic of its own. The road to Isfahan ran through vast, uninhabited desert regions and mountain landscapes and consisted of a trail of caravanserais and water reservoirs, constructed in many cases by local landlords, but occasionally also by rich traders operating in India.²⁴

In spite of all kinds of partnerships with mainly Indian and Armenian intermediaries, during the seventeenth-century boom in silk, the Shah was the VOC's main trading partner. The different treaties and contracts show that the Shah was prepared to supply silk on an annual basis, albeit at a relatively high price. In addition, the VOC was granted exemption from inspections and taxes. When, after the silk monopoly came to an end in 1629, the VOC no longer wanted to buy silk from the Shah, the Company still had to pay taxes as compensation, and from 1696 was liable for premiums on what were referred to as taxable items (*recognitie-goederen*). Initially, the Shah was primarily looking for new trade routes that would make him less dependent on his Ottoman arch-rivals. At that time, the bulk of the Iranian silk still reached Europe via the Levant. However, because of the Turkish–Iranian wars, an increasing proportion was diverted via the Persian Gulf and Russia.

The situation on the Ottoman front was just as important for the trading position of the VOC in Iran as for the Shah. The difficulties of the Levant route put pressure on the price of silk in Europe, which during the first decades of the seventeenth century resulted in a growing interest in transporting silk via the Persian Gulf and Russia. The all-important peace treaty of Zuhab (1639) between the Safavids and the Ottomans resulted in an increase in trade with the Republic via the Levant. However, this again led to price pressure in Europe. Renewed trade with the Ottoman Empire also revitalised the eastward flows of precious metals to Iran. The VOC could do nothing but follow this trend: the low prices in Europe meant that the Company was no longer interested in buying Iranian silk, also due to the fact that silk from Bengal turned out to be not only cheaper but also of superior quality. As early as the 1640s, the situation for the VOC in Iran had changed quite drastically. Whereas the Safavids wanted to hold the VOC to buying a fixed amount of silk, the Company wanted to keep its purchases of silk as low as possible and, through the sale of its spices, to tap as much as possible from the restored

²⁴ Floor, 'The Bandar "Abbas–Isfahan Route"', 67–94.

flows of cash that passed through Iran en route from the Ottoman Empire to India.

These changed economic circumstances led to military confrontations in 1645, 1684 and 1712; in the first two of these confrontations, the Company blockaded the Iranian coast. The outcome was that the contracts were amended, with the Company committing itself to buy a set amount of silk: 300 *cargas* for 48 tuman. In addition, free trade was subject to a ceiling of 20,000 tuman (about 800,000 guilders). This seemed to constitute a worsening of the situation, although in practice the Shah supplied little or no silk and the VOC continued to export precious metal from Iran. By deviating from the terms agreed, this practice gave rise to accusations of illegal money export and claims of overdue taxes. In addition, there was always the expectation from the Safavid side that the Company would provide military support, first against the Portuguese, then against Oman.

With the failure of the silk trade, the Iranian trading post lost its significance for the VOC. The 1650s were characterised by an increase in all kinds of warring activities in the area. Partly as a result of the Safavid–Mughal conflict between 1649 and 1655, the tax pressure on the VOC in Bandar Abbas increased and, like many of the Indian merchants trading with Iran, people went in search of alternative sales channels such as Bandar Kong and Bandar Rig, as well as Muscat on the other side of the gulf. The Company tried to focus on the trade relationship between Sind and Basra, a route that completely circumvented Iran. At the end of the 1660s, when all the different tolls were brought under the control of the *shahbandar* (harbour master) of Bandar Abbas, the situation returned more or less to normal. However, despite the sometimes short-lived demand for silk, such as at the turn of the century, and despite the development of new export products, such as Kirman wool and pearls from Kung and Bahrain, Bandar Abbas continued to be of prime interest to the VOC as a sales office and thus as a safety net for the precious metals that were so important to their offices in India. For the same reason, they tried to open trade on Muscat in 1672, but left again only three years later when it appeared that the local Ya'ariba prince was interested solely in Dutch military assistance against the Portuguese. For the VOC, the struggle against the Portuguese had long since ceased to be a priority.

After the fall of the Safavids in 1722, the VOC continued to maintain its ailing trading post in Bandar Abbas until 1759, while looking for all kinds of alternatives, outside Iran, such as in Sind, Bahrain, Muscat and Basra, but also within Iran, such as Bushehr and Kirman. The phenomenal military successes of Nadir Shah may well have had a positive impact on his new core regions in Khorasan and hence on Afghanistan and Sind, but

his amphibious military operations along the Iranian and Arabian coasts did not manage to put an end to the increasing isolation of Bandar Abbas.

What other opportunities were there for the VOC in the Persian Gulf? Basra, the most easterly access route to the Ottoman Empire, had served as an alternative sales market for Bandar Abbas since 1652. It also played an important role for the Company in the old postal link where, among other things, the Catholic mission network in the Levant was used to transport messages from Iran and India via the Dutch consul in Aleppo to the Mediterranean (especially Marseille, Livorno and Venice) and onwards to Amsterdam. After a brief absence at the beginning of the eighteenth century, after 1724 the VOC once again enjoyed a reasonably prosperous period in Basra, during which good relations were established with the autonomous Arab tribes at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab. In 1753, at the instigation of the eccentric Tido Frederik Baron von Inn and Kniphausen, the VOC decided to close Bushehr (which had been open since 1734) and Basra and concentrate all its trade on the island of Kharg in order to open the new, eastbound access routes to Iran. In 1766, however, the Dutch were once again driven out by the Arab shaykh Mir Muhanna from Bandar Rig.²⁵ Iran itself was embroiled in all sorts of centrifugal regional uprisings almost throughout the eighteenth century, which, however, unlike in India, led not to the emergence of powerful new coastal regions, but to a shift of economic weight to the south coast, where the many shallow waters were difficult to navigate: the Banu Ka'b at the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab, the Banu Utbah in the north around Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, and the Qawasim in the south in Ras al-Khaima and around the Straits of Hormuz. Under the Bu Said dynasty, an important upturn in trade in Oman took place. Thanks in part to intensive trade contacts with the Indian west coast, the Omanis were able to build a true East African coastal empire. Although the VOC continued to sail to Muscat intermittently until 1793, here too, opportunities were missed.

The Red Sea

Just as with the Gulf, the VOC also tried to explore trade with the Red Sea from Surat. Here, too, the main interest was in the sales opportunities, all the more so because people had seen how lucrative trade was for the merchants from Surat. Although Pieter van den Broecke had already visited southern Arabia in 1614 and an attempt was made to establish a trading post in Mocha in 1620, trade in this part of Arabia remained only of secondary importance to the VOC until well into the seventeenth

²⁵ Perry, 'Mir Muhanna and the Dutch', 79–95.

century. It soon became apparent that it was not possible to compete adequately with the Indian merchants, who were able to manage with only small profit margins. Neither was it possible to penetrate further into the Red Sea, to Jeddah as well as to Mecca and Medina, because the Ottomans had banned all European trade there. When the Ottomans were driven out of Yemen once and for all, a more active trading policy emerged under the now fully autonomous Qasimi leaders, a branch of the ancient Shiite line of Zaidi Imams. Piracy along the extremely important trading and pilgrim routes, particularly in Surat and along the Malabar Coast, continued to be a source of conflict with the VOC. Here, just as with the Mughals, the VOC was held responsible for the losses, largely because people in Mocha were unable – and one cannot blame them – to distinguish European pirates from European companies.²⁶

All this changed with the sudden arrival of the European coffee houses at the end of the seventeenth century. This consumer revolution – we briefly discussed it in Chapter 2 – was the impetus for the VOC to engage more intensively with the main oriental supplier of coffee, Yemen. In the first instance they tried to buy the coffee indirectly in Iran and India. However, this proved unsuccessful, and in 1696 Mocha gained a trading post, where the Company was to run a flourishing coffee trade for almost thirty years – with an interruption between 1702 and 1706 as a result of the problems in Surat. Just as in the case of the silk trade, the ocean routes had to compete with the caravan trade via the Levant, in this case primarily via the inland entrepôt of Bayt al-Faqih to Egypt and Syria. In view of the competition with the French and English companies, the VOC tried to facilitate trade by sailing to Mocha not from Surat but directly from Batavia and Syria. This was partly prompted by the fact that it was not Indian products but cash that was becoming ever more important as a means of exchange. The VOC tried to acquire the cash which was needed as much as possible from the spice sales, but this meant that a lot of time was lost vis-à-vis their competitors. Opening a trading post in 1707 made it possible to start buying earlier in the season. In addition, with the help of Gujarati traders, it was possible to obtain cash against Surat bills of exchange. The close relationship with Indian traders was further strengthened because, unlike its competitors, the VOC wanted to operate primarily from Mocha and left contacts with Bayt al-Faqih to contracted Indian brokers.

Meanwhile, the coffee price in Yemen had risen sharply as a result of the enormous growth in European demand. An internal war of succession in 1714 led to an increase in political unrest and, as a result, a higher tax

²⁶ Serjeant, *The Portuguese off the South Arabian Coast*, 113–29.

burden on merchants. However, this also created the ideal conditions for the exploitation of the coffee introduced by the VOC in Java. As early as 1725, cheaper Javanese coffee dominated the VOC orders for Europe, and in the 1730s this was supplemented by coffee from the Caribbean and Brazil. As a result, interest in Yemen waned. However, the trading post was maintained until 1739, because, as in Iran, sales were still profitable and pressure could be exerted on the international coffee price. After that the VOC continued to send ships to Mocha for almost twenty years, and in 1751 and 1752 they even sailed to Jedda.

It is clear that for almost two centuries the Dutch merchants built their entire presence in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea on the existing network of Indian merchants. Without the Gujarati brokers and bankers, it would have been virtually impossible for the Company to trade in these areas. A second pillar of VOC operations in both areas was the spice monopoly, which, despite the disappearance of silk and coffee, allowed them to continue to make profits, albeit small, that could be used for purchases in the Indian offices. The experiences of the VOC in Gujarat and Hindustan, Iran and Arabia once again confirm the dominant role of the Indian economy in this part of the Indian Ocean, with Surat as its financial and commercial axis.

Bengal

Located at the other maritime gateway to the Mughal Empire, Bengal developed to become one of the most important locations of the VOC during the second half of the seventeenth century. With hindsight, it is perhaps odd that the Company became interested in the region only at such a late stage, that it did not open a trading post in Hugli until 1635, and that it continued under the Coromandel office until 1655. First of all, however, this late interest is apparent only because much earlier the Coromandel directors had sought a rapprochement with the kingdom of Arakan, now situated in western Myanmar, but at that time at the heart of an elongated Bengali–Burmese continuum from Orissa to Pegu. It was not so much the more western Hugli River, but rather the easternmost part of the Ganges delta, around the harbour town of Chittagong, that was considered by the newly arrived Europeans as an attractive trading zone. However, during the seventeenth century this area deteriorated from a prosperous, intensively rice-focused economy to a highly contested frontier region, trapped between the expanding kingdom of Arakan in the east and the Mughals in the west.²⁷ Since Arakan was the

²⁷ See van Galen, 'Arakan and Bengal'.

first to gain control in the region at the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was an obvious move for the VOC to seek a rapprochement with precisely this kingdom. The VOC opened a trading post in 1610 in the capital of Arakan, Mrauk U. The Company's interest was mainly in the supply of rice and slave labour to the new VOC settlements in the archipelago, in particular Batavia, Ambon and the Banda Islands. In Arakan, it was mostly private Portuguese companies that exploited the northern and southern border areas of Arakan as semi-autonomous *fronteiros* or frontiersmen. This came down partly to skimming off regular rice production via tax leases, and partly to a mass hijacking of people. Apart from Mrauk U, the mainly Portuguese-led slave trade was concentrated in Pipli in Orissa, where the VOC established a trading post in the 1720s. During the years when Batavia had to contend with a large shortage of rice and the lack of an adequate labour force, the Portuguese, operating from Arakan, provided the VOC with large quantities of rice and hundreds of slaves via Chittagong, Mrauk U and Pipli. In short, initially for the VOC, 'Bengal' meant primarily its peripheral areas of Arakan and Orissa, and not so much the western areas along the Hugli River. What, then, was the motivation for moving to Hugli?

The answer to this question lies in the parallels between the Mughal Empire and the VOC, which had already been observed at Surat. As in Gujarat, the VOC benefited from the expansion of the Mughals, but the effects were more gradual in Bengal than in Gujarat. Although the conquest of the delta's confluence was relatively simple, the tangled network of endless and ever-changing tributaries in the delta created huge logistical barriers for the Mughal armies, which were only finally overcome in the 1660s. This resulted in a gradually shifting frontier zone, where the eastern regions suffered most from the raiding activities of warring groups of Portuguese and Arakanese. In order to maintain control over the area, in the 1640s the Arakan king Narapati Kri resorted to massive forced migrations, which, as one might imagine, had dire consequences for the regional economy. In western Bengal, on the other hand, from the beginning of the century onwards, Mughal conquests strengthened the links with the northern Indian economy, accompanied by an ongoing expansion that brought more areas that had hitherto been jungle under the plough. After 1660, this commercial and agricultural expansion continued further eastwards and in due course resulted in a very fruitful synergy between government, landowners and financiers. From this time on, the Bengal economy was characterised by enormous fiscal-agricultural investments. Hence we also find mercantile archetypes that are somewhat different from the ones that we encountered before: the more specialised merchant of long-distance trade of Gujarat or the more politically

oriented portfolio capitalist from the Coromandel Coast. Unlike in Gujarat, in Bengal the export sector remained in the hands of non-Bengali traders from the rest of India, with Mughal executives holding a relatively large stake in it until the end of the century. Bengal's financial-fiscal elite, who were also foreign-born, but became increasingly rooted in the region, could make or break the Mughal government up to and including the British takeover in 1757. As early as the beginning of the eighteenth century, the government developed under Murshid Quli Khan into a *de facto* autonomous regional government. In 1739, a coalition between the banking house of the Jagatseths and the main landowners (*zamindars*) toppled the new nawab Sarfaraz Khan, replacing him with their own candidate, Alivardi Khan. Given this history, Robert Clive's famous coup two decades later, again supported by the Jagatseths, was nothing new in Bengal's political history.

Initially, it was rice and slaves in particular that drove the Dutch towards eastern Bengal and Arakan. The increasing instability of this area and the gradual infiltration of the Mughals in the 1630s led to a shift of interest towards West Bengal, and consequently also from rice and slaves to what would become the four most important export items: textiles, raw silk, saltpetre and opium. Here again, as elsewhere in Asia, the dynamics of the interior consciously or unconsciously played a major role in the choices made by the Dutch Company directors.

Insofar as the dynamics of the interior are concerned, it is clear that Mughal control actually led to the re-integration of the Bengal area with Hindustan and Gujarat, especially during the second half of the seventeenth century. For example, raw cotton from Gujarat was used to make Bengali fabrics, and raw silk from Bengal was used to make Gujarati textiles. As they did in Gujarat, so too in Bengal, the Mughals were trying to use the VOC for what they saw as a perfectly legitimate fight against rebellion and piracy. These 'rebels' consisted mainly of Afghans – remnants of the *ancien régime* that had ruled Hindustan before the Mughals – and the so-called Bhara Bhuyans, the small autonomous landlords of the eastern Ganges delta. The 'pirates' consisted mainly of Arakanese and Portuguese, the latter as autonomous warlords, such as Filipe de Brito and Sebastião Tibau, who only ostensibly served the Estado da India in Goa and/or the king of Arakan.

For the Mughals, the Bengali Portuguese, in whatever guise, represented a threat to the early Mughal government in the Ganges delta. Hence, in 1632 the Mughals decided to expel the Portuguese from Hugli, by the way using a rhetoric of anti-slavery. Although the Portuguese were able to continue trading later, this marked a major blow to the trading position of the Company's arch-rivals and, at the

same time, opened up possibilities for mutually beneficial bilateral relations between the Mughals and the VOC, the first aiming at trade privileges, the latter at maritime support in their campaigns against Arakan. Of course, the Mughals were not unique in this respect; we have seen this before, for example in Iran and Oman, and the Arakanese king regularly called on the VOC for military assistance. However, what made the position of the Mughals special – and we have already observed this in Gujarat – is that they were actually in a position to force the VOC to provide this military support. The VOC were dependent on the Mughals, who could at any time refuse the VOC access to the hinterland. On a particular occasion, in 1666, the Mughal Governor Shaista Khan requested the VOC to supply ten to twenty ships for the Chittagong conquest. In return, he would exempt the VOC from excise duty (normally 3.5 per cent) throughout the whole Mughal Empire and would even repay them with a quarter of the conquered area. The Company could hardly refuse this request, but eventually sent just two ships, which did not actually arrive until after Chittagong had been annexed. It goes without saying that this delay meant that the Mughals did not have to keep their word either.

The sudden boom of the Bengal economy after 1660 was truly spectacular, not only for the Mughals, but also for the Company. Almost everything a merchant could want was more plentiful and cheaper than anywhere else in the Indian Ocean. Ranged along the endless waterways were many smaller bazaars and trade settlements, all with access to the sea and hinterland. Outside the Mughal administrative centres, such as Rajmahal, Dhaka and Murshidabad, there was a largely 'rurban' landscape of scattered settlements, with just a few real cities with large public buildings or surrounded by fortifications that provided a clear boundary between the city and the countryside. The endless flooding and the constantly shifting riverbeds also meant that it was very unwise to invest a lot of money in valuable real estate. The Company itself had experienced this at first hand when in 1656 its trading post, which had been established in 1635, was washed away in the Hugli and had to be moved to nearby Chinsura. Wise or not, the new trading post in Chinsura was one of the most beautiful in Asia and again, without much in the way of fortifications, it lay relatively exposed in the landscape. It was not until 1742 that the trading post was reinforced as a protection against the threat of Maratha campaigns and renamed Fort Gustavus after Governor-General Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff. At about the middle of the century, a network of secondary sales offices spread out from Chinsura. However, the Company focused not only on purchasing, as in Gujarat, but also on the initial processing of raw materials, such as silk in Kasimbazar – in

1715 it employed as many as 4,000 silk winders – and saltpetre in and around Patna. At first, the prime export item was the raw silk produced mainly for Japan – the Bengali variety being cheaper than that produced in China, and both better and cheaper than that produced in Iran. At the end of the seventeenth century, however, far larger quantities of raw silk were shipped to Europe and, at the same time, textiles and opium became by far the most important export commodities: textiles mainly for Europe; opium mainly for the archipelago, and later also for China. In about 1700, Bengal was far and away the most important export region for the VOC, with about 40 per cent of the total Asian import volume in the Republic, a position that it managed to maintain until well into the eighteenth century.

These enormous exports from Bengal were mainly paid for with hard currency from Europe. After all, as in Surat, the ‘natural’ supplies from the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea were not available, and, later in the seventeenth century, Japan, too, ceased to be a supplier of precious metals. For the Mughals, Bengal, like Gujarat, was a crucial source of supply for silver and hence for this extraordinarily stable currency of the Mughal Empire: the silver rupee. And, as we have already seen, the rise in silver imports caused little or no inflation, but rather resulted in a further expansion of production. Again, it is clear that the exchange of money for textiles was at the heart of the partnership between the Mughals and the VOC.

In Bengal, as elsewhere in India, the system of trading was run by brokers and intermediaries who, for example, provided the VOC with the goods commissioned via advance payments (*dadni*). This system worked fine as long as the brokers were able to keep their heads above water in the midst of economic expansion. However, during the 1740s, partly due to the Maratha attacks from the south-west, there was a decline in production, which also led to large-scale bankruptcies among textile brokers. As an alternative, the Company tried, as in Coromandel, to shift the responsibility for fundraising onto small collective companies financed by shares. Another option was to employ agents (*gumashtas*) who would purchase the goods directly from the producers. Compared with the other Indian territories, the acquisition of textiles and silk in Bengal seems to have been a combination of the more indirect method in Gujarat and the more direct mode of delivery in Coromandel, but further comparative research is needed to provide more clarity here. It is also interesting to note that, as in the indigo villages near Agra, the VOC was confronted with a Mughal monopoly on production. It happened at the same time as in Agra, again in the interior, but this time in Patna, in saltpetre, not in the hands of the central government, but in those of the

revenue farmer and entrepreneur Dip Chand, who was backed by his brother Om Chand, an influential banker who had also bought himself an important administrative position as *faujdar* in the region.

The example of the Chand brothers illustrates a Bengali pattern in which financial interests could penetrate deep into the agricultural and fiscal sector. Only the last step, publicly taking up a senior administrative function, may have been somewhat unusual and is more reminiscent of the situation in Coromandel than of that in Gujarat. It tallies, though, with the situation in 1757 in which the EIC suddenly changed its role from trader to ruler. By that time, it fitted perfectly with an emerging eighteenth-century pattern of a retiring Mughal government, on the one hand, and emerging regional regimes with a strong fiscal–military background on the other. What is unusual here is that the VOC in India remained altogether unwilling to engage in expensive large-scale military interventions and thus lost out against their British rivals, first just in Bengal, but later in Asia as a whole.

