

Introduction

“If Vijayanagar is now only its name and, as a kingdom, is so little remembered ..., it isn’t only because it was so completely wiped out, but also because it contributed so little; it was itself a reassertion from the past ...”

— V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977).¹

Thus wrote the renowned author V.S. Naipaul after his second trip to India in the mid-1970s. In these lines, he referred to the legacy of the south Indian Vijayanagara state, which existed from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries CE and is often considered the region’s last empire.² After his visit to its capital—now best known as Hampi—Naipaul rather gloomily described the unusual landscape as unfriendly and declared the buildings and sculptures to have been archaic even when they were created.³ In his view, Vijayanagara largely emulated the culture of

¹ V.S. Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (London, 1977), 15.

² For discussions on Vijayanagara’s imperial nature, see: Burton Stein, *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge, 1989), 27; Velcheru Narayana Rao and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Ideologies of State Building in Vijayanagara and Post-Vijayanagara South India: Some Reflections,” in Peter Fibiger Bang and Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (eds), *Universal Empire: A Comparative Approach to Imperial Culture and Representation in Eurasian History* (Cambridge, 2012), 215-17; T.V. Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity* (Madras, 1967), 8; Jack A. Goldstone and John F. Haldon, “Ancient States, Empires, and Exploitation: Problems and Perspectives,” in Ian Morris and Walter Scheidel (eds), *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (New York, 2009); Carla M. Sinopoli and Kathleen D. Morrison, “Dimensions of Imperial Control: The Vijayanagara Capital,” *American Anthropologist* (New Series) 97, 1 (1995); Carla M. Sinopoli, “From the Lion Throne: Political and Social Dynamics of the Vijayanagara Empire,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43, 3 (2000); Elizabeth Jane Bridges White, “Beyond Empire: Vijayanagara Imperialism and the Emergence of the Keladi-Ikkeri Nayaka State, 1499-1763 C.E.” (unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan, 2015), 19-25; P.K. Gode, “Ākāśabhairava-Kalpa, an Unknown Source of the History of Vijayanagara,” in idem, *Studies in Indian Literary History*, vol. II (Bombay, 1954), 130-1. For an early seventeenth-century Flemish merchant’s view, stating that Vijayanagara’s ruler was considered an emperor rather than a king “in the entire East,” see Jaques de Coutre, *Aziatische omzwervingen: Het levensverhaal van Jaques de Coutre, een Brugs diamanthandelaar 1591-1627*, ed. Johan Verberckmoes and Eddy Stols (Berchem, 1988), 168.

³ In an earlier travel account—relating his first stay in India, in the early 1960s—Naipaul had been milder about the capital’s remains, admiring its grand lay-out, impressive architecture, and spectacular natural surroundings. See V.S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (London, 1964), 215-16.

preceding states without adding much of its own. At its height, decay would already have set in, accelerated by the many wars this “Hindu kingdom” fought with its Muslim-ruled neighbours. And after what Naipaul regarded as an inevitable conquest by these sultanates, Vijayanagara presumably vanished entirely.⁴

But although perhaps currently not well remembered, Vijayanagara was neither completely wiped out nor did it innovate and contribute “little.” During its gradual fragmentation from the sixteenth century onward, the empire gave rise to several succeeding kingdoms—reigned over by former vassals—that flourished in the following centuries. Some of them survived until the British came to dominate south India in the late eighteenth century or even beyond India’s independence in 1947. These so-called Vijayanagara successor states derived their origins, legitimacy, political organisation, court culture, art, architecture, and so on, at least partially from their parental empire, rather than from the older polities mentioned by Naipaul. Indeed, Vijayanagara contributed substantially, and in many different fields, to its successors and remained a political and cultural focus point for south Indian royal courts right into the colonial period.

Those politico-cultural legacies of Vijayanagara among its heirs form the general theme of the present research. It deals with what is here termed “court politics”: political culture and political developments at the royal courts of these states, covering both single events and long-term patterns. Phrased differently, this study defines court politics as activities of rulers, courtiers, and other people that affected the courts’ political functioning. Thus, court politics comprise the strategies employed by various parties to preserve or enhance their power or status at court, and the reactions of others to these strategies, be they supportive or antagonistic. In particular, this work is concerned with the role of dynasties in court politics and investigates how ruling families achieved, maintained, legitimised, displayed, and finally lost their positions.

Court politics being a vast, multi-faceted subject, this research must limit itself to a selection of its aspects. It deals consecutively with dynastic foundations, successions to the throne, the power of courtiers, court protocol and insults, politico-cultural influences from Muslim-ruled states, and relations between the successor states—with a chapter devoted to each topic. To gain an optimal view of these matters, extensive bodies of local (south Indian) as well as external

⁴ Naipaul, *India: A Wounded Civilization*, 14–18. Notably, it seems Naipaul did not so much stress the idea of Vijayanagara as a bulwark of Hinduism (like several historians have done) as emphasise its supposed archaic nature and lack of innovation. For some responses to Naipaul’s writings on Vijayanagara, in particular its perceived Hindu character, see: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Is “Indian Civilization” a Myth? Fictions and Histories* (Ranikhet, 2013), 4; William Dalrymple, “‘Sir Vidia Gets It Badly Wrong,’” *Outlook* (15 Mar. 2004); V.K. Bawa (ed.), “Rama Raya and the Fall of the Vijayanagara Empire: V.S. Naipaul versus William Dalrymple,” *Deccan Studies II*, 2 (2004).

(European) primary sources are investigated and juxtaposed, a combination that is only possible from the period under study onward.

The overall approach of this research is a systematic comparison of court politics in several Vijayanagara successor states, both among these kingdoms and with the empire itself. A comparative analysis of the courts and dynasties of Vijayanagara and its heirs has hitherto not been conducted, and this study hopes to fill that gap to some extent. Central questions are: How did these states resemble and differ from each other with regard to court politics? Did the heirs of Vijayanagara form a distinct group? How did Vijayanagara's legacies manifest themselves at the successors' courts? And in addition to what was inherited from the empire, how were court politics shaped by features that varied among the heirs—like the dynasties' origins and the kingdoms' geographic conditions—and by broader developments in the region? Further, what were the general characteristics of court politics in these states and what consequences did these have for the position of kings? And how does all this relate to previous research, not only on Vijayanagara and its successors but also on earlier south Indian courts, for which external sources are non-existent or at best very limited?

Besides “court politics,” other central concepts in this work—court, dynasty, and courtier—need to be specified, the more so since these European terms do not necessarily have clear equivalents in the languages of Vijayanagara and its heirs.⁵ “Court” is often defined as the spatial abode of a ruler as well as the social circle around him or her. This two-fold meaning is found both in several south Indian terms and within the European idea of courts. Words like *āsthānam*, *kolu(vu)*, and (*per*)*olugu* (appearing in several variations in Dravidian languages), and *sabhā* (Sanskrit) all include spatial as well as social aspects, denoting the residence and the retinue of the ruler.⁶ Therefore, in this research too, “court” is used as a broad term, indicating both the royal palace complex or moving camp and all people present there, in whatever capacity. Courts are here considered to have been not strictly demarcated entities but fluid, open-ended communities partly overlapping with the rest of society.

For “dynasty,” the most common south Indian word appears to have been *vaṁśam* (deriving from Sanskrit and its spelling again varying in Dravidian languages), meaning “family” or “lineage.” South Indian dynastic chronicles are

⁵ These include Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu, which are Dravidian languages (native to south India), and Sanskrit and Marathi, which belong to the Indo-Aryan language family (originating in north and west India).

