# Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia[1]

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The majority of Japanese even today believe that the politico-cultural universe of the Edo period was fundamentally determined by the closure of the country. They also think that the opening of Japan can be reduced to the development of exchanges with the West, following the birth of the Meiji regime. It is hard for them to imagine that Japan developed in relation with other Asian countries, since they are hardly used to appreciating Asian cultures.

—Yuko Tanaka (1995).[2]

## I

The paper is a somewhat indirect response to the 'theme essay' around which the present volume is organized. Victor Lieberman's exercise seeks to compare six countries, Burma, Siam, Vietnam, France, Russia and Japan, and sets out twelve factors on the basis of which a 'calculus of integration' can be notionally set out for them. In an earlier version of the essay, he had proposed strong parallels between the experiences of these countries based on a neo-Gerschenkronian formulation of rimlands and cores, with the rimlands having the 'advantage of relative backwardness'. Abstracting from the details, we see that this represents a neo-cyclical theory, since the cores eventually must become rimlands, as the rimlands develop 'advanced' features at a rapid rate.

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[1] This paper was originally prepared for the seminar, 'The Eurasian context of the early modern history of mainland South East Asia, c. 1400–1800', at the Centre of South East Asian Studies, SOAS, 22–4 June 1995. A preliminary version was presented to a seminar at Leiden University in May 1995. I am grateful to Peter Carey, W. G. Clarence-Smith, Jos Gommans and David Wyatt for comments or helpful reflections.

[2] Tanaka Yuko, 'Le monde comme représentation symbolique: Le Japon de l'époque d'Edo et l'univers du *mitate*', *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 50, 2 (1995), 281.

Various responses are possible to this large, highly ambitious and wide-ranging project. Let us begin by noting that in his paper in this volume at least (in contrast to another published by him a few years ago in the pages of this journal), Lieberman pays relatively little attention to South Asia (one of the ostensible areas of my own expertise), and—as in the other paper—none at all to Iberia, my other major area of interest.[3] In closing the paper, he presents us with a rather sketchy discussion of India, partly juxtaposed to his earlier discussion of China.[4] Given Lieberman's limited foray into early modern South Asia, one might think that the task for the South Asianist in this context has been cut out in simple terms: to make those comparisons which elude Lieberman, and locate South Asia (either in whole, or in bits and pieces) in his rank-order scheme. But in view of the notorious recalcitrance of South Asianists, and their well-known lack of desire to be cannon-fodder for other people's model building, it might be optimistic to expect such an exercise. What I shall attempt to bring to the table here are therefore not the missing South Asian pieces in Lieberman's puzzle, but a rather different view of the problem of early modern comparison, a set of reflections that I hope to develop and carry in part into two works-in-progress.[5]

My concern in general (as implicitly that of Lieberman) is with a period that specialists of many different regions (and not only western Europe) have begun to call, with growing comfort and confidence, the 'early modern' epoch. The chronological coverage of this period obviously needs some definition. I would provisionally propose a rather more generous definition than the usual one, arguing that the 'early modern' in Eurasia and Africa at least (pre-Columbian America being a more complex problem) would extend from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, with a relatively great emphasis on the period after about 1450. For those who like political demarcations, it might be suggested per-

[3] See Victor Lieberman, 'Secular Trends in Burmese Economic History, c. 1350–1830, and their Implications for State Formation', *Modern Asian Studies* 25, 1 (1991), 1–31.

[4] Nevertheless, the present project by Lieberman represents, in my view at least, a considerable advance on his earlier conceptual framework of the 'administrative cycle'; for which see his *Burmese Administrative Cycles: Anarchy and Conquest, c. 1580–1760* (Princeton, 1984).

[5] Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Making of Early Modern Asia* (Boulder: Westview Press, forthcoming); Subrahmanyam, *The Early Modern World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, forthcoming).

versely that the reformulation of Eurasian polities in the context of
the great enterprise of Amir Timur Gurgan (d. 1405) could serve as
the convenient, obviously somewhat symbolic, point of departure.[6]
Of course, an earlier date could be chosen—say the late twelfth cen-
tury, in the sense of marking the Great Mongol Moment. But there
are reasons to feel, all in all, that this would be really be an abuse
of the notion of 'early modern', drawing protests from medievalists
the world over! At the same time, it is of some importance (and here
I part company with Lieberman in some respects) to delink the
notion of 'modernity' from a particular European trajectory (Greece,
classical Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and thus 'modern-
ity' . . .), and to argue that it represents a more-or-less global shift,
with many different sources and roots, and—inevitably—many dif-
ferent forms and meanings depending on which society we look at it
from.

Nevertheless, some obvious unifying features are present. To begin
with, the early modern period defines a new sense of the limits of
inhabited world, in good measure because it is in a fundamental way
an age of travel and discovery, of geographical redefinition. There
were thus various attempts, often from conflicting perspectives and
points of departure, to push back the limits of the world, as they
were known to different peoples in about 1350. Rather than treat
the European voyages of exploration as the sole or even the single
most important focus, we need to bear in mind that the period wit-
nesses the expansion in a number of cultures of travel, as well as
the concomitant development of travel-literature as a literary genre,
whether the routes explored are overland (trans-Saharan, trans-
Central Asian) or maritime.[7] The notion of 'discovery' thus applies
as much to Zheng He's Indian Ocean voyages in the early fifteenth
century as those of Cabral or Magellan a century later. These voy-
ages were accompanied by often momentous changes in conceptions
of space and thus cartography; significant new empirical 'ethno-
graphies' also emerged from them.[8]

[6] Cf. the relatively recent, important, work on Timur by Beatrice Forbes Manz,
*The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1989).

[7] See, in this context, the essays collected in Claudine Salmon (ed.), *Récits de
voyage des asiatiques: Genres, mentalités et conception de l'espace* (Paris, 1996); and more
particularly on (semi-fictional works for) Japan, Kosugi Keiko, Satake Akihiro and
Jacqueline Pigeot, *Voyages en d'autres mondes: Récits japonais du XVIe siècle* (Paris, 1993).

[8] The history of 'early anthropology' is obviously in need of revision, as are the
implicit presuppositions of such pioneering but dated works as Margaret T. Hodgen,
*Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1964). The

But the early modern period also sees other shifts. Among these is a heightening of the long-term structural conflict that inhered in relations between settled agricultural and urban societies on the one hand, and nomadic groups (hunter gatherers, pastoralists, etc.) on the other.[9] This tension, to which ecologically minded historians have drawn our attention in recent times, represents a paradigm within which to address questions relating to the agricultural frontier and agricultural innovation, demography, urbanization and patterns of urban settlement, and the issue of travel, discovery and colonization as leading to an ecological shift of global dimensions.[10] Obviously, the balance between settlers and wanderers differed, too, from continent to continent and region to region. However, rather than pose the issue in terms simply of the ostensible conflict between non-European societies, which had achieved some form of ideal, Golden Age, equilibrium between settlers and wanderers, and an expanding Europe which had somehow broken out of this (on account of its unfortunate 'modernity'), it may be more useful to argue for certain broadly universal conflicts during the period in life-styles, and modes of resource-use. In turn, it is of obvious interest to link up these questions with the issue of global trade flows (commodities, bullion), their dimensions and their implications both backwards and forwards, for producers and consumers. Amongst other matters, the early modern period sees the rise of a slave trade of unprecendented dimensions (both in the Atlantic and elsewhere), as also the emergence of new cash crops with powerful social consequences for both producers and consumers, notably tea and coffee, but also opium, the production of which expands considerably, even if it was already traded in an earlier period.

