This comparative study investigates court politics in four kingdoms that succeeded the south Indian Vijayanagara empire during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries: Ikkeri, Tanjavur, Madurai, and Ramnad. Building on a unique combination of unexplored Indian texts and Dutch archival records, this research offers a captivating new analysis of political culture, power relations, and dynastic developments.

In great detail, this monograph provides both new facts and fresh insights that contest existing scholarship. By highlighting their competitive, fluid, and dynamic nature, it undermines the historiography viewing these courts as harmonic, hierarchic, and static. Far from being remote, ritualised figures, we find kings and Brahmins contesting with other courtiers for power. At the same time, by stressing continuities with the past, this study questions recent scholarship that perceives a fundamentally new form of Nayaka kingship. Thus, this research has important repercussions for the way we perceive both these kingdoms and their ‘medieval’ precursors.

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This is an important contribution to the study of Early Modern South India. Its comparative approach highlights what makes each court distinctive, while also showing the courts’ family resemblances as ‘heirs’ of Vijayanagara. Bes’s careful study of Dutch-language primary sources describing the customs and relationships between historical actors are critical to a fuller understanding of this period.

– Anna Lise Seastrand, University of Minnesota.

This monograph makes a major contribution to early modern history in India and to south Indian history in particular. It takes an understudied and important subject – royal courts – during a period of pronounced historical complexity to present the reader with a remarkable analysis that will leave an enduring imprint on the field. Its sound historical method and meticulous archival research recommend it all the more. Notable is the author’s wide use of sources culled from different archives and in different languages. He allows sources with vastly different textual ecologies to be juxtaposed in the same interpretative field in order to read his sources against one another and to find a judicious way forward. – Daud Ali, University of Pennsylvania.