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0521574641 - The Political Economy of Merchant Empires

James D. Tracy

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## Introduction

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"FROM experience, your lordships ought to know very well that in India trade is driven and maintained under the protection and favor of your own weapons, just as the weapons are furnished from the profits of trade, in such wise that trade cannot be maintained without war, nor war without trade."

Jan Pieterszoon Coen to the Heren XVII (Board of Directors of the United East India Company), Bantam, 27 December 1614.<sup>1</sup>

*The Rise of Merchant Empires* dealt with changes in the growth and composition of long-distance trade between roughly 1450 and 1750. This volume, *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires*, focuses on why European concerns eventually achieved a dominant position in global trade, at the expense (especially in Asia) of well-organized and well-financed rivals. In responding to this question, one can argue that Europeans had better means of transportation, or better business methods, including more sophisticated forms of credit. Alternatively, one can contend that Asian business methods were in no way inferior, and that Europeans owed their triumphs solely to the use of superior armaments for commercial aims. Finally, one may conclude, as Professor Steensgaard does in an important essay, that Europeans succeeded because they created forms of organization in which "the use of violence was subordinated to the rational pursuit of profit."<sup>2</sup> Which-

I am grateful to Professors Michael Pearson (University of New South Wales) and Anthony Reid (Australian National University) for their helpful criticisms of an earlier version of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Colenbrander, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen: Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië* (7 vols., The Hague, 1919–53), I, 97–98. Volume VI, separately titled *Jan Pieterszoon Coen: Levensbeschrijving*, is in effect a summary of Coen's correspondence. See also the comment on this citation in Professor Parker's chapter, note 42.

<sup>2</sup> Niels Steensgaard, "The Dutch East Indian Company As an Institutional Innovation," in Maurice Aymard, *Dutch Capitalism and World Capitalism* (London, 1982), 255. For the view that Europeans owed their triumphs to military superiority, see Irfan Habib, "Merchant Communities in Precolonial India," in James D. Tracy, ed., *The Rise of Merchant Empires* (Cambridge and New York, 1990), 398–9; and the chapter by Geoffrey Parker in this volume.



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ever approach one may favor, the issue involves careful attention to the principal feature that differentiates European enterprises from indigenous trade networks in various parts of the globe – that is, the fact that they organized their major commercial ventures either as an extension of the state, like Portugal's *Estado da India*, or as autonomous trading companies like the English East India Company (EIC) and the Dutch United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, or VOC), which were endowed with many of the characteristics of a state, including the capacity to wage war in furtherance of their interests.

In the Eastern seas, no European enterprise was more willing to resort to war to gain its objectives than the VOC, and the Heren XVII were nowhere quicker to employ force than in the Spice Islands or northern Maluku (the Moluccas). Northern Maluku was at one time the only source of cloves, but clove trees were planted farther south during the sixteenth century, especially on Amboina, and on Huamool, a peninsula forming the southwestern tip of the large island of Seram. The Banda Islands, southeast of Amboina, remained the only source of nutmeg and mace. Having devoted their acreage to cash crops, island cultivators were wholly dependent on rice brought in great junks from the ports of north Java, which called either in to the Moluccas or at the island of Great Banda, where Bandanese traders offered not only the homegrown nutmeg and mace, but also cloves they brought from the Moluccas in junks or outriggers (proas).<sup>3</sup> When the Portuguese took Melaka (1511), they began sending ships to northern Maluku, but with orders to avoid the use of force. A Portuguese fortress was built on the island of Ternate (1522), as part of an agreement with the sultan, but only after the remnants of Magellan's fleet, passing through the archipelago, had built a Spanish fort in the rival island kingdom of Tidore. The *Estado da India* initially attempted to make the purchase and transport of cloves Crown monopolies, but by 1540 the trade was left open to all comers. In struggles with the ruling family of Ternate, the Portuguese were eventually driven from their fortress on the island (1575), but they had in the meantime built a fortress on Amboina, where Jesuit missionaries (starting with St. Francis Xavier) had notable success in converting the not-yet Islamized population of the southern portion of the island. Yet the principal markets for fine spices were still in northern Maluku and, to the south, and on the island of Great Banda; and both regions were still

<sup>3</sup> M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague, 1962), 93–9.