These shifts are equally accompanied by complex changes in political theology (to borrow a phrase from Ernst Kantorowicz), which the exclusive focus on the emergence of the nation-state and the ideologies that go under the name of 'nationalism' has served to

important work of Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge, 1982), adds depth to the analysis, but does not shift the perspective.

[9] For a sense of some of the complexities of this relationship through a careful case-study, see Joseph Fletcher, 'The Mongols: Ecological and Social Perspectives', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 46, 1 (1986), 11–50.

[10] Besides the oft-cited (and oft-criticized) works of Alfred Crosby (*The Columbian Exchange*, and *Ecological Imperialism*), see the recent and ambitious synthesis by Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism* (Cambridge/Delhi, 1994), which pays far greater attention to Asia than does Crosby.

obscure. The early modern construct of the Universal Empire obviously had classical (and even mythological) roots, but was considerably reworked in the new geographical and political settings of the period. Thus, on the one hand, we have the Chinggis Khanid–Timurid tradition, that informs a great deal of what occurs in West Asia, the Ottoman Empire, Iran, North India and Central Asia; one part of this legacy is also present in China. In pre-Columbian America and Southern and Central Africa, equally, notions of universal empire existed, related to indigenous cosmologies (as in South Asia, or the 'galactic polities' of Southeast Asia).[11] The great projects of universal empire embodied by the Spanish Habsburgs (who looked back to classical roots—especially the Holy Roman Empire), and later even by the major trading Companies, and eventually by Great Britain, need to be related to these other, at times pre-existent and autonomous, notions of empire. A number of authors in recent times have addressed both the technology and insitutional bases of empire-building (warfare, the 'military revolution', financial markets, accounting, record-keeping on paper, etc.), but have paid far less attention to the symbolic and ideological constructs (in particular, millenarian visions of empire) that underlie these.[12] This may be the result of embarrassment in the face of this seeming contradiction, or a residue of naive Enlightenment teleologies. But one of the points to be developed (and which is touched on briefly by Lieberman, albeit in a rather different context) is the coexistence of such seemingly archaic forms of political articulation as empires and the notion of an emerging 'modernity'—thus a return in a manner of speaking to the issue addressed (albeit not wholly satisfactorily) by Joseph Schumpeter in his classic work on imperialism.

The early modern period also raises a number of key issues that may be addressed under the broad head of 'historical anthropology'. Thus, it is of obvious interest to examine how notions of universalism and humanism emerge in various vocabularies, and yet how these terms do not in fact unite the early modern world, but instead lead to new or intensified forms of hierarchy, domination and separation.

[11] Cf. Serge Gruzinski, *Les Hommes-dieux du Mexique: Pouvoir indien et société coloniale, XVIe–XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1985); also the very widely cited work by the same author, *La colonisation de l'imaginaire: Sociétés indigènes et occidentalisation dans le Mexique espagnol, XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1988).

[12] An exception is Geoffrey Parker, 'David or Goliath? Philip II and his World in the 1580s', in Richard L. Kagan and Geoffrey Parker (eds), *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic World: Essays in Honour of John H. Elliott* (Cambridge, 1995), 245–66.

This may be seen in a certain sense as the 'paradox of enlighten-ment' revisited (with or without the capital E, to be sure). A subsidi-ary question is to re-examine what remains (after a half-century and more of debate) of the well-known Burckhardt hypothesis, concering the new notion of the individual that emerges with modernity.[13] This would require *inter alia* an exploration of literature, and literary forms, as they are established in the period, not just in Renaissance and post-Renaissance Europe, but elsewhere in the world. Some links with the 'social history of medicine' literature are also indicated, since there are some obvious links to be made between medical and biological knowledge, and conceptions of the individual.[14]

Taking all these questions together, it is obvious that we are faced with a very much larger agenda than even that of Lieberman, and what is worse, it is still not a comprehensive one. But what is also significant for our purposes is that it is more or less orthogonal to the approach proposed by Lieberman, who really seeks to downplay the global and connected character of the early modern period, in order to reify certain chosen national entities. However, this critique has been partly acknowledged by him, and indeed in response to it, he has sought to dilute his hypotheses to the point at times of having more exceptions and qualifications than clear hypotheses. In this context, a brief retrospective may be in order here. Roughly a decade ago, the present author found himself embarked, willy-nilly, on a comparative exercise that sought to link and compare the histories of India and Indonesia between roughly 1500 and the present, as part of the so-called Cambridge–Delhi–Leiden–Yogyakarta project.[15] Seeking out buoys in those relatively little-charted comparative waters, the most striking fact at that time was their very absence: the great lack of serious comparative work that linked even the two adjacent regions of South and Southeast Asia, apart from a few grand

[13] In this context, see the useful essay by Cemal Kafadar, 'Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth Century Istanbul and First-person Narratives in Ottoman Literature', *Studia Islamica* 69 (1989), 121–50, which draws in turn on Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France', in T. C. Heller, M. Sosna and D. E. Wellbery (eds), *Reconstructing Individual-ism: Autonomy, Individuality and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford, 1986), 53–63.

[14] This point was made forcefully by Frank Dikötter, 'Parallel Modernities: Nor-malization, Individuation and the Biologizing Process in China', presented to the seminar, 'The Eurasian context of the early modern history of mainland South East Asia, c. 1400–1800', at the Centre of South East Asian Studies, SOAS, 22–4 June 1995.

[15] For selected papers of that conference, see P. J. Marshall, R. van Niel *et al.*, *The Ancien Régime in India and Indonesia* (Leiden, 1988).

and fast-aging overarching syntheses, notably those of J. C. van Leur, and to a lesser extent J. S. Furnivall. The project was not a great success, to put it bluntly, but some of the participants in the third of the C.D.L.Y. conferences ('The Ancien Régime in India and Indonesia'), went on themselves to produce some grand syntheses, usually in a spirit informed by the notion of 'world-systems': one need only refer to K. N. Chaudhuri's *Asia Before Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), or André Wink's *Al-Hind* Vol. I (Leiden: E. G. Brill, 1990), to have a sense of these. Even others, more cautious, and more solidly anchored in Anglo-Saxon empiricism, like C. A. Bayly, produced such works of global ambition as *Imperial Meridian* (London: Longman, 1989) in the same context.

A brief comparison between these three works—Chaudhuri, Wink and Bayly—may be instructive, as alternate ways of approaching the problems that the present collection of essays seeks to address. All three are works of considerable erudition, but framed in very different ways. Wink seeks to examine a space that he defines as the 'Indo-Islamic world', and which includes a good part of Southeast, South and West Asia. In his view, the defining notion is that of 'Islam', a glue that holds his 'world-system' together (and in this Wink follows Marshall Hodgson, and to a lesser extent Maurice Lombard and D. S. Richards). The treatment is largely monocausal, and materialist, in the sense that the growth of trade (which is actually asserted rather than demonstrated) is portrayed as the sole motor of change in the system.

In evident contrast to Wink's linear vision of the inexorable march of Islam, and trade-oriented perspective, is Chaudhuri's massive, primarily structural comparison of various civilizational entities in Asia before 1750. The overt theoretical apparatus here is highly eclectic, but what underlies it is an approach that uses anecdotal evidence to present a surprisingly static vision of Asia before the 'European impact'. More than Wink, Chaudhuri takes as given the traditional division of Asia into areas, and posits structural characteristics for each, even going so far in some draft versions of the chapters to 'plot' the characteristics using elementary Cantorian set theory. The work has had a rather mixed reception, but even its admirers would find it difficult to find clear threads of historical (as opposed to structural, essentialist) argument running through it.