⁶ The often used term *darbār* (adopted from Persian into many Indian languages) is more specific, referring to the king's physical and spiritual presence at assemblies. Thus, it differs from the concept of “court” as used here.

regularly referred to as *vaṃśāvali* and *vaṃśa carita*, “family line” or “family history.” In agreement with this broad meaning, in this study dynasties comprise not just series of rulers but also their extended families, including collateral branches, in-laws, and adoptees. As shown in Chapter 2, even such distant family members could succeed to the throne. Consequently, the terms “dynasty,” “royal family,” and “(royal) house” are used here interchangeably.

Finally, for want of a better term, this work employs the notion of “courtier,” which is somewhat problematic as it has no fixed meaning in south Indian history, let alone a clear European parallel. In accordance with the discussion of “court” above, a wide definition of “courtier” is adopted here, covering basically everyone somehow active at court—continuously or intermittently—such as officials and servants of all kinds, the entire royal family, and regular visitors from beyond the court. The term “courtier” is discussed in more detail in the introduction to Chapter 3.⁷

All aforementioned thematic chapters cover the courts of Vijayanagara itself and a selection of its heirs. Getting a grasp of the multitude of royal houses reigning over these states is something of a challenge, but this dynastic constellation can be briefly summarised as follows. Four consecutive families ruled Vijayanagara: the Sangamas, Saluvas, Tuluvas, and Aravidus. From the early sixteenth century on, under the latter two houses, several provincial chiefs appointed by the imperial court founded their own dynasties, five of which came to reign over relatively large and increasingly autonomous kingdoms while the empire disintegrated. These main successor states were Madurai, Tanjavur, Senji, and Ikkeri—all ruled by so-called Nayaka houses—and Mysore, governed by the Wodeyar dynasty. The first three of these kingdoms were located in the empire’s south-eastern Tamil-speaking zone, the other two in the north-western region where Kannada was spoken.

In the course of the seventeenth century, some of Vijayanagara’s heirs themselves fragmented or were taken over by other dynasties. The Ramnad kingdom, ruled by the Setupati house, gradually seceded from Madurai. Tanjavur’s Nayaka rulers were replaced by the Bhonsle (or Maratha) house, which originated in western India. The other main Nayaka dynasties in the Tamil area, Senji and Madurai, and the last rulers of Vijayanagara itself, were also overthrown in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The two successor houses in the Kannada area,

⁷ I thank David Shulman, Phillip Wagoner, Caleb Simmons, Nikhil Bellarykar, Gijs Kruijtzter, and Herman Tiekens for discussing these Indian terms with me. See also Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987), xxvii, 75. For general descriptions of these concepts, see: Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300–1800* (Cambridge, 2016), 4, 157–9, 235–6; idem, “The Court as a Meeting Point: Cohesion, Competition, Control,” in Maaike van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam (eds), *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives* (Leiden/Boston, 2018), 37–40, especially n. 14.

Mysore's Wodeyars and Ikkeri's Nayakas, suffered the same fate in the late eighteenth century, but the former dynasty was later reinstalled by the British colonial government as a quasi-independent monarchy. During this new phase, Ramnad's Setupatis and Tanjavur's Bhonsles were also incorporated into the colonial system, as demoted land-holding chiefs and pensioned-off kings, respectively. Thus, several dynasties lasted through the British period into independent India and still enjoy an informal regal status today.

For reasons explained below, the present work is largely concerned with four kingdoms—or five dynasties—among this variety of Vijayanagara's heirs: Ikkeri, Madurai, Ramnad, and Tanjavur, the last under both the Nayakas and the Bhonsles. This research limits itself to the period before the British came to control south India, when these states still held both formal and actual power: roughly the centuries between 1500 and 1800.

After this outline of the study's main research questions, concepts, and spatial and temporal coverage, the remainder of this chapter consists of a historical survey, a discussion of primary sources, a historiographic overview, and an explanation of this work's structure.

Historical Background

As said, this research largely focuses on the period from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, often called the “early modern” age.⁸ During this time Vijayanagara reached its zenith—signalling the beginning of its disintegration—followed by the emergence, flourishing, and decline of its heirs. But this study also considers the preceding “late medieval” era, which saw the rise and fall of Vijayanagara's predecessors and the foundation and growth of the empire itself. During the whole of these two periods, together spanning the major part of the second millennium, south India witnessed a succession of empires—or at least supra-regional powers—that fragmented into smaller, regional states, which in turn were absorbed or defeated by new empires that eventually broke up, too

⁸ I use the terms “early modern” and “medieval” merely as convenient temporal markers. I do not take a stand here in debates on the applicability of these concepts, as used for European history, to (south) India's history. For some discussions on this issue, see: Daud Ali, “The Idea of the Medieval in the Writing of South Asian History: Contexts, Methods and Politics,” *Social History* 39, 3 (2014); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South India* (New Delhi, 2001), 259-65; Hermann Kulke, *History of Precolonial India: Issues and Debates*, ed. Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, trans. Parnal Chirmuley (New Delhi, 2018), 141-52. See also Jeroen Duindam, “Rulers and Elites in Global History: Introductory Observations,” in Maaïke van Berkel and Jeroen Duindam (eds), *Prince, Pen, and Sword: Eurasian Perspectives* (Leiden/Boston, 2018), 9-10, n. 22.

(see table 1).⁹ Despite those recurrent changes, memories of vanished dynasties lived on and often became part of the legitimization practices of succeeding royal houses, which cultivated or invented ties with former imperial overlords and other erstwhile polities.¹⁰

In the centuries preceding Vijayanagara's beginnings, south India was initially dominated by two powerful dynasties: the Chalukyas, reigning from Kalyana (or Kalyani) in the Kannada-speaking area on the northern Deccan plateau; and the Cholas, centred at Tanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram in the south-eastern Kaveri River delta, where Tamil was spoken. By the eleventh century, both polities had grown far beyond their homelands, holding sway over various linguistic and political areas. When from the late twelfth century onward their power waned, smaller, subordinated states rose and attained autonomy.

Thus, by the thirteenth century, south India comprised several regional successor kingdoms, each located in a largely mono-linguistic zone and ruled by a royal house of local origin. The three main dynasties that succeeded the Chalukyas were all based in the Deccan. In this plateau's south-west and east respectively, the Hoysalas at their capital Dvarasamudra ruled a region of Kannada speakers, while the Kakatiyas, based at Warangal, governed a Telugu-speaking area. In the Deccan's north-west, the Yadavas (or Sevunas) at Devagiri reigned over a zone where Marathi was spoken. In addition, much of the peninsula's Tamil-speaking south, formerly under Chola rule, was controlled by the Pandyas of Madurai.

⁹ The best-known overview of south India's history is K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India: From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar* (Madras, 1975), but it pays little attention to Vijayanagara's heirs. A recent, historiographically revised history of the region, including the empire's successors, is found in Noboru Karashima (ed.), *A Concise History of South India: Issues and Interpretations* (New Delhi, 2014). For recent histories of late medieval and early modern India, placing the south in a wider context, see: Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, *India before Europe* (Cambridge, 2006); Richard M. Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age 1000-1765* (London, 2019). A survey of India's history that pays more attention to the south than usual is Burton Stein, *A History of India* (Oxford, 1998). For discussions of historiography treating the south as a separate region, see: Janaki Nair, "Beyond Exceptionalism: South India and the Modern Historical Imagination," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 43, 3 (2006); Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 210-11.