The VOC's only major military intervention in Bengal took place in 1759, in response to the British takeover by Robert Clive after the Battle of Plassey two years earlier. But even that one intervention, intended to reclaim the lost ground in Bengal with the help of the dissatisfied, newly installed nawab of Bengal under *de facto* British supremacy, Mir Jafar, was prepared and carried out extremely half-heartedly. By order of Governor-General Jacob Mossel, on 16 June of that year, seven Company ships were deployed from Batavia with in total fewer than 900 European and indigenous troops – the High Government had previously considered at least 4,000 soldiers necessary for this purpose. This force, together with the garrison of Fort Gustavus and the intended Bengali ally, was charged with halting British expansion and restoring the prestige of the Company. However, one of the ships left the squadron prematurely and arrived far too early in Bengal, completely destroying the intended surprise effect. Once on the spot, the Dutch ships were initially denied permission by Mir Jafar – under British pressure – to continue sailing to Chinsura and land troops. In addition, the Company was not effectively supported by Governor Adriaan Bisdom and his council, who dragged their feet right up to the last minute. After the expedition had finally gone ashore in November to join forces with some of Mir Jafar's troops and advance to Fort Gustavus, on 25 June there was a decisive encounter with the British near Bedara, not far from Chinsura, with the army defeated in less than an hour and a half. The five East Indiamen that were still present at that time suffered the same fate – the two others had meanwhile already departed. In an equally short battle on the Hugli, they proved to be no match for the two British naval vessels that had in the meantime been

directed to the river. These unequivocal defeats meant that from then on in Bengal, too, the VOC had to bow to the authority of the British: all fortifications had to be dismantled and the military occupation was limited to a maximum of 125 soldiers.²⁸

Analysis of the relationship between VOC agents in Bengal and their English competitors is essential to properly understand the increasing Dutch passivity in India. First of all, we have to bear in mind that during this period the VOC operated very pro-actively and even aggressively in other areas, such as the Persian Gulf, Ceylon and Java. What made the Indian situation so different? Was the importance of the Indian establishments in general, and Bengal in particular, not good reason to be more pro-active? The answer to this question is hidden behind the institutional scenes of the rival European companies and is embedded in the increasingly close financial relationships between individual VOC servants and their colleagues from the other companies, as well as with other private traders. Before we go into this in more detail, we will first consider the special position of VOC officials in the region.

Dutch Nabobs

Even more than the other Indian factories, Bengal had always been a very attractive post to make a quick fortune by engaging in smuggling and other forms of illicit trade. The bigger the Company turnover, the greater the opportunities for abuse by employees. It was one Jan Albert Sichterman (1692–1764) who probably benefited most from what was considered the Company's *vetste weide*, its 'richest pasture', Bengal, clearly considered to be the Company's most lucrative post. Behind the screen of the official VOC trade, Sichterman was able to amass an enormous amount of capital, thanks to his long sojourn there (1718–24 and 1725–44). In all his Bengali ranks and positions, Sichterman would not have earned more than 50,000 guilders in total. Besides this, though, he gained by far the greatest part of his income from his own private enterprises. He owned, for example, his own silk mills in Bengal, from which he continued to earn income after his departure. He also had a dozen or so ships with which he maintained an extensive trading network in the Indian Ocean. He did this together with allies inside and outside the Company, including Joseph Dupleix, governor of the French trading post Chandernagore, and François de Schonaville, council member of the Ostend Company in Banquibazar that was so fiercely contested by the VOC. He also had his personal affairs in order, particularly thanks

²⁸ s'Jacob, 'Bedara Revisited', 117–33.

to his marriage to the daughter of the Bengali head of trade and administration and later director Jacob Sadelijn (1727–31). With this clever move he forged a connection with the Bengali director families Pelgroms (Jacob Pelgrom was Director of Bengal from 1701 to 1705) and Huysman (father Marten: Commander of Malabar 1678–83, Director of Bengal 1683–5; son Anthony: Director of Bengal 1710–16). A father–son relationship developed with Anthony Huysman, who was to rise to the position of Director-General in Batavia, a relationship that was to prove highly beneficial.²⁹ That he used his family to facilitate his career was even more apparent from the name and the two godfathers of Jan Albert's oldest son, Anthony Ewout. The first name referred to his patron Anthony Huysman, and the second to Ewout van Dishoeck, director from 1717 to 1722, who was also a relation of Pieter van Dishoeck, director from 1696 to 1701. Ewout made a huge fortune, part of which he used to purchase the Domburg manor, where he had a fine estate built. He also started his own chintz printing company with an exclusive Zeeland patent. In short, this was a true dynasty of Bengali-Dutch nabobs (from *nawab*, the Persian honorary title for Mughal governors) with strategic branches in Batavia and the Dutch Republic. In this light it is not strange that relative outsiders such as Petrus Vuyst – director from 1722 to 1724 – must not have had an easy time. Probably as a result of a lack of influential friends, Vuijst was ultimately condemned to death on the grounds of corruption. The historian Frank Lequin pointed out that during the eighteenth century only a few families demanded the Bengali directorship for themselves. The van Dishoeck, Huysman, Pelgrom, Sadelijn and Sichterman families were related to one another. The directors from this family network arose exclusively from a generation of people who had served in Bengal in about 1700 and who within the period from 1700 to 1744 together held the directorship for almost thirty-three years.³⁰

In 1744 Sichterman returned to the Netherlands and settled in a beautiful new city mansion at the Ossenmarkt in Groningen. Both here and in his new villa Woellust at Wildervank he surrounded himself with a phenomenal collection of art treasures, including such valuable items as works by important Dutch masters, exquisite chinoiserie and all kinds of exotic curiosities such as a stuffed crocodile and a 'foetus trimestris of a negroe woman', part of a collection of 'creatures in alcohol'. Some time before, purely because of the animal's size, Sichterman had had to

²⁹ Feith, 'De Bengaalse Sichterman', 14–74; Jörg, 'Jan Albert Sichterman', 178–95; Kühne-van Diggelen, *Jan Albert Sichterman*; Parmentier, *De holle compagnie*, 49ff.

³⁰ Lequin, 'Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie', volume 1, 148.

give up the rhinoceros that was to create a furore far and wide on the European stage as Jungfer Clara. His house at Ossenmarkt had an imposing main entrance with a balcony supported by two black servants; a reminder that not only Africans but also dark-skinned Bengali servants could provide any home-coming Dutch nabob with exotic symbols of status. Although Sichterman and van Dishoeck with their boundless exorbitance were most probably an exception, they nonetheless represent a very common phenomenon, namely that in particular senior staff in Asia, and specifically in Bengal, were able to use their position within the Company to amass an enormous personal fortune outside the Company.³¹ Considering the enormous estates of former Bengali EIC agents in England, as well as the grand palaces of former Bengali Mughal governors in the deserts of Rajasthan, we can say with some certainty that investing Bengal's riches in opulent real estate at home was hardly an exclusively Dutch, or even exclusively European, phenomenon.

In any event, the Company directors were aware of this and simply turned a blind eye to it. Instead of trying to counter corrupt practices – something that had been tried repeatedly in the previous century – in the middle of the eighteenth century the decision was finally taken to open up intra-Asian trade gradually and to a limited extent to private traders, on precisely those routes and in those goods that were already unprofitable for the Company. However, under the leadership of Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff, in 1745 a further step was taken by setting up an Opium Society, which was to privatise one of the most profitable branches of intra-Asian trade, namely that in Bengali opium. Nonetheless, this was anything but an example of privatisation. The purpose of this organisation was precisely to create a new monopoly for a smaller group of people, including, of course, the initiator himself, many of his colleagues, and friends and cousins, all from the higher echelons of the Company organisation. Soon the stadtholder was included in the club of shareholders, so as to guarantee the continuity of the Society politically. It goes without saying that, after the British takeover in Bengal, the shareholders of the Opium Society could not afford to be permanently at odds with the victors since this would undoubtedly undermine their profits.

This brings us to the question raised above about the relationship between the Company employees and the other Europeans in Bengal. What is striking, in particular after about 1750, is the level of financial entanglements between the Dutch and the British. For example, Governors Robert Clive and Warren Hastings used the VOC Directors

³¹ For Bengal's reputation as a hub of corruption in the Dutch Republic, see Sur, 'Keeping Corruption at Bay'.

Adriaan Bisdom (1755–60) and Johannes Ross (1776–81) to transfer enormous amounts of capital from Bengal to Europe via bills of exchange. For the Company, this was not unfavourable as these funds were used to finance the Bengali purchases. In fact, it proved so successful that there was occasionally even a larger stock of cash than was actually needed for the Company's acquisitions. In another variant, the British tried to use the VOC for the China trade, with the British requesting the Dutch to kindly pay for the opium delivered to them only in Canton, so that they did not have to supply precious metals to China themselves. All in all, it is clear that in Bengal, both via official means and via illegal routes, an informal British–Dutch network had developed, which benefited from good mutual relations. On the occasions when it went wrong by accident, as in 1758 and during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War in 1780, the best option was probably to focus on external appearances, and then toast together, behind the scenes, to a good outcome. An illustration of this is the surrender of Fort Gustavus by Ross to his friend and cousin Hastings in 1781. Ross was not willing to hand over the fortress to the British until Hastings had declared himself willing to send not just two, as was initially the case, but 'a more honourable number' of soldiers as occupying forces.³² By the way, it was clear at that time that the initiative in India was entirely in the hands of the British.

Nostalgia for Empire

After a short revival in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–4) heralded the collapse of the VOC's branches in India. Everywhere on the subcontinent the Company had proved powerless against British supremacy. The losses were in the millions of guilders. Even though, with the exception of Negapatnam, all of the trading posts were returned by the British after 1784, much had been plundered and, even after peace had been restored, the debts only increased even further. Following the French invasion of the Republic in 1795, the Dutch trading posts in India were again occupied by the British. At the London Convention in 1814, the new Kingdom of the Netherlands regained the offices of Surat, Bengal and Coromandel (including Tuticorin), but without its former rights and privileges, which meant that it was difficult to rebuild the trading stations as they had existed before. Consequently, there was little regret when in 1824, in the Treaty of London, all of the Dutch trading posts in India were once

³² Gaastra, 'De VOC en EIC in Bengalen', 24–35.

again transferred to the British. The Dutch were now able to focus fully on their increasingly coherent possessions in the archipelago.

The deeply romantic Jacob Haafner (1754–1809) managed to evoke that intensely nostalgic sentiment of decline and *vanitas* at the end of the eighteenth century, in which that rich and ‘lusty life’ in Sadras from before the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War contrasted sharply with the barren misery thereafter:

How different from previous times! I couldn’t imagine that I was in the fertile and densely populated Coromandel, and was on this side of Madras, all at once as if I had crossed over into a foreign country. This richness of vegetation, these vast fields of all kinds of cereals and fruits, these many beautiful villages, teeming with inhabitants – everything had disappeared, and the vast plains only here and there at first glance offered a few devastated and semi-burnt villages and hamlets, with a small number of built-up areas. Even the inhabitants of these ruined villages appeared wretched, poorly clothed and miserable, and lacking in everything.³³

In his travel reports, Haafner probably attributed too much to the British, whom he so hated, and too little to the natural famines that increasingly plagued this part of India during this period. However, it is interesting to compare Haafner’s subdued, sentimental mood with the equally nostalgic, late-Mughal genre of *shahr ashob* (literally, ‘the unhappy city’) of his Indian contemporaries, the poets Sauda (1713–81) and Mir (1724–1810), who, like Haafner, described the desolate present with restrained anger and at the same time depicted with melancholy the glory of yesteryear. This perhaps somewhat unexpected common mood of imperial nostalgia once again illustrates the close correlation between the rise and collapse of the Mughals and that of the Dutch in India.

³³ De Moor and van der Velde (eds.), *De werken van Jacob Haafner*, volume 3, 356.

9 The South China Sea

It is under another oceanic term that we will concentrate on the VOC settlements in an area covering China, Korea, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan (Formosa) and the Pescadores Islands, which all together created a kind of Sinic cosmopolis with all the cultural variety and multicentricity that should be associated with that term. Moving towards the mainland of Southeast Asia, the northern part of Vietnam was another such centre in this wider cosmopolis. Clearly beyond the Sinic sphere but still under its spell, the rest of mainland Southeast Asia will also be included in the framework of this chapter. All these regions experienced little or only short-lived direct influence from Dutch expansion. The position of the VOC remained peripheral here, in some cases out of free will – as in Burma, Cambodia and Vietnam – and in other instances because there was no other option – as in China and Japan. When we focus on the region's maritime links, the Chinese distinguished two diverging routes going south. In the sixteenth century, they referred to the *Nanyang*, a Chinese 'Southern Ocean' that was encircled at the time by a western route and an eastern route. The western route (*Hsi Yang*) passed through Champa, Cambodia, Siam, the Malaysian Peninsula and Sumatra to Java; the eastern route (*Tung Yang*) went via the Philippines and the Sulu Archipelago to the Maluku Islands. There is no mention of Japan in this list because shipping to the island was prohibited by the Chinese government for a large part of the sixteenth century.

During this period, it was primarily the Spanish who managed to gain a foothold along the eastern route and the Portuguese along the western route. With their sights on the lucrative China trade, during the seventeenth century the Dutch gradually usurped the role of the Portuguese. The VOC may have taken increasing political and economic control of the areas around the annexed ports of Batavia, Melaka, Makassar and Banten, yet in almost all other western stopping places of the *Nanyang*, Dutch activity was overshadowed by the

Chinese economy – even more so when, from the end of the seventeenth century, this economy started to show new signs of growth.¹

Purely on account of its size, the Chinese economy dominated all the neighbouring countries in East Asia. Also in terms of sheer demography, China was an imposing force in the region. In our period, Southeast Asia probably had a total of between 20 and 30 million inhabitants, about the same number as Japan, while China had about ten times that number. However tempting participation in the growing China trade may have been for China's neighbouring principalities, at the same time there was the constant threat of being overrun by an influx of Chinese immigrants and consequently of losing internal political control. In Japan there was the added circumstance that the shogunate was always concerned that increasing trade with China would lead to an unstoppable draining of the country's stock of precious metals. In 1685, two years after the Manchu annexation of Taiwan, this led to a broadening of Japanese import restrictions. In the more distant colonial trading centres, such as Batavia and Manila, China's growing economic power was seen as less of a threat, and, during the eighteenth century, Chinese traders were generally welcome to offer their goods and services there. But, as the various pogroms in these cities demonstrate, sinophobia could also suddenly raise its head; in fact, this was a sure sign that dependence on the growing group of Chinese migrants had slowly but surely increased.

During the eighteenth century, the ripple effect of the Chinese economy spread exponentially. More than the Indonesian archipelago, which came increasingly under the political and economic influence of the VOC, it was mainland Southeast Asia that felt the effects of the growth in Chinese influence. The VOC could only look on and at best try to grab a piece of the action. The exception in this picture is Taiwan, an island that, just like Ceylon and Java, was colonised substantially by the VOC, albeit somewhat earlier and more briefly than the other two islands. Nonetheless, Taiwan also was unable to escape the Chinese sphere of influence and, once the VOC had been driven out of the main settlement in Fort Zeelandia and had abandoned its final support centre Kelang (Chilung) in 1662, the island was annexed by the Manchus.

Also for Southeast Asia as a whole, there is every reason to view the developments not only from Batavia but also from a Chinese perspective, in particular with regard to the different states of the mainland. Towards the end of the seventeenth century China opened its doors to overseas trade, resulting in a divergence between the Dutch-dominated eastern part of the archipelago and the increasingly China-oriented western part.

¹ Blussé, 'No Boats to China', 59.

By that time the VOC had finally contested the country's spice monopoly with success and had acquired an increasingly dominant position in the eastern archipelago in spite of the fact that the Malay region continued to be accessible for merchants from West and South Asia.

The cultural-religious dividing line between the mainly Theravada-Buddhist mainland and the primarily Muslim archipelago could not conceal the fact that for centuries there had been close economic bonds between the two regions. As the crow flies, the empires of the mainland were closer to continental China, but, be that as it may, the mountains in the interior of the country with their dense tropical forests also formed a natural barrier against Chinese expansion. On the other hand, several large rivers, such as the Irrawaddy, the Chao Praya, the Mekong and the Red River, provided relatively good maritime access from the southern coastal areas and thereby made connections with the archipelago and other maritime regions of Asia relatively easy.

A particular characteristic of mainland Southeast Asia was that, from the end of the first millennium, the main demographic and agricultural centres were not in the deltas with their erratic water levels, but further upstream in the easier-to-cultivate interiors; among these centres were the old capitals of Pagan in Burma, Sukhothai in Siam and Angkor in Cambodia. In an ideal world, the local princes would stimulate agricultural expansion in the interior and maintain control over the deltas and the coastal regions downstream via the rivers. Unlike in the archipelago, with the exception of Java, the economic focus was less on trade than on intensive rice cultivation. Some of the largest cultivation areas, however, were located quite isolated and far from the navigable rivers and tended to drift away from the immediate control of the state. The result was a pattern of settlements of relatively small, widely dispersed, densely populated and intensively built-up core areas in the middle of vast tropical forests, areas that were either not cultivated at all, or only cultivated very extensively.

In the fifteenth century an important change took place in the pattern of cultivation that continued into the VOC period. During Reid's Age of Commerce, roughly the period between 1450 and 1680, there was a significant increase in the relative importance of inter-regional trade as a source of income for the local princes. At the same time, as a result of the drier climate and the introduction of new crops and cultivation methods, it became easier to cultivate and populate the marshy river deltas. Both developments probably played an important role in the increasing orientation towards the southern coastal regions: in Burma towards Pegu (until 1634), in Siam towards Ayutthaya, in Cambodia towards Phnom Penh (Lovek) and in Vietnam (although not until later) towards Champa. It is

quite likely that during this period, which largely coincided with what was known in Europe as the 'Little Ice Age', the level of rainfall throughout the whole of Southeast Asia fell and that, just as in Europe, the coastal areas had the advantage that diminishing harvests could relatively easily be compensated for with food imports via the sea. If we combine this political and demographic shift towards the coast with the growing presence of Chinese traders sailing to China, it is easy to appreciate that, even during the early years of the Company, circumstances were completely different from those in the archipelago, and we can understand why the VOC was thus unable to play a role on the mainland in stimulating the further development of overseas trade. Just as in India and China, the demographic, political and military predominance of the interior did not allow the VOC to build its own power base in the coastal areas, if, indeed, the Company were interested in doing so, given the lack of interesting monopoly goods to be found there. Nonetheless, the maritime trading activities of the VOC in this part of Southeast Asia may certainly have served as another, albeit rather late, catalyst for the region's move towards the coast. For the VOC, of course, the new maritime orientation of the mainland states created wonderful new business opportunities.

Interestingly, from the middle of the seventeenth century, the principalities of Burma and Japan tried to sidestep this new maritime dynamic by imposing rigid state control. They were following the example of Ming China, which had been seriously concerned during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries about the uncontrollable dynamic of the coasts. It was then specifically the Ming authorities that regularly tried to channel maritime trade by introducing strict regulations and imposing bans. The political chaos that followed the take-over of power by the Manchus in the middle of the seventeenth century led to the development of an autonomous maritime state on the south coast of China under the Zheng family. At the same time, the VOC was able to establish a colony in Taiwan. At the end of the seventeenth century the Manchus again suppressed this free maritime dynamic, and there was a return to a policy of strict regulation. This time, however, there were plenty of opportunities for the Chinese merchants to trade overseas, with all the attendant consequences for the surrounding areas. Like the other European trading companies, the VOC also tried to profit from the eighteenth-century boost of the Chinese economy. During the previous century, the Company had tried to tap indirectly into the Chinese economy, by establishing a trading post in places with close Chinese links, as in Patani, or by attracting Chinese merchants to their own trading centres, as in Batavia. Now they sought direct access by establishing trading posts on the Chinese coast, more particularly at Canton (from 1728).

For the Dutch, all the relevant action occurred in the south. But, due to the cyclones that regularly ravaged the seas in this part of the world, they sometimes washed up ashore in places where they had no interests whatsoever. This was the case, for example, with the Company vessel *De Sperwer* that was blown off course by a typhoon while en route from Taiwan to Nagasaki in 1653; the vessel ran aground on the island of 'Quelpaert' (Cheju do). Among the thirty-six survivors was the book-keeper Hendrik Hamel (1630–92), who wrote an account – as unique as it was accurate – of his experiences in this 'hermit' kingdom and had the work published in Amsterdam in 1668. In Korea, Hamel came across another Dutchman, Jan Janse Weltevrete, who had been on the coast since 1627 and was employed by the Korean court as a weapons expert. Like other stranded seamen along the coasts of northern East Asia, he had never been given permission to return home, and the same fate now befell Hamel and his fellow mariners. After thirteen years, he and eight other hostages finally escaped to Japan in a stolen fishing boat. This Korean adventure was no more than an incident for the VOC; the Company's main interest was and remained the trade with China and Japan. With this fact in mind, a summary of the Company's activities now follows in more or less chronological order for the three large sub-regions: China and Taiwan, Japan and mainland Southeast Asia.