Finally, Bayly's *Imperial Meridian* is ostensibly the least ambitious of the three, certainly the most traditional in its overall construction and coverage, but in many respects the most subtly argued. Despite a

number of minor errors, the argument is of change on a global scale, with many different impulses to change that interact, to produce *inter alia*, the British Empire of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To be sure, this is still macro-history, painted in bold brush strokes, but there is plenty to argue with or even against, and a series of positions that are staked out, both on the political economy of the metropolis, and the multilateral nature of causality.[16]

Taking one thing with another, and considering the works discussed above with a whole host of others, it would appear obvious that we are today in a far better situation with respect to placing early modern Southeast Asian history in a larger comparative context than we were a decade ago. One noteworthy reason for this is that specialists working on Southeast Asia, such as Anthony Reid, Lieberman himself and Denys Lombard, have taken it upon themselves to open up the doors of comparison, and to project early modern Southeast Asia, as it were, on a world stage. This is a significant fact, even if the Anglo-Saxon and Gallic traditions approach the problem rather differently (despite Reid's genuflection in the direction of Braudel). Generalizations are, to my mind, obviously too important to be left to specialized generalists anyway. Yet it is the generalists who, in this century, have all too often generated the 'big' hypotheses in early modern history, be it the great project of the study of comparative civilization proposed and implemented by Max Weber early in this century, or the latter-day historical sociology of Barrington Moore, Perry Anderson, Immanuel Wallerstein or Jack Goldstone.

There is thus a warning to be sounded at the very outset. Area studies can very rapidly become parochialism, and we often see an insistence, taken to the limits of the absurd, concerning the unity of 'Southeast Asia', 'South Asia' or whatever one happens to study. In the case of South Asia, appeals are made to 'caste' and other multi-millennial 'civilization constants' as defining foci. It is as if these conventional geographical units of analysis, fortuitously defined as givens for the intellectually slothful, and the result of complex (even murky) processes of academic and non-academic engagement, somehow become real and overwhelming. Having helped create these Frankenstein's monsters, we are obliged to praise them for their beauty, rather than grudgingly acknowledge their limited functional

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[16] My own book, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia, 1500–1700: A Political and Economic History* (London, 1993), drew inspiration in part from Bayly's work. There are, of course, a number of points of divergence, both stylistic and substantive.

utility.[17] Thus, when Anthony Reid at the outset of his *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, Vol. I, argues (taking half a leaf out of John Smail's book) that Southeast Asia is a well-defined region, has a series of long-standing physical, ethnic, cultural and linguistic characteristics of its own, and thus has a right to an 'autonomous history', the sceptical reader still remains unconvinced. One wonders whether such an argument, made resoundingly in terms of objective absolutes, is at all necessary to justify the choice of a particular geographical canvas, which is after all a mere contingent device. And it is salutary to bear in mind that any Vietnamese voyager who found himself in Arakan in the late seventeenth century would have been as much at a loss as he would in Hughli, whereas many a Bengali notable found a comfortable living in the Magh court.

A collective reflection such as this one may thus seem at first a useful occasion to break out of our specializations and compare notes, perhaps even to reorient our research agendas and 'tune our violins' (as the French put it). The obvious device that presents itself, if we wish to free ourselves from our self-imposed straitjackets and embark on a Roman Holiday, is surely that proposed in Victor Lieberman's theme paper: namely to take the geographical units as given from the conventional wisdom, and then proceed to a higher level of comparison using these very units as building-blocks. This recalls earlier exercises in a similar vein by Perry Anderson, Barrington Moore, Eric Jones and even Braudel (notably in his *Capitalism and Civilisation*). Thus, Lieberman proposes that we accept as appropriate such units as the ones Area Studies provide, or even more conventionally, the borders of modern-day nation-states. Then, working outwards from such units as 'Burma', 'Siam', 'Vietnam', 'Russia', 'France' and 'Japan', we should attempt to generate a series of general propositions. Lieberman periodically argues besides that all of Eurasia can be divided into two blocs: the 'heartlands' or 'cores', and the 'rimlands' that he himself surveys. This very process of arrangement is seen as advancing the argument, even if scholars of France will be somewhat dismayed by his view that the Great Hexagon was a 'rimland', of lesser centrality than, say, Kurdistan.

However, the exercise as it is carried out gives reason for pause. It is striking from my own perspective that the strategic momentum

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[17] From a rather different perspective, this parallels observations made on the study of systems of medicine by Francis Zimmermann, *Généalogie des médecines douces: De l'Inde à l'Occident* (Paris, 1995).

of Lieberman's formulation is not a revisionist, but rather a *conservative*, one, namely to compare Southeast Asia with what are today seen as the really 'big players' in early modern history, Japan and western Europe (the case of Russia being admittedly more complex), to the neglect and detriment of other intra-Asian comparisons. As he himself notes disarmingly, it may seem that the purpose of this exercise is to say that Burma or Laos are as important for early modern world history as the countries of north-western Europe, that is to valorize these areas (today seen as 'marginal') by comparing them with the areas of 'serious' research. From his comparison of the 'rimlands' as he defines them, four general propositions are produced:

1. That the early modern period in these lands is characterized by a sustained movement from local fragmentation to political consolidation.
2. That a drive towards centralization and the growth of coercive state apparatuses accompanies this process.
3. That the standardization of culture and ethnicity within each domain is a concomitant.
4. That commercialization and a 'military revolution' also go hand in hand to interact with the features noted above.

Two objections can be raised directly. Are these four characteristic processes equally true of the areas surveyed by Lieberman? Clearly not, despite the fact that the dice is already loaded in Lieberman's favour, in the sense that he has chosen the examples most congenial to his argument. And are they more true of these areas taken together than of the areas left out? Could they not be equally applied to Spain and Portugal, to the Netherlands, or to Iran under the Safavids and Qajars? Even the case of India appears to be closer to some of these propositions than Lieberman posits.[18]

There is also something to be said for methodological scepticism concerning comparative exercises that are based on an acceptance of what appears to be the broadest conventional wisdom in each of the area-based historiographies under consideration. These area specialists will merely find themselves either 'fitted in' to a big picture, or 'left out'; and no true dialectic engagement will be really possible here between the area specialists and the (even temporary) generalist. Is there a realistic methodological alternative, one that

[18] For a discussion, see Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'L'Etat Moghol et sa fiscalité', *Annales HSS* 49, 1 (1994), 189–217.

does not require one to become a specialist on everything? There are probably several, and in what remains of this paper, I shall concentrate on one broad possibility, namely that of 'connected histories' as opposed to 'comparative histories'. What I shall summarize here are arguments that are developed at greater length elsewhere, and emerge from a series of engagements with specialists on Central Asian and West Asian history, as well as a long period of reflection on the Bay of Bengal as a locus of early modern interaction. To do so, however, we must abandon the developmental perspective that comes down to us with two fathers (Marx and W. W. Rostow), and which believes that the only question worth asking is that of Who Succeeded and Who Failed on the long road to modern industrial capitalism, from a list of modern nation-states.

## II

Contrary to what 'area studies' implicitly presumes, a good part of the dynamic in early modern history was provided by the interface between the local and regional (which we may call the 'micro'-level), and the supra-regional, at times even global (what we may term the 'macro'-level). For the historian who is willing to scratch below the surface of his sources, nothing turns out to be quite what it seems to be in terms of fixity and local rootedness. Methodologically, this poses a problem not only to local patriotism, but to the methodological fragmentationism (*émiettement*, if one likes) proclaimed from the rooftops by some of our post-modernist colleagues to be the only alternative to the Grand Narrative of Modernization. Alas, these post-modernists have conveniently forgotten here that *their* entire theoretical charge is based on the universalization of certain rather limited and specific interventions by philosophers of one particular tradition in relation to others of the same tradition, and—even worse—that it is based on the assumption that certain arbitrarily chosen (and usually evil!) Great Historical Processes (the Enlightenment, Colonialism) have an objective basis that is inexplicably denied to others.

