

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-56367-3 - Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era

Edited by Sushil Chaudhury and Michel Morineau

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Merchants, Companies and Trade

Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era

Written by well-known scholars, this book throws new light, raises pertinent questions and takes up fresh perspectives on the growth and development in international trade between Europe and Asia, especially India, in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Through a comparative and comprehensive study of merchant communities, markets and commodities the individual authors argue, contrary to conventional views, that Asian merchants were in no way inferior to Europeans in terms of their commercial operations and business acumen. The book emphasizes the continuing and growing importance of India's overland trade, even in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, traces the little-known world of Armenian merchants, the hitherto obscure, but voluminous, Indian trade with the Ottoman Empire, and, by unearthing new evidence, demonstrates that the export activity of Asian merchants through the overland route from Bengal was higher, in fact, than the combined total of European exports. It also attempts to show that the period was characterized more by competition than by collaboration; hence the authors suggest that this period would be accurately described as much an 'age of competition' as an 'age of partnership'. This is an important book for all scholars wishing to discover more about relations between and amongst traders in the early modern period.

SUSHIL CHAUDHURY holds the University Chair of Islamic History and Culture at the University of Calcutta. He has written for many journals and his books include *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal* (New Delhi, 1995).

MICHEL MORINEAU is Professor emeritus of the University of Paris XII. Apart from numerous articles (180), he has written three principal books: *Les faux-semblants d'un démarrage économique: agriculture et démographie en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1971); *Incroyables gazettes et fabuleux métaux. Les retours des trésors américains d'après les gazettes hollandaises* (Cambridge, Paris, 1985); and *Les Grandes Compagnies des Indes Orientales* (Paris, 1995).

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
Introduction	1
SUSHIL CHAUDHURY AND MICHEL MORINEAU	
 Part I Asia, especially India, around 1500	
1 Of what world-system was pre-1500 'India' a part?	21
RAVI ARVIND PALAT AND IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN	
2 Trade in the Indian Ocean at the dawn of the sixteenth century	42
GENEVIÈVE BOUCHON	
 Part II Routes, markets and merchants	
3 The route through Quandahar: the significance of the overland trade from India to the West in the seventeenth century	55
NIELS STEENSGAARD	
4 The Armenian merchant network: overall autonomy and local integration	74
MICHEL AGHASSIAN AND KÉRAM KÉVONIAN	
5 Commercial relations between India and the Ottoman Empire (late fifteenth to late eighteenth centuries): a few notes and hypotheses	95
GILLES VEINSTEIN	
6 Eastern and Western merchants from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries	116
MICHEL MORINEAU	
	vii

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii	Contents	
7	The other 'species' world: speciation of commodities and moneys, and the knowledge-base of commerce, 1500–1900 FRANK PERLIN	145
Part III European presence in Asia		
8	The Portuguese and the Dutch in Asian maritime trade: a comparative analysis OM PRAKASH	175
9	Competition or collaboration? Relations between the Dutch East India Company and Indian merchants around 1680 FEMME S. GAASTRA	189
10	The French India Company and its trade in the eighteenth century PHILIPPE HAUDRÈRE	202
11	Sweden and India in the eighteenth century: Sweden's difficulty in gaining access to a crowded market C. KONINCKX	212
12	The ambitions of the Austrian Empire with reference to East India during the last quarter of the eighteenth century HELMA HOUTMAN-DE SMEDT	227
Part IV Implications of trade: Asia and Europe		
13	The Indian challenge: seventeenth and eighteenth centuries MICHEL MORINEAU	243
14	The changing pattern of British trade in Indian textiles, 1701–1757 DIETMAR ROTHERMUND	276
15	French traders and India at the end of the eighteenth century PAUL BUTEL	287
16	The Asian merchants and companies in Bengal's export trade, circa mid-eighteenth century SUSHIL CHAUDHURY	300
	<i>Index</i>	321

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The present volume is a collection of essays based on the papers presented at the International Seminar on ‘Merchants, Companies and Trade – the Asian and European Scene in the Indian Context, 16th–18th Century’ organized at the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme (MSH), Paris, in 1990. The main inspiration behind the Seminar was provided by Maurice Aymard, and the MSH came forward with liberal assistance, both financial and secretarial, for holding the Seminar in Paris. The delay in the publication of the volume is partly due to the fact that the two editors, living in two different continents, took quite some time to finalize the details of publication. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the failure on their part, the editors do hope that the volume will be welcome at least on the principle ‘better late than never’. They take this opportunity to convey their grateful thanks to the staff and members of the MSH, especially Maurice Aymard, for all their generous help and cooperation. Finally, they remain grateful to the Syndicate of the Cambridge University Press for accepting the volume for publication and to the editors at the Press for a very demanding period of working together.