China and Taiwan

In sharp contrast to the situation on mainland Southeast Asia, but similar to that in large parts of India and Iran, the relationship between coast and interior in China was somewhat overshadowed by the political–military relationship between the more sedentary agricultural areas of the south and the nomadic pastures of the far north. In spite of the new military technology, which improved the effectiveness particularly of the infantry and artillery, China, like India and Iran, remained heavily dependent on the availability of large numbers of mounted warriors and war horses from Central Asia. As a result, China's key political and military area centred on the nomadic border areas around the Great Wall. The Ming (r. 1368–1644) were well aware of this, and in 1403 they had already moved the capital from the southern city of Nanking to the much more strategic Beijing location. Central and southern China – the Yangtze valley and the south-east coast (Fujian and Guangdong) – had undergone very rapid development since the start of the second millennium, and, in part due to the region's intensive rice cultivation, this area formed the economic and demographic nucleus of the country. But how could these two centres now be connected? To be able to supply the capital city with

food, the Grand Canal, built centuries before, and the Yangtze River were deepened and extended further to the north. This waterway more than 2,000 kilometres long transported food supplies to the imperial armies without having to make use of the much less manageable coastal traffic. Just as with the steppes, for the Chinese authorities there was always the danger of separatist dynamics along the coast leading to regional revolts and autonomy.

In order to counter this maritime threat, a policy of expansion was adopted at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, and during the period from 1403 to 1433 the court eunuch Zheng He was despatched no fewer than seven times in succession, with a great show of power, to the furthestmost southern and western shores of the Indian Ocean in a fierce attempt to persuade the 'barbaric' princes to pay humble tribute to the Middle Kingdom. Once this aim had been achieved, the decision was taken not to engage in any more of these costly expeditions. But what was the alternative? Should overseas trade be completely banned, which was in fact the situation during the period from 1522 to 1566? It was more common, as in the subsequent period, to control the maritime trade as much as possible by implementing a strict system of licensed trading cities, traders and destinations. In general, the very fertile provinces of Fujian and Guangdong, with their ports of Amoy (Xiamen) and Canton (Guangzhou), situated in the far south and relatively shielded by mountains, were the main beneficiaries. However, precisely because of this favourable geography, they were very difficult to keep under the control of a distant imperial capital. The special position of the Portuguese in Macau – one of the secondary landing ports for Canton – has to be seen in the light of the Chinese licensing policy. Outside these tolerated zones, foreign shipping could be outlawed by the government, and the same also applied to the direct trade with Japan. As a result, much of the existing free maritime trade was criminalised as piracy.

However dangerous these centrifugal tendencies on the coast were, it was the 'barbaric' threat from the north that was truly existential for every Chinese administration. At the start of the period covered in this book, a process of military expansion and state-formation under Manchu leader Nurhaci (1559–1626) gradually developed in the vast border area to the north-east of Beijing. This led in 1644 to the occupation of Beijing, after which it was not until well into the seventeenth century that the last Ming rulers, who by now had retreated to the far south, accepted their defeat. The relatively persistent threats from all kinds of warriors in the coastal provinces initially led under the new Manchu dynasty (also referred to as Qing, r. 1644–1911) to a repressive trading policy in the coastal areas. It was not until the Qing occupation of Taiwan in 1684 that the conquest of

China was considered complete and the Qing felt confident enough to relax their hold over the coastal areas. This resulted in the already-mentioned spectacular expansion of the Chinese economy – incidentally, just as under the Ming dynasty, with strict government control of foreign trade but also with more possibilities for Chinese maritime traders. As a post-nomadic dynasty, the Qing, like the Mughals, may well have known better than the Ming how best to combine the world of mobile trade and sedentary agriculture, and perhaps they were therefore much less suspicious of coastal trade. Under the Ming dynasty, the Great Wall and the Grand Canal had kept nomads and pirates, respectively, at a distance; now, under the early Qing, the policy of exclusion was replaced by a more outward-looking approach. In sum, booming maritime trade was part of an eighteenth century in which China experienced a period of hitherto unknown political and economic growth. The challenge for the neighbouring states, including the VOC, was to make good use of this growth but without being overwhelmed by it.

China Trade

Rather than resulting from decisions taken by the Lords XVII in the Republic or the High Government of Batavia, the history of Dutch trading relations with China was determined by the internal Chinese political constellation. During the seventeenth century, the VOC initially had to contend with the relatively suspicious attitude of the Ming authorities. Nonetheless, between 1620 and 1660 the Company managed to benefit from the growing autonomy of Fujian under the Zheng, first under Zheng Zhilong alias Iquan, and later under his son, Zheng Chenggong alias Koxinga. However, before addressing the careers of these powerful ‘pirate princes’, let us first detail the main events in the Dutch–China trading relationship in chronological order.

China was among the very earliest destinations for Dutch merchants, after the Spice Islands. Unsuccessful attempts were made by Jacob van Heemskerck and Willem Barentsz in 1594 and 1595 to evade the Portuguese and to reach China via the Northern Arctic Ocean. The subsequent routes via the Cape of Good Hope were more successful, but they nonetheless made it very clear that anyone engaging in trade with China would meet strong opposition from the Portuguese operating from Macau. This was immediately apparent in 1601 with the first China expedition on behalf of one of the Amsterdam-based predecessor companies of the VOC, led by van Neck. The Dutchmen who went ashore in Macau were taken prisoner by the Portuguese, and all but four crew members were hanged. In revenge, on 25 February 1603, the Dutch

seized the Portuguese carrack *Santa Catarina*, which in turn incited enormous indignation among the Chinese authorities. They interpreted the Dutch action as out-and-out piracy; even if they could possibly have foreseen it, they would not have been in the least impressed by the fact that this incident was the impetus for Hugo de Groot to develop the 'right to spoils' (*De Jure Praedae*), as discussed in the Introduction to Part I.

After this fiasco in Macau, the Dutch decided to try again via Patani. And indeed, from this port on the east coast of the Malaysian Peninsula, in 1605, commanded by leader of the fleet Wijbrant van Warwijck and aided by Chinese merchants, they navigated the route to the Pescadores. This may not quite be China, but it was a group of islands just off the coast of Fujian. However, the attempt to make the leap to the mainland by offering bribes failed, again due to the fierce opposition of a *kongsi* (or association) of Portuguese and Chinese mandarins. The next attempt, this time in Canton in 1607 under Cornelis Matelieff, also failed for the same reasons. The Chinese attitude during this period was clear: Canton, in the Pearl River delta, was designated as the only port where foreign merchants were admitted, and even then under strict trading conditions. The Portuguese in Macao, at the mouth of the same river, served as watchdogs against the 'pirates', including the Dutch. Only the merchants of Fujian were allowed to sail overseas, and initially they traded with the Dutch only outside China, mainly in Patani and Banten.

After the opening of the Japanese trading post at Hirado in 1609, the VOC regime became even more aware than before of the importance of the China trade. With the help of the Chinese silk that was so much in demand in Japan, it was relatively simple to obtain Japanese precious metals, in particular silver. These precious metals from Japan could be used to finance both the China and the India trade without the need to import precious metals from Europe. But there was still the issue of how to break into this exceptionally lucrative silk-for-silver trade without access to a trading post in China. Privateering on the indirect regional shipping via such ports as Tonkin, the Taiwanese port of Takau (present-day Kaohsiung) and Manila was an option, but would not exactly make the VOC popular with the Chinese and Japanese authorities. For the warmongering new Governor-General Jan Pieterseon Coen the answer was as simple as it was reckless: the Company should use force to drive the Portuguese out of Macau and then construct a castle on the Pescadores from which they could intercept the remaining shipping from Amoy. Under orders from Cornelis Reijersen, the plan was put into practice in 1622 by a fleet of eight ships with a crew of 1,024. Quite surprisingly, this time it was not a complete fiasco.

After a failed attack on Macao, Reijersen, with his business unfinished, had to divert to the Pescadores, where he embarked on the construction of a fortress. Indeed, one year later, the Dutch military operations did lead to the first real negotiations between the Company and the Chinese government – that is, between Reijersen and the governor of Amoy, Shang Zhouzou. However, when Reijersen reneged on his agreement and chose not to withdraw from the Pescadores, the Company was nonetheless driven from the island group in 1624 under threat of violence. Thanks to the mediation of the Fujian merchant Li Dan, the Company was offered the opportunity to establish a new settlement on the island of Taiwan, outside the control of the Ming authorities. This was probably tolerated because the Chinese wanted to create a counterweight to ‘pirates’ like Li Dan, who dominated the coastal waters of Fujian. For the VOC this signified the start of the thirty-eight-year-long colonisation of Taiwan, and also of a completely new phase in the trade with China. Later on, the Company abused this ‘offer’ of Taiwan made by a mere regional Ming official by interpreting it as a legal contract in which the Empire had officially handed over the island to the VOC. Of course, for the Dutch as true republicans this imperial concession was not that crucial as they also could have recourse to the bottom-up consent of the Taiwanese inhabitants themselves. This quickly became a ‘legal’ reality when a few local villagers warmly welcomed the Dutch and allowed them to build a fort, which then, as Fort Zeelandia, enabled the Dutch to provide ‘protection’ in return for further territorial possessions offered by the inhabitants.² In possession of Taiwan, and with the cooperation of the new Zheng regime in Fujian, the VOC was at last in a position to engage in regular exploitation of the highly profitable silk-for-silver trade between China and Japan.

The First Colony: Taiwan

Owing to the power struggle between the Ming and Manchu-Qing, a new political and economic dynamic developed in the maritime world of Fujian, Taiwan, the Pescadores and the Ryukyu Islands, with the Company both benefiting from and contributing to this momentum. Whereas for the successive continental Chinese governments this rapid emergence of mariners, merchants and fishermen was neither more nor less than piracy, for those involved in the activities the political uncertainty in the interior offered new opportunities, for example to make a profit from trading or, as in the case of the VOC and the separatist

² Clulow, ‘The Art of Claiming’, 20–1.

Zheng dynasty, to establish autonomous political enclaves. The seventeenth century thus provides an almost unique example of Chinese maritime state formation, made possible in part by the VOC. Is it not telling that the founder of the Zheng company, the Catholic convert Zheng Zhilong (alias Nicholas Iquan Gaspard, 1604–61), started his career as Li Dan's commercial agent and then as Company interpreter? Just like other interpreters, he was a crucial link between the Dutch and the Fujian people. Later, we find this member of the Zheng family as one of the privateers hired by the VOC for the Manila route. By providing reciprocal support, the Zheng were able to build an extensive network from Amoy in Fujian, stretching from Cambodia to Japan, and the Dutch were able to build their first real settlement colony in Taiwan. Naturally, 'pirates' like the Zheng and the VOC were in competition with each other, but these two rivals owed their existence to the same free maritime dynamics that the central Chinese government had feared for centuries. Lacking any means of power, it could do nothing other than try to play these pirates off against one another. For the Qing dynasty, this policy of divide and conquer started to bear fruit from 1660.³

Let us return to the early days of the Dutch occupation of Taiwan. Following the construction of Fort Zeelandia in 1624–5, before the colonisation of Java and Ceylon, a true colony, that is a territorial power with agricultural settlements, developed on a peninsula in the Bay of Taiwan, on the coastal plains around the bay, where rice and sugar were cultivated by thousands of Chinese migrants from Fujian. This meant that Taiwan owed its importance not only to its position as a transfer port for the trade with China, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia and Siam, but particularly, after 1636, also to revenues from agriculture, ranging from exports of sugar to Iran and Japan, to a monthly per capita tax levied on Chinese farm workers. Another important source of income was the sale of property rights and the leasing of exclusive trading rights with the various Taiwanese villages. It should also be borne in mind that, before the arrival of the Dutch, Taiwan was a wild, sparsely populated area that in terms of language and lifestyle was closer to Austronesian Southeast Asia than to China and Japan. The population of slash-and-burn farmers and hunters lived mainly on the proceeds from deerskins that were exported by Chinese traders to Japan, where they were used for the military equipment of the samurai. As far as the indigenous society is concerned, far from perceiving the locals as 'noble savages', the obviously biased Dutch accounts stress fiercely rival village communities where

³ For a recent survey of the Zheng state, see Hang, *Conflict and Commerce*.

status was derived from headhunting under the watchful eyes of female shamans.

The arrival of the Dutch represented an absolute revolution for the local population. Besides several new crops such as sugar and indigo, the Dutch also introduced oxen to the island, using the animals mainly for transport and land clearance. The construction of irrigation works was stimulated by exemptions from taxation, and deer hunting was optimised by the sale of exclusive trading rights to the Taiwanese villages. All these interventions had considerable ecological consequences: in 1638, for example, no fewer than 151,400 deer were killed! Nonetheless, these effects should also not be exaggerated, because this was still a relatively small area in the south-west of the island. However, Dutch colonisation did lay the foundation for the much more serious changes under Chinese administration in the centuries to follow. Indeed, in this sense, Dutch colonisation paved the way for Taiwan's sinification.

Apart from the radical economic changes, attention was also paid to the administration of the region. Besides the Dutch organisational structure of Governor and Council, Court of Justice and local magistrate (from 1654), including Dutch lower government officials, priests and schoolmasters stationed in the villages, there were also the 10,000 to 20,000 Chinese peasants who came together under their own chiefs (*cabessas*), and who from 1645 convened in a council of ten *cabessas*. As revenue farmers, they became the engine of agrarian expansion in Taiwan. However, they could not prevent the farmers' uprising of their countrymen in 1652 in protest against an excessive capitation tax. The Chinese revenue farmers watched, powerless, from the sidelines while the uprising was defeated with the help of native Taiwanese support troops and the use of considerable violence.

'Country diets' or *landdagen* for the indigenous population were organised almost every year from 1636, at which new village representatives were appointed by the Company with great shows of ceremony; these representatives were immediately legitimised as local elders. The skull trophies of the chiefs were now replaced by a rattan staff bearing the VOC logo. The staff represented the new authority of the States-General, delegated by means of the Company, which was passed on to the next village elders appointed by the Dutch. The Chinese were barely involved in this ceremony, and were dismissed in the official speeches as foreign extortionists against whom the Company offered protection. Just like the role of the Taiwanese in subduing an uprising by farmers in 1652, this shows how the VOC tried to play the island's ethnic groups off against one another.

The idea of the diet originated from the missionary Robert Junius, who served in Taiwan from 1629 to 1643. Junius was to become one of the few successful ministers under VOC rule. He was more than just a successful vicar, missionary and teacher; thanks in part to the support of governor Hans Putmans (r. 1629–32), he became an extremely energetic administrator and even a military commander. This Protestant ‘crusader’ reminds one of the Jesuits, all the more so because, like his predecessor Georgius Candidius, his missionary zeal went hand in hand with a keen interest in studying the languages, customs and practices of the native population. In this sense Junius was a typical product of the *Seminarium Indicum* established by Professor Walaeus in Leiden in 1622. As has already been seen in Chapter 3, this seminary focused especially on the Asian mission, emphasising the importance of preaching in the local languages, so that the indigenous people could share in the Bible’s ‘joyful message’. On the other hand, Junius also wanted to teach the Taiwanese the Dutch language and even sent them to the Netherlands to study for the ministry. As a result, in the eighteenth century – long after the end of the Dutch occupation – Taiwanese converts were still able to read Dutch books and use the Latin alphabet! Back in the Netherlands in 1645, Junius started a private training programme in his home in Delft (and from 1653 to 1655 in Amsterdam), one of his students being Philippus Baldaeus, the renowned minister who became active in South India.⁴

On Taiwan, the mission work was most successful among the animist indigenous peoples, the Chinese immigrants preferring to hold fast to their Buddhist and Taoist cultures. The success of the mission was directly related to the military expansion of the VOC. The small local armies were no match for the advanced weapons of the Dutch. The villages that joined the Company and allowed themselves to be converted to Christianity could count on immediate success in their endless conflicts with other villages. Junius himself took the lead in the battle against the ‘heathen’ enemies. Owing to the role of female shamans, this creates the odd impression of a gender war in which the *inibs*, as these local female teachers were called, were increasingly banned from village societies by aggressive male missionaries. A more fruitful association may be the witch-hunts that were raging at that time in Europe and may have inspired the clergymen in their fight against these ‘devilish heathens’.

As we have discussed previously, the Taiwanese converts also served as a counterweight to the ever-growing influx of Chinese immigrants. For the same reason, Taiwan, more than the other VOC settlements, was a resounding success for the Protestant mission. Between 1627 and 1657,

⁴ Van Lieburg, ‘Het personeel van de Indische kerk’, 80.

no fewer than 32 ministers served in Taiwan, who together managed to convert about 10,000 Taiwanese. Along with dozens of comforters of the sick, proponents and schoolmasters, the ministers functioned as important intermediaries between the VOC management and the Taiwanese, and became an essential factor in the ‘pacification’ of the island. The commercial profits, the massive exploitation, the mission and the military successes – by 1642 the remaining, but neglected, Spanish settlements in the north of the island had already been annexed – all contributed to the creation of a flourishing Dutch colony. But, just as in the Batavian Ommelanden, this success would have been unthinkable without the contribution of thousands of Chinese migrants.⁵

However, in the 1650s, a Chinese uprising in 1652, an epidemic in 1653 and a plague of locusts and an earthquake in 1654 seemed to bring about a reversal of this propitious development. By emphasising the use of the Dutch language, the mission also lost some of its allure. An even more important factor was the growing conflict on the Chinese mainland between the Qing and the Zheng, which made trading difficult, and in the early 1660s resulted in large parts of the Fujian coastal area becoming depopulated. The Chinese silk that was so vital to Japanese trade was immediately replaced by Tonkinese and Bengali silk. Slowly but surely, the win–win relationship between the VOC and the Zheng, now under the leadership of Zheng Zhilong’s son, Zheng Chenggong, came to an end. Cornered by the scorched-earth policy of the Qing armies, the Zheng initiated an attack on Taiwan. Only in Fort Zeelandia – a state-of-the-art ‘modern’ fortress – did the VOC manage to resist for a few more months the enormous Zheng supremacy of 300 to 400 junks and 25,000 troops, who also had access to the very detailed information provided by Chinese interpreter and defector Pinqua. Moreover, Zheng Chenggong could profit from the advice of the high-ranking Dutch officer Hans Radis, who showed him the latest in the art of counter-fortification. Despite Dutch supremacy in both shipping and fortification, the Zheng army was one of the best of the time, using state-of-the-art artillery as well as well-drilled and disciplined African(!) musketeers.⁶ Indeed, following a nine-month siege, the surrender was signed on 1 February 1662. The Dutch were granted a free retreat, but all merchandise, money, weaponry and ammunition had to be left behind. They were allowed to take nothing with them other than their accounts books.

⁵ Blussé, ‘Retribution and Remorse’, 153–82; Blussé, ‘De Formosaanse proeftuyn der Gereformeerde zending’, 189–201.

⁶ For an in-depth analysis, see Andrade’s *Lost Colony*.

Direct Trade: Fuzhou and Canton

The VOC directors took the loss of Taiwan very badly. In order to restore the Company's dented prestige in the Chinese world, but above all as an attempt by the High Government to establish better relations with the new regime by providing military support to the Qing forces. From Batavia, three large naval expeditions were deployed in 1662, 1663 and 1664 under the command of Balthazar Bort against the Zheng's support centres and naval power. Zheng Chenggong himself died unexpectedly in 1662, after which, following a brief power struggle, his eldest son, Zheng Jing (1642–81), succeeded him as head of the dynasty and as ruler of Taiwan. However, the Chinese authorities made only a very limited response to the overtures from Batavia. The 1662 expedition yielded virtually nothing from a military point of view, although in Fuzhou, the capital city and main port of Fujian, the Qing regional authorities did start to engage in a modest level of direct trade. During the expedition of 1663, the Chinese and Dutch acting together seized the fortresses on the islands of Amoy and Quemoy. A planned large-scale joint attack on Taiwan in December 1664, during the third expedition, came to nothing when the Qing fleet caught sight of the impressive maritime might of Zheng Jing in the Formosa Straits and hastily reversed, after which Bort's much smaller squadron was no match for the hundreds of enemy junks.

During the final ten years before trade with Fuzhou was opened up in 1662, the Company made several attempts to gain direct access to China. In addition to silk, porcelain had now become an important commodity, not only for the intra-Asian trade, but increasingly also for exporting to Europe. In 1652, the merchant Frederick Schedel was sent with two ships from Taiwan to Canton, where he was indeed given permission by the provincial authorities to sell his small cargo and to buy some Chinese goods. He took with him courteously worded letters from the governors for the High Government in Batavia, who then allowed two more ships to sail to Canton in the same year. This mission under Frederick Schedel and Zacharias Wagenaer was rendered unsuccessful as a result of machinations by the Portuguese in Macau, and Schedel and Wagenaer were eventually forced to return to Batavia with their cargo intact. In 1655 the Company decided to make a new attempt, this time via a strong legation directly from the High Government to the court in Beijing. This embassy that lasted almost two years under the leadership of Pieter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyzer, which was made famous by the report published in book form in several languages and the drawn impressions of Joan Nieuhof, was to determine the image of the Chinese Empire until well into the eighteenth century, but in real terms gave the Company no solid advantages.