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frequented by Asian merchants of many nations. Thus, a century of Portuguese presence in Southeast Asia had not radically altered the structure of a traditional system of trade that was to be smashed to pieces in the early seventeenth century by the Dutch.<sup>4</sup>

Appropriately enough, the monopolistic aims of the merchant oligarchs of Amsterdam met their stiffest resistance in this region from the Islamicized merchant oligarchs of the Banda Islands.<sup>5</sup> When the VOC was formed (1602) by initiative of the States General, the first four fleets to the Indian Ocean were sent out with the patriotic objective of conquering Portuguese possessions in the east, which since 1580 had been part of the Spanish Crown. These expeditions met with little success, save for the conquest of the Portuguese fort on Amboina (1605), and the prospect of a cessation of hostilities with Spain made the Heren XVII concentrate their attention on what was most important. Early in 1609 a specially dispatched *jacht* caught up with Pieter Willemszoon Verhoeff, admiral of the fourth fleet, and delivered news of a twelve years' truce that was to take effect on September 1, together with orders to gain control of the Banda Islands and northern Maluku before that date because these groups of islands "are the principal target we are shooting for." In northern Maluku, Dutch traders had for some years been formally allied with the Sultan of Ternate against a combined Spanish-Portuguese garrison on Tidore, but the sultan was less than punctilious in observing contracts for exclusive delivery of cloves to the VOC because prices were being driven up steeply by competitive bidding among English, Portuguese, Javanese, and Malay merchants. In the Banda group, the enforcement of similar contracts for the delivery of nutmeg and mace was even more difficult because the company had to deal with the *orang kaya* (literally, rich men)<sup>6</sup> who ruled each island, and who collectively had a proud seafaring tradition. Thus, when Verhoeff anchored in the roadstead of Banda Neira with an imposing fleet (April 1609), the *orang kaya* first granted him

<sup>4</sup> Vitorino Magalhaes Godinho, *Os Descobrimentos e a Economia Mundial* (4 vols., Lisbon, 1981–4), III, 135–58; John Villiers, "Trade and Society in the Banda Islands in the Sixteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 15 (1981): 743–9.

<sup>5</sup> Villiers, "Trade and Society in the Banda Islands," describes the Bandanese *orang kaya* as "a kind of mercantile aristocracy." In the Netherlands, the close connections between the ruling oligarchy of the leading cities and the directors of the VOC (especially the Amsterdam chamber) were well known; one may compare the town *regenten* listed in J. E. Elias, *De Vroedschap van Amsterdam* (reprint, 2 vols., Amsterdam, 1964) with the lists of large investors in J. G. van Dillen, *Het Oudste Aandeelhoudersregister van de Kamer Amsterdam der Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (The Hague, 1958), 61, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Villiers, "Trade and Society in the Banda Islands," 730; Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence*, 93–9.



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the desired permission to build a fortress, but then summoned him to a council in a remote corner of the island, where, having agreed to send away their escort, the Dutch admiral and his advisers were massacred. There followed a period of intermittent warfare in which neither side could gain a decisive edge. By Dutch estimates there were only about 15,000 Bandanese, yet they could not be dislodged from the mountain citadels to which they retreated when under attack.<sup>7</sup> Bandanese war proas (*kora-koras*) could not give battle to a fleet of East Indiamen, but they could outrun any European vessel, and Dutch mariners could not learn to maneuver them as deftly as native seamen did.<sup>8</sup>

By 1615 the Heren XVII were urging their servants in the east to seize and burn Bandanese *kora-koras*, or even to "exterminate or chase out the leaders, and repopulate the country with pagans,"<sup>9</sup> considered more tractable than the Muslim Bandanese. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, who was president of the factory at Bantam in 1617, was named governor-general by an order of the Heren XVII dated October 1617. Four years later, Coen led a major assault on Great Banda and several smaller islands, in which, by Coen's estimate, 2,500 Bandanese died by hunger or by the sword, and some 3,000 more were transported into exile, leaving their burned villages to be repopulated by docile cultivators from elsewhere in the archipelago. On receiving Coen's report of the episode, the Heren XVII rapped him on the knuckles: "We would have wished for matters to be taken care of with more moderate measures." But it is clear, as M. A. Meilink-Roelofs concludes, that the governor-general had merely been carrying out his masters' instructions.<sup>10</sup>

The Heren XVII of course recognized that there were many local

<sup>7</sup> Villiers, "Trade and Society in the Banda Islands," 727; Armando Cortesao, ed. and tr., *The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodrigues* (2 vols. = *Hakluyt Society*, 2d ser., vols. 44, 49, London, 1944), I, 211.