¹⁰ In addition to examples elsewhere in this study, concerning Vijayanagara and its successors, see for instance: Daud Ali, "Royal Eulogy as World History: Rethinking Copper-Plate Inscriptions in Cōla India," in Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali (eds), *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia* (Oxford, 2000), for example 189, 192-3, 199-200; Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300-1600* (New Delhi, 2014), 14-15.

Table 1: South India's succession of dynasties, 2nd millennium CE (strongly simplified), with arrows indicating close succession ties between polities.

until 13th cent.	CHOLAS					CHALUKYAS			
11th-14th cent.	Pandyas					↓ Hoysalas	↓ Kakatiyas	↓ Yadavas	
14th century	DELHI SULTANATE conquests								
14th-17th cent.	VIJAYANAGARA					BAHMANIS			
16th-18th cent.	↓ Madurai	↓ Tanjavur	↓ Senji	↓ Mysore	↓ Ikkeri	↓ Bijapur	↓ Golconda	↓ Ahmadnagar	↓ 2 more
17th-18th cent.	↓ Ramnad	MARATHA conquests					MUGHAL conquests		
18th-20th cent.	BRITISH conquests								

All these regional houses looked back to earlier states to justify or strengthen their position. The successor dynasties of the Chalukya house—itsself tellingly named after the powerful Chalukyas of Badami in the Kannada region (sixth to eighth centuries)—imitated phrases from Chalukya inscriptions in their own epigraphy, adopted court offices and practices from their overlords, and tried to conquer the former imperial capital Kalyana. The Pandyas, as well as the Cholas for that matter, took their names from earlier, semi-mythical dynasties based in the same areas. At least since the medieval period, the Tamil-speaking lands comprised a number of politico-cultural regions or centres, called *maṇḍalams* (circles), that harboured a succession of polities, including Tondaimandalam in the north, Cholamandalam in the centrally located Kaveri River delta, and Pandyamandalam, with the ancient southern town of Madurai.¹¹ Notably, the main heirs of Vijayanagara that later appeared in the Tamil zone each occupied one of these *maṇḍalams*.¹²

¹¹ Some recent works on dynasties and polities preceding Vijayanagara include: Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, chs 1-2; Cynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Region, and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (New Delhi, 2001), chs 1-4; Daud Ali, “The Betel-Bag Bearer in Medieval South Indian History: A Study from Inscriptions,” in Manu Devadevan (ed.), *Clio and Her Descendants: Essays for Kesavan Veluthat* (Delhi, 2018), 537-47; Ali, “Royal Eulogy as World History.”

¹² These terms were still used in the early modern period. For some references in Dutch East India Company records, see: *Nationaal Archief*, The Hague (hereafter NA), Archives of the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (Dutch East India Company, access no. 1.04.02, hereafter VOC), no. 1055, f. 275; no. 2147, f. 4838: treaty with Senji (“Tonda Mandalan”), Mar. 1610, instructions for Dutch envoys to Tanjavur (“Chiolemandelan”), Mar. 1730. For discussions of the Tamil *maṇḍalams*, see: Burton Stein, “Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* XXXVII, 1 (1977), 18-26; David Ludden, “Spectres of Agrarian Territory in Southern India,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 39, 2-3 (2002), 243-4; Jennifer Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South*

In the late medieval kingdoms emerging on the Deccan plateau from the former Chalukya realm—the abovementioned Hoysalas, Kakatiyas, and Yadavas—the close regional ties between territory, language, and dynasty were fuelled by local warriors who often belonged to castes (*jātis*)¹³ with a low ritual status in society. A number of them bore the title of *nāyaka*, a broad designation that denoted a military leader, landholder, or local notable and could be assumed by anyone.¹⁴ These warriors developed pastoral, sparsely inhabited, dry frontier zones into sedentary farming areas and patronised both long-venerated and newly built temples. Thus, they created integrative political and commercial networks.

Their influential role exemplified the relatively egalitarian character of these societies. Most valued here were individually acquired occupational and military skills, regardless of one's ancestry and caste. This view formed a marked contrast to the classical notion that status and power were based on hereditary aristocratic credentials—like a high caste—as had long been advocated by the priestly Brahmin *varṇa*, the highest of the four main caste categories. Indeed, even the Kakatiya rulers were proud members of the Shudra *varṇa*, the lowest category, instead of the second highest Kshatriya or warrior *varṇa*, to which kings traditionally belonged.¹⁵

These regional states were all annihilated in the early fourteenth century, following the expansion of the militarily superior north Indian Delhi sultanate under the Khalji and Tughluq houses. Although Delhi's rule in south India turned out to be short-lived, its impact was far-reaching. Until then dominated by local, "Indic" culture and religion, the region now assimilated strong influences from the Muslim-ruled Delhi sultanate, itself shaped by practices and ideas from the

India: Material Culture and Kingship (London/New York, 2003), 186–9. See also British Library: Asian & African Studies department (formerly Oriental & India Office Collections), London (hereafter BL/AAS), Mackenzie General collection (hereafter MG), no. 1, pt. 7D: "The present Maratta Rajas who are managing the country of Tanja-Nagaram," f. 69 (possibly translated from a Tamil text, see J.S. Cotton, J.H.R.T. Charpentier, and E.H. Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages Belonging to the Library of the India Office*, vol. I, pt. II, *The Mackenzie General and Miscellaneous Collections* (London, 1992), 8–9); Mackenzie Translations collection (hereafter MT), class VII (Telugu: Northern Circars), no. 23: "Chronological account of Bijayanagar," f. 134 (translated from a "Gentoo [Hindu] book" in 1797).

¹³ *Jāti*: endogamous, commensal, corporate group ranked in society on perceived level of ritual purity.

¹⁴ For recent historiographic surveys of *nāyakas*, see for instance: Nobuhiro Ota, "A Reappraisal of Studies on *Nāyakas*," *Journal of Karnataka Studies* 5, 2 (2008); Manu V. Devadevan, *A Prehistory of Hinduism* (Warsaw/Berlin, 2016), 128–33.

¹⁵ Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, chs 1–4. For a summary, see Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan, 1300–1761: Eight Indian Lives* (Cambridge, 2005), 12–16.

Persian-speaking world. These were manifest in, for instance, political and social organisation, court culture, law, art, and military technology. After Delhi's conquest of the south, its sultans installed their own servants, but also native chiefs such as *nāyakas*, as landholders and commanders in the region. By 1340, however, insurgencies had forced the sultanate to retreat from south India.

One of Delhi's rebellious commanders formed a powerful sultanate in the northern Deccan, ruled by the Bahmani house from its capitals at Gulbarga and Bidar. But in the late fifteenth century, the Bahmani state fragmented into five successor sultanates, including those of Bijapur, Golkonda, and Ahmadnagar. The sequence of politico-military appointments by Delhi in south India and the subsequent power vacuum after its withdrawal also provided excellent opportunities for ambitious local warriors and chiefs, like *nāyakas*. Among them were the Sangama brothers, who, after a period of military service for one or several rulers, founded a dynasty of their own in the southern Deccan. Thus arose around the 1340s the Vijayanagara state, with its headquarters at the abode of a regional Hindu deity, located in a dry and thinly populated Kannada-speaking area. Although only this capital was named Vijayanagara ("city of victory") and the Sangamas themselves called their realm Karnataka,¹⁶ modern historiography has used the former term to refer to the empire as a whole. The new kingdom soon acquired imperial dimensions and came to encompass large parts of south India, including fertile, heavily populated coastal areas and covering several linguistic zones, most notably the Kannada-, Telugu-, and Tamil-speaking regions. These various areas harboured vastly different types of society, both sedentary (such as priests, peasants, artisans, and traders) and semi-nomadic (like herdsmen, warriors, and forest dwellers).