The High Government was granted the privilege of being allowed in future to send a legation every eight years; under this veiled obligation, another ambassador from Batavia could be expected in Beijing in 1664.

Trade with Fuzhou had not really got off the ground, partly as a result of the continuing struggle against the Zheng, partly because the central Chinese government was not inclined to legitimise the Dutch trading post. In 1664 and 1665 Batavia failed to send the expected embassy to Beijing, while at the same time for other reasons the early direct Dutch–Chinese relations came under pressure. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction in the High Government about the apparent lack of real Chinese support for the joint operations against the Zheng polity and about the limited trading results. The Qing authorities for their part were enraged by the increasing number of instances of piracy against Chinese vessels and the plundering of coastal towns by Company ships during this period, which in their view confirmed their long-held opinion of the Dutch as nothing more than barbaric pirates. A large-scale legation to Beijing, under the leadership of Pieter van Hoorn, despatched in July 1666, was no longer able to turn the tide. Even before the legation could start the land journey to the capital, having arrived in Canton in 1667, the very limited and provisional trading privileges that the VOC had previously managed to acquire had already been completely rescinded.⁷

It was not until 1676 that a further opportunity arose to open direct trade with China. In 1673, a major revolt broke out in Fujian and Guangdong against the Qing regime, which Zheng Jing quickly joined. The rebels reconquered Amoy and Quemoy and furthermore managed to occupy a large part of the neighbouring coastal area until 1676; the areas around Canton and Fuzhou were at that time principally in the hands of their allies. In 1675, the rebel governors in these regions invited the High Government by letter to send out merchant ships, the main cargo being lead, small arms and various ingredients for the production of gunpowder. In Canton, however, on the arrival of the Dutch ships later the following year, the political situation was considered too unstable for them to be able to trade effectively, while Fuzhou had again been conquered by the imperial army. Obviously, the Qing administration there was also interested in the supply of Dutch weapons and even in joint military action against the Zheng, in exchange for which the Company was able to establish a new trading post in Fuzhou in 1676.

⁷ Wills Jr., 'Wat zegt een ceremonie?', 239–57.

As in the past, however, this was not formally sanctioned and was therefore entirely dependent on the agents of the regional authorities. On the basis of this provisional arrangement, the High Government, for its part, did not wish to be further involved in the internal struggle in China and against the Zheng, and did not provide effective fleet aid in the following years, despite a request made by a Chinese mission to Batavia in 1679–80. When, in 1680, the Qing forces conquered Amoy, Quemoy and the Pescadores without Dutch support, and the final resistance of the insurgents on the mainland was broken the following year, from a Chinese point of view, there was no longer any need to extend the authorisation of the Company's post in Fuzhou.

How did the Chinese authorities view these developments on the coast? Under the Ming or the Qing, the Middle Kingdom accepted only tribute relations with foreign powers, and the emperors accordingly saw no benefit in permanent contracts and/or semi-permanent privileges, such as so-called royal *firmans* granted by the rulers in India and Iran. However, after the Qing conquest of Taiwan in 1683, the Ming threat had finally disappeared, and trade with China was officially opened.⁸ With its many facilities, Canton quickly proved to be the most attractive Chinese emporium for foreign traders, benefiting mainly the English and later the Ostend Company (1722–31). However, for the time being, the Dutch refused to accept this. On the pretext of free trade, the Company wanted to create a privileged position with an array of exemptions. After all the disappointments, it was decided to have China's trade proceed entirely through Batavia. Ever larger amounts of Chinese goods were already being delivered by Chinese junks in Batavia. Moreover, the taxes paid by Chinese traders in Canton were lower, and in Batavia the VOC was able to exercise much stricter control of the pepper traded with China. Another consideration was the declining importance of the China-related Japan trade and the increasing awareness that much cheaper silk could be purchased from Bengal.

However, all these considerations suddenly proved redundant when tea came into huge demand in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Initially, the VOC tried to meet this demand completely through the Batavian junk trade. However, this meant that they had less control over the price and quality of the tea. In addition, in view of the competition with other Europeans who did deal directly with Canton, it became increasingly difficult to ship sufficient quantities to Batavia. In 1717, Batavia tried to fix the price at a low level, but this immediately resulted in an official embargo by the Chinese on trade with Batavia. It was not

⁸ Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean*.

until 1728 that the first ship was despatched from the Republic to Canton to trade silver for tea directly. During the subsequent years, the VOC took over a large proportion of the market for tea, although one disadvantage of this was that it necessitated the export of an enormous amount of silver. The question was whether it was not more cost effective to use products from the archipelago, such as pepper and tin, for this purpose and to sail directly from Batavia. In 1734, the decision was indeed taken to sail from Batavia to Canton, the majority of the ships subsequently sailing on to Holland. To further stimulate the supply of products, from 1743 even private tea trade was allowed. In this so-called *recognitiehandel* VOC employees were given the opportunity on board the East India vessels to send tea from Canton to Batavia and from Batavia to the Netherlands, at their own cost. In spite of the advantages of this arrangement, from the perspective of intra-Asian trade there were of course also disadvantages. Because the VOC was less keen to pay in silver, the Company continued to play second fiddle in Canton. Moreover, the junk trade to Batavia experienced strong competition from the direct China shipping and, particularly after the dramatic massacre of Chinese in Batavia in 1740, the junk trade declined significantly.

In the face of poor sales results, in 1756, the China trade was again reorganised. Direct trade from the Netherlands was reinstated and management was delegated by the Lords XVII to a special board comprising a number of prominent governors. It was primarily a cosmetic change: the ships from the Netherlands continued to sail via Batavia, and this China Committee, too, had a shortage of silver and consequently had to continue to trade in pepper and tin. The main purpose of setting up this body, just like, for example, that of the Amfioen Society (1745–94), was to allow a small, privileged group of governors to benefit from the profits from trade by means of a cartel. In any case, the Chinese Commission was a resounding success for the first two decades thanks to the growing tea market and, initially, also thanks to the Seven Years' War (1756–63), which affected the trading capacity of most other European trade organisations, but which the Republic managed to keep out of.

Like their Dutch counterparts in the Republic and Batavia, Chinese regents in Canton made use of all kinds of restrictive monopolies and licences wherever possible in an attempt to line their own pockets. Just as on Deshima in Japan, the Dutch traders had very little room for manoeuvre in Canton. The city itself was forbidden territory, and outside the trading season, from June to September, the Europeans were even ordered to quit the island and wait for the new ships in Macau, where they fell under the responsibility of the Portuguese governor. There were also few opportunities for interpreters to operate autonomously:

Europeans acquiring knowledge of Chinese were as little appreciated by the Chinese authorities as interpreters who became competent in European languages. The growing use of business pidgin offered an ideal solution, since this prevented interpreters from developing very close relationships with foreigners.

The leased European trading posts were located outside the city walls. Owing to the shallow depth of the Pearl River, the Company ships could not sail any further than Whampoa Anchorage. On arrival there, the Dutch traders had little option but to be carried along in a well-oiled administrative routine of supervision, supply and taxation, under the leadership of the *hoppo*, a senior official who was responsible for supervising foreign trade for a period of three years. All further trading contacts were channelled through a designated trading house or *hong*, which, thanks to an official permit as a so-called *fiador*, or guarantor, had full responsibility for the comings and goings of the merchants assigned to it. The *fiadors* occupied themselves with the trade of those under their protection, although they were not permitted to monopolise them completely. Although the number of 'hongists' could be counted on the fingers of one hand, from 1760 a number of them united for a period of time in a so-called *co-hong*, a cartel that put them in a better position to regulate trading activities.

The Fourth Anglo-Dutch War brought the boom period of the Dutch tea trade to an end. After the war, in 1784, the British passed the Act of Commutation, closing their own tea market to foreign competitors, thus permanently excluding the Dutch, while the Dutch market remained open for foreign importers until 1791. Owing to their special access to India, the British were in a unique position to deploy large quantities of opium for the trade with China and hence became less dependent on silver than the Dutch. In spite of these adversities, trade with Canton continued, albeit at a lower level. In 1791, like the East India Company in England, the VOC acquired sole rights for the import of tea into the Netherlands, which gave a temporary boost to the tea trade. After 1795, and even after the dissolution of the Company in 1799, Dutch trade with China was continued mainly through American captains, although under Dutch licence. It was not until 1824 that this arrangement changed, following the establishment of the Netherlands Trading Company, which continued trading with Canton until 1830.

Looking back at more than 200 years of the Dutch in China, what first strikes one is how peripheral their presence was, including in comparison with other regions of Asia. This makes for an interesting comparison with that other major Asian empire: the Mughals in India. Although the VOC

was also in a marginal position in India, its officials were able to operate relatively autonomously there, spread over the whole empire, in all kinds of partnerships with an almost endless series of indigenous traders. The interests of the Mughals and the Company even seemed to complement each other, with an increasing role being played by regional traders and rulers. This was very different from the situation in China, where the VOC withdrew when the country came under the absolute control of the Manchus. The Dutch had little or no room to manoeuvre in the region, which left them little option but to resort to coalitions with rebel pirates, such as the Zheng family, even though the Zheng developed into an existential threat to the Company itself. In Canton, the Dutch were completely isolated along the coast; they had little contact with the indigenous population, and, in Fujian and Taiwan, intermediaries such as trading agents and interpreters were unable to establish any power base of their own. In comparison with the extremely interactive Dutch missions to the capital cities of India, the court visits to Beijing remained isolated and incidental events that had no discernible political or cultural influence.

Japan

As with so many regions in Asia, the first Dutch contacts with Japan were via Dutch people working for the Portuguese. The two main individuals concerned, both hailing from Enkhuizen, were Dirk Gerritsz Pomp alias Dirk China (1544–1608) and Jan Huygen van Linschoten (c. 1563–1611), whose stories and writings gave the Dutch their first inkling of the wealth of the Japanese silver resources. It was already clear that silver could provide access to trade with Asia: the more silver could be extracted from Asia, the less one needed to import from Europe. The experience of the Portuguese had already shown that Japanese silver was absolutely crucial to the Chinese silk trade.

The first Dutch ship to reach Japan was *De Liefde* in 1600. This Rotterdam vessel was initially outfitted together with four others to attack Spanish settlements via the Strait of Magellan. From there, the expedition leaders were free to decide whether to continue to the silver paradise of Japan. The expedition was a fiasco: of the 500 crew, 450 perished and only one ship managed to make it back home. *De Liefde* was the only vessel to reach Japan. It landed on the east coast of Kyushu just in time to make a contribution with its crew and arms to the important defeat by Tokugawa Ieyasu of Ishida Mitsunari, his biggest rival, in the Battle of Sekigahara (21 October 1600). This battle symbolises the definitive end of the persistent civil wars and the start of the Edo period (1600–1868),

a time of peace and tranquility under the Shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty. The majority of the crew members of *De Liefde*, including the Englishman William Adams, continued in the service of the new Shogun Ieyasu. Adams even became his vassal, was given an estate and built several European-style ships for the Shogun. It was not until 1606 that Captain Jacob Jansz Quaeckernaek managed to establish the first official contacts between the shogunate and the VOC via a Japanese ship in Patani. With their sights on the highly lucrative trade with China, both Japan and the VOC were keen to enter into permanent reciprocal trade relations.

The VOC directors were principally interested in Japanese silver, and for the Japanese authorities the Company represented a welcome opportunity to break through the embargo introduced by the Chinese in 1547. This embargo had been put in place to rein in the aggressive activities of Chinese and Japanese ‘pirates’ (*wako*). Following an exchange of correspondence at ‘royal’ level between Prince Maurits and Shogun Ieyasu, a VOC trading post was opened in Hirado in 1609, which was managed by director and senior merchant Jacques Specx (during the years 1609–13 and 1614–21). The aggressive maritime operations of the Dutch meant that in Japan they were initially treated as pirates, just as in China. This led to embarrassing diplomatic problems, the low point of which was the so-called Nuyts affair in 1628. Pieter Nuyts, Governor (1627–9) of Taiwan, had driven a number of Japanese traders into a corner, probably in revenge for the rough treatment he had received during his court visit to Edo in 1627 – treatment that was provoked because Nuyts suddenly introduced a tax on Japanese trade in Taiwan. The Japanese merchants subsequently managed to take several Dutchmen hostage, including Nuyts’ son Laurens. Nuyts’ behaviour cost the VOC dear and led to an immediate Japanese embargo on Dutch trade. Thanks to Nuyts’ extradition to Japan in 1632 – an unprecedented measure in the history of the Company – relations were once again returned to normal. In the meantime, Laurens had died of dysentery; Pieter himself was released, after four years of ‘useful’ imprisonment, during which he read all kinds of classical works, learned Japanese and also wrote some works himself, including *Lof des elephants*, a study of elephants that was later published by his son. He died in 1645, a wealthy mayor of Hulsterambacht and Hulst.⁹

In order to understand properly how Japanese–Dutch relations worked in practice, it is important to give a brief outline of internal developments in Japan. Even before the Edo period, a process of internal pacification

⁹ Blussé, ‘Bull in a China Shop’, 97–106.

and centralisation was started under the warlords Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. This policy also included contesting the Catholicism spread by the Jesuit and Franciscan priests in Japan. Political centralisation continued under Ieyasu Tokugawa, a former ally of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, and went hand in hand with a new economic prosperity that lasted until the start of the eighteenth century. This boom was mainly an inland phenomenon and was facilitated by a substantial production of silver, gold and copper. These precious metals were also used in foreign trade, primarily in order to obtain silk (yarns and material) from China but also for deerskins and ray skins from Siam, Cambodia and Taiwan. Under the Tokugawa Shoguns, the economy came increasingly under central supervision. Until the 1630s, Japanese merchants still had a free hand to play an active part in foreign trade, and the Tokugawa Shoguns Ieyasu (r. 1603–16) and Hidetada (r. 1616–32) even issued sailing permits as a means of encouraging the establishment of Japanese trading settlements abroad. By now, Japanese merchants had settled all around the South China Sea and had gained a high degree of influence at the various non-Japanese courts. This was probably a welcome outlet for some of the Japanese Catholic converts, who were persecuted increasingly severely in the interior of the country, and for the feudal lords (*daimyo*), samurai and pirates who were also subjected to increasingly harsh punishments. However, there was a growing fear that if these groups acquired too much power abroad, it might also affect internal stability, which had been so difficult to achieve. From 1633 onwards, this led to a new course with greater restrictions on foreign trade. The Japanese were now completely banned from leaving the country.

The room to manoeuvre of the Portuguese, who had been present in Japan since 1543, was considerably reduced. The suppression of the 1637–8 Shimabara uprising, a revolt by mainly Christian farmers on West Kyushu, was the impetus for a veritable persecution of Christian converts, which wiped them out totally. In 1638, the Portuguese first had to retreat almost as permanent hostages to Deshima, a small man-made island in the port of Nagasaki. A year later they even had to withdraw completely, after which foreign trade was placed almost entirely in the hands of the Chinese and Dutch under strict government supervision. The Dutch were tolerated partly because they had helped defeat the Shimabara rebellion, and partly because, thanks to the settlement on Taiwan, they were able to take over from the Portuguese in supplying Chinese silk. In the opinion of their European rivals, however, the Dutch were tolerated only because as shrewd traders they all too readily foreswore their Christian identity when the Shogun tested their sympathies – as he had done with other Christians before them – by ordering them to

step on a so-called *fumi-e*, a picture of the Virgin Mary and Christ, and as Protestants they were happy to oblige. As can be gleaned from a work like *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, the saying 'we are not Christians but Dutchmen' became a well-known trope in the growing anti-Dutch rhetoric in eighteenth-century England. In any event, in 1641 the Dutch took the place of the Portuguese on Deshima, and the trading post in Hirado was demolished. During the next two centuries the Dutch refrained from missionary activities, and, in fact, became increasingly domesticated by the Japanese political system. In Japan, more than anywhere else, the humiliation was real and by no means masked a gradual increase of power, as in the case of Ceylon or Java.¹⁰

Returning to the early seventeenth century, the Japanese continued to trade with Korea, via the island of Tsushima, and with Ryukyu. The policy of exclusion (*sakoku*), as it was known, was not so much an expression of a new Japanese isolationism – foreign trade simply continued – but rather a sign of a strongly centralised government which, just as in the Chinese case, aimed to stimulate economic growth as far as possible, but without jeopardising national peace and stability. Under the Tokugawa dynasty there was a repeat of the fifteenth-century history of the Ming in China: first a rather aggressive policy of overseas expansion and then, as if shocked by the sudden dynamics that this gave rise to, stringent control of all overseas contacts.

The VOC had realised some time previously that Japanese precious metals could play a crucial role in intra-Asian trade. They were a means of acquiring Indian fabrics and clothing, which could in turn be used for buying spices, thus reducing the need for the expensive transport of precious metals from Europe. Besides the VOC spices, for example, silk from China and deerskins and pine wood from mainland Southeast Asia could also be exchanged for Japanese precious metals. The Japanese policy of exclusionism meant that all that was necessary for the Company was to follow in the footsteps of the now stifled Japanese trading diaspora in China and Southeast Asia. Indeed, during the seventeenth century, VOC trade with Japan proved to be an enormous success, becoming the cornerstone of Dutch intra-Asian trade. Thanks to the contacts with Japan, the VOC was able to develop into a significant commercial force elsewhere in Asia, unmatched by any of its European competitors.

However, the Japanese authorities became increasingly aware of the disadvantages that the export of their precious metals posed for their own economy, and to stem the flow they started to introduce an array of

¹⁰ Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun*.

restrictive measures. In 1668, the silver export that was so vital for the Company was halted, which meant they had to switch their priority to gold. In the form of so-called *kobangs*, this found a very large market on the Coromandel Coast. Until the loss of Taiwan, the Company had been importing gold from China, but Japan now offered a welcome alternative. Here, too, the Japanese authorities were concerned about the country's stocks: from 1670 they raised the prices, and in 1685–6 there was a blanket ban on the export of gold. In spite of the fact that in the eighteenth century the gold content of the *kobang* was halved, gold was still exported from Japan until 1752. At the end of the seventeenth century, the emphasis shifted to Japanese copper, which, like gold, was mainly sold by the VOC on the Coromandel Coast. This trend continued in the eighteenth century, with Gujarat and Bengal in particular absorbing more and more copper. Some of the Japanese copper was also destined for Europe, although far less went to Europe than to India. The Company retained its copper monopoly until well into the eighteenth century. With the shift from silver to gold to copper, the Japanese VOC trade centred less and less on China and increasingly on India, particularly if the trade in Bengali silk and Indian textiles to Japan is included. Until 1715, part of the VOC fleet that sailed from Batavia to Deshima continued directly on to India. In the eighteenth century, Japan produced its own silk, and it was mainly Javanese sugar that was shipped to Japan, until the Japanese also managed to provide their own supplies of this commodity. Eventually, the Company had no other option than to import cash from Europe.

Even the copper trade was subject to restrictions imposed by the Japanese government in the form of export ceilings, and in 1685 import limits were also introduced on barter goods in general. This was the result of a series of regulatory measures applicable to the Chinese and Dutch who, in 1641 (and lasting until 1655) had already introduced the *pancado* or *itowappu* system, under which the bulk price of the total imports of Chinese silk was fixed in advance. In 1672 the switch was made to the system of notional valuation whereby a total shipment was bought at a set price by a central purchasing agency that then sold everything on to licensed merchants. In terms of the level of regulation, this system is reminiscent of the Chinese cartel system in Canton.

In 1685, the *pancado* system was revived, at the same time as import ceilings were set, this time not only for Chinese raw silk, but for all imported raw silk. All this should be seen as a reaction to the new Qing policy of opening up the China trade. The Japanese wanted to avoid being flooded with Chinese imports, with all the attendant consequences for precious metal stocks in Japan. In 1697 the Nagasaki Accounting House was set up to supervise the amount and value of the imports, and at the

same time to control precious metal exports. In 1715, these arrangements were once again laid down in the so-called Shotoku reforms, which reduced the Company's trade to two ships a year.

This strict government supervision meant that the VOC had little other option than to maximise the export of precious metals within these boundaries; during the first half of the seventeenth century this was mainly silver for the Chinese market, and after that gold and particularly copper for the Indian market. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, the importance of the Japanese trading post gradually diminished due to the autarkic policy of the Japanese government. In 1790 only one ship a year was allowed to sail to Deshima, which reduced the role of this lodge to a purely diplomatic presence. As a consequence of the war in Europe, hardly any Dutch vessels arrived in Japan between 1795 and 1817. Just as in Canton, it was mainly the Americans who kept up the momentum. At the same time, Director Hendrik Doeff, by now completely isolated, found a highly professional way of keeping the British at bay. To pass the time, Doeff worked on a Dutch–Japanese dictionary, a fairly essential tool that the Dutch had lacked up to that point. Although trade was by now of scarcely any importance, the Dutch managed to maintain their privileged position in Japan until 1853, when Commodore Matthew C. Perry opened Japan for the American market. On 30 January 1856, a Dutch–Japanese Treaty of Friendship was concluded that freed the Dutch – now organised in the Netherlands Trading Company – on Deshima from their isolation. This was followed on 18 August 1858 by a more comprehensive Treaty of Amity and Commerce, after which, in the autumn of 1859, the Dutch Consulate General moved to Edo. In February 1860 the trade mission on Deshima was closed down; Yokohama, the port close to Edo, was now undisputedly the new centre for foreign trade in Japan. After this, the Dutch post on the island in the bay of Nagasaki was maintained only as a Vice-Consulate.