<sup>8</sup> Coen to the Heren XVII, 7 October 1619, J. P. Coen, *Bescheiden omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, I, 501–2; for a recent edition of a manuscript of what has every appearance of being Galvao's lost "Historia das Molucas," see Hubert Th. M. Jacobs, *A Treatise on the Moluccas* (Rome and St. Louis, 1971), 155.

<sup>9</sup> Instructions from the Heren XVII, dated 30 April 1615, in J. P. Coen, *Bescheiden omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, IV, 307: "dat men nu deselve onse force en schepen mochte gebruycken omme yets groots tot affbreuck van den vyande uut te mogen rechten ende de Bandanesen te vermeesteren, de principale uut te doen roeyen ende verjagen, ende 't land liever met heydenen wederom te doen peupleren." Cf. Coen to the Heren XVII, 22 August 1617, *ibid.*, I, 259–60.

<sup>10</sup> The fullest treatment remains that by J. A. van der Chijs, *De Vestiging van het Nederlandsche Gezag over de Banda-Eilanden* (Batavia, 1886); Coen to the Heren XVII, 6 May 1621, in *Bescheiden omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, I, 625–33; Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence*, 197–203, 207.



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markets in which it made better economic sense simply to join in as traders, rather than to deploy the force that would be necessary to achieve a dominant position.<sup>11</sup> Yet Coen's deliberate destruction of an indigenous trading society in the Banda Islands shows how far the builders of Europe's merchant empires were prepared to go, especially when presented with the opportunity to gain control of the supply of particularly valuable commodities that were uniquely localized. By way of an introduction to this volume, it may be useful to reflect on the mentality that supported such campaigns, as well as many less dramatic applications of force in furtherance of trade. Rather than attempting a survey of the globe, or of the vast Indian Ocean, the discussion that follows will concentrate on Southeast Asia,<sup>12</sup> a rich trading region where three European nations each found the use of force necessary to some degree. The discussion that follows will first review differing strategic aims for which force was employed, and then consider how modern students of this region have reinterpreted Southeast Asian trade in the era of early European contacts, suggesting that things were not quite as they seemed to the builders of Europe's merchant empires.

## I

From an early date, the Portuguese clearly had a grand strategy for controlling the trade of the Indian Ocean by controlling the major entrepôts.<sup>13</sup> Albuquerque's decision to make for Melaka in 1511 seems to have been an afterthought, but when his fleet was drawn up in front of the great harbor's fortifications the governor had no doubt of his purpose: "We shall perform [a great service] to our Lord in casting the Moors out of this country, and quenching the fire of this sect of Mafamede [*sic*]," for if Melaka were taken "the Moors" would

<sup>11</sup> Colenbrander J. P. Coen: *Levensbeschrijving*, 45–6, 59, 83, and Governor General Gerard Reynst to the Heren XVII, 26 October 1615, in W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-General en Raden aan Heren XVII der VOC*, 1, 1610–38 (*Rijks-geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Grote Serie*, vol. 104, The Hague, 1960), 47: the VOC seized a Portuguese fort on Solor, but then abandoned it because it could not be used to control the sandalwood trade from nearby Timor.

<sup>12</sup> For a superb overview, see Anthony Reid, *South East Asia in the Age of Commerce*, vol. 1, *The Lands below the Winds* (New York, 1988); Prof. Reid will deal with trade in the second volume.

<sup>13</sup> In a very useful review essay on Meilink-Roelofs's *Asian Trade and European Influence*, D. K. Bassett, "European Influence in Southeast Asia, c. 1500–1630," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 4 (1963), 186–7, believes that the author gives too much credit for Portugal's grand strategy to Afonso de Albuquerque, the conqueror of Goa and Melaka.