The Vijayanagara court also greatly extended its religious patronage, as shown both in the building of temples for pan-Indian Hindu gods in the capital and in endowments to sanctuaries and Brahmins in distant, recently annexed regions. But, although the emperors professed various and changing strands of Hinduism—reflecting efforts to forge ties with different religious power bases—their polity possessed many characteristics found in its Muslim-ruled neighbours.

¹⁶ See, for instance: Shrinivas V. Padigar, "Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers: Volumes: I to III (Kannada Inscriptions)," in Shrinivas Ritti and Y. Subbarayalu (eds), *Vijayanagara and Kṛṣṇadēvarāya* (New Delhi/Bangalore, 2010), 160-1; Vasundhara Filliozat, "Hampi – Vijayanagar," in G.S. Dikshit (ed.), *Early Vijayanagara: Studies in Its History & Culture (Proceedings of S. Srikantaya Centenary Seminar)* (Bangalore, n.d. [1988]), 183-4; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 186, 229. The Dutch also used corruptions of the term Karnataka for Vijayanagara. See: NA, VOC, no. 2317, f. 329; no. 2631, ff. 407-10: final reports (*memorie van overgave*) of Coromandel Governors Adriaan Pla and Jacob Mossel, Feb. 1734, Feb. 1744; *Beknopte historie, van het Mogolsche keyzerryk en de zuydeleke aangrenzende ryken* (Batavia, 1758), 1.

Unlike preceding regional kingdoms, Vijayanagara became a transregional, multi-ethno-lingual, outward-looking state, like the Bahmani sultanate and its successors. Many of the aforementioned aspects of Perso-Islamic political culture manifested themselves in Vijayanagara. This transformation was partially linked to military developments, including the need for war horses and soldiers with special skills and the incorporation of *nāyakas* into the imperial system. Over the centuries, many such warriors migrated from the Deccan to the peninsula's south—where they came to be known as *vaḍugas* or northerners—taking their languages and martial ethos with them.

With the empire's expansion came commercial and monetary changes, too, like a growing dependency on long-distance trade and revenue collection. As for the latter, fiscal management was one of several administrative and financial activities in which Brahmins had now become engaged. At courts, ports, markets, and fortresses, they served as ministers, bankers, scribes, merchants, and accountants. As for overseas trade, besides all sorts of Asian mercantile networks this involved from around 1500 the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* ("State of India") under a viceroy seated in Goa, followed about a century later by the chartered trading companies of the Dutch, the English, and the Danes, and after some further decades the French. In their wake came European missionaries, travel writers, mercenaries, artists, and private traders.

Between the late fifteenth and late sixteenth centuries, the role of military men remained decisive in Vijayanagara's politics. Imperial generalissimos usurped the throne three times, in each case leading to a new dynasty. After the rule of the Sangama and Saluva houses, Vijayanagara's power and glory are generally thought to have reached their zenith in the first half of the sixteenth century under the Tuluva dynasty. This was also the time when the empire started disintegrating. The Vijayanagara court had gradually and partially replaced a system that left rulers of subjugated regions in place as long as they acknowledged their overlord, with the practice of appointing imperial relatives, generals, and other courtiers as governors in far-flung or newly conquered territories.

This created opportunities for ambitious warriors once again. Several governors and chiefs—some commanding fertile, populous, and wealthy coastal areas far removed from the empire's dry core zone—founded dynasties of their own that grew ever more autonomous. They were allowed to maintain their increasingly regal positions in return for military, financial, and ceremonial support to the central court. Many of these houses bore the title of "Nayaka," referring to their martial origins as *nāyakas* and continuing the dominant political role of warriors from low-ranking castes in Vijayanagara and its immediate predecessors. Besides referring to a military function, the term *nāyaka* thus came to be used as a dynastic

name by various newly emerging royal families: the Nayaka houses that ruled many of the Vijayanagara successor states.¹⁷

The empire's fragmentation accelerated when in 1565 its troops were defeated and the capital was attacked by the combined armies of the neighbouring Deccan sultanates,¹⁸ after Vijayanagara had humiliated them militarily and diplomatically for ages. The imperial household was forced to flee south-eastward and became a court on the run of sorts, every few decades relocating between the towns Penukonda, Chandragiri, and Vellore. Now under the reign of the Aravidu house, the empire continued to shrink during the following years.¹⁹

By the seventeenth century, large parts of Vijayanagara's former territory were ruled by a handful of powerful dynasties that had originated from imperial governorships. Referring to the three most prominent heirs in the Tamil-speaking region, in 1675 a high official of the Dutch East India Company, Rijcklof van Goens, described this political state of affairs as follows:

The land of Tansjaour [Tanjavur] ... has since long been a member of the Carnaticase realm [Vijayanagara], but it has always had its own sovereign [*souvereyjne*] princes, named Naick [Nayaka] by them, being related to the Carnaticasen king—[as are] the Naiken of Madure [Madurai] and Singier [Senji]—in the same manner as the elector-kings of Germany to the emperor, or it may be at least compared to that ...²⁰

¹⁷ In the early modern period, the *nāyaka* title was still borne by a wide variety of people. To mention one unusual case, in 1672 at the port of Tuticorin the Dutch Admiral Hendrik Adriaan van Rhee de conferred on a locally employed soldier the designation of “Neijke” in return for his services to the Dutch East India Company. See Department of National Archives, Colombo (hereafter DNA), Archives of the Dutch Central Government of Coastal Ceylon (access no. 1, hereafter DCGCC), no. 2672, ff. 15v-16: final report of Tuticorin's chief (*opperhoofd*) Laurens Pijl, Dec. 1672.

¹⁸ For some recent, revisionist literature on the famed “Talikota” battle of 1565 and the extent of the destruction of the imperial capital, see respectively: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge (MA)/London, 2012), ch. 1; Mark T. Lycett and Kathleen D. Morrison, “The ‘Fall’ of Vijayanagara Reconsidered: Political Destruction and Historical Construction in South Indian History,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 56, 3 (2013).

¹⁹ For some relatively recent overviews of the political history of Vijayanagara and connections with its predecessors and successors, see: Stein, *Vijayanagara*; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, chs 1-4; Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, ch. 5; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, chs 1, 3; Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi, 1992), ch. II.

²⁰ NA, *Hoge Regering Batavia* collection (Batavia High Government, access no. 1.04.17, hereafter HRB), no. 542 (unpaginated, 1st document, c. halfway, section “Tansjaour”): description of Ceylon, Madurai, south Coromandel, Malabar, and Kanara by Rijcklof van Goens, Sept. 1675 (translation mine); quote also partly included in François Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5 (Dordrecht, 1726), 8th book, 233.