Mainland Southeast Asia

The establishment of trading offices on mainland Southeast Asia was from the very outset a by-product of the more central aim of the Dutch merchants to gain access to the Chinese silk market. Obtaining Chinese silk was still an important prerequisite for trade with Japan. Nonetheless, as we noted at the start of this chapter, given the relatively restricted trading policy of Ming China and the presence of the Portuguese in Macau, gaining access to China was far from easy. For this reason, products from mainland Southeast Asia – such as deerskins from Cambodia, silk from Tonkin and, increasingly, sugar from all these

regions – served as alternative export items; these, like Chinese silk, could be traded in Japan for the so highly prized precious metals silver and gold, as well as copper. Although regions such as Siam, Cambodia and Tonkin were also important for the supply of rice to Batavia, and later to Melaka and Taiwan, all the settlements on mainland Southeast Asia served the trade with China and especially Japan. Unsurprisingly, with the relative decline in the Japanese trade at the end of the seventeenth century, these offices, too, lost much of their significance (Siam) or were even shut down completely (Burma, Cambodia, Tonkin). At the same time, it was also clear that it was almost impossible to compete with the hugely expanding Chinese trade networks in these areas, which, in the eighteenth century, claimed most of the former VOC trade in the region – even in Batavia. As we have stressed already, the eighteenth century was primarily a Chinese century. The VOC continued with its efforts to participate in the China trade, but increasingly came to focus on the trade in Chinese tea, which was transported to Europe not via mainland Southeast Asia, but more directly from Canton and via Batavia.

How did the rulers of mainland Southeast Asia envision these developments? What did they have to gain by giving the VOC access to their regions? They, too, were very aware of the economic and political importance of China, which was expressed, among other things, in various tribute relations between these countries and China. Tribute was in any event the means of shaping the reciprocal trade relations, as in the case of the states on the Malaysian Peninsula and Jambi in Sumatra, that sent ‘golden flowers’ (*bunga emas*) as a tribute to Siam to facilitate trade – or rather the exchange of gifts – with that country. The VOC, too, was obliged to conduct a large part of its trade in the form of gifts to regional rulers. In addition to the cultural–diplomatic influence of China, during the eighteenth century the region had to contend with Chinese traders and other migrants who played an increasingly important role in such activities as the exploitation of silver, copper and tin mines in northern Burma, northern Vietnam and the Malaysian Peninsula, as well as in the cultivation of new farming land, such as in southern Vietnam. In addition to this increasing orientation towards China, however, there were also the long-standing ties between mainland Southeast Asia and South Asia, which were expressed in the ritual of kingship orchestrated by Indian Brahmins and Theravada Buddhism practised mainly by monks. Over the course of centuries, these tendencies had become closely blended with Islamic influences that were mainly exerted by Arabs, Iranians, Indians and Malays via the coast through overseas trade. The addition of a new, European-Christian sphere of influence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was in this sense nothing new for the regional

principalities, which in a cultural sense were typified by a pragmatic eclecticism, where all kinds of religious traditions were tolerated and could exist alongside one another. Even a monotheist choice in favour of Islam, as in the case of Ibrahim (r. 1642–58) in Cambodia, was largely a case of ‘both-and’ and rarely ‘either-or’. The often thoroughly cosmopolitan and charismatic princes of mainland Southeast Asia did not see any merit in amplifying religious contradictions and sought only the widest possible recognition and emanation of their kingship. This trend increased particularly during the seventeenth century, when more and more principalities began to focus on maritime trade, and Iranians, Japanese, Malays, Europeans and Chinese alternated in taking precedence and occupying important government posts at the various mainland courts. Just as in India and the Indonesian archipelago, but very differently from in China or Japan, there was a relatively open trading climate, in which merchants from all corners of the world, including the Dutch, could develop their business.

In comparison with India and China, the rulers in mainland Southeast Asia had much authority over relatively few people. The difficult access to and exploitation of the dense mountainous terrain in these areas made the landscape a kind of inland archipelago of intensively cultivated rice areas in the midst of an endless tropical wilderness. Because of the pattern of widespread settlements with relatively small populations, the rulers were not as concerned about control over land as over people and their military and agrarian services. The major rivers and coastal areas were obviously crucial for irrigation and transportation, and it was along these rivers and coasts that the main states developed: Burma along the Irrawaddy; Siam along the Chao Praya; Lan Sang, Cambodia and Champa along the Mekong; Cochinchina along the Vietnamese coast; and Tonkin along the Red River. State control was at its maximum around these key political and economic arteries that often acted as bottlenecks. What is striking in comparison with the other areas around the Indian Ocean – with the exception of Iran – is that the Company did business almost exclusively with the rulers and their intermediaries. Despite the ideological openness of the region, there existed no free markets, but strongly government-led economies, with the sovereigns being by far the most important traders, enjoying numerous trade monopolies. Incidentally, the VOC structure perfectly matched this regional pattern in which kings and merchants were closely intertwined.

It was an extremely attractive proposition for the regional princes to establish diplomatic and economic relations with the Dutch. As in the case of Iran, Japan, Johore and Aceh, they sought direct contact – in the form of the exchange of letters and gifts – at diplomatic level, preferably

with a fully fledged, i.e. princely, counterpart, even if in the case of the Republic it was only a stadtholder. In 1608 this led to the King of Siam sending an impressive legation to the Republic. Like the similar diplomatic missions from Aceh (1602) and Iran (1626), this was a good opportunity for the Dutch to refute once and for all the humiliating gossip of Portuguese and other European competitors about the Republic. The Siamese envoys were now able to satisfy themselves with their own eyes – and probably even with the assistance of Hans Lipperhey's latest high-tech telescope – that the Dutch were not pirates, as the Portuguese had made them believe, but that they actually resided in real homes in real towns and villages. Both for Prince Maurits and for Siamese Prince Ekathostarot (r. 1605–1610), these long-distance relationships and the accompanying exhibiting of exotic treasure chambers and technological masterpieces emphasised the cosmopolitan status of their royalty.¹¹

In terms of economics, the kings of the mainland needed only contacts with the High Government in Batavia, and their primary concern was the sale of their own – largely monopoly – goods as favourably as possible, in particular tin, deerskins, rice and silk, as well as sappan wood, benzoin, glue, musk and ivory. They were also intent on selling Chinese imports (mainly silk and gold), and purchasing Japanese silver and copper (in the form of coins, or *kasjes*), and to a lesser extent also Indian textiles, spices, sandalwood and, last but not least, military goods, such as bronze and cast iron cannons, muskets, saltpetre and sulphur. Some of these items were exchanged in the form of gifts; it was simply not possible to conduct regular trade without presenting the prince and his most senior ministers with items that they had ordered, such as precious stones, glassware, horses and firearms.

The military ingredients of the import package suggest that the VOC was regarded as a potentially important military ally. As well as the supply of the most modern firearms, the princes were also interested in the use of the advanced VOC ships. During the first years of its existence, the Company tended to provide practical support to the rulers with whom they had agreed lucrative trade contracts and who were seeking more control over their own borders. Thus, in the 1640s, the VOC ships supported both the Trinh-Tonkinese attack on Nguyen-Cochinchina (1642–3) and the Siamese intervention in the Malay provinces of Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat), Songkhla, Phatthalung, Patani and Kedah (between 1634 and 1649). Owing to the lack of coordination between them, these combined land–sea operations were less than successful, and in 1643 the VOC even had to endure an extremely painful defeat against

¹¹ Zoomers and Zuidervart, *Embassies of the King of Siam*.

the Nguyen galleys at the mouth of the Gianh river estuary in central Vietnam. Although the heavily armed European vessels were markedly superior on the open seas, in coastal waters in Asia they were far more vulnerable. But successful or not, the Company sought collaboration with the established political powers here just as elsewhere in Asia, in the hope of securing the most favourable conditions possible for their trade. This VOC policy boosted the stature of the regional princes of the mainland and afforded them greater financial and military flexibility, which only reinforced the trend towards continuing regional centralisation that was typical of this period.

A particular characteristic of the rulers on the mainland was that they themselves participated actively in oceanic trade, while the 'local' population remained relatively passive. The daily management of the trade sector was generally left completely to immigrant groups, who were able to attain very prominent official functions. Their lack of regional roots meant that they were heavily dependent on the prince, who for this very reason could with the greatest of ease replace them with another rival group. In Siam, for example we see alternating Iranian (c. 1655–78), European (c. 1680–8) and Chinese (after c. 1700) periods, during which prominent representatives of these groups were able to acquire the powerful position of *phraklang* (a kind of finance and foreign trade minister) or the governorship of important outposts such as Mergui or Ujang. The alternation between these groups not only led to a new commercial orientation but at times also gave rise to a cultural change that left its mark on ceremonies, fashion and culinary preferences at the relevant court. During the reign of King Narai (1657–88), the Iranian *phraklangs* Abdurrazzaq Gilani and Aqa Muhammad Astarabadi not only promoted trade relations with Iran and India, but also ensured a short but intense revival of Iranian court culture. After this it was the Greek Constantine Gerakis alias Phaulkon who, as the dominant figure at court, promoted private English and French interests. Phaulkon was followed by Afghan horse lover Husain Khan, who, as a bosom friend of the new King Phetracha (r. 1688–1703), managed to acquire increasing power in Siam.¹²

In the other kingdoms of the mainland, immigrant merchants often played a prominent, albeit short-lived, political role. In the early 1640s, the major influence of Malay and Champa Muslim merchants in Cambodia even led to the conversion of King Ramadipathi as the already

¹² Pombejra, 'Ayutthaya at the End of the Seventeenth Century', 250–73; Aubin, 'Les Persans au Siam', 95–126; van Goor, *Kooplieden, predikanten en bestuurders overzee*, 16–58; Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad', 340–63.

mentioned Ibrahim.¹³ If we look at Tonkin during the same period, it was mainly Japanese traders who held sway, with the Japanese merchant 'Resimon' playing a key role. During the eighteenth century, the role of Chinese intermediaries increased at almost all courts, with one Chinese figure in Siam – Taksin (r. 1776–82) – even making it to the position of king.

In this context, it is remarkable that the VOC, as an immigrant trader group, was both unwilling and unable to infiltrate regional state structures as deeply as these examples. Given the institutional background of the VOC, it was in fact inconceivable that its staff could serve two lords at the same time. Still, there are various examples of intermediaries who were on the payroll of the VOC and at the same time also held influential court positions. The best known of these is the Brochebourdes family of surgeons, who enjoyed considerable power in Ayutthaya. No fewer than three generations of this family (between 1670 and 1730) acted as important intermediaries between the Siamese court and the Company. Like gunners and artists, Dutch physicians, too, had particular expertise that was in demand with the princes, and they can be found not only in Japan and Siam, but everywhere in Asia as local and well-integrated intermediaries between the courts and the Company. Such intermediaries had more direct contact with the ruler in mainland Southeast Asia than they did in the more bureaucratic structure typical of China or Japan, but in this sense, they were also very dependent on his personal whims. Ultimately, it was the relatively limited trading interests of the VOC in mainland Southeast Asia that prevented these individuals becoming as powerful as the Iranians or the Chinese.

Patani, Siam and Cambodia

Bearing these more general considerations in mind, we can now briefly review the history of the VOC settlements in mainland Southeast Asia. The early interest in the Chinese market, on the one hand, and the very circuitous way of gaining access to this market, on the other, were the reasons why the Dutch predecessor companies established themselves in Patani, even founding three separate lodges, one for each company! Patani was regarded as a Chinese trading city outside China, where Japanese and other foreign traders could conduct business relatively freely. The ban on direct Chinese–Japanese trade introduced by the Ming dynasty in 1557 led to the formation of a few market centres in Southeast Asia, such as Ayutthaya, Faifo (Hoi An) and also Patani, which

¹³ Kersten, 'Cambodia's Muslim King', 1–22.

now began to focus specifically on Chinese–Japanese trade, mainly in Chinese silk and Japanese silver. It was not only Chinese silk, but also locally produced pepper that made Patani an ideal entrepôt for Dutch merchants. However, with the establishment of trade offices in Japan (1609), the Pescadores (1622) and later Taiwan (1624), as well as the conquest of Batavia (1619), the special attraction of Patani dwindled rather rapidly, all the more so because the pepper and rice capacity in the region fell short of the demand.

Although Patani was *de facto* able to operate autonomously, the authorities had a formal tribute relationship with the kingdom of Siam, also known after its capital, Ayutthaya. It is thus not surprising that the Dutch received an invitation via Patani to join a Siamese legation to China, aiming to gain direct access to the Chinese market. Although nothing came of this mission, it did initiate the first contacts between Siam and the VOC, and in 1608 it even resulted in the previously mentioned legation to the Republic and the establishment of an office in Ayutthaya that continued, albeit intermittently (it was closed during the periods 1621–4, 1629–33, 1663–4, 1705–6 and 1740–54), until 1767. Although, as in Patani, Siam's initial interest was in the Chinese silk trade, after the establishment of the VOC office in Hirado in 1609, the interest shifted to the direct trade in Siamese deerskins and ray skins to Japan, and ten years later also to the supply of mainly rice, but also coconut oil and timber, to Batavia. During the 1730s and 1740s, this trend became stronger because, firstly, the Japanese traders themselves were no longer allowed to maintain foreign contacts; and, secondly, besides Batavia itself there was also demand from Melaka and Taiwan for additional rice imports through Batavia. Both factors played key roles in the opening of a trading post in Lovek in Cambodia in 1620, but, as a result of the political instability in the region, this VOC settlement had a much more irregular and short-lived existence (1620–2, 1636–43, 1656–8 and 1664–7). Siam offered additional incentives with the supply of sappan wood and tin, which was purchased from 1642 by the VOC office in Ligor (until 1664 under the management of Melaka, and later of Ayutthaya). In Ligor, where the VOC had already opened an office in 1612, the Company acquired the export monopoly for tin, which was maintained – with an interval between 1734 and 1754 – until the closure of the trading post in 1756. However, both these products could be acquired more easily and more cheaply elsewhere: sappan wood from Burma, tin from Palembang and Melaka.

Given the similar trading profile, for the VOC, Cambodia was a reasonable alternative to the Siamese trading post. Further upstream along the Mekong, in 1641 the Company even explored possibilities for

trade in what they called *Lauwenlandt* (Laos), deep in the interior, but this spectacular expedition led by the junior merchant Gerard van Wusthof remained a one-off experiment. With the threat of exchanging Ayutthaya for Lovek in Cambodia, the Company had a considerable lever for putting pressure on the Siamese ruler, who still saw Cambodia as a rival centre of Buddhist power. Just as in Vietnam, where the VOC was able to navigate between the rivals Tring and Nguyen, the Company generally opted for the most stable principalities and thus for the greatest possible certainty that the trade agreements entered into would be honoured. In that sense, Ayutthaya was probably not the most profitable of the VOC settlements, but it was certainly one of its most stable. This was particularly true after the brief crisis in 1663 when the VOC closed its trading post and the Siamese Prince Narai was prepared, in exchange for the post reopening, to agree a new treaty with the Company, under which the two partners' desire for a monopoly was accommodated as far as possible. This is how the VOC obtained the export monopoly on deerskins and tin (in Ligor) after they had ceded a set share to the other monopoly holder, namely the Siamese prince himself. This arrangement represented a valuable privilege for the VOC, and for the Siamese prince provided the opportunity to bring this trade under greater state control.

At other locations, too, there was little chance of a free market and the VOC, like all other traders, had to deliver all its imports to the royal warehouses where the turnover and the price were determined by government officials. The VOC for its part attempted to exclude its competitors in the Japan trade by having a clause included in the 1664 agreement that Siamese ships were henceforth forbidden from making further use of Chinese crew members. The Company had in mind in particular the Chinese agents of the Zheng maritime empire that had annexed Taiwan in 1662 and that would drive the Dutch out of Cambodia in 1667.

At the end of the seventeenth century, with the loss of the trade in skins with Japan and the rice trade with Batavia and Melaka, the trade between the VOC and Siam became more than ever an exclusive business for and of the king. There was only tin from Ligor that could serve as a means of exchange in the growing trade in Chinese tea. At the same time, the VOC's trade in Indian textiles also declined as a result of the strong competition from mainly Indo-Muslim, English and French traders. On top of this, the Siamese king himself had a trading network that stretched as far as Surat, which meant that reliance on the Company for trade with India was out of the question. Under King Petracha, the focus of Siam shifted increasingly to the east: Japan, Tonkin, Manila, but most of all China, a trend that was to continue in the eighteenth century. Even so, the

contacts with Siam and Cambodia remained of interest for Dutch merchants, be it legally via Batavian citizens or other 'Dutch' private individuals, such as Bastiaan Brouwer in Manila, Samuel Baron in Tonkin or Nicolaas Bang in Ayutthaya (especially during those periods when the VOC did not have its own office), or illegally by VOC officials who engaged directly in illegal trafficking with Japan, or via some other means made use of a range of private agreements with Siam and Cambodia.

Vietnam

During the seventeenth century, Vietnam consisted of four political configurations, the two most powerful of which were formally part of the empire under the old Le dynasty, but in practice were governed by two autonomous dynasties: firstly, the Trinh in the densely populated northern areas (also called Dang Ngoai or literally 'outer region', known by the Dutch as Tonkin) around the Red River with Thang Long (Hanoi) as the administrative centre; secondly, the Nguyen along the coastal area of central Vietnam (also called Dang Trong or literally 'inner region', also known as Cochinchina and Quinam by the Dutch), with Phu Xuan as the capital and Faifo (Hoi An) as the main trading centre. At the end of the seventeenth century, both states had to contend with rival dynasties on the borders of their domains: the Trinh with the Mac principality at Cao Bang in the farthest north of Vietnam; the Nguyen with non-Vietnamese Champa in the farthest south of Vietnam. The Trinh and the Nguyen ruled over states that were quite different. The more traditional north had from ancient times focused strongly on rice production, was strongly oriented towards China and practised a Confucianist state philosophy. The Nguyen governed over a much younger state with a strong maritime and commercial orientation and in the south a strongly expanding agrarian frontier. This 'march to the south' (*Nam tien*) was probably made possible as a result of both the increasing trade revenues in Faifo and the colonisation of the southern border areas by Ming soldiers who had fled from China. The Trinh and the Nguyen were engaged in an almost permanent war with one another between 1627 and 1679, with both parties seeking aid from the VOC in the form of supplies of weapons and direct naval support.

Just as in Siam and Cambodia, the VOC's trade contacts with Vietnam were from the outset aimed at trade with Japan. During the 1630s measures imposed by the Japanese government also prevented Japanese merchants established in Vietnam from continuing to trade with their home country. In Tonkin and Quinam, too, the VOC tried to take advantage of

these fractured relationships by taking over responsibility for them itself. Although there was an office in Faifo from 1633 to 1638, the Company focused more and more on northern Tonkin, since this region had ample access to the silk that was so important for the Japanese market. In order not to jeopardise relations with the Trinh government in Tonkin, the decision was taken to close the office in Faifo where trading was difficult. Besides the importance of the Tonkinese silk, the VOC also preferred to conduct business here exclusively with an authoritarian government rather than operating in a relatively free market with numerous – mainly Chinese and Portuguese – competitors. Moreover, Tonkin was closer to China, which meant it was possible to buy gold, musk and sandalwood. There was even the possibility of trying to set up a completely new office directly on the Chinese border, as had been tried between 1661 and 1664 in Tinnam, but the Trinh leaders refused to cooperate. For them, the arrival of the VOC was, of course, a solution to the loss of the silver imports from Japan. Just as in other parts of the mainland, the VOC trade was conducted largely via the king, his officials and all kinds of other intermediaries.

In Tonkin the VOC did not pay any import or export duties, but they did have to pay a fixed amount of the silver imports to these individuals in the form of annual gifts. The import of silk was also conducted via the king or intermediaries allied to the government. It was only after this skimming off of the revenues that it was possible to buy the privilege of trading freely in Tonkin. The recurring gifts of luxury goods and military equipment offered the Trinh government additional advantages over their Nguyen rivals in the south. Once the VOC had made such a clear choice in favour of Tonkin, matters in the south got definitively out of control, and between 1641 and 1651 the Nguyen even held hostage dozens of stranded VOC officials. After they had been released, a new contract was agreed, and a lodge was opened in Faifo. However, it was closed down after a year as a result of new incidents with Prince Nguyen Phuc Tan (r. 1648–87), who continued to distrust the VOC because of its alleged northern sympathies.

At the end of the 1650s, the Tonkinese trade suffered because the Company decided to use more and more Bengali silk for the Japanese market. In the meantime, copper coins had replaced silver as the main import product. The 1670s also saw a dramatic increase in the competition from Chinese, English and French merchants. The imposition of the Japanese import ceiling in the 1680s finally meant the end of the Tonkinese silk export to Japan. The sale of other export products, such as silk garments (*pelings*), musk and ceramics could not turn the tide, and the lodge in Tonkin was eventually closed in 1700.