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be deprived of the “spices and drugs” that nourished a network of trading communities stretching from the Red Sea to the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>14</sup> The strategic thinking of the Portuguese conquerors seems to have been based on a vivid if somewhat simplistic perception of the importance of seaports, which shines through with particular clarity in the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires, the apothecary who, in Portuguese Melaka, became a diplomat. As Pires guides his reader along the Asian coastline, it is evident that some cities are much more important than others. Thus, Aden is “the key not only of Arabia but the strait,” Hormuz is the “key of Persia,” and Goa is “the key of first and second India,” that is, Gujarat and the Deccan. For just as “doors are the defense of houses, so are seaports the help, defense, and main protection of provinces and kingdoms.” Melaka is not called the key to anything, but Pires thinks of it in the same terms. For example, he expects that “the kings of Pase and Pidie,” the chief ports of northern Sumatra, “will be tributaries and vassals to him who now owns Melaka” because otherwise in a year’s time there will be no Pase and Pidie, and those who realize it are “making themselves vassals [to the Portuguese] before they have to.” Elsewhere, Pires allows himself a lapidary comment on what the recent capture of Melaka will mean for Portugal’s chief rival among Christian states: “Whoever is lord of Melaka has his hand on the throat of Venice.”<sup>15</sup>

Nearly a hundred years later, when Dutch ships arrived in the East, the entrepôt strategy had clearly failed to meet the high expectations of the Portuguese, but it was nonetheless not without its charms for the newcomers. After all, the VOC in effect began as an enterprise for the conquest of Portuguese-held emporia, prompting investors familiar with the trading practices of the private companies that preceded the VOC to protest this unwonted use of trading capital for military aims.<sup>16</sup> But, beginning with the appointment of the first governor-general in 1609, the VOC shifted to a single-minded focus on controlling the supply of key commodities, starting with fine spices. One could attempt to control supply by buying up whatever came on the market in an entrepôt like Bantam, where the VOC and the EIC both had factories, but this strategy had little chance of success at a time when, owing to the continuing accessibility of the Banda

<sup>14</sup> Walter de Gray Birch, tr., *The Commentaries of the Great Affonso Dalbuquerque* [by his natural son, Bras de Albuquerque] (4 vols. = *Hakluyt Society*, 1st ser., vols. 53, 55, 62, 69, London, 1875–84), III, 116–18.

<sup>15</sup> *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, 15, 19, 56, 144–5, 287.

<sup>16</sup> Steensgaard, “The Dutch East India Company As an Institutional Innovation,” 245–7.



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Islands to traders of many nations, nutmeg and mace fetched higher prices there than at Bantam.<sup>17</sup> The logical alternative was the policy, worked out in correspondence between the Heren XVII and their servants in the East, of keeping all “foreign” traders out of the Bandas and northern Maluku – that is, not just the troublesome English, but also Javanese, Malays, and Klings (from India’s Coromandel coast).<sup>18</sup> Modern scholars have shown a certain understandable partiality for Dutch critics of this policy, including Dr. Laurens Reael, Coen’s predecessor as governor-general. Reael pointed out, correctly, that cultivators of the spice plants were being impoverished by the company’s policy of buying spices cheap while selling rice dear, and that Dutch shipping was not satisfying local demand, not just for the preferred varieties of rice and cotton cloth, but even more for countless other articles in which only small-scale traders would take an interest. Reael also believed that schemes for repopulating the Banda Islands were not workable, as was suggested by the fact that colonists brought in to settle Banda Neira after the Dutch had expelled the natives soon returned whence they had come: “One has great trouble forgetting the sweetness of the land where one is born and reared.” But even a man of Reael’s temper was bound by the logic of his position, as the representative of a commercial power that claimed the attributes of a state. For example, when the men of an important village on Great Banda seized the president of the local VOC factory in retaliation for an unwarranted Dutch attack on local shipping, Reael knew what had to be done: “Although we for our part are not wholly free of blame, still, such things must not be allowed to pass unavenged.”<sup>19</sup>

Coen’s refusal to shrink from any measures necessary to gain control of the supply of nutmeg and mace marked out the future direction of company policy. In order to control the supply of cloves, the com-

<sup>17</sup> For the focus on the Spice Islands, see paragraph 22 of the Heren XVII’s instructions to Pieter Both, dated 9 November 1609, in Pieter van Dam, *Beschrijving van de Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. III, ed. F. W. Stapel (*Rijks-geschiedkundige Publicatiën. Grote Serie*, vol. 87, The Hague, 1943), 524; Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence*, 243.

<sup>18</sup> Coen to the Heren XVII, 10 November 1614, and the Heren XVII to Coen, 30 April and 30 November 1615, in *Bescheiden omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, I, 82–3, IV, 306, 331–2.