How might the local and specific have interacted with the supra-local in our terms? Consider the Bay of Bengal in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although not a closed sea, the littoral areas of the Bay are a far more tightly knit unit of interaction in this period than the Indian Ocean taken as a whole. Within this zone,

we can witness on the one hand the development of networks of commercial exchange (trade between the Coromandel coast of south-eastern India and Bengal, and Burma, Mergui and the Malay coast), and on the other hand a significant nexus by which military elites, courtiers and religious specialists crossed the Bay on a regular basis. Yet, reading Lieberman's account of Siam, one is left with little or no sense of how this Bay of Bengal nexus mattered for polities like Ayutthaya or Arakan.[19] After all, even Shah Sulaiman's ambassador, Muhammad Rabi', makes it clear in his *Safina-yi Sulaimânî*, written in the 1680s, that the Persian influence in Ayutthaya was played out through the commercial networks of the Bay of Bengal. We have little sense for that matter, from the standard accounts, that the Arakan ruler Thirithudhamma (r. 1622–38) routinely conducted his diplomatic correspondence in Persian, and that he boasted in his letters that his power came not only from Firangis (Franks, here Portuguese and Luso-Asians), but also Telangas (viz. troops from the Deccan).[20] It is almost as if a set of blinkers oblige the historian of Southeast Asia to write, on the one hand, of agriculture, and on the other hand of European trade, as if all external contact in the early modern world was limited to dealings with Europeans. Yuko Tanaka's comments, cited in epigraph at the outset of this paper, are obviously of relevance to more than Japan alone. It makes little sense, to my mind, to talk of mainland Southeast Asia in this period as if it were isolated from the Indian world, even though Southeast Asianists may fear for their part that this is the thin end of the wedge of a revamped 'Greater India' formulation.

Let us continue with a simple example that takes us further west. During the course of a campaign in Afghanistan in mid-1581—that is in the year 989 of the Hegiran calendar which is followed by most Muslims the world over—the Mughal ruler Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar began quizzing the Portuguese Jesuit António Monserrate (then on a mission to his court) on matters pertaining to the millennium, that is about 'the Last Judgement, whether Christ would be the Judge, and when it would occur'. The underlying purpose was

[19] For an earlier, more empirically substantiated, statement, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500–1650* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 4.

[20] I develop these themes at greater length in my paper, 'Persianisation and Mercantilism: Two Themes in Bay of Bengal History, 1400–1750', in Denys Lombard and Om Prakash (eds), *Trade and Cultural Contacts in the Bay of Bengal, 1400–1800* (Delhi: Manohar, forthcoming).

complex, and surely lay in part in Akbar's desire to tease out both the theological differences and the commonalities between his own heterodox brand of Islam and the Jesuit version of Christianity. Monserrate, himself a strong believer in portents like some other influential members of his order, reports in his *Mongoliecae Legationis Commentarius* that he stated that the Day of Judgement was a divine mystery, which would, however, be known by certain signs, namely 'wars and rebellions, the fall of kingdoms and nations, the invasion, devastation and conquest of nation by nation and kingdom by kingdom: and these things we see happening very frequently in our time'.[21] The hint in the last phrase was rather broad, and must have found an echo in a court where millenarian verses attributed to Nasir-i Khusrau and others, enjoyed wide circulation. Later, Akbar is reported to have asked if Muhammad was mentioned in the Gospel, to which Monserrate responded by insisting that he was not, being a false prophet. Monserrate now writes that Akbar wondered aloud, somewhat disingenuously, 'Surely Muhammad cannot be he who is to appear at the end of the world as the adversary of all mankind (that is he whom the Musalmans calls Dijal)', the reference being to the idea of the *masîh al-dajjâl*, the Anti-Christ who appears in some Islamic legends as riding on an ass at the end of time.

This incident, a trivial one, begins to assume significance when set in its wider regional and supra-regional context. For a millenarian conjuncture operated over a good part of the Old World in the sixteenth century and was the backdrop to such discussions as that between Akbar and Monserrate, which took place just eleven years before the year 1000 A.H (1591–92). This was a time when many Muslims in southern and western Asia, as well as North Africa anxiously awaited signs that the end of the world was nigh, and when the Most Catholic Monarch, Philip II of Spain, equally wrote gloomily: 'If this is not the end of the world, I think we must be very close to it; and, please God, let it be the end of the whole world, and not just the end of Christendom'.[22] Speaking of supra-local connections in the early modern world, we tend to focus on such phenomena as world bullion flows and their impact, firearms and the so-called

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[21] H. Hosten (ed.), 'Mongoliecae Legationis Commentarius', in *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3 (1914), 513–704; S. N. Banerjee and John S. Hoyland (tr.), *The Commentary of Father Monserrate S.J. on his Journey to the Court of Akbar* (London, 1922).

[22] Cited in Geoffrey Parker, *Philip II*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, 1995), xvi. The letter is dated December 1574.

'Military Revolution', or the circulation of renegades and mercenaries. But ideas and mental contructs, too, flowed across political boundaries in that world, and—even if they found specific local expression—enable us to see that what we are dealing with are not separate and comparable, but connected histories. The fact that Akbar and Monserrate could and did converse on the impending End of the World (or *qiyâmat*, from an Indo-Persian viewpoint) obviously reflects several facts. First, it points to the conspicuous presence of European Catholic missionary orders, who—partly propelled by the Counter-Reformation—made their way to Asian and African courts, and thus were an element of circulation in early modern Eurasia, together with mercenaries, renegades, diplomats, Buddhist monks and Sufis. Indeed, Augustinians and Jesuits are to be found in both Burma and Cambodia at the turn of the seventeenth century, and provide valuable insights into local histories (especially elite politics) at the time. Any consideration of early modern state-building activity that neglects this element of elite circulation misses out on one of the key themes that characterizes the period: namely a change in the nature and scale of elite movement across political boundaries. Besides, the Akbar–Monserrate conversation points to the permeability of what are often assumed to be closed 'cultural zones', and the existence of vocabularies that cut across local religious traditions, here the heterodox Sunni-inflected Islam represented by Akbar, and Monserrate's zealous Counter-Reformation Christianity. These vocabularies were partly 'secular' (in the sense, at least, of spilling across sectarian boundaries), and also drew on a body of lore and myth that went back to medieval times. And, finally, the locus of the conversation itself is not without interest, for it took place as Akbar was on an expedition to suppress the ambitions of his half-brother Mirza Muhammad Hakim, ruler of Kabul, and a rival claimant in the Indian sub-continent to the legacy of the 'world-conquerors' Chinggis Khan and Timur. Akbar's eventual triumph, and the death of Mirza Hakim in 1585, signalled the victory of a Timurid order that was less oriented towards Central Asia, less prone to appanaging and which sought to adumbrate a theory of sovereignty with a far wider social basis than any that had existed in the domain of the Indo-Islamic states.[23] The conversation on Messianism thus represents one

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[23] For a further discussion, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'A Note on the Kabul Kingdom under Muhammad Hakim Mirza (1554–1585)', *La Transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman périphérique, Lettre d'information No. 14* (1994), 89–101.

of the many ideological currents that were present in Akbar's court at this crucial moment of transition.[24]