Burma

In a certain sense Burma (present-day Myanmar) fits less well into the pattern of trading on mainland Southeast Asia as described above. The VOC settlements established in 1634 in Syriam, Pegu, Ava and Prome, for example, were not under the direct responsibility of Batavia, but fell under the Governor of Coromandel in Pulicat. The same applied initially to the VOC office on the west coast of Burma, Arakan, that, thanks to the natural regional boundary of the Arakan Yoma and the exploitation of the eastern Ganges delta, was able to survive as an autonomous principality for a long time (until 1784). Pegu, the more maritime-oriented southern part of Burma, was also relatively strongly focused on India, a situation that developed particularly when the administrative centre was located in that area, as in the fifteenth century under the autonomous Pegu state, but also from 1546 under the new Toungoo dynasty. Just as in other parts of the mainland, the coastal areas of Burma grew in importance during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a consequence of this maritime dynamic, there was always the threat of a political split between maritime Lower Burma (Pegu) and continental Upper Burma (Ava). This last region, with its extensive rice fields in Kyaukse, was the traditional heartland of the old Burmese kingdoms. The Irrawaddy River was the central artery holding the two together. This geopolitical balancing act represented a very difficult challenge for the Burmese kings; it taught them that it was easier to impose political control downstream than upstream. However, in about 1600, it certainly looked as if combined Arakan–Portuguese armed forces would succeed in separating Pegu from the interior. However, under Anaukpetlun (r. 1605–28), ruler of the restored Toungoo dynasty, the southern provinces, including Martaban, Moulmein and Tavoy, were again incorporated into the northern region. His successor Thalun (r. 1629–48) decided in 1635 to turn his back on the coast once and for all and to settle in the new capital, Ava, with his entire government administration and court. Just as in Japan, this new inland orientation meant a choice in favour of greater political stability and tighter control and certainly not in favour of isolation. In the same year, the VOC established itself in Burma, both in the south (Syriam and Pegu) and centre (Prome) as well as in the north (Ava).

The choice in favour of Ava was also a choice for neighbouring China. Here we see that, much more than Arakan, Burma did connect with the rest of the mainland in its increasing focus on China. To the north of Ava, along the so-called Bhamo route, a trade flow was created during this period by Muslim traders and transporters (Hui), with Burmese cotton

being exchanged for Chinese copper coins. The large-scale military operations of the Qing in Yunnan – first (1658–62) against the Yung-li emperor, the last Ming successor, and then (1676–81) against Wu Sangui, one of the three rebellious feudal lords – brought many old Ming and new Qing coins into circulation. Particularly during the 1650s and 1660s, the VOC was also able to benefit from these Chinese imports, which found a good market mainly in Bengal and Coromandel. With the loss of Taiwan, just as in Tinnam in Vietnam, attempts were made in Bhamo to build a more direct relationship with China, but, just as in Tonkin, this was unacceptable to the Burmese authorities, who feared more far-reaching Chinese infiltration.

Burma was primarily important for the VOC as a market for – mainly simple – Indian textiles and red cotton yarns. To the exasperation of the VOC, the prices of imported textiles were set at a very low level by the Burmese authorities. Furthermore, to prevent smuggling, every garment imported was marked. Other sales were also hampered by very high import duties (14 per cent) as well as by need for the usual supplementary gifts to the king and all kinds of government officials. As in Siam and Tonkin, the king himself was the largest trader in Burma, leaving little room for his competitors. In addition to Chinese products such as copper coins, and also gold, the VOC received *ganza* – a copper-lead alloy used in Burma as a means of payment besides silver – and a diverse package of other Burmese goods, such as tin, teak wood, oil, ivory, long peppers, lacquer and musk. Especially for the Japanese market, there was cachou and *namrack* (liquid black lacquer). In contrast to the factories on the other side of the Malaysian Peninsula, in Burma there was never any question of a direct relationship with Japan through Japanese or Chinese intermediaries. Just like Siam and Cambodia, Burma was important as an exporter of rice, particularly to Ceylon. Arakan delivered directly to Batavia. However, in general, Burmese goods were of minor importance to the overall commerce of the VOC, and the main advantage of the settlement was the proceeds from sales which, through *respondentia* (loans on goods) to Indian merchants trading in Burma, could also be collected in Coromandel and Bengal. These proceeds reduced the need to import precious metals from Japan or Europe. At the end of the 1670s, it was decided, in spite of relatively large sales profits, to close the Burmese trading posts, probably because the Chinese gate via Bhamo remained firmly closed and it was difficult to compete with the many private Indian, European and Armenian merchants locally.

At the end of the seventeenth century, in a new atmosphere of austerity and re-assessment of the truly core tasks of the Company, all VOC trading

posts on the mainland were evaluated, and, with the exception of Siam, they were all considered unprofitable and consequently were closed. Just as at the promising start of these trading posts, this had everything to do with the adverse developments for the VOC on the Japanese and Chinese markets.¹⁴

¹⁴ For an overall survey of the VOC in Burma, see Dijk, *Seventeenth-Century Burma*.

Conclusion

Just how unique was the VOC in Asia? In attempting to answer this question, the first thing to establish is that the VOC did not act any more rationally than its Asian competitors. One crucial advantage it enjoyed was that its central organisation gave it a hitherto unparalleled trading network stretching from Amsterdam to Manila. This extensive network meant that the survival of the Company was not dependent on the events in any single region. Rather, it was the sum of a number of specific regional circumstances that contributed significantly to the Company's success and decline. Apart from understanding these regional developments in their internal cohesion, it is also important to go back to the conclusions of Part I, to reflect briefly on the VOC's economic performance, both overall and in comparison with its two main European rivals in Asia: the Portuguese Estado da India and the English East India Company. Let us start, though, by drawing some more general conclusions from the various regional chapters above, regarding, firstly, the Dutch settlement colonies in the Tropics and, secondly, the Dutch trading posts on the peripheries of the great Asian empires.

The Dutch Tropics

In the first place, a remarkable number of parallels between Java and Ceylon stand out. The VOC arrived on each of the two islands at a point in time when a relatively new inland empire (Mataram and Kandy, respectively) was trying to get a tighter grip on previously more independent coastal areas. In both cases, the rise of the coast was largely the result of external factors: the spread of Islamic states in Java and the Portuguese conquests in Ceylon. Although the coastal areas gradually came under the control of the VOC, and were thus initially in political terms not integrated with the interior, the inland rulers had the feeling that, because of the military intervention of their Dutch 'vassals', these areas did become embedded in the traditional indigenous political system. Initially, the VOC continued to feed this fiction until well into the eighteenth century

by engaging in particular contracts and/or ceremonial duties. The result was a win–win situation: the VOC could concentrate on the commercial exploitation of the trade crops, the local rulers were able to enjoy an unprecedented ritual affirmation of their rule. A similar combination of political disarmament and ritual re-arming in South India has been referred to by the anthropologist Nicholas Dirks as a ‘hollow crown’.¹ Both in Mataram and in Kandy, this quintessential Indic idea of gaining authority by losing power, led during the eighteenth century to a rethinking and at times a re-invention of the indigenous religious and cultural traditions. At the same time, the coastal regions were brought under ever stricter control ‘for the king’, thus integrating them *de jure* with the interior. But while Mataram became increasingly isolated from the exterior world, Kandy managed to intensify its ritual and religious contacts with southern India as well as with mainland Southeast Asia. In short, although the VOC initially disrupted the process of the integration of coast and interior, during the eighteenth century the Company strengthened its own control over the coastal population, while also bringing it in a ritual sense closer to the court in the interior. This court increasingly shrugged off its political responsibilities and indeed began to resemble Dirks’ model of the ‘hollow crown’, which in its ritual sophistication compares rather well with Geertz’s more famous – and equally toothless – ‘theatre state’.²

The inclination to take stronger control of the coastal areas was given a new impetus in the middle of the eighteenth century as a result of a combination of native uprisings and a new, ‘modern’ drive for reform, two phenomena that reinforced one another. The Ceylon revolts of 1734 and 1760 had much in common with the Chinese-Javanese revolts of 1740–3. In both instances, the population seems to have outgrown the available agricultural resources. The revolts were also to some extent a protest against cultural imperialism and the *corvée* system imposed by the Company. In both regions, the popular revolts resulted in more intensive regulation and registration – the latter much more strongly in evidence in Ceylon than in Java. The military interventions that followed the revolts and that continued during the second half of the eighteenth century were only partly intended to strengthen domestic control. What was more important was the fear that the British might exploit the regions’ internal unrests. The final conquest of Java and Ceylon was therefore in both cases largely also an effect of the late-eighteenth-century increase in British imperial power – a primarily European, Atlantic and South Asian success story.

¹ Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*. ² Geertz, *Negara*.

It goes without saying that there were also important regional differences in the backgrounds to these uprisings: in the case of Java there was, for example, too little rather than too much control over the rural regions; and in Ceylon the farmers were protesting against excessively strict regulations on land use. However, the obvious differences do not detract from the fact that both cases were a reaction to the same VOC policy of supporting the traditional order, to then exploit it to extract commercial crops through forced labour.

It was virtually impossible for the VOC to operate in Java or Ceylon without the cooperation of ethnic minorities, namely the Chinese and, albeit to a lesser extent, the Chetties. These two groups served as crucial intermediaries who took care of the retail trade and also organised the vital distribution of commercial products within the monopolies to and from the VOC depots, and outside these monopolies to and from the domestic and foreign markets. Indeed, in terms of agricultural exploitation, the Chetties in Ceylon played a much more limited role than the Chinese, who had themselves exploited a large part of the Ommelanden and therefore kept much more of a finger in the pie. The Company was thus able to entrust the exploitation of the Ommelanden and to some extent also of the Pasisir to the Chinese, while in Ceylon, without such energetic intermediaries, they opted for either stricter registration of the landed community or agreements with the traditional landed elites. In fact, the latter was also the case in the Javanese interior of the Priangan and later also in the *Vorstenlanden*, the 'royal domains' of Central Java.

Beyond these two tropical islands, there are remarkable similarities between the position of the VOC in the Malay regions and in Malabar. Along both littorals, the Company's prime concern was pepper, and it had access to one main storage depot in each region – respectively Melaka and Cochin – both of which had been seized from the Portuguese and then rigorously restructured. In both regions, there were significant difficulties in enforcing the pepper contracts; some states remained hostile (Aceh and Calicut, for example), and during the eighteenth century there was also the problem of the emergence of strong new coastal states (such as Travancore and Johore-Riau) and rapidly increasing British competition.

What brought all these tropical regions together was the relative dominance of the VOC. This was most directly visible in and around the production centres of the Maluku Islands and the colonial cities such as Batavia and Colombo, Melaka and Cochin. Whereas its control over Java and Ceylon became tighter, the Company came under increasing pressure from rival powers in the Malaysian Peninsula and in Malabar. From the perspective of colonial control, the Malukus seemed to be following

the example of Java and Ceylon, even though, as early as the seventeenth century, the dispute was settled there by brute force in favour of a colonial regime that could directly enforce the production of spices. However, underlying the peace and stability on this extreme edge of the Eurasian world was the imposition of a scorched-earth policy: a price that the VOC, as a rational trade organisation, was fully aware of and that, for two centuries, generated massive profits for the Company.

Among Asian Empires

The influence of the VOC in India and Iran was by comparison relatively marginal, and the Company could do little but go along with the rhythm of the existing economic interaction between coast and interior. In Iran, the Portuguese operating from Hormuz (1515–1622) ensured that the relatively autonomous development of the coastal regions continued unabated. The Indian subcontinent had witnessed the emergence of autonomous coastal states during the fifteenth century, such as the sultanates of Gujarat, Bengal and Golconda. As an effect of this development, Arakan and the Nayaka principalities in Coromandel also flourished. From the end of the sixteenth century, most of these areas were again incorporated into the great continental empires of the Safavids and the Mughals. Just as in Java and Ceylon, the Company was neither able nor willing to disturb this integration process, but rather aimed to use it to maximise the benefit to itself.

Most regions of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal have in common that they were more or less part of one large South Asian world economy operating from the very densely populated core regions of the Mughal Empire – Gujarat, Hindustan and Bengal – that exercised a strong magnetic force on the outer areas. This effect was most apparent in the almost permanent flows of precious metals to India, as well as in the extensive networks of Indian merchants from Astrakhan to Java. Owing to the open structure of the Mughal Empire, the VOC was able to participate fully in this Asian trade circuit, albeit in exchange for large levies on precious metals and a strong dependence on Indian intermediaries. In the Mughal core regions, the VOC relied entirely on the effective functioning of the market economy; outside these areas they were at times willing and able to use military means in order to gain more direct control of the production process. This was the case in South Coromandel, which also reflected the increased control exercised by the Company over Ceylon and Malabar. Because of the more fickle, diffuse nature of their economies and the continuing predominance of nomadic raiding, more control was neither desirable nor possible in Iran and Arabia. However, these

relatively sparsely populated areas were also well within the range of the Mughal economy, which automatically attracted the VOC to the area. In addition to silk and coffee, the intention was to tap the lucrative east-bound flow of precious metals, mainly with the help of the spice monopoly, but also, and above all, through partnerships with regional governments and/or Indian traders. The disintegration of the Mughal and Safavid Empires suddenly necessitated much greater political and military investment, which the VOC in any case neither wanted nor was able to provide.

Although we do not intend to discuss the disintegration of the Mughal Empire in depth, it has to be said that this was primarily a product of its own economic success. The more peripheral regions in particular experienced enormous economic growth during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a result of which the regional rulers were increasingly able to keep the central government at a distance and to reinforce their own position. In the south, it was the warlords in Mysore, Hyderabad and Maharashtra (i.e. the Marathas) who profited from this development; in the north, it was mainly the Afghans, the Sikhs, the Jats and the governors of the former Mughal provinces of Awadh and Bengal who were increasingly able to set the tone. This new political situation was accompanied by an increase in military conflicts, which also impacted trade relations between the various growth regions, albeit often temporarily. The eighteenth-century picture is therefore one of enormous regional diversity: the central areas around Delhi and Agra, the Carnatic and North Coromandel suffered increasing economic hardship, while peripheral imperial areas, such as Bengal and Maharashtra, enjoyed continued economic expansion.

Unlike the VOC, the British were able to benefit from this process of regional centralisation. They were prepared to invest heavily in the new regional regimes, diplomatically, financially and, if necessary, also militarily. The rise of the colonial metropolises of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras was a direct result of this new regional dynamic, in which India unfolded, as it were, from the drier marsh areas of the interior to the wetter and relatively fertile areas of the coasts. Both the Mughals and the Dutch could only stand on the sidelines and watch how the subcontinent was smoothly transformed into the bridgehead of British global power.

If we now take into account the two centuries of the history of the VOC's presence around the South China Sea, we can see that here, too, the Company was highly dependent on the internal developments in the two most important economies in the region: China and Japan. In terms of size alone, the Chinese economy dominated inter-regional trade in the area. Just like the authorities in the surrounding regions, the VOC, too,

wanted to profit from China, either as a sales outlet or as the producer of commodities, primarily silk, tea and porcelain. These authorities were at the same time petrified that they would be overrun by hordes of Chinese immigrants, a fear that from time to time led to pogroms against the Chinese. Even the Chinese authorities had an ambivalent relationship with their own economy: prosperity is good, but it must, of course, remain manageable! This hyperdynamic of the Chinese economy peaked during the eighteenth century when, following the Manchu conquest, China underwent an enormous economic boom period and more and more Chinese migrants working as merchants, land workers, mine workers and artisans gave an enormous impetus to the neighbouring regional economies. Losing momentum, the VOC had at that point in time more or less withdrawn to the archipelago, from where they were able to share in the benefit of the Chinese expansion from a relatively safe distance.

In spite of the early fascination with China and the importance of the Chinese economy, during the seventeenth century the VOC's focus was still primarily on Japan. This was to some extent a consequence of the internal Chinese power struggles, which were not conducive to the market conditions in the country. It was, however, the continuing demand for precious metals that caused attention to turn to Japan. The VOC's strategies could only react to Japanese policy. They tried time and again to gain access to the Chinese silk market as a means of acquiring more Japanese precious metals. When this proved unsuccessful, the regional markets that were able to rely on close relations with China – in particular Patani and Siam – were the next resort. The closing off of Japan acted as a catalyst in this process because the Company – as it happens, together with the Zheng Chinese – was able to take the place of the now slowly but surely diminishing diaspora of Japanese trade in Cambodia and Vietnam. From 1640 to 1660, Siamese and Taiwanese deerskins and Vietnamese silk were the main currency for trade with Japan. After the loss of Taiwan, the 1660s were a time of fervent new attempts to force an alternative access route to China: directly via Fuzhao, by way of the difficult land route via Bhamo, or along the Vietnamese coast via Tinnam. When, at the end of the century, Japan began to increasingly protect its stocks of precious metals, this put an end to the preparedness of the Dutch to maintain expensive trading posts all around the South China Sea, particularly when it also became apparent that Indian silk and textiles could be used for the copper trade with Japan. In an environment of reforms and economies that was typical of the Company at the end of the seventeenth century, it made sense to concentrate fully on its own possessions

in the Indonesian archipelago and to use Chinese traders in Batavia, who in a sense brought China to them. In the macro-economic trade-offs at about the end of the seventeenth century, China and Japan declined in importance, while the emphasis shifted to India. This changed only with the sudden rise in importance of the tea trade, as a result of which direct trade with China came sharply back into focus. Establishing itself in Batavia, the eighteenth-century VOC operated more as a regional ruler than as a flexible trading organisation, and consequently became less able or willing to respond to the new economic developments in these regions.

Among European Empires

Following the approach of Part II regarding the Dutch Atlantic empire, in this part we will also make a few comparative reflections on the economic performance of the VOC in Asia. It should not be forgotten that the VOC was a trading company and thus should also be evaluated as such. What was the VOC's role in Eurasian trade as a whole and how does it compare with its two main rivals, the Estado da India and the English East India Company?

As mentioned already, initially the VOC followed in the footsteps of the Portuguese: it built a headquarters of its own and captured some of the most important commercial port cities to set up a dynamic intra-Asiatic trade circuit. What made the VOC different from the Estado, however, was its preferred practice of operating the entire commercial circuit, from monopolistic purchasing or even production in Asia to sales in both Asia and Europe, while, incidentally, also taking care of the circuit's administration and protection. Although the Portuguese crown also monopolised the Asia trade, it was soon privatised by granting various concessions to private parties. Hence, even when the crown faced increasing financial problems, the Portuguese Empire could be quite flexible in preserving its resilience since there were numerous groups, mostly with mixed ethnic backgrounds, that one way or another participated in the empire and continued to make profits at its multiple regional branches in private hands. Although in economic terms the *official* Estado gave way to the Dutch, in cultural terms the famous Portuguese 'shadow empire' had much more of an impact on Asia than the Dutch, basically because of the predominant practice of *mestizaje* as well as the success of the Catholic mission, both of which also made Portuguese a major lingua franca of the Indian Ocean, even in most of the Dutch settlements. What a cultural success story this was! In contrast, the Dutch language made hardly any enduring inroads in Asia, not even in the Dutch nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonies.

The English approach was somewhere in between the Portuguese and Dutch models. From the very beginning, the EIC tended to give more leeway to private initiative, both at home, in the case of leasing ships from private shipbuilders, and in Asia, where the intra-Asian country trade was increasingly left to private traders. The home conditions for the EIC were also markedly different from those of the VOC. The management of the VOC overlapped considerably with the political elites of the Republic, whereas the directors of the EIC were just one of many pressure groups in an economy where the interests of Atlantic trade and manufacturing were far better represented than in the Dutch Republic.

Now, what about the economic performance of the three European empires?³ Firstly, it is important to stress that, during the three centuries following Vasco da Gama's entry into the Indian Ocean, the bulk of all the Asia trade with Europe indeed went via the Cape of Good Hope through Portuguese, Dutch and British hands – by and large, the first dominating the sixteenth century, the second the seventeenth century and the third the eighteenth century. Although the overland trade across the Levant and through Russia continued, for the long-distance connections with South, Southeast and East Asia, the overland routes increasingly gave way to the route around the Cape. If we look at the total volume of trade in Asia, it is interesting to observe that the Dutch used fewer ships for the same volume. With their 700–800 tons, the Dutch *Oostindischevaarders* were much bigger than the vessels of the British. At least during the sixteenth century, the Portuguese built even bigger ships, but the Portuguese ships were reduced in size again in later centuries. If we look at the total number of ships that departed for Asia between 1500 and 1795, almost half were Dutch (4,785 out of 10,781), a quarter were British (2,690) and under 15 per cent were Portuguese (1,325).