The comparison to Germany—more accurately the Holy Roman Empire, whose ruler was chosen by a college of royal and ecclesiastical electors—seems far-fetched and the Nayakas certainly did not officially elect Vijayanagara's emperors.²¹ Yet, Van Goens' remark shows that these dynasties were considered to have grown independent for all practical purposes but continued to recognise Vijayanagara's formal supremacy. As the English put it in 1642, "... every Naique is a king in his owne country, and will attend the greate kinge [of Vijayanagara] at their pleasure."²²

South India had thus entered an age of regional kingdoms again, but this new political constellation differed from the regional kingdoms that had preceded the empire. The close links between dynasty, language, and territory found under the Hoysalas, Kakatiyas, Yadavas, and Pandyas no longer existed. Vast parts of the Kannada-, Telugu-, and Marathi-speaking areas were now governed by the Deccan sultans, who were of Central and West Asian descent and whose principal court languages were Persian and to a lesser extent Dakhani.²³ Local kings still held sway over the remainder of the Kannada zone, but this region was divided into a number of states. And much of the Tamil area was ruled by several *vaḍuga* houses, families with a northern, Telugu background.

It may be asked which states could actually be regarded as successors of Vijayanagara. Modern historiography has generally distinguished five kingdoms as the major offshoots of the empire: Tanjavur (or Tanjore), Madurai, and Senji (or Gingee) in the Tamil area, and Ikkeri (also called Keladi) and Mysore in the Kannada zone.²⁴ That these five were considered the main heirs by contemporaries, too, is suggested by historical notions in the region reported by European visitors. In 1712, when German Pietist missionaries enquired who were the rulers of the "Tamils," local scholars in Tanjavur mentioned the kings of Tanjavur, Madurai,

²¹ However, in the 1640s the Jesuit Balthazar da Costa wrote that the Nayaka of Madurai, Tirumalai, declared the new (and last) Vijayanagara emperor, Sriranga III, could not be formally installed without the Nayakas' consent. See A. Saulière (ed.), "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks" [pt. 1], *Journal of Indian History* XLII, I (1964), 97. Perhaps Van Goens' remark referred to the alleged influence of the Nayakas during the empire's last phase.

²² William Foster (ed.), *The English Factories in India 1642–1645: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office, Westminster* (Oxford, 1913), 50; Henry Davison Love (ed.), *Vestiges of Old Madras 1640–1800, Traced from the East India Company's Records Preserved at Fort St. George and the India Office, and from Other Sources* (London, 1913), vol. I, 46.

²³ For languages in the Deccan sultanates, see Sumit Guha, "Transitions and Translations: Regional Power Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500–1800," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, 2 (2004), 25–6.

²⁴ Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 130–3; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 212–13.

Senji, Ikkeri, and Mysore.²⁵ Probably denoting the ongoing formal subordination of these monarchs to the now defunct Vijayanagara polity, the Tanjavur scholars added that these rulers were all “kings without a crown.”²⁶ Further, in 1738 the governor of the Dutch settlements on south India’s Coromandel (or eastern) Coast, Elias Guillot, wrote to his successor Jacob Mossel:

Under the king of Carnatica [Vijayanagara] were in the past three prominent Naiks or monarchs, who paid their tribute, and at his coronation had to carry: ... the Naijk of Madure or Tritsjenapalli [Tiruchirappalli]—under whom the Theuver lord [of Ramnad] was a visiadoor [governor]²⁷—the spittoon, the Naijk of Singi the betel [-leaf] box,²⁸ and the Naik of Tansjour the fan. Apart from these Naijks, there were two other great visiadoors or generals [veldwagters], of Maijsjoer and Ikeri ...²⁹

Regardless of this distinction made by both contemporaneous observers and current scholars, there were in fact all sorts of polities succeeding Vijayanagara in some way, and their number and shared characteristics are hard to determine. As said, Vijayanagara itself continued to exist under the Aravidu dynasty until the mid-seventeenth century, now based near the east coast in the Tamil-Telugu border zone. Having lost its glorious initial capital and much of its prestige, it had been practically reduced to a regional kingdom, although it still harboured imperial ambitions.

²⁵ For the scholars’ literal statement, see the introduction to Chapter 6.

²⁶ Daniel Jeyaraj and Richard Fox Young (eds), *Hindu-Christian Epistolary Self-Disclosures: “Malabarian Correspondence” between German Pietist Missionaries and South Indian Hindus (1712–1714)* (Wiesbaden, 2013), 258–61.

²⁷ The term “visiadoor” (from the Portuguese “vigiador,” watcher or guard) was used by the Dutch as a generic reference to people with political or military power somehow subordinated to a higher authority. It could indicate kings who only nominally acknowledged an overlord (as in the quote above), semi-autonomous rulers of smaller principalities, local representatives of higher powers, guards, or even (foot)soldiers. See for instance: NA, VOC, no. 1231, f. 791; no. 1321, f. 881v; no. 1508, f. 172v: letters from Pulicat and Nagapattinam to Batavia, Oct. 1659, Aug. 1676, Oct. 1692; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire: Portuguese Trade and Settlement in the Bay of Bengal, 1500–1700* (Delhi, 1990), 191 (n. 9); idem, *Penumbra Visions*, 112.

²⁸ For the court office of betel-bearer and the formalising, binding, and honouring functions of the donation of betel-leaves by kings to servants and visitors, see Ali, “The Betel-Bag Bearer.”

²⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2443, ff. 2679–80 (translation mine). See also: *Beknopte historie*, 1–2; J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel (eds), *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum: Verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het oosten gesloten, van privilegebrieven aan hen verleend, enz.*, vol. 1 (The Hague, 1907), 546. The latter Dutch source identifies the same five main successor states, declaring that “tributary to the Carnaticase king were the overlords of Maisoer, Jkeri, Madure, Tansjour, and Sinsij.”

The seventeenth century also witnessed the emergence of various “indirect” successors of the empire. The Nayaka houses of Tanjavur and Senji were themselves succeeded by invading Maratha dynasties (belonging to the prominent Bhonsle family), after interludes of Madurai and Bijapur rule respectively. The Marathas originated from the Marathi-speaking north-west Deccan, which had never been part of Vijayanagara, and their links with the empire were therefore rather distant. Additionally, in the course of the seventeenth century, the kingdom of Ramnad in the south-east of the Tamil region seceded from Madurai, and, as its inclusion in the Dutch quote above indicates, it became an important state in its own right. In turn, Ramnad experienced several partitions itself in the decades around 1700, leading to the rise of the Pudukkottai and Shivagangai kingdoms.³⁰

Besides the five main heirs of Vijayanagara and the abovementioned indirect successors, numerous other small (often still under-researched) states, with varying levels of autonomy, traced their origins and legitimacy back to the empire in various ways and to different degrees.³¹ Three examples, among many, are Sonda in the Kannada region—also ruled by a Nayaka dynasty—and Ariyalur and Udaiyarpalayam in the Tamil zone. Their rulers were all powerful enough to maintain diplomatic contacts and conclude commercial treaties with the Portuguese, the Dutch, or the English.³² Further, near the southernmost Kannada-Tamil boundary

³⁰ For Shivagangai, see Chapter 2 (Ramnad section). For Pudukkottai, see Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, chs 4-6.

³¹ One overview of such smaller polities is found in Henry Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. 1 (Madras, 1927), 172-93, 424-7, mentioning for example Yelahanka (among whose rulers was Kempe Gowda, founder of Bangalore), Belur, Chitradurga, Honavar, Bhatkal, Ullal, Gangolli, and Vellore, all but the last in the Kannada area. Other principalities in this region included Gersoppa, Barkur, Bangher, Harapanahalli, and Santebennuru. See: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India 1500-1650* (Cambridge, 1990), 121; Devadevan, *A Prehistory of Hinduism*, 127-8. For some minor states in the central Tamil zone—for instance Ariyalur, Udaiyarpalayam, and Turaiyur—see: Lewis Moore, *A Manual of the Trichinopoly District in the Presidency of Madras* (Madras, 1878), 254-62; F.R. Hemingway, *Trichinopoly*, vol. I (Madras, 1907), 344-6, 350-3.

