The English East India Company can be said to have been the most important company ever founded. In existence for more than two hundred and fifty years, it ran a complex, highly integrated, and truly global trading network. It governed territories that far exceeded, in extent and population, the British Isles, and protected its seaborne trade and vast territories with a navy and one of the world’s largest armies. It minted coins in its name, established law courts and prisons, sponsored scientific expeditions, prosecuted wars and signed treaties, and accounted for about 14% of all imports to Britain during much of the eighteenth century. It supplied tea for Boston’s tea party, the saltpeter for Britain’s gunpowder industry, and the opium for China’s principal nineteenth-century addiction. For most of its history, it was a British monopoly, with exclusive rights to trade and rule in Southern and Eastern Asia. What it brought back to London was astonishingly varied, from wealth that helped to underwrite Britain’s European wars to the Chinese porcelain and silks that inspired the eighteenth-century Chinoiserie craze, to new words, such as “loot” and “cash” and “thug” that are now so much a part of the English language. What it took from London were woolen goods it could barely sell, Spanish silver that always opened doors, and a fiercely competitive mentality. Over time, the Company developed a pronounced and aggressive nationalism that laid the foundation for Britain’s Eastern empire. A study of the Company, then, is a study of the rise of the early modern world.