<sup>19</sup> Reael to the Heren XVII, 10 May, 2 July, 127 December 1617, 7 May, 20 August 1618, in *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal aan Heren XVII*, I, 71–4, 77–9, 82–4, 87–94 (the settlers whom Reael describes as leaving of their own volition are said by Coen to have been chased away by the Bandanese: Colenbrander, J. P. Coen, *Levensbeschrijving*, 83–4.) Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence*, 196–202; S. Arasaratnam, “Monopoly and Free Trade in Dutch-Asian Commercial Policy: Debate and Controversy within the VOC,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4 (1973): 1–16.



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pany subsequently undertook protracted campaigns against the Muslims of northern Amboina (1634–7), and against their confreres on Huamoal, who received assistance from the Sultanate of Ternate (which claimed lordship of this region) and from the burgeoning Muslim port of Makassar (1652–7). In the end, a victorious VOC caused the trees on all the clove plantations of northern Maluku and Huamoal to be uprooted, while *hongis* manned by the now Protestant Christians of southern Amboina patrolled the archipelago to guard against unauthorized planting.<sup>20</sup> Because the Dutch could not wholly curtail “foreign” shipping in the islands, they eventually resorted to seizing the major entrepôts where goods from the Spice Islands still got through: Melaka (1641), Makassar (1667), and Bantam (1682).<sup>21</sup> It was only in the eighteenth century, as the advantages of a less tightly regulated trade gradually became apparent, that the VOC lost ground to its rivals.

The EIC’s aims for trade in Southeast Asia are less transparent, partly because the weight of documentation for the English company’s early history falls more on India.<sup>22</sup> It is clear, however, that Dutch commercial aggression in the archipelago offered the English a golden opportunity. A succession of EIC agents reported that the people of northern Maluku would starve if the English did not bring the food-stuffs they had promised, and that the Bandanese would sacrifice their lives rather than submit to domination by the Hollanders.<sup>23</sup> To be sure, voices within the EIC warned against imitating the Dutch by investing so heavily in fortified bases. But John Jourdain, who was president of the EIC factory of Bantam when Coen held the same post for the VOC, urged his superiors in London to send out a force that would test the real intentions behind the bellicose words of the Dutch, and, if need be, provide a shield behind which the English might offer islanders the free trade they so ardently desired. The fleet of five well-armed vessels that arrived in the Banda Islands in 1616

<sup>20</sup> H. de Graaf, *De Geschiedenis van Ambon en de Zuid Molukken* (Franeker, 1977), 82–7, 108–30; G. J. Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen: de VOC en de Bevolking van Ambon, 1656–1696* (Dordrecht, 1983), 17–28.

<sup>21</sup> The best overviews are C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600–1800* (New York, 1988, reprint of 1973 edition), 103–16; Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the East* (Minneapolis, 1976), 31–38, 50–64; and F. S. Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC* (Haarlem, 1982), 37–42.

<sup>22</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri, *The English East India Company* (London, 1965), 12–15. It also seems that the EIC’s Court of Directors was less willing than the Heren XVII to commit to paper matters of grand strategy – that is, if one may judge from Court minutes and other documents summarized in Noel Sainsbury, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, the East Indies, China, and Japan, 1513–1629* (6 vols., London, 1862–84).

<sup>23</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series*, I, nos. 783, 1004, 1006, 1071; II, nos. 99, 245.



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seems to have been a response to Jourdain's arguments; these ships made it possible for the EIC to maintain fortresses for short periods of time on first one and then another of the smaller islands of the Banda chain. But such provocations led the Dutch to make good their threats of force against the English despite the formal alliance between the two nations that had been dictated by conditions back home, where both were united by hostility to Spain. The Heren XVII simply would not allow anyone else to share in the fruits of their considerable military investment in the Spice Islands trade.<sup>24</sup> The famous "massacre" of English traders and their Japanese allies on Amboina (1623)<sup>25</sup> was a further blow to EIC ambitions in this region, and the company subsequently had to be content to join forces with other European and Asian merchants who aimed at circumventing the Dutch spice monopoly, rather than attempting to contest it directly.<sup>26</sup>