³² For Ariyalur, see Chapters 1, 6 and previous note. For Udaiyarpalayam, like Ariyalur situated north-east of Tanjavur and supplying the Dutch with textiles, see previous note and: A. Vadivelu, *The Aristocracy of Southern India* (Madras, 1903), vol. II, 196-243; NA, VOC, no. 1343, ff. 65v, 91v; no. 1349, ff. 1405-7; no. 1463, ff. 173v, 215-16; no. 1617, ff. 67v-8v; no. 2631, ff. 412, 433: report on the Tanjavur lands, May 1679, letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, from Pulicat to Gentlemen XVII, June-July 1679, Dec. 1688, June 1699, treaty with Udaiyarpalayam, 1688, final report of Jacob Mossel, Feb. 1744; *Beknopte historie*, 3. For Sonda (or Sunda), north of Ikkeri and producing pepper, see: NA, VOC, no. 1274, ff. 179v-80v; no. 2461, f. 92v: Basrur diary extract, July 1670, letter from Cochin to Batavia, Apr. 1739; Severine Silva, “The Nayaks of Soonda,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* LXV, 2 (1974); A.R. Kulkarni, “The Chiefs of Sonda (Swādi) and the Marathas in the Seventeenth Century,” in G.S. Dikshit (ed.), *Studies in Keladi History (Seminar Papers)* (Bangalore, 1981); João Melo, “Seeking Prestige and Survival: Gift-Exchange Practices between the Portuguese Estado da Índia and Asian Rulers,” *Journal of the Economic*

lay the states of Kongu and Kodagu (or Coorg), the former ruled by yet another Nayaka house and the latter by a branch or close ally of Ikkeri's royal family.³³

In the far south of the Tamil-speaking area there were several dozens of tiny polities—traditionally numbering seventy-two—whose rulers were known as Palaiyakkarars or, in its anglicised form, “Poligars.” Although nominally subordinated to the Nayakas of Madurai, they regularly operated rather independently, especially after their overlords were overthrown in the 1730s. Partly originating in the Deccan and bearing the title of Nayaka, many of these houses mentioned Vijayanagara in their origin stories.³⁴ Some chiefs in the region where Marathi was spoken also produced texts referring to ancient ties with the empire, which served to back claims in judicial disputes. A principality in the far north-east of the Telugu area bore the very name of Vijayanagara (often spelled Vizianagaram), allegedly acquired during the reign of the empire's most celebrated monarch, Krishna(deva) Raya. And the chieftains of Belagutti in the Kannada region even declared that

and Social History of the Orient 56, 4/5 (2013), 686-8; B.S. Shastry, “The Portuguese and Immadi Sadashiva Raya of Swadi (Sonda), 1745-1764,” *South Indian History Congress: Proceedings of Fifth Annual Conference* (Tirupati, 1987); Foster, *The English Factories in India 1668-1669* (Oxford, 1927), 111-12, 115-16, 268; Charles Fawcett (ed.), *The English Factories in India* (New Series, 1670-7, 1678-84), vol. I (The Western Presidency) (Oxford, 1936), 297-8, vol. III, *Bombay, Surat, and Malabar Coast* (Oxford, 1954), 403-4.

³³ For Kongu, see: C.M. Ramachandra Chettiar, “Rule of Vijayanagara over Kongu Country,” in S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar et al. (eds), *Vijayanagara Sexcentenary Commemoration Volume* (Dharwar, 1936); T.V. Mahalingam, *Readings in South Indian History*, ed. K.S. Ramachandran (Delhi, 1977), 154; V. Rangachari, “The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura,” *The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research* XLIII (1914), 133-5. For Kodagu, see: B. Lewis Rice, *Mysore and Coorg: From the Inscriptions* (London, 1909), 133-6; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 69-70, 76-9; “A Biographical Account of the Ancestors of the Present Rajah of Coorga,” in *The Asiatic Annual Register, or, a View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia, for the Year 1800* (London, 1801), section “Characters.”

³⁴ For the Palaiyakkarars in the Tamil zone, see: K. Rajayyan, *Rise and Fall of the Poligars of Tamilnadu* (Madras, 1974); G. Revathy, *History of Tamil Nadu: The Palayams* (New Delhi, 2005); P.M. Lalitha, *Palayagars as Feudatories under the Nayaks of Madurai* (Chennai, 2009); T.V. Mahalingam (ed.), *Mackenzie Manuscripts: Summaries of the Historical Manuscripts in the Mackenzie Collection*, vol. I (Madras, 1972); Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, chs 1-6. The last two works contain references to connections with Vijayanagara. For a published version, with English translation, of one of several texts listing these Palaiyakkarars—here 75, including the rulers of Ramnad, Pudukkottai, and Ariyalur—see S. Soundarapandian (ed.), “Palayappattu Vivaram / Estates of Polegars,” *Bulletin of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library* 28 (2001), 1-24. For other lists, see: William Taylor (ed.), *Oriental Historical Manuscripts in the Tamil Language, Translated with Annotations* (Madras, 1835), vol. II, 161-6; C.S. Srinivasachari, “The Southern Poligars and Their Place in the Political System,” in D.R. Bhandarkar et al. (eds), *B. C. Law Volume*, pt. I (Calcutta, 1945), 246-9; idem, *Ananda Ranga Pillai: The “Pepys” of French India* (Madras, 1940), 200-5 (n. 22). The term Palaiyakkarars could refer to chieftains all over the Vijayanagara area. For examples in the Kannada and Telugu regions, see: J.C. Dua, *Pallegars of South India: Forms and Contents of Their Resistance in Ceded Districts* (New Delhi, 1996), 1-2, 47-64; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 72-3.

one of their sons was installed as Vijayanagara's emperor after the Aravidu ruler Tirumala had supposedly left no lawful heir to the throne.³⁵

Mysore's late-eighteenth-century Muslim ruler Tipu Sultan, too, sought to connect himself to the empire, partly through presenting himself as the successor of Ikkeri's Nayakas and Mysore's Wodeyars, for instance continuing some of their religious activities.³⁶ As a final example, the kingdom of Kandy in central Ceylon (or Sri Lanka) might be regarded as an indirect successor state from 1739 onward, when its throne was occupied by kings professing to belong to Madurai's Nayaka family. Even though this kinship was remote, the claim served as an important justification for the royal position of what came to be called the Kandyan Nayakas.³⁷

Given this wide range of kingdoms and dynasties, the question of what should be considered a heir of Vijayanagara can be answered in various ways. Any state that emerged, directly or indirectly, from the empire's disintegration or otherwise sought legitimation through some sort of association with Vijayanagara could be regarded as such. However, this study aims to focus on a selection of the larger successors that together represent as much political and socio-cultural diversity as possible. At the same time, substantial and diverse sets of primary sources should be available to research these kingdoms. As it turns out, five polities fit these criteria: Nayaka-ruled Ikkeri, Tanjavur, and Madurai, all direct heirs; Ramnad, an indirect successor; and Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, which because of its distant connection with Vijayanagara provides a useful counterpoint to the other kingdoms.