The same goes for human resources: the VOC with almost a million people again taking half of the total, the Portuguese Estado coming second with around 20 per cent and the English EIC bringing up the rear with a mere 15 per cent, although the English figure may be based on navigational personnel only. The high Dutch figure may be partly due to the need to compensate for a relatively high mortality rate among Dutchmen, but the main reason behind the high Dutch number is the fact that a large proportion of the Portuguese and the British activities in Asia was delegated to non-official individuals; in the case of the Portuguese, these were mostly people with a mestizo background, who were maybe therefore relatively immune to tropical diseases. All this

³ The quantitative data in the following section are almost entirely based on the best comparative study in this field: de Vries, 'Connecting Europe and Asia', 35–106.

suggests that the VOC was faced with much higher overhead costs in Asia than the Portuguese and British, who gave much more leeway to private trade.

Insofar as the efficiency of Dutch shipping is concerned, it is quite telling that only 3 per cent of vessels failed to arrive at their destination, whereas the Portuguese lost a staggering 16.4 per cent! Apart from losses due to shipwreck or violent capture, about a quarter of the ships were not intended to return to Europe at all, as they mainly served the intra-Asia trade, in particular at colonial hubs such as Goa and Batavia. For example, in its heyday the VOC maintained a permanent Asian fleet of about 100 ships. Overall, throughout the eighteenth century, the intra-Asia trade declined in comparison with the direct trade connections. Of all the ships departing, about three-quarters returned home.

The total volume of the return trade from Asia to Europe between 1500 and 1800 increased steadily, at an annual rate of 1.10 per cent. Calculating on the basis of about 2,000 tons at the beginning of the period, Jan de Vries arrives at a growth rising to about 50,000 tons per annum at the end of our period, reaching a total of 100 million tons or one pound of Asian commodities per inhabitant of Europe.⁴ There were only a few setbacks: in the middle of the sixteenth century and during the 1620s, 1630s, 1690s and 1740s. At the beginning, pepper and spices were the main commodities, but these decreased in importance during the seventeenth century, although for the Dutch, spices continued to deliver about a quarter of the VOC's revenue. From about the 1650s spices increasingly gave way to Indian textiles, amounting at the end of the century to 43 per cent of VOC sales and an astonishing 75 per cent of EIC sales. As the mercantilist English/British state increasingly protected the textile production at home, the bulk of the textile imports were re-exported abroad, partly to the Dutch Republic, which, compared with the rest of Europe, retained a fairly open economy.

Apart from textiles, Arabian and Javanese coffee and Chinese tea became the most important imports during the eighteenth century, although the slave-produced coffee from the Caribbean and South America was cheaper. As the British gained increasing control of the Indian markets, they also gained the edge in the China trade as they could start using opium to barter against tea.

The eighteenth-century position of India for the British compares quite well with the seventeenth-century position of Japan for the Dutch: both

⁴ Although this is impressive, de Vries also points out that the entire annual volume of late-eighteenth-century Europe-Asia trade could be carried by one or two modern container ships. See de Vries, 'Connecting Europe and Asia', 67.

regions provided the Europeans with crucial alternatives to the use of American precious metals for the Asia trade. As a third of all precious metals entering Europe from the New World were transported towards Asia, it had always been crucial for Europeans to gain access to the Asian markets. But, after they had gained political dominance in Bengal in 1757, the British were able to reduce the amount of silver going to Asia from 72 per cent of their exports to a mere 27 per cent in 1764–1800!

On comparing the economic performances of the two North-West European companies, one may observe that from the start the VOC was a much bigger enterprise than its English counterpart. As mentioned already, from its very beginning, the latter left much more room for private initiative – most probably *not* out of free will but, as in the case of the Portuguese crown, because of a lack of resources. Indeed, the Portuguese also had to leave a great deal of the Asia trade in private hands and thus it remained moderately profitable for the many who, officially, but in particularly unofficially, participated in it.⁵ Compared with the Portuguese and the English, the huge apparatus of the VOC was less flexible and found it harder to respond to market developments.

Interestingly, whereas in Asia the English/British administration took a lenient stance towards free trade, at home it was very much ‘Britain first’. The British government increasingly closed the domestic market to Indian textiles in order to protect its own industry that had started to produce imitations of Asian textiles. At the same time, it increasingly exported its Asian and its own manufactured textiles both to Europe and to its colonies in Africa and the New World. In contrast, despite the VOC’s ongoing monopolies in Asia, in the Dutch Republic itself an open economy was maintained, even importing many Indian *and* English manufactured textiles from England.

As a result of this situation in Asia and Europe, we may conclude that, compared with the Dutch, the British could probably buy their goods in Asia at lower transaction costs and thus with higher profit margins. At the same time, they could sell these goods in a much wider, global market, which included their colonial hinterland in the Atlantic. The Dutch happily retained their Asian monopolies because these continued to deliver huge profits to a privileged class of regents who continued to call the shots in the Dutch Republic and who had no interest whatsoever in stimulating the domestic industry. Of course, the Dutch had their own textile manufacturers and print shops, but these found it increasingly difficult to compete on the market. The Republic continued to have

⁵ For this, see Boyajian, *Portuguese Trade in Asia*.

a relatively efficient financial and economic infrastructure. Although it also continued to maintain a relatively high status in the natural sciences, what it lacked was the practical drive to make these advantages more useful. When, at the end of the eighteenth century, the British started to demonstrate that they could make effective use of science on the work floor, the Dutch were simply too late to follow suit as they were enmeshed in devastating wars, first against the English, then against the French.⁶

In these military confrontations, too, the VOC had clearly lost the initiative. Whereas the British were able to bring a more specialised navy and a more permanent sepoy army into operation in Asia, the VOC continued to rely for too long on their own trade vessels as well as rash, improvised methods of mobilisation. Indeed, by the middle of the eighteenth century, it was not only textiles and opium, but also the huge military potential of the Indian subcontinent that delivered the British their Asian empire. So whereas England could fruitfully build on its territorial possessions in Asia to become a global power, the Dutch Empire in Asia increasingly became an expensive liability that actually hindered the development of a competitive domestic economy.

⁶ Mokyr, 'The Industrial Revolution and the Netherlands', 503–20.

Coda

Holland, this miracle of a republic, has only one driving force – the commercial spirit – and I should like to read a history of this spirit: how it succeeded the spirit of the feudal wars, transplanted itself from America and Asia to Europe and created the spirit of a new age. It was not identical with the spirit of exploration: Portugal and Spain did not exploit their discoveries; it was [the spirit of] a new European economy, to which a poor, needy, industrious republic raised itself out of the marshes. And what a great concatenation of circumstances accompanied Holland's rise to good fortune – to the good fortune of Europe! Everyone learned from the Dutch; the same spirit spread everywhere: to England with its Navigation Acts, to France, Sweden, Denmark, etc.

Johann Gottfried Herder¹

Having made this extended voyage along the margins of the Old and New Worlds, what can be said about the impact of Dutch expansion on the rest of the world? Just as in the conclusion to Part I, where we primarily discussed the impact of these worlds on the Netherlands, we will make a distinction between the economic and cultural dimensions. Next, we will take up again the issue of the Empire's Dutchness as raised in the Introduction of the book and ask ourselves whether there are any particular ingredients that stand out to make the Dutch case different from other empires. We will finish with a brief note on some of the present-day moral issues to do with the Dutch Empire.

Economic Impact in East and West

The effect of Dutch expansion on Africa, Asia and the New World varied from region to region and cannot, therefore, be summarised in a few short sentences. We can say that in Asia the impact was limited. The Asian products that the Dutch shipped back to the fatherland were generally not substantially different from the goods produced for the Asian market. At most, the demand from Europe diversified and

¹ Herder, *Journal meiner Reise*, 87.

broadened the existing range of products. In India, more and more different types of textiles were produced that would otherwise not have been made without this European demand. The Maluku Islands, Ceylon and the Ommelanden of Batavia were an exception to this rule. In these regions, the VOC had a strong grip on the production of spices, sugar and coffee, directly or indirectly; here the Company acted as a true colonial power. Elsewhere in Asia the VOC traders simply had to stand in line with Asian traders. What they contributed there comprised in part other Asian goods, and in part – still – a large amount of minted and unminted precious metals. This eastwards flow of precious metals was far from being a new phenomenon – it was something even the Romans had complained about – but it is indisputable that the flow increased strongly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that much of this was attributable to the activities of the VOC. Although difficult to quantify, the increased flow of money promoted the monetisation of the Asian economies, in particular that of China and India. The increased money supplies made it possible for these Asian economies, which were already benefiting from the increased sales opportunities for their products in Europe, to develop even further. What the VOC contributed to these economies was a combination of extra trading opportunities and an additional supply of American and Japanese precious metals. Where they were successful in controlling the distribution channels of the money supplies, the Asian empires were also able to benefit from them. In this sense the Netherlands can be said to have contributed to the stability and prosperity of the early-modern Asian political economies, in particular those of India and China, but with the exception of those territories that had been taken over by the VOC.

In the latter regions – Java, Ceylon, Taiwan and the Maluku Islands – the Dutch presence was of a completely different nature. Here, new areas were cultivated and market crops were introduced, for which new markets were sought. The extent to which these developments benefited the local population can, however, be questioned. It is in any event clear that the monopolistic tendencies of the VOC meant that the economies of Java and the Maluku Islands were less and less able to maintain independent contact with the surrounding economies of the Indian Ocean. The cities annexed by the VOC outside these areas, such as Makassar, Banten and Melaka, also evolved from well-integrated hubs of inter-regional maritime trade into buying and selling offices working primarily for the Company. In Java and Ceylon, the vigorous actions of the VOC in the coastal areas rendered the integration between coast and interior that occurred elsewhere in Asia impossible. As a result, Mataram and Kandy

became relatively isolated kingdoms. On the Maluku Islands, the scorched-earth policy meant that Dutch influence was even more drastic.

Anyone who today claims that the VOC monopoly was beneficial for the Republic also has to realise that the depopulation of Banda was a direct consequence of that monopoly. Although a number of ports under VOC control benefited from the booming trade with China during the eighteenth century, we, following Anthony Reid, can conclude that, insofar as the Indonesian archipelago was concerned, the VOC played a significant role in bringing the previously so flourishing Age of Commerce to a close.

In Western Africa, the Dutch presence was only marginal, and the same applied to the consequences of Dutch expansion there. The debate on the effects of the slave trade may well still be ongoing, but the Dutch contribution appears to have been too minor to have any great effect. In the southernmost tip of Africa, Dutch expansion did bring about change as the VOC started a new settlement colony there. But, because of the small number of European immigrants, the effects remained relatively limited for the first century and a half. This was even more true of the short-lived Dutch expansion in North America.

European and Dutch expansion had their most dramatic effect in the Caribbean region. As a relatively tolerant and free country, the Netherlands – along with England – introduced what was paradoxically the most efficient form of unfree labour, which contrasted starkly with the situation on the labour market at home. This contrast was less extreme in the colonies of Portugal and Spain, because slavery still existed in the respective parent countries until well into the eighteenth century. In France and Germany, too, feudal relations were still common in large parts of the countryside between 1500 and 1800, and the same applied to Eastern Europe. In all these countries, the domestic labour market was less remote from overseas slavery than in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In any event, both the Caribbean islands and the plantation colonies on the mainland looked completely different in 1800 from how they appeared at the start of Dutch colonisation. Although Suriname had been in English hands for some years before the Dutch conquest, the number of plantations and the number of African slaves initially remained limited. In about 1800, Suriname had hundreds of plantations, about 50,000 slaves and some 4,000 freemen, half of whom were white. The number of the original peoples in the colony had reduced sharply, and there was even less of the indigenous past to be found on the Dutch islands in the region. There it was not the slaves but the free people who were in the majority, and there were many more of them than at the time of the Spanish conquest. And what applied to Suriname and the smaller

neighbouring colonies of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice was even more the case for the six Netherlands Antilles. These islands changed completely as a result of the Dutch expansion. At the start of the seventeenth century they were still almost uninhabited, but by about 1800 there were 22,000 slaves, 5,000 free people of colour and 9,000 ex-Europeans living there. Immigration had changed the islands beyond recognition, while in the Dutch plantation colonies on the mainland of South America, this applied only to the strip of land along the coast and the upper reaches of the rivers.

Although quantitatively not insignificant, the Dutch slave trade in Asia had much less impact on the existing state of affairs. In about 1700, Dutch Asia (including the Cape) had no fewer than 60,000 slaves, who were mainly bought via Asian channels and deployed in line with Asian practices, primarily on a more limited scale for household tasks, but also, in a few cases, more massively for work on the plantations and in the mines of the Indonesian archipelago. Overall, slaves did not play a preponderant part in agricultural production, but they did dominate the economies of the main colonial cities of Batavia, Colombo, Melaka, and Cochin. But even here it is questionable whether the Dutch practice was very different from that in other cities in Southeast Asia that had to contend with a structural shortage of manpower. Certainly, in comparison with the Atlantic world, the slave economy of the Indian Ocean was not a European innovation, let alone a Dutch export product.

As in the case of its horrific exploitation of slaves, why the Republic invested so many human lives, and so much money and energy, in overseas expansion? For spices, silk and cotton from Asia and gold, coffee and sugar from the Atlantic? None of these products was essential to Dutch society or the Dutch economy. This question is all the more pressing given that these commodities from Asia and the Atlantic region demanded such a high price in terms of human lives. This toll was probably the highest for products from Asia. It has already been indicated that a large minority of the million seafarers did not return home alive. Combined with the relatively small volume of trade with Asia, the mortality rate per kilo of merchandise must have been extremely high. In the Atlantic, the mortality among Africans, American Indians and Europeans in the tropical parts of the New World was barely lower than that among seafarers and soldiers in Asia, but lower per kilo of merchandise, because the New World supplied mainly bulk products to Europe. In the Atlantic region, European expansion, with its degrading slave trade and slavery, meant that people in some parts of Europe could smoke, eat more sweet-tasting foodstuffs and drink coffee more cheaply than would otherwise have been possible. Without exports from Asia, the households of the

wealthy bourgeoisie in the Netherlands and Europe would have had less porcelain and chintz, and fewer spices. It took almost 200 years before this situation of one-sided exploitation would evoke mass alienation, and the Netherlands was certainly not at the forefront of this movement.

In England, on the other hand, as early as the second half of the eighteenth century, a public debate began on the scandalous self-enrichment of the merchant elite and oppression of non-Europeans by a relatively small number of colonial settlers in the Indies. However, the loudest protests were against the Atlantic slave trade and slavery in general. In England, the Industrial Revolution and the economic growth it engendered had created a new middle class, which began to take ever more vigorous action against the inhumane treatment of African slaves on board English ships and on plantations in the British colonies in the Atlantic region. Many opponents of slavery and the slave trade had left the Church of England and become Baptists, Methodists or Quakers, and these new religious communities sent many missionaries to British colonies, where they converted large numbers of slaves. On their return, these former missionaries regaled their fellow believers in England, Scotland and Wales with colourful stories of life on the West Indian plantations. This allowed large swathes of people in the farthest corners of the UK to imagine the horrors of the slave trade and slavery. It was no wonder that the *Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade* founded in 1787 was able to count on the wide support of the British people. There was no subject on which so many petitions were sent to the House of Commons as the abolition of the slave trade and later of slavery. In France, there was much less public interest in abolitionism, although slavery was abolished as early as 1794 in the face of revolutionary radicalism, before being re-introduced by Napoleon in 1802 without any significant public protest.

There was no major abolition movement in the Netherlands. The whole issue of slavery interested only a few intellectuals and vicars. The Protestant church in the Netherlands sent no missionaries to the West Indies, and its Roman Catholic counterpart, which had many converts among the slave population of the Netherlands Antilles, had its own emancipation problems in the Republic, and so remained silent on this issue. The German Unity of the Brethren, who did send missionaries to the Dutch plantation colonies, had no base in the Netherlands. It was not until after the French invasion that the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself became the subject of debate in The Hague, and consequently everything remained as it was. The Patriots' new constitution made no mention of plans to abolish the slave trade and slavery, the colonies now having fallen into British hands.

With its inaction, the Republic allowed the moment when it could have been the first country to abolish the slave trade and slavery to pass. This would have made economic sense, because by the end of the eighteenth century it was only the Dutch slave trade that shrank and only the Dutch plantation colonies that had such a weak economic basis. Paradoxically, it was England, with the largest, fastest growing and most profitable slave trade, that was the first country to abolish initially the slave trade (1806) and later also slavery (1833). The explanation for this remarkable paradox lay in the fact that the economy of England was much more dynamic than that of the Netherlands, and England had many other lucrative opportunities that it could offer the people (and their money) who previously had been dependent on the slave trade and the overseas plantation economy.

The abolition debate at the end of the eighteenth century can be regarded as a touchstone of modernity. England, France, Denmark and the United States led the way; Spain, Portugal, Brazil and the Netherlands followed. The abolition of slavery in the Dutch colonies did not take effect until 1 July 1863. It will certainly have been a contributing factor that the non-Western world was a saving grace for the Netherlands. As the Netherlands was increasingly forced to defend itself commercially within Europe, the colonies – where competitors could be excluded – grew in importance. The Dutch elite at the time firmly believed that rich countries may be in a position to entertain all kinds of fashionable philanthropic whims, such as the abolition of the slave trade, but the Netherlands could not afford such a luxury, even though the slave trade was no longer a significant factor in the country.

Cultural Impact in East and West

In Part I, we discussed at length the Dutch contribution to early-modern globalisation in the field of cartography, science and painting. Many of these influences, however, cannot be isolated and are difficult to trace back specifically to the designation 'Dutch'. It would be more appropriate to refer to them as European influences that reached the rest of the world through the channels of the VOC and the WIC. Yet, during the seventeenth century, the Republic played a prominent role in the creation of what would later be termed European or even modern characteristics. Contemporaries were also well aware of this, as is shown by the cited observations in 1769 of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder that launched this coda. Here we are thinking of two elements of this so-called modernity, the contours of which were already visible in the Republic, and for which the overseas possessions served as the earliest

testing ground. Both are direct consequences of the new interest in the Book of Nature, as expressed especially in the Republic in the endless controversies between ministers, philosophers and scholars that the historian Jonathan Israel refers to as the Radical Enlightenment.² We are referring here to the idea of ‘natural’ peoples, on the one hand, and ‘natural’ civil rights and tolerance, on the other, the first of which mainly affected the Asian and the second specifically the Atlantic world. Let us take a brief look at both.

Insofar as the first concept is concerned, we can say that the VOC attempted to classify people into ethnic categories in the cities under its control. Registering ethnic origins was a way of gaining control over the population and preventing the indigenous people from uniting against the Company. Although this ethnic registration was the result of a pragmatic divide-and-rule policy, we also observe that it was accepted that every ‘nation’ has its own traditions and customs, and that these should be respected. We have also been able to conclude that ethnic registration in cities such as Batavia and Colombo was far from watertight. It was mainly an exercise on paper that failed to take account of the then common practice of continuous ethnic miscegenation. One may wonder, though, whether this policy was that different from that in other Asian cities, where ethnic identity was important in an administrative sense, but did not indicate any rigid, intrinsic classification. It is true that ethnic registration in the nineteenth-century European colonies took on a dynamic of its own that was to lead to intensive forms of social engineering, but the cautious steps taken in this direction by the VOC in its own areas of Java, Ceylon and Taiwan may have had little overall effect and did not deviate greatly from the general practice throughout Asia.

Insofar as civil rights are concerned, the importance of the Republic and New Amsterdam as a source of inspiration for American civil rights has been much discussed in recent years. We have already pointed out the ideological significance of van den Enden and the role of the Republic as a springboard for the Pilgrim Fathers and other ‘idealistic’ settlers. It should also be noted, however, that these influences developed mainly outside the official channels of the Republic and the Company. It was in spite of rather than thanks to the efforts of the Dutch authorities that something of a democratic Atlantic momentum emerged here. At the same time, there was such a phenomenon as a Dutch republican model that emphasised the ‘natural’ role of citizens and aimed to significantly limit royal influence. This Dutch idea enjoyed its greatest success not in the colonies, but in England, in the form of the Glorious Revolution of

² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

1688: the successful Dutch invasion that made Stadtholder William III King of England, Scotland and Ireland – an often forgotten success story of Dutch expansion overseas. Despite such ‘democratic’ tendencies, on both sides of the Channel, the companies wanted to have nothing to do with civil rights; in Asia they would only undermine the monopoly system, and in the New World granting such rights would lead to an intolerable weakening of the already-fragile colonial authority. In the case of the Dutch, this certainly had less to do with the fear that the free settlers would break a monopoly on trade than it did with a colonial hierarchy that was characterised by enormous inequality between the numbers of free people and those who were not free.

The same applied to ideas about tolerance. The directors of the companies were more likely to suffer problems of conscience because they did not impose Calvinism on everyone rigorously than because they treated the various religious minorities unfairly. The official policy endorsed the importance of the missions and did not allow any other religious truth than Calvinism. A high degree of tolerance, at any rate in the Iberian colonies, was first and foremost a necessity: how else could a small nation maintain its position? The tolerant climate in Dutch Brazil towards the Jewish community there was far less a matter of principle than a strategy to attract Jewish merchants and financiers to Brazil. The tolerance shown towards the Chinese in Batavia was equally motivated by strategic considerations: there happened to be a need for a prosperous middle class that could be counted on to exploit the colony together with the Dutch. The famed Dutch tolerance overseas mainly came down to a policy motivated by pragmatism.³ There was a strong contrast between the tolerance of a few radical scholars in the Republic and the country’s overseas practices. Again, Dutch practices were no different from practices in Asia, where the early-modern empires boasted a long tradition of cosmopolitanism in which religious minorities were tolerated and even privileged. There was nothing the Asians could learn from the Netherlands in this respect!