The notion of the 'early modern' is hence linked, if not directly, then in some important indirect respects to a changed domain of global interaction that has to do with such diverse matters as the legacy of Chinggis Khan and Timur, the Counter-Reformation and its overseas drive to proselytize, as well as the so-called Voyages of Discovery. Indeed, researches in recent years have shown that millenarian aspirations helped drive Columbus on his westward voyage, and that there may even have been a curious—and ironical—parallel between that millenarianism and the apocalyptic vision of some of the indigenous American peoples that the Spaniards encountered in the aftermath of 1492. Columbus, it now appears, was heavily influenced by Franciscan apocalyptic thought on the coming of the millennium, so much so that he asked to be buried in the habit of that religious order.[25] Thus, the Great Discoveries to the west, for long regarded as signalling the Birth of Modernity and the beginnings of a truly universal sensibility, now appear to historians to have been the product not only of advances in navigational techniques and geographical knowledge, or of the materialist drive to acquire riches (as Vitorino Magalhães Godinho argued so forcefully in the Portuguese case), but equally of an embarrassingly 'medieval' view of the world, which had as much in common with Joachim of Fiore as with Copernicus.[26] Not only Columbus, but the Portuguese monarch Dom Manuel (r. 1495–1521) and some of his chief ideologues and agents such as Duarte Galvão and Afonso de Albuquerque inhabited this altogether curious collective mental world.

In fact, as the fifteenth century of the Christian calendar drew to a close, the power of signs and portents concerning the millennium did not diminish; they were merely modified, and appeared in unprecedented forms. The sixteenth century thus saw the emergence of a new set of material conditions within which millenarianism could

[24] In this context, we may note that the social, ideological and political ramifications of the important Mahdawi movement in sixteenth-century northern India will be discussed in the forthcoming work of Derryl Maclean, *Waiting for the End of the World*.

[25] Abbas Hamdani, 'Columbus and the Recovery of Jerusalem', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, 1 (1979), 39–48; also John L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World* (Berkeley, 1970).

[26] Cf. Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, *Mito e mercadoria, utopia e prática de navegar, séculos XIII–XVIII* (Lisbon, 1990); and in contrast, the important new interpretation in Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor* (Lisbon, 1994).

arise, and propagate itself both as a current that embraced a large geographical space, and as a phenomenon that had specific, and even unique, local manifestations. The metaphor of monetary circulation, although inevitably flawed, may be useful here, for the sixteenth century saw dramatic transformations in world bullion flows as well, as a vast interpenetrating network of silver girdled the globe. And yet, the consequences of this phenomenon were different for different societies. The inflation and accompanying social unquiet witnessed in the Iberian peninsula found only a pale reflection in the Ottoman domains, and India seems to have witnessed practically no inflation at all. Millenarianism, like money, allows us to approach a problem of global dimensions, but with quite different local manifestations.[27] This means in turn that we cannot attempt a 'macro-history' of the problem without muddying our boots in the bogs of 'micro-history'.

As has been pointed out by the Ottomanist historian Cornell Fleischer, in his forthcoming work *A Mediterranean Apocalypse*, one can show, using the notion of a millenarian conjuncture, that the historical rhythms of the northern and southern shores of the early modern Mediterranean were linked together not only by climate and geography, economic forces and political rivalries (as argued by Fernand Braudel), but by certain common cultural traits, including a shared sense of millenarian expectation in the century after Columbus. Drawing on primary materials from the Ottoman domains, and linking them to an array of secondary millenarian materials from the European Mediterranean, ranging from writings on Savonarola in Florence, to Carlo Ginzburg's celebrated miller, to the millenarian expectations at the court of Philip II of Spain set out by Richard Kagan and others, Fleischer skilfully suggests that the entire Mediterranean was the space over which a millenarian conjuncture operated in the Age of Charles V and Philip II.[28] While this is undoubtedly valid, I shall argue that it may be equally fruitful to see Ottoman millenarianism in relation to similar processes further east (notably in Safavid Iran, Mughal India and the Deccan), while at the same time suggesting that, in the far west of Eurasia, Portugal, too,

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[27] See the important paper by Cemal Kafadar, 'Les troubles monétaires de la fin du XVIe siècle et la prise de conscience ottomane du déclin', *Annales ESC* 46, 2 (1991), 381–400.

[28] See, for example, Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley, 1990); and earlier, Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1970).

should be brought into the picture for a rounded understanding of the Mediterranean.

Taking a broad view of the Ottoman Empire, Iran and North Africa, we see that in the context of the year 1000 A.H., expectations in these areas were not uniformly apocalyptic. Rather, they also hovered optimistically around the possibility of a re-ordering of the known world, through the intercession of a *mujaddid* (or 'Renewer'); thus, at least one celebrated religious reformer of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in India, Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, assumed the title of *mujaddid-i alf-i sânî* ('Renewer of the Second Millennium'). The idea of the *mujaddid* paralleled, but did not replace, another idea with deep roots in Islamic history, namely the notion of the Imam Mahdi, the Concealed or Expected One, who would emerge to reform the world in a radical fashion. Canonical texts describe the Imam Mahdi thus: that he would be a descendant of the Prophet and hence a member of the Quraishi clan, that he would be a certain Muhammad Mahdi and that when he appeared Christ (Isa Masih), too, would appear. After all men had been led to Islam by the Mahdi's intervention, the Day of Judgement would commence.

It has sometimes been asserted, somewhat erroneously, that it is the Shi'as alone who believe in the Mahdi. This appears to be incorrect, even if some orthodox Sunnis have argued in a similar fashion at various points in time. We may consider the example of Morocco in the middle years of the sixteenth century, where the ruler Muhammad al-Shaikh, second of the Sa'di dynasty of Sayyids from the southern Atlas, took to titling himself 'al-Mahdi'. Of Al-Mahdi's older brother, Ahmad al-A'raj, it had already been said by his admirers that he was the one who had been promised by the Prophet and Law-Giver (*sâhib al-shari'a*) as 'the one who would appear at the end of time'. It is noteworthy that their opponents, the Wattasids, reacted to their challenge by accusing them of being Shi'as, whereas it appears far more probable that these millenarian ideas were brought to their court by Andalusian Muslims.

Indeed, as Cornell Fleischer has demonstrated, that most Sunni of states, the Ottoman Empire, had a long-drawn-out flirtation with Mahdism in the mid-sixteenth century, particularly during the reigns of Yavuz Sultan Selim (r. 1512–20) and his son Sultan Süleyman (r. 1520–66). He cites a text composed after Selim's conquest of eastern Anatolia, Syria and Egypt, in 1517, which uses a series of grandiose epithets to describe him, ranging from 'Succoured by God', to 'The

Master of the Conjunction', to the 'Shadow of God' (*zill Allâh*). A
later retrospective account from the 1550s went much further: in
this text by Lutfi Pasha, titled *Tawârîkh-i Âl-i 'Osmân*, Selim is
described as the *mujaddid* of the age, and as a World Conqueror. Lutfi
Pasha cites with evident approval two letters addressed to Selim,
ostensibly written by Sunni *'ulama* from Transoxania, which refer to
him quite unambiguously as *mahdi-yi âkhir-i zamân* ('Last Messiah of
the Age'), and as *qudrat-i ilâhî* ('Divine Force'). Fleischer argues in
some detail that the nature of Süleyman's ambitions and self-
perception changed rather extensively between the 1520s, when he
first came to the throne, and the 1560s. In the first half of his reign,
the Ottoman Sultan appears to have been strongly influenced by the
millenarian currents that had been inherited from the previous
reign, and had taken to designating himself *Sâhib-Qirân*, 'Master of
the Conjunction' (a title derived paradoxically, from the Ottomans'
erstwhile enemy, Timur), as also *Mujaddid*.