The Nayaka dynasties of Ikkeri, Tanjavur, and Madurai were direct heirs of Vijayanagara as their founders were installed by the empire itself. Therefore, politically and culturally, the courts of these states were closely related to that of Vijayanagara. Yet, these royal houses, and the kingdoms they governed, differed from each other, as well as from the various indirect successors and from the

³⁵ Sumit Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia, 1200–2000* (Seattle, 2019), 113; Sri Sri Raja Saheb, "The Origin of Vizayanagar in Kalinga," *Deccan History Conference (First Session)* (Hyderabad, 1945), 286–7; S. Ranganatha Rao, "The Belagutti Kaifiyats," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XXXV, 2 (1944), 69.

³⁶ Caleb Simons, *Devotional Sovereignty: Kingship and Religion in India* (New York, 2020), 18, 33–4, 48–9, 58–9, 66–72.

³⁷ Lorna S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka 1707–1782* (2nd edition, Colombo, 1988), ch. II; Gananath Obeyesekere, "Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas: The Many Faces of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1591–1765," in Zoltán Biedermann and Alan Strathern (eds), *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History* (London, 2017); Julius Valentijn Stein van Gollennesse, *Memoir of Julius Stein van Gollennesse, Governor of Ceylon 1743–1751, for His Successor Gerrit Joan Vreeland, 28th February, 1751*, ed. Sinnappah Arasaratnam (Colombo, 1974), 13; Joan Gideon Loten, *Memoir of Joan Gideon Loten 1752–1757*, ed. E. Reimers (Colombo, 1935), 3; W.Ph. Coolhaas et al. (eds), *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der VOC*, vol. XI (The Hague, 2004), 423. See also Chapter 6 and the Epilogue of the present study.

imperial dynasties themselves. This was maybe most notable with respect to dynastic origins and geographic and demographic characteristics.

As for the former aspect, the Nayaka houses reigning at Madurai and Tanjavur (and Senji) rose after their founders achieved high military ranks at the Vijayanagara court and were appointed governors in areas far south of their place of origin. Consequently, the Tamil zone came to be ruled by *vadugas*, Telugu-speaking immigrants. In contrast, in the Kannada region, the kings of Ikkeri (and Mysore) descended from local chiefs, who were incorporated into the empire and recognised as rulers of their own realms. Besides these direct heirs, indirect successors gained power through secession—for instance the Setupatis of Ramnad, who broke off from Madurai—or by conquest, such as the Maratha Bhonsles of Tanjavur, who succeeded this kingdom's Nayaka house. Thus, some royal families had stronger local roots and therefore possibly held closer ties with individuals and groups at their courts than did houses of foreign origin, which perhaps maintained a certain distance from such parties.

The kingdoms' physical aspects also made them distinct from one another. The archives of the Dutch East India Company occasionally refer to the sizes of the various successor states. Several Dutch documents from around the mid-seventeenth century declare that Ikkeri ran along India's western Kanara and Malabar coasts from "Mirzee" (Mirjan?) near Ankola in the north, down to Nileshvar, some 50 miles south of the port of Mangalore, altogether stretching about 200 miles. Travelling to the kingdom's eastern boundaries in the interior from various points along the shore was said to take two to three-and-a-half days, which suggests distances of between approximately 40 and 80 miles.³⁸ The kingdom thus shared borders with Sonda, Bijapur, Mysore, and Kannur (or Cannanore, in Malabar), as well as several smaller principalities. Dutch reports of about a century later reveal that Ikkeri's then coastal strip still occupied more or less the same area, including the ports of Honavar, Bhatkal, Basrur (or Barcelore, near Kundapura), Barkur, Mulki, and Mangalore.³⁹ Secondary literature, based on other sources, presents a comparable

³⁸ Reports of Dutch diplomatic missions to Ikkeri make clear that the (largely uphill) journey from their coastal settlement at Basrur to the kingdom's capital Bednur, a distance of around 40 miles, took about two days. For an eighteenth-century Dutch description of this road—saying it was beautiful, tree-lined, clean, and safe even for foreigners sleeping with their pockets full of money—see Jacobus Canter Visscher, *Mallabaarse Brieven, behelzende eene naukeurige beschryving van de kust van Mallabaar ...* (Leeuwarden, 1743), 69.

³⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1224, ff. 74, 77-8v; no. 2601, ff. 169v-70: report on "Canara" (Ikkeri), July 1657, "Malabar dictionary," 1743; HRB, no. 542 (unpaginated, 1st document, c. halfway, after the section on Malabar): description of Ceylon, Madurai, south Coromandel, Malabar, and Kanara by Rijcklof van Goens, Sept. 1675; Hugo K. S'Jacob (ed.), *De Nederlanders in Kerala 1663-1701: De memories en instructies betreffende het commandement Malabar van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (The Hague,

demarcation of Ikkeri's territory, although it claims that parts of the kingdom's eastern limits lay over 100 miles from the shore.⁴⁰

As for Tanjavur, Dutch records of the decades around the mid-eighteenth century state that this kingdom covered the area between the Kollidam (or Coleroon) River in the north and the lands of Ramnad and its offshoots in the south. The latter boundaries were often contested and regularly shifted, but generally seem to have run along a zone comprising the towns of Pudukkottai and Arantangi and the port of Adirampatnam on the eastern Coromandel Coast. In the west, Tanjavur neighboured on Madurai, the border lying between Tanjavur town and nearby Tiruchirappalli, one of Madurai's capitals. The Dutch wrote that Tanjavur encompassed five provinces, centred around the towns of Mannargudi, Pattukkottai, Papanasam, Kumbakonam, and Mayuram. All this considered, it must have roughly measured 50 to 70 miles both from north to south and from east to west.

The Ramnad kingdom, south of Tanjavur, was probably slightly bigger when it attained practical autonomy in the late seventeenth century, but it soon lost considerable parts of its territory when Pudukkottai and Shivagangai seceded from it. Besides, the border with Tanjavur appears to have moved southward in the first half of the eighteenth century, in the 1740s said to have reached the eastern shore at Manamelkudi. In the same period, but also in the mid-1670s for instance, Ramnad's southern littoral did not extend much further westward than the port of Kilakkarai.

Finally, Madurai, lying west of Tanjavur and Ramnad, was several times larger than those states. It stretched—still according to the Dutch—from Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari) and the major part of the Fishery Coast in the far south all the way north of the Kollidam River, where it bordered the kingdoms of Mysore, Senji, and Ariyalur, while the mountain range known as the Western Ghats marked its western limits. Although the Jesuit Bouchet claimed in the early eighteenth century that Madurai's size was similar to that of Portugal, the kingdom thus appears to have been somewhat smaller, covering about 200 miles from north to south and an average of around 60 miles from east to west. A largely similar territorial division between the major states is depicted in Dutch and British maps from the late seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, respectively (see illustration 1).⁴¹

1976), 84, 192; Julius Valentijn Stein van Gollennesse, *Memoir on the Malabar Coast by J. V. Stein van Gollennesse ...*, ed. A.J. van der Burg (Madras, 1908), 15-16. The latter work is also available in English: A. Galletti, A.J. van der Burg, and P. Groot (eds), *The Dutch in Malabar: Being a Translation of Selections Nos. 1 and 2 with Introduction and Notes* (Madras, 1911), there see 68.