One adopts a strategy because one hopes to achieve something, but also because one fears what may happen in the absence of a coherent plan. The fears of Europeans stationed in Asia were structured not merely by national rivalries back home, but also by the fact that, despite their differences, they all had in common what one may call the psychology of an interloper.<sup>27</sup> Twentieth-century historians can agree that it was usually the Europeans who broke violently into Asian trading systems that had been relatively peaceful before their arrival. But the men who first came to Asia from the far west almost invariably saw themselves as beset by greedy Asian foes whose conniving ways revealed a skullduggery that decent folk in Europe had not yet imagined. Many of these Asian enemies were adherents of a creed that made them sworn enemies of all Christians. Recent scholars have been skeptical of the importance of crusading zeal as a stimulus

<sup>24</sup> On the aversion to military expenditures within the EIC, see *Calendar of State Papers*, I, nos. 371, 522, and Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence*, 196; for Jourdain's views, see *Calendar of State Papers*, I, nos. 783, 888, and II, no. 143. Bassett, "European Influence in Southeast Asia," 206, suggests that Jourdain's activities in the archipelago undermined whatever credibility Reael's views may have had with his superiors in the Netherlands.

<sup>25</sup> D. K. Bassett, "The 'Amboinese Massacre,'" *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 1 (1960): 1–5; De Graaf, *Geschiedenis van Ambon*, 73–7. English and Dutch writers are still not agreed on whether the executions should be seen as an excess of zeal on the part of officials not trained in the law, or as a thinly veiled effort to expel the English from the spice trade.

<sup>26</sup> Bassett, "The 'Amboinese Massacre,'" 6–29: EIC imports from Southeast Asia increased rather than decreased after 1623, with cloves being obtained mainly at Makassar.

<sup>27</sup> What seems crucial here is Robert Lopez's distinction between "inner" and "outer" zones of long-range trade, touched on in this volume in the chapters by Russell Menard and Anne Pérotin-Dumon.



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for Portuguese expansion,<sup>28</sup> and one may also doubt whether Asia's many communities of Muslim traders manifested any greater religious solidarity among themselves than Europe's Christian nations did. Yet the Portuguese did not always imagine things when they saw "the Moors" behind the problems they encountered in India, and, even if they did, imaginary fears are no less important to those who think them real. Thus, before the conquest of Goa, Albuquerque blamed the sufferings of his countrymen in India on the fact that they lacked "a stronghold wherein they might be safe from the vexations which the Moors of every land every day inflicted on them." Roughly a hundred years later, Coen was no doubt equally earnest in thinking that the Dutch had to have a fortress on Java, "cost what it may," among other reasons "so that we no longer stand at the mercy of faithless Moors."<sup>29</sup> Indeed it was a Christian cliché that all "Moors" were "faithless" because they had been taught that promises made to infidels are not binding.<sup>30</sup>

If the Protestant Dutch did not have the same crusading heritage as their Iberian rivals, the fervor of a protracted war for independence from Catholic Spain made up for this lack, inspiring in them too the conviction of fighting in a righteous cause, against the forces of manifest iniquity. Expressions of confidence in the special favor of God are less frequent in Coen's correspondence than in (for example) the *Commentaries* of Bras de Albuquerque, but, one must assume, not less deeply felt.<sup>31</sup> Whatever damage the English might do to Dutch interests, Spain was always "the enemy" in VOC correspondence, and Dutchmen overseas had an understandable tendency to project onto the Asian scene the emotions of a war for national survival back home. Thus, VOC officials in the Spice Islands feared an attack from the northeast, even though Spanish forces in Manila did less and less as time went on to exploit their toehold in northern Maluku. Coen assumed that Asians had a European, specifically Dutch, understanding of the great conflict: once the VOC established a fortified base on Java, traders of all nations would flock to it because "the good old

<sup>28</sup> Godinho, *Os Descobrimentos*, I, 45–62. But see also the chapter in this volume by Professors Subrahmanyam and Thomaz, note 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Commentaries of Afonso Dalbuquerque*, I, 1–5; Coen to the Heren XVII, 1 January 1614, in *Bescheiden omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, I, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Colenbrander, J. P. Coen, *Levensbeschrijving*, 51, 135–6.

<sup>31</sup> *Commentaries of Afonso Dalbuquerque*, I, 129–31; Coen to the Heren XVII, 29 September 1618, in *Bescheiden omtrent zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, I, 399. On the Dutch sense of the righteousness of their cause, see S. Arasaratnam, "The Use of Dutch Material for Southeast Asian History," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3 (1962): 95–05.