At the same time, the particular vocabulary utilized in the entour-
ages of Selim and Süleyman must be seen in the context of develop-
ments immediately to their east, notably their long-standing rivalry
with the Safavids, a dynasty with fairly overt messianistic preten-
sions. The founder of the dynasty, Shah Isma'il, on his assuming royal
titles in 1501, emerged rapidly as a figure with an eschatological
aura surrounding him.[29] Identified by himself and by his followers
variously with the prestigious figures of 'Ali and Alexander, and at
times even with God himself, Shah Isma'il's appearance on the scene
of Iranian politics caused ripples as far as Venice and Lisbon. Sur-
rounded by his *qizilbâsh* followers, who saw in him a Sufi master of
whom they were the disciples, Shah Isma'il elaborated a set of rituals,
drawing elements from the practices of both earlier Sufi orders, and
shamanistic ritual. The contemporary Italian traveller, Francesco
Romano, wrote of him: 'Some say that he is God, others that he is a
Prophet. All of them, and in particular his soldiers, say that he will
not die, and will live eternally'; another Italian reporter, Giovanni
Morosini, wrote to his principals from Damascus in 1507 that the
Shah was 'adored in place of one Ali, a relative and apostle of
Muhammad'. There was a certain element of simplification inherent

[29] For the best discussion to date of early sixteenth-century Iran, see Jean Aubin,
'L'avènement des Safavides réconsideré', *Moyen Orient et Océan Indien* 5 (1988), 1–
130. My discussion of Shah Isma'il draws liberally on this extensive, and very well-
documented, essay. But, see also several of the essays in Jean Calmard (ed.), *Études
safavides* (Paris–Teheran, 1993).

in this description, of course. Some of Shah Isma'il's own seals suggest that he took a more nuanced view of his own position, as we see from the epithet 'Sovereign whom God has in His Grace accompanied on the way' (*Shahanshâhi ke khudâ shud be lutf hamrâh ash*) used in one of them. Further, his own poetry, while judged to be not of the highest literary quality, is significant for its simultaneous identification with Alexander, God and 'Ali, and its use of the pen-name (*takhallus*) of Khatâ'i, which is to say 'The Sinner'.[30]

While the reign of Shah Isma'il's successor, Tahmasb (r. 1524–76), remains obscure in many respects, it appears more or less certain that he had begun by its middle years to retreat from the messianic pretensions that attended the dynasty's foundation. Ties with the *qizilbâsh* were gradually loosened, and the old Turkoman Sufi followers of Shah Isma'il kept at a distance from the reign. The contested and bloody interregnum that followed this reign, and especially the rule of Shah Isma'il II (1576–77) and its aftermath, saw the recrudescence of millenarian rumours and political forces.[31] However—and this is significant—such groups as adhered to millenarian ideologies were now largely ranged against the state, usually through the device of supporting pretenders claiming to be Shah Isma'il II, miraculously returned from the dead. The most important of these episodes dates to 1580–81 (988 A.H.), when a *qalandar* (or dervish) called Muzawwar emerged to challenge Safavid regional governors, claiming to be the dead Shah. This movement claimed at its height some 20,000 supporters, and was eventually brutally crushed through military force. Other similar movements appeared over the next few years, albeit with more limited popular support.[32]

With the accession in Iran of Shah 'Abbas in the late 1580s, the millenarian atmosphere there took on a decidedly different twist. The first decades of the reign are marked by conflicts between the Shah and a resurgent order of heterodox Sufis, the Nuqtavis. As recently analysed in some detail by Kathryn Babayan, the Nuqtavi challenge fructified precisely because the Safavids moved from their initial insistence on

[30] Cf. V. Minorsky, 'The Poetry of Shâh Ismâ'îl I', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 10, 4 (1942), 1006a–53a; for other verses, see also Tourkhan Gandjei, *Il Canzoniere di Shâh Ismâ'il* (Naples, 1959).

[31] For a brief overview of this reign, and an attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of this ruler, see Michel M. Mazzaoui, 'The Religious Policy of Shah Isma'il II', in M. M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen (eds), *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honour of Martin B. Dickson* (Salt Lake City, 1990), 49–56.

[32] R. M. Savory, 'A Curious Episode in Safavid History', in C. E. Bosworth (ed.), *Iran and Islam: In Memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky* (Edinburgh, 1971), 461–73.

_ghuluww_ (which is to say heterodox beliefs of a chiliastic nature, in their case), to a form of Imamism which brought them far closer to the _sharī'a_.[33] This meant abandoning an attachment to certain legendary or semi-legendary characters in early Islamic history, such as Abu Muslim, and Muhammad ibn Hanafiyya, who had earlier played a significant role in the Safavid world-view. In turn, the Nuqtavis took to claiming by the 1580s that the Shahs had lost legitimacy, and that it was one of their number who would convert 'spiritual monarchy' into a form of real sovereignty (_pādishāhī-yi sūrī_). A large number of _qizilbāsh_, who had in any case been drifting away from the Safavid dynasty, now attached themselves to the new order, leading to a most dramatic confrontation in the early 1590s.

In a first step to resolving the tensions with the Nuqtavis, Shah 'Abbas went so far as to declare himself a disciple of the powerful Nuqtavi, Darvish Khusrau. But this was not enough to appease the Nuqtavis, who began to claim that in Muharram 1002 (1593), one of their number would emerge as ruler and displace 'Abbas. Once the Safavid court astrologer, too, announced that the imminent conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter portended the death of the ruling sovereign, 'Abbas decided to resolve the affair in a novel manner. He imprisoned or executed the bulk of the Nuqtavis, but chose one from amongst them—a certain Yusufi Tarkishduz—to whom he abdicated the throne. Thus, the puppet Yusufi was the one who actually sat the throne during the unlucky conjunction, while Shah 'Abbas claimed merely to be the guardian of the harem gates for the interim. Once the conjunction had passed, after a four-day reign in which he was kept under strict guard, Yusufi was taken out, shot and his body hung on a scaffold for public view.[34] Thus, the prophecy was nominally fulfilled; a Sultan did indeed die, but it was not Shah 'Abbas! In other words, millenarianism was not a given to be accepted fatalistically, but a resource that a monarchy with centralizing tendencies of no mean dimensions could make use of creatively.

## III

Millerarianism was thus a force to be reckoned with, and a potent and complex political strategy, in the sixteenth century not only in

[33] Indeed, my discussion here draws largely on Kathryn Babayan, 'The Waning of the Qizilbâsh: The Temporal and the Spiritual in Seventeenth-Century Iran' (Princeton University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1993).

[34] Babayan, 'The Waning of the Qizilbâsh', 48–64.

the Mediterranean but further east, indeed as far as Southeast Asia, as I shall argue below. If at times it was used to build a state, as with Shah Ismaïl, or to consolidate a phase of rapid geographical expansion, as with Sultan Selim, it was at other moments used to challenge the state in significant ways. Before we extend our analysis further into India, it may be useful to pause a moment to set out some of the common salient elements of Islamic millenarianism as it extended in the sixteenth century from North Africa and the Balkans into South Asia. Central to the issue, we have seen, was the imminent arrival of the millennium. The expectation of a messianic figure was linked to dreams of a 'universal' kingdom, which in the Ottoman case was perhaps interpreted somewhat literally, but in other instances appears to have a more metaphorical content ('universal' being interpreted to signify the conquest of an enemy, who was at the same time a 'complementary' element). Such a quest for universal conquest led almost inevitably to a reinterpretation of the legend of Alexander, the quintessential World Conqueror for the Islamic world in the epoch.