What more can we say about the cultural influences in the West? Portugal, Spain and England were at the forefront here, because these countries were responsible for establishing the principal colonisation projects in the New World. It is no wonder that almost the whole of North America speaks English, while South America speaks Spanish and Portuguese. These languages also brought other cultural elements to the New World, such as Catholicism and the different variants of Protestantism, as well as European norms and values relating to family

³ See also Israel and Schwartz, *The Expansion of Tolerance*.

structure, justice, economy, art and architecture. This cultural transfer remained very limited in the Dutch (and also English) plantation colonies in the Caribbean region, and after the middle of the seventeenth century these were the only kinds of colonies held by the Netherlands, where the vast majority of the slave owners had little interest in converting their slaves to Christianity, let alone in their education or language learning. That the slaves usually had totally different views about God, family formation, private property and much more did not seem to matter to the slave owners in the Dutch plantation colonies as long as the slaves did their work. This attitude did not change until the nineteenth century, i.e. in the last decades before the abolition of slavery, when both government and planters regarded Christian missions as an instrument to prepare the slaves for a life without slavery. Only the relatively small number of slaves on Curaçao were christened earlier, albeit not by missionaries of the official Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands but by Roman Catholic missionaries from the mainland of Spanish America.

It has to be said, therefore, that the direct cultural influence of the Republic on the colonies was limited. This should come as no surprise: culturally, the influence of the world on the Netherlands was much more significant than that of the Netherlands on the world, or, to use Herder's remarkable quote once again, the Dutch Republic created the spirit of a new age, by transplanting itself *from America and Asia back to Europe*. As we have seen in Part I, the confrontation with other cultures played a crucial role in shaping Dutch identity as it reached maturity during the Golden Age. In that sense, this cosmopolitan Republic would indeed leave its mark on the further development of a modern bourgeois civilisation, which would not gain a grip on the rest of the world until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A Dutch Empire?

Let us briefly return to the question raised in the Introduction, but now try to use the insights arising from the previous pages. What was specifically Dutch about the Dutch empire? To start in the West, the various regions of the Dutch Atlantic Empire exhibited a relatively high degree of economic interdependence compared with the colonies of the other powers. The large settlement colonies in the English, Portuguese and Spanish parts of the Atlantic were more focused on internal production and consumption, while the Dutch Atlantic Empire consisted mainly of plantation colonies, trading companies and a way station, which were primarily import and export centres. Within the Atlantic region, there was little 'colonial' influence with regard to West Africa. The Europeans had

little influence in this region and, moreover, the Dutch were much less important in economic terms than the big three in the Atlantic: Portugal, England and France. The first half of the seventeenth century was an exception. At that time, the English and the French still had little experience with the slave trade, and the Republic was in second place after Portugal in the trade with West Africa. The situation in the Cape colony and New Netherland was different again. There, the Dutch operated from the outset as colonisers, and in North America this was not very different from the English and the French. The Dutch colonisation of the Cape colony, on the other hand, cannot be compared directly with that of the others. The situation in the Cape most resembled that of the English colonies in the south of North America, where the original population rapidly declined and the numbers of immigrants and slaves from outside the country increased.

In comparison with other empires, the Dutch possessions in the Atlantic region were only loosely linked with the mother country and they were therefore in character the most non-Western. This was the result of the lack of a large Dutch settlement colony in North America. The beginning of such a settlement, New Netherland, was lost as early as the third quarter of the seventeenth century. In addition, not only was the number of Europeans in the Dutch plantation colonies lower than the corresponding numbers for the other European powers, but also by no means were all of them from the Republic. In terms of culture, there was more diversity among the population of the Dutch Atlantic Empire than elsewhere because of the high proportion of non-Europeans. In the Dutch sphere of influence in Africa and the New World, there were already such large differences within the European segment that a concerted attempt to impose a different culture on the indigenous peoples and the African slaves was not a realistic option.

In the Atlantic world, societies in the Dutch colonies were based on a strict division between white and non-white. This is hardly surprising since, more than in Asia, the Dutch overseas economy in the New World was based on slave labour, and the more slaves there were in the Dutch colonies, the more strictly the division was maintained. The numerous gradations in social status of the descendants of mixed unions of Europeans, Africans and American Indians that applied in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies were out of the question in the Dutch overseas societies in the Atlantic region. The relatively small group of free black and non-black people of colour could never penetrate to the upper reaches of society in the Dutch colonies.

But in Asia, too, there was a strong division between the white upper classes and the large group of free and non-free Asians in the Dutch

regions. Mestizos and ethnic minorities such as the Chinese in Batavia were somewhere in between. At first sight, it seems that the Dutch in Asia were less inclined than the Portuguese, French and English to marry an Asian woman and/or to start a new Asian life. More than the other Europeans, they often opted for a 'separate' life within the safe confines of fort and trading post. This image is probably strongly coloured by Dutch historiography, which has all too often been based on the official VOC perspective, in which private initiative outside the Company's monopoly was often suppressed and rebuffed. Although many Dutchmen also interacted actively, and sometimes very passionately, with the local communities, in the case of the Portuguese, there was indeed much more scope on the part of the authorities to develop a kind of Luso-Asian citizenship. Much more so than in the Atlantic, all the Europeans in Asia, in one way or another, had to adapt to local societies. However, in the Dutch case, it often meant not integration, but segregation into *kampongs* and *mahallas* on the basis of a relatively open and variable division of ethnic groups.

Are there not more general characteristics that are indicative of a typical Dutch 'colonial' approach? Could the 'policy of tolerance' mentioned earlier not fall into this category? The answer is yes, provided we realise that this was not a matter of some proto-democratic idealism. The relatively small number of Dutch in the settlements went hand in hand with an above-average ethnic and religious diversity within the colonies. In this environment, tolerance was a means of survival. Indeed, matters were quite different in the Iberian colonies, where there was much more evidence of a Catholic *Leitkultur*, which was often imposed successfully on the overseas territories through mass immigration and fanatical missions. In the Netherlands there was no such civilising mission, and the missionary zeal of the preachers was no match for the fear among the Company directors that the indigenous population might at some point rise up against them, which would seriously jeopardise the trading revenues. In order to please the customers on the mainland of Latin America, the Catholic Church in Curaçao was given the opportunity to carry out missionary work among the slaves, while, towards the end of the eighteenth century, a German Pietistic society, the Unity of the Brethren, was allowed to gradually start missions to the slaves in Suriname.

Not only in their trading factories in the great Asian empires, but even in their colonial cities and territories in the Caribbean, Africa and South and Southeast Asia, the Dutch always found themselves in the minority, certainly among the locals and often even among the whites. The two exceptions were the early Cape settlement and New Amsterdam, but only if we ignore the fact that the indigenous populations were kept at arm's

length from the white settlements on the coast. Being a minority may have stimulated an already-existing proclivity of Dutch administrators in the Republic to govern indirectly through the existing elites. In the Republic, with its many autonomous cities and provinces, the Dutch were familiar with a political system of power-sharing, elite consultation and acknowledgement of segmented autonomy. Compared with the other European states, there was only a weak sense of governmental centralisation. Hence, also in the colonial context, there was a tendency to maintain the existing, sometimes re-invented customs and laws of the indigenous populations.

But in the colonial context there is more: the Dutch could not maintain or develop their settlements without, in one way or another, employing other 'trustworthy' peoples for their own purposes. Hiring or buying members of the indigenous population was the least attractive option, since there were too many of them, and all of them were too deeply rooted in the local political system that the Dutch aimed to overturn. In the case of the limited Dutch population available to govern and settle their colonies, there was, of course, the Portuguese precedent of creating a colonial class through *mestizaje* and conversion. Another well-proven alternative was provided by some of the Islamic states – the Ottomans, the Safavids and Aceh in particular – in the form of training *mamluks*: reliable, deracinated elite slaves to run the top levels of the army and the government administration. In fact, the Dutch, after experimenting with aspects of both policies, opted for several solutions. The first was the most radical and was applied to the Banda Islands: weeding out the entire indigenous population to establish a new class of 'trustworthy and thrifty' colonial citizens. Even in this most cruel case, the Dutch lacked enough settlers, and they could maintain themselves only by recourse to another option: slave labour. In addition to Banda, slaves were employed extensively in their American possessions, Suriname in particular, as well as in South Africa and to a lesser extent in Java. It was, however, not only the plantations that needed slave labour. The Dutch colonial cities in Asia – in particular Batavia, Colombo and Cochin – also depended heavily on slaves. Actually, the Dutch were crucial for the creation of a new tropical southern zone of forced migration and exile which connected the already-existing slave-trading networks stretching from West and South Africa to the East African Swahili coast, and via Ceylon, to South and Southeast Asia.

Whereas slavery provided *the* solution for the lack of a labour force in the plantations and the cities, there was also a need for a thriving, middle-class of merchants, artisans and shopkeepers, as well as soldiers. Again, for the colonial authorities, the most trustworthy class was one that was a minority itself, preferably without local roots, in other words, migrants. In the Atlantic, and partly in Cochin, the middling role was

played by the Jewish community. By 1644, the Jews of Dutch Brazil numbered 1,450, which amounted to approximately one-third of the white civilian population of the colony. They were not engaged in the actual production of sugar, but handled a large part of the colony's trade with Holland. The WIC regarded them, their skills and their resources as indispensable to Dutch colonial expansion in the Americas. Jewish Amsterdam became one corner of the transatlantic triangle, closely linked from the 1660s with Curaçao and from the 1670s also with Suriname. Curaçao had the largest of the Sephardi communities, which arose in the West Indies during the second half of the seventeenth centuries and acted as a hub for the more minor communities on Barbados, Jamaica, Martinique, Tobago and other islands. Later in the century, when British and French protectionism started to make inroads, the Jews were instrumental in developing Suriname as the prime source of sugar and other Caribbean cash crops, this time also working as agricultural producers themselves. By 1730, more than a quarter of the 400 plantations were in Jewish hands.⁴

In the case of the Dutch cities in Asia, the intermediate role of the Jews was primarily played by the Chinese, who dominated the daily economic life of Batavia and many other cities surrounding the South China Sea and, from there, also gradually infiltrated the hinterlands. Although both the Jews and the Chinese were clearly recognisable groups, this did not mean that, as communities, they were entirely fixed or closed. Although less so than in the Portuguese case, even in the Dutch colonies, racial mixing was a common phenomenon, which interestingly could give rise to a new round of segregation, or, as in the case of the so-called *Mardijkers*, could create an entirely new ethnic label for a group with organisations and institutions of their own. Most *Mardijkers* originated in South Asia but maintained a 'Portuguese' way of life when serving the VOC in the local militia, which supported an army that consisted mostly of German soldiers and Asian (but non-local) auxiliaries. In Java, the non-local Asians were made up of artificially segregated ethnic groups: Madurese, Ambonese and Buginese, who, like the *Mardijkers*, lived in their own encampments (*kampongs*) just outside the city walls of Batavia.

So, overall, the Dutch colonial establishment in Asia was more segmented than the Portuguese one. Rather than the broad Lusitanian middle ground consisting of Eurasian *casados*, the Dutch engineered a more layered and segregated society of European Christians, Eurasians, local Christian client communities and freed slaves (e.g. *Mardijkers*, *Topasses* and free Blacks), non-Christian but free 'foreign'

⁴ Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 106, 145, 177.

groups (e.g. Chinese), slaves and local peoples.⁵ But the way Dutch law was not imposed upon, but was, rather, constantly renegotiated with these communities, also shows that the Dutch colonial authorities often lacked the capacity to implement this policy in full.⁶

So, within their early-modern colonial cities, the Dutch engineered a new intermediate class of 'foreign' business people, shopkeepers, artisans and soldiers. At the same time, and mostly beyond the city walls, there was a growing need to consult with the established local communities through their traditional leaders. Obviously, the traditional community leaders were less relevant in the Atlantic colonies, since they lacked clear majorities of indigenous populations, but even in relatively hybridised cities such as Paramaribo and Willemstad the Dutch authorities were keen to deal with recognisable ethnic groups, created, or not, by these authorities themselves. In places with large numbers of more rooted indigenous populations, the moment one left the colonial port city, one entered a 'middle ground' of mutual dependence with numerically dominant indigenous populations.⁷ In such marginal situations, being Dutch became less and less relevant as the Dutch had to adjust to existing patterns of behaviour.

Perhaps the main exception to this Dutch tendency towards segregation was the small urban settlement of New Amsterdam. Its diverse but predominantly white population was not segmented into ethnic groups but was, in many ways, truly hybrid and, as such, less Dutch than the Dutch in the other Dutch establishments. Even the famous Dutch notion of religious tolerance seemed less relevant for New Amsterdam. Indeed, the authorities offered its inhabitants freedom to believe whatever they wanted, but only as long as their belief did not extend to religious exercises outside the family circle. Any non-Reformed exercise of religion was strictly forbidden. Pleas of tolerance were directed towards Protestant dissenters such as Mennonites, Baptists and Remonstrants. Even the Jews who had escaped from Brazil and who were so cherished by the WIC because of their financial importance were treated harshly in New Amsterdam, both by the government and by the burghers. While in Brazil they had flourished under the cosmopolitan regime of William Maurits of Orange, New Amsterdam's staunchly Calvinist governor, Peter Stuyvesant, and his council requested that the WIC directors refuse them permission to remain in the colony. Apart from forbidding the public exercise of their religion, Jews were generally not allowed in the

⁵ Kruijtzter, 'European Migration in the Dutch Sphere', 97–154.

⁶ For this, see in particular Raben's insightful comparative study, 'Batavia and Colombo'.

⁷ The term is from White, *The Middle Ground*.

local militia; they were refused a burial ground, their trade and crafts were restricted, and discriminatory taxes were levied on them – so much for the celebrated tolerance of this Dutch ‘City upon a Hill’.⁸

Is this religious pragmatism linked to the exclusive profit motive a typically Dutch trait? Is the latter not reflected in the VOC as the first real form of a public limited company where the risk was spread over a longer period of time and over several shareholders, most of whom did not themselves control the policy? Some time ago, Danish historian Niels Steensgaard even referred to what he considered an ‘Asiatic trade revolution’: for the first time, it was possible for a company to set optimal selling prices on the basis of transparent and predictable cost calculations.⁹ This indeed led to an excessive need for accounting records, which enabled the Company traders to justify themselves to their superiors. The calculational capacity of the Iberian colonial functionaries does indeed seem to have lagged somewhat behind, although this does not necessarily mean that the actual profit margins achieved, both inside and outside the official channels, were higher. There is no doubt, however, that Iberian politics were more administratively and less commercially oriented than those of the companies. However, this Dutch commercial mentality did not lead to an Asian trade revolution, and European competitors were also more sceptical about the effectiveness of all this, as is also shown by the sceptical assessment of the French merchant Georges Roques in the 1690s, which gives this rather Kafkaesque impression of Dutch bookkeeping:

This is how it is arranged in all their trading posts. In this way they know exactly the amount needed to maintain each of the [trading posts] separately, and by maintaining a healthy system they have a clear view of their annual profits and losses, so that they can withdraw from the non-profitable places. They do not do this, even though they have too many posts that do not make a profit but that cost a great deal; nonetheless, they do not relinquish these posts. They are there, and they intend to remain at all costs.¹⁰

If we summarise the insights of Parts II and III and compare the Dutch trading policy with that of their West European competitors, the VOC and WIC are somewhere between the relatively free English and the strongly government-directed French system. In Asia, the preferred French *modus operandi* was to enter into diplomatic relations with other regional authorities. The English, on the other hand, stood out

⁸ But note the case of Asher Levy, who appealed and was allowed to serve in the civil militia in 1656. See Roitman, ‘Creating Confusion in the Colonies’, 55–90.

⁹ Steensgaard, *The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*.

¹⁰ Ray, *The French East India Company*, 73 – our own translation.

mainly because of their informality, first in the shadow of the Dutch, then themselves overshadowing the Dutch. The VOC held on to its monopolies for too long, as a result of which during the eighteenth century it was overtaken in almost all areas by the much more flexible English – as well as Portuguese and other – country traders. Although the Dutch free citizens in the East had been given a little more room for manoeuvre in the middle of the century, the real profits continued to be reserved for the VOC and its top officials. In the West, there was a greater need for private initiatives right from the start, and the contrast with the English was less pronounced. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the trading activities of the WIC in the Atlantic region had come to an end, and the Company acted only as a colonial ruler. In terms of a practical trade policy, therefore, there was in fact no overall Dutch policy that applied everywhere in East and West; instead, Dutch policy was primarily determined by local circumstances.

From Burden to Accountability

Did the Netherlands act unlawfully by expanding overseas and seizing, buying or renting trading posts, plantation colonies and settlement colonies? According to our current norms, this could certainly be said to be the case, but that was not so during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During that period, the world belonged to the powerful and to those who were most successful at exploiting it. This meant that, in principle, the indigenous peoples of the world had to bow to European wishes. This was not the case in Africa and Asia during the period under discussion, since the Europeans were not in power there, but in the New World the indigenous populations were not able to defend themselves against these European principles. The result was that they had to cede large parts of their continent to the Europeans; either they were forced to do so or they signed the land away in various agreements. It seems almost impossible to determine what would have happened in the New World if the Europeans had not invaded and to assess how the European invasion has influenced the level of prosperity of today's First Americans and whether any claim for compensation is due.

While the indigenous American peoples are the real losers of early European expansion, so are those Africans who were taken to the New World by the Europeans against their will as slaves. The Dutch were also a party to this. Unlike with the original population of the Americas, their numbers were carefully recorded. What would they and their descendants have had in terms of income if they had remained in Africa? This is not an easy question to answer, because, in the absence of an Atlantic slave trade,

some of the slaves sold to the Dutch would undoubtedly have been sold to an African slave owner. A proportion of them would probably not have become slaves. But income is not everything. It is also a matter of emotional damage and there is no doubt that the Dutch did cause tremendous emotional harm to the African slaves they bought. Just as in the cases of the slave trade under the VOC and Coen's depopulation of Banda, this raises a moral question: to what extent should the present-day Dutch be held responsible for the crimes committed by their forebears? What does it mean more particularly for a Dutch state that at times still blatantly celebrates VOC heroism? In all this, Dutch colonial history warrants a proper awareness of historical responsibility and piety.¹¹

At the same time, it is crucially important that historians do try to tell the full story in its proper historical context. If we lose the power to understand the past as the past, history will be reduced to a series of caricatures that will be lost in the flattened, easy-to-digest summaries of our present-day historical 'canons' and museums. In the famous words of L. P. Hartley, 'We should be aware that the past is another country: they do things differently there!' Yes, the past was – and often is – very painful, especially for those who were killed, enslaved or exploited, as well as for their descendants, but historians from all backgrounds should try to tell the whole story, both of the colonisers and of the colonised.

We feel that this should be done in an awareness that all cultures are shaped in interaction with their outside worlds, an awareness that forces us to engage deeply with the cultures that we encounter as historians. Hence, at least the attempt in this book at in-depth engagements with these 'other' cultures: to understand the Dutch Empire as fully as possible as much from the inside out as from the outside in. Of course, one could call this an act of 'cultural appropriation', but how can we empathise with others without in some way or another appropriating them? Overly stressing ethnic or social identities will create fixed dichotomies, a ghetto mentality, that in the end will undermine the historian's capacity to understand the connections that produced and still produce these very identities.¹²

Apart from trying to empathise with others, historians should not – and indeed cannot – avoid comparing and connecting their histories with

¹¹ A book that did much to trigger this discussion in the Netherlands is *White Innocence* (also translated into Dutch as *Witte Onschuld*) by the Afro-Surinamese anthropologist Gloria Wekker. More important, however, are the ongoing public debates surrounding the position of *Zwarte Piet* or Black Pete as the blackfaced servant of Saint Nicholas during the annual nationwide feast of *Sinterklaas*.

¹² For such a process in the case of South Asian studies, see the enlightening analysis of Eaton, '(Re)imag(in)ing Other²ness', 57–78.

those of others. Accentuating differences between cultures is one obvious outcome of this, but perhaps more important, at a time of unprecedented levels of cultural encounter, is the exploration of their commensurabilities. It will reveal that cultures have never been fixed, that they have always been manufactured in interaction with each other, as is most visibly illustrated in the way Mughal miniatures contributed to the making of that quintessential Dutch master Rembrandt. The challenge for the historian of today is to temporarily forget about the present in order to grasp how these forgotten connections have created the identities of the past. Indeed, the past is a foreign country, but it is 'a country from which we have all emigrated; its loss is part of our common humanity'.¹³

¹³ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 12.



Fig. 6 The Dutch Empire in present-day India. Women washing clothes on a Dutch gravestone at Sadras, Tamil Nadu, in the mid-1990s. (Photograph by courtesy of Marion Peters and Ferry André de la Porte)

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