The eastern recension of the Alexandrine legend, which passed from Syriac into Persian, and was raised to classical form by Nizami Ganjawi in his *Sikandar Nâma*, usually recognized Alexander not only as a World Conqueror but as a Prophet.[35] Certain elements in the legend were seen as key in nature. There is first the linking of him to Darius, in fact his Achaemenid opponent in history, who is now often seen as Alexander's half-brother. The war between the two is thus a fratricidal one, and is an important step in Alexander's (Sikandar's) claim to be a universal monarch and a world conqueror, uniting the Hellenic and Persian worlds. Darius is defeated by Alexander (hence the latter's epithet of *dârâ-shikan*), and in many versions two traitors among his own men stab him, hoping to win favour with Alexander (in fact, Darius was assassinated by a satrap at Hecatompylos, in 330 B.C.). Alexander kills the two traitors and visits a dying Darius, promising to restore him to his throne; but it is too late. This pairing appears not only in the *Sikandar Nâma*, but equally in the *Akhbâr-i Dârâb*, or *Dârâb Nâma*, a fantastic cycle of stories, which provided the basis for some fine paintings of the early Mughal period (c. 1580).[36]

[35] *The Sikandar Nâmah-i-Bahri by Nizâmî*, 2 vols, eds A. Sprenger, Agha Muhammad Shustari and Moulawi Ali Agha Ahmad Ali (Calcutta, 1852–69).

[36] The *Dârâb Nâma* in question is by Abu Tahir ibn Hasan Musa al-Tarsusi, British Museum, London, MSS. Or. 4615; two paintings representing the swallowing of Shah Ardashir by a dragon, and the island of Nigar are reproduced in Stuart Cary Welch, *Imperial Mughal Painting* (London, 1978), 48–51.

A second element in the legend concerns the science of signs, for Sikandar is shown not merely as conqueror but seer. There are thus a number of treatises in astrology (*Fâl-Nâma*) attributed to him. Alexander's association with Aristotle obviously did his reputation no harm in this respect. In terms of pictorial representation, this aspect of the legend often focuses on the so-called *waqwâq* tree, or he tree of Waqwaq island. Alexander, in his wanderings, is reputed to have arrived at this legendary island, in which monkeys had been taught to sweep houses and fetch wood, where gold was in such easy availability that the inhabitants made their utensils from it, and where a celebrated tree had fruits that resembled the heads of animals and men. In the legend, it is the *waqwâq* tree that informs Alexander of his own impending doom. It is the science of signs, and astrology, that also helps to establish the connection between the Alexandrine legend and another key piece in the textual fabric of sixteenth-century millenarianism. This is the Book of Daniel (or *Kitâb-i Dâniyâl*), which revolves around the apocalyptic myth concerning the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.[37] Much used by court-astrologers in the sixteenth century, the Book of Daniel was often conflated, or read together with talismanic texts, and the *Fâl Nâma* texts attributed to Alexander. It also helped give currency to the equivalence between the Universal Kingdom to be established in the millennium, and the Fifth Empire of Daniel's interpretation.

A third element in the legend is Alexander's search for immortality and the Water of Life (*âb-i hayât*), to which end he receives instruction not merely from Aristotle. His guide in this search is none other than Khwaja Khizr, the immortal prophet of verdure, who takes him to the very end of the journey, where Alexander eventually fails. Khizr, on the other hand, drinks the elixir, hence his immortality. He thus represents a sort of initiator and guide-cum-prophet, who is also a sign of the coming of the Eternal Kingdom; in sixteenth-century North India and the Ottoman Empire, we can see him clearly linked to Islamic millenarian expectations.

Finally, an element of great significance in the eastern Alexandrine legend is his protection of 'civilization' against 'barbarian' forces. Concretely, this is the episode that recurs in most such texts, where Alexander (Sikandar) builds a copper wall at the edge of the

world, to defend civilization against the depredations of Gog and Magog (*ŷajûj wa majûj*), again figures that can be used to trace links to the Old Testament. The crucial point underlying the legend must, however, not be forgotten. It is Alexander's destiny to establish not merely an universal kingdom, but a kingdom of *Islam*, and Gog and Magog are thus the enemies of Islam. Assimilated to the tenuous figure of the Zu'lqarnain (the 'Two-Horned') in the Qur'an, Alexander is thus to the Persian, Indo-Persian and Ottoman authors a paragon of Persianized Islam.[38]

We can briefly follow the Alexandrine legend in its career into Southeast Asia as well. In the case of Aceh, we see the production of the *Hikayat Iskandar Zulkarnain* in several Malay recensions, dating to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and a fairly explicit attempt to assimilate the legend to the figure of the celebrated Sultan Iskandar Muda (r. 1607–36), whose title and grandiose patronage to texts (some based explicitly on Mughal models) tell their own tale. Elsewhere, Denys Lombard has analysed this text in some detail, and also placed it in a comparative perspective, by relating its world-conquering ambitions to those of the *Voyages of the San Bao Eunuch* (i.e. the Chinese admiral Zheng He), and Camões's *Lusíadas*.[39] He concludes that this text represents the beginnings of a rather different ordering of space in the Malay world, and argues in turn that this can be related to an emerging conception of the individual and of agency in the commercial cities of the *pasisir* and elsewhere. Later in the same century, a version of the *Sikandar Nâma* was written at the Arakan court by Sayyid Alaol, in Bengali; this version portrays Sikandar as a protagonist of a vigorous and altogether uncompromising Islam, who appears to be compared with Alaol's sometime patron, the Mughal prince Shah Shuja'. The Arakan court, wherein the court chronicles were written in Pali, but where Persian was used, and Bengali the major language of literary expression, has escaped scholarly attention for the most part,

[38] I have closely followed the summary in Mohammad Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (Delhi, 1935), 200–1; but, see also Peter Gaeffke, 'Alexander and the Bengali Sufis', in Alan W. Entwistle and Françoise Mallison (eds), *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature, Research Papers, 1988–1991* (New Delhi, 1994), 275–84, basing himself on the text in Ahmad Sharif (ed.), *Alâûl viracita Sikandarnâma* (Dhaka, 1977).

[39] Denys Lombard, 'Les *Lusiades* comparées à deux autres "visions" de la fin du XVIe siècle: le *Xi Yang Ji* et le roman malais d'Alexandre', in Artur Teodoro de Matos and Luís Filipe F. Reis Thomaz (eds), *As Relações entre a Índia Portuguesa, a Ásia do Sueste e o Extremo Oriente* (Macau–Lisbon, 1993), 173–86.

because it falls in the cracks between defining Area Studies. Yet, it may very well be here, at the uncomfortable edges of our categories, that we may find important clues that help us to define the key elements of connectedness and transmission that characterize early modern history. After all, Arakan was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also a player in the network of inter-state politics that concerned the control of Buddhist relics; in Arakan, as in Kandy or in lower Burma, such artefacts and their circulation were central to the definition of the state's legitimacy, and explain the frequent exchange of embassies, relics and learned Buddhist monks between Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka.[40]

How are we to read such materials in the context of a broader notion of what constitutes early modern history? Clearly, we have the possibility of posing such questions in the context of a comparative model, in which individual states are taken as building blocks. Thus, we may take, for example, the synthesis proposed by comparative sociologist Jack A. Goldstone (from which Lieberman explicitly draws sustenance), where we have a discussion of 'Ideology, Cultural Frameworks, Revolutionary Struggles, and State Reconstruction' (Chapter 5), in which the reader is presented with a model in which 'state breakdown', often accompanied by millenarian movements, is the result of a Malthusian population–resource imbalance in a series of autonomously modelled states. Thus, population pressure leads to a fiscal crisis, the fiscal crisis to intra-elite conflicts, and these interact with popular unrest (centring inevitably on food shortages) to produce ideologies of 'rectification and transformation'.[41]

Further, and rather more curiously, Goldstone's early modern world is divided neatly into two sub-sets, societies that work with 'eschatological' frameworks, and those that work with 'cyclical' frameworks. He concludes, moreover (pp. 447–8), that Iran alone from the Islamic world adhered to 'a uniquely eschatological strain of Islam', namely Shi'ism, and that otherwise the 'eschatological element was an innovation of Judeo-Christian culture'. Goldstone does

[40] Cf. in this context, H. L. Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State* (Cambridge, 1978), for an exploration of Buddhist rituals around the sacred tooth relic at Kandy, and its relations to state-building. Also, C. E. Godakumbara, 'Relations between Burma and Ceylon', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 44, 2 (1966), 145–62, and most recently, Catherine Raymond, 'Étude des relations religieuses entre le Sri Lanka et l'Arakan du XIIe au XVIIIe siècle: Documentation historique et évidences archéologiques', *Journal Asiatique* 283, 2 (1995), 469–501.

[41] Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley, 1991).

not draw any major conclusions from this for his model, which is after all constructed with a mechanistic materialism that makes Maurice Cornforth appear a cultural relativist. But, the characterization is, nevertheless, important in and of itself as a way of analysing early modern ideological frameworks. And, needless to add, the brunt of our argument has been to argue for the contamination of such neat categories: far from being a mere prisoner of the cyclical vision of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimâh* (as Goldstone bluntly states), the Ottoman version of sixteenth-century millenarianism contained significant areas of commonality with both Iran, India and the Christian Mediterranean, to say nothing of some parts of mainland and insular Southeast Asia.

## IV

To resume the argument thus far, it has been that several spheres of the circulation of powerful myths and ideological constructs relating to state formation existed in early modern Eurasia, and that these often transcended the boundaries defined for us retrospectively by nation-states or Area Studies. How were these myths and ideas carried, and did the channels by which they circulated also serve as the sluices for the convection of other 'technologies'? Before entering into this question, it is imperative to note that the brunt of our argument is not to negate the notion of difference, and to reduce the Eurasian landscape to a flat terrain. Even if we were to accept Frank Perlin's picturesque formulation of Eurasia as an 'unbroken landscape' before say, 1900, this would not require us to argue that continuity (thus, unbrokenness) and change (thus, difference) were antonyms.[42]

My purpose here is more complex. It is, first of all, to shift the grounds of discussion from Lieberman's highly materialist conception (wherein agricultural expansion, commercial exchange, firearms, fiscal methods and functional ideologies are all that count) to a rather broader-based conception of early modern history. This partly reflects my concern as a historian trained in economics at the rather cavalier use of materialism by colleagues, who are constantly dashing off to find Price Revolutions and Little Ice Ages, just because they

[42] Cf. Frank Perlin, *Unbroken Landscape: Commodity, Category, Sign and Identity: Their Production, Strengths and Knowledge from 1500* (Aldershot, 1994).

happened to be in vogue twenty years ago in the European histori-ography. The fact is, as the symposium on the 'seventeenth-century crisis' in Asia in this journal (Vol. XXIV, No. 4, 1990) some years ago shows, that the major evidence thrown up by W. S. Atwell, Anthony Reid and John Richards of such a 'crisis' is the traditional evidence of political crisis at the level of states.[43] The attempts to link these up to gigantic materialist motors puts one in mind of Rube Goldberg rather than any recognizable form of social science.

What underlies these materialisms? There is, first of all, the option of geographical determinism: some states are too small, others too large, others have mountains to their north, some to the south, still others are islands and so on. Since such arguments are used fitfully and opportunistically for the most part, once the outcome is known, there is obviously quite a lot of room for manoeuvre once geography has been disposed of. The second is residual cultural explanation, of the type favoured by Weber, and still the ghost in many machines. Here the 'failure' to be the same (as western Europe, naturally) is eventually laid at the door of 'culture' because no other reason exists. There is, of course, a profound circularity in this type of reasoning, since no two cultures are the same by definition.

Taking as our point of departure the notion of connectedness may conceivably lead us down a different path. After all, even within a 'society', however we choose to define it, the constituent sub-units fare differently over historical time, not only in the sense of better and worse, but in the sense of survival and elimination, or more simply difference. Thus, when inflation struck Spain in the latter part of the sixteenth century, not all parts of Spanish society were equally affected by its negative effects; some sections may even have been better off as a consequence. Regional and social differences are likely to have affected the response to, and the making of, this phenomenon.[44] At one level, the global phenomenon of bullion flows

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[43] For the most thought-provoking piece in the collection, see brief essay by Niels Steensgaard, 'The Seventeenth Century Crisis and the Unity of Eurasian History', *Modern Asian Studies* 24, 4 (1990), 683–97. It is curious that what inspired this 'revisionist' wave in early modern Asian studies was the singularly inconclusive, and at times positively woolly-headed, debate on seventeenth-century Europe, for which see Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith (eds), *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1978).

[44] For one detailed case-study, see Carla Rahn Phillips, *Ciudad Real, 1500–1750: Growth, Crisis and Readjustment in the Spanish Economy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 71–5, *passim*. The 'bureaucratic elite' of the area is shown to have invested in land, taking advantage of distress sales by small landholders.

both magnifies and renders complex what we can see in Iberia. The extent of regional and social variants becomes that much more complex, and the consequences in terms of the redistribution of wealth are also rendered so, without wholly altering the nature of the phenomenon.

Nationalism has blinded us to the possibility of connection, and historical ethnography, whether in one of its western variants of high Orientalism, or whether practised in the East, has aided and abetted this unfortunate process. The thrust of such ethnography has always been to emphasize difference, and more usually the positional superiority of the observer over the observed (save in particular situations where the 'colonized' observer had internalized someone else's values, and found himself and his own society wanting by those measures).[45] At the same time, this ethnography itself was the product of certain characteristically early modern phenomena, the intensification of travel, the desire to be able to map the world in its entirety and locate each human 'species' in its niche, and thus, to separate the civilized from the uncivilized, as well as to distinguish different degrees of civilization.

Contrary to what is sometimes argued, I do not see these phenomena as peculiar products of European expansion, although western Europeans were often in a better position, empirically speaking, to practise it than others. Nevertheless, almost any process of early modern empire building was also a process of classification, of identifying difference either in order to preserve it (as in the case of the Ottoman *millet* system), or in order to further a civilizing mission of acculturation. The post-modernist wave in social science persists in the error of identifying this urge to define, describe and classify (and eventually to differentiate) with the European Enlightenment, but in fact it exists outside of Europe, and earlier than the so-called Enlightenment. We find ourselves, in part, its victims even today, and it would be absurd to suggest that we could throw off this heavy heritage by a mere act of will. Given the fragmentary nature of access to knowledge, each of us is more or less condemned in greater or lesser measure to Area Studies. Let me end, therefore, with the plea, once more, that we not only compare from within our boxes, but spend some time and effort to transcend them, not by compar-

ison alone but by seeking out the at times fragile threads that con-
nected the globe, even as the globe came to be defined as such. This
is not to deny voice to those who were somehow 'fixed' by physical,
social and cultural coordinates, who inhabited 'localities' in the early
modern period and nothing else, and whom we might seek out with
our intrepid analytical machetes.[46] But if we ever get to 'them' by
means other than archaeology, the chances are that it is because they
are already plugged into some network, some process of circulation.

[46] Cf. in this context, the pertinent comments in David Ludden, 'History Outside
Civilization and the Mobility of South Asia', *South Asia* (n.s.) 17, 1 (1994), 1–23.