⁴⁰ K.D. Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri* (Madras, 1957), 2, map facing title page; K.N. Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity* (Dharwar, 1974), xiii, 86-9; A. Sundara, *The Keḷadi Nāyakas: Architecture and Art*, vol. V, pt. 2, *The Shivappa Nayaka Palace in Shimoga* (Mysore, 1987), x.

⁴¹ NA, VOC, no. 1615B, f. 471; no. 2317, f. 329; no. 2443, ff. 2682-3, 2693-4; no. 2631, ff. 417-23: map in report of inspection tour by Ceylon Governor Gerrit de Heere, Sept.-Oct. 1699, final reports of

In the Tamil-speaking zone too, the territorial division observed by the Dutch generally agrees with what is concluded in secondary literature.⁴² In fact, the situation came quite close to traditional local notions on borders between political regions (or *maṇḍalams*) in this area. These held, for example, that the boundary between the Chola realm (Tanjavur) and the Pandya realm (Madurai, including Ramnad) was demarcated by the Vellar River, which flows into the sea right at the abovementioned town of Manamelkudi.⁴³ The Dutch records also suggest that although borders often moved and claims to land frequently overlapped, boundaries were still fixed in the sense that at a given moment it was usually clear where the actual control of one party ended and that of another began. These documents contain many statements that territories extended up to specific towns, rivers, capes, or mountains.⁴⁴

With respect to the kingdoms' geographic and demographic characteristics, Tanjavur was situated in a fertile river delta that supported intensive wet-land agriculture and a dense, largely sedentary, and highly stratified population. Ramnad's demography was different, located as it was in a semi-arid region,

the Coromandel Governors Adriaan Pla, Elias Guillot, and Jacob Mossel, Feb. 1734, Sept. 1738, Feb. 1744; *Beknopte historie*, 85-6, 91-2, 95-6; HRB, no. 542 (unpaginated, 1st document, c. halfway, section "Teuverslant"): description of Ceylon, Madurai, south Coromandel, Malabar, and Kanara by Rijcklof van Goens, Sept. 1675; *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères, nouvelle édition*, vol. XIII, *Mémoires des Indes* (Paris, 1781), 126; Robert Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year MDCCXLV ...*, vol. 1 (London, 1763), 112-13; Markus Vink (ed.), *Mission to Madurai: Dutch Embassies to the Nayaka Court of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century* (New Delhi, 2012), 303-4, 352; BL/AAS, Orme Collection, O.V. series (hereafter OOV), no. 333, sheet 6: "Promontory of India for the intelligence of Hyder Ally's war, copied from Captain Kapper, reduced." For reproductions of the Dutch map, see: Jos Gommans, Jeroen Bos, Gijs Kruijtzter, et al. (eds), *Grote Atlas van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie / Comprehensive Atlas of the Dutch United East India Company*, vol. VI, *Voor-Indië, Perzië, Arabisch Schiereiland / India, Persia, Arabian Peninsula* (Voorburg, 2010), sheet 301 (see also sheet 165, which is only accurate for Tanjavur and the coasts of Madurai and Ramnad); Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, fig. 2 (between 12-13).

⁴² K.R. Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore* (Madras, 1928), 79, map facing title page; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 146; R. Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura* (Madras, 1924), 55-7.

⁴³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 25: "The limits of the Cholla, Pandian and Charan countries," f. 187 (a translation of three Tamil verses). See also BL/AAS, MT, class VII, no. 23: "Chronological account of Bijayanagar," f. 134.

⁴⁴ In addition to the previous footnotes, see: NA, VOC, no. 1195, ff. 496-6v; no. 1351, f. 2358; no. 2400, ff. 410v-11; no. 2956, f. 1223; no. 8985, ff. 104, 117v: letters from Pulicat, Nagapattinam, and Colombo to Batavia, July 1652, Jan. 1680, June 1737, reports of missions to Mysore and Ramnad, Dec. 1680, Jan. 1681, June 1759; Lodewijk Wagenaar et al. (eds), *Gouverneur Van Imhoff op dienstreis in 1739 naar Cochijn, Travancore en Tuticorin, en terug over Jaffna en Mannar naar Colombo (zondag 25 januari tot zaterdag 18 april)* (Zutphen, 2007), 168; Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 8th book, 236, 238. But see also Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 138-9; Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 174-6.

where towns were surrounded by dry wilderness and woods. It harboured a sparse populace, of which roving, independent-minded herdsmen and warrior bands formed a substantial portion. Madurai combined physical and societal elements of Tanjavur and Ramnad, the latter region being initially part of it. With its much larger size, Madurai encompassed riverine and populous lands as well as thinly inhabited wasteland and forests. Another combination was found in Ikkeri, where the successive capitals and most of its territory lay in a hilly and wooded upland area, separated by the Western Ghats from the kingdom's riverine coastal strip. This was another very fertile region.⁴⁵ According to the early eighteenth-century Dutch Pastor Jacobus Canter Visscher, Ikkeri served as "the granary of entire India [*Noorder-Indie*, "Northern Indies"]."⁴⁶

As mentioned, the variety that these four kingdoms—and their five dynasties—together represent is one reason why they are the focus of this work. They are systematically and extensively discussed in every chapter. Occasionally, however, this study deals with other heirs of Vijayanagara when they provide illustrative

⁴⁵ For south India's geography and its impact on demography, society, and politics, see: O.H.K. Spate and A.T.A. Learmonth, *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography* (3rd edition, Suffolk, 1967), 47, 669-73, 684-7, 700-3, 762-82; Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 43-7, 170; J.C. Heesterman, "Warrior, Peasant and Brahmin," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, 3 (1995); Jos Gommans, "The Silent Frontier in South Asia, c. A.D. 1100-1800," *Journal of World History* 9, 1 (1998), 2-4; Burton Stein, "Agrarian Integration in South India," in Robert Eric Frykenberg (ed.), *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison, 1969), 188, 206; idem, *Vijayanagara*, 15-17, 21, 24-5, 44-7; B.A. Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire (A.D. 1346-A.D. 1646)* (Madras, 1934), vol. I, 39-44; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 9-25; idem, *Penumbra Visions*, 226; David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton/Guildford, 1985), 81-96; Nagendra E. Rao, *Craft Production and Trade in South Kanara A.D. 1000-1763* (New Delhi, 2006), 6-10; Pamela G. Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1996), 7-10; Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, ch. 1; Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800* (Delhi, 2001), 179; Kathleen D. Morrison, *Fields of Victory: Vijayanagara and the Course of Intensification* (Berkeley, 1995), passim, especially ch. 2; idem, "Coercion, Resistance, and Hierarchy: Local Processes and Imperial Strategies in the Vijayanagara Empire," in Susan E. Alcock et al. (eds), *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* (Cambridge, 2001), 258-9; Bridges White, "Beyond Empire," 100; David Shulman, "On South Indian Bandits and Kings," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 17, 3 (1980), 288-90, 301-6; Lennart Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits in Eighteenth-Century Ramnad (South India)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 44, 4 (2001), 545-6, 563-6. For Dutch and Jesuit descriptions of these kingdoms' geographic and demographic features, see: NA, HRB, no. 542 (unpaginated, 1st document, c. halfway, sections "Tansjaour," "Teuverslant," and subsequent folios): description of Ceylon, Madurai, south Coromandel, Malabar, and Kanara by Rijcklof van Goens, Sept. 1675; Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 8th book, 233-4, 236; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 304-8, 352-3; *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. X, *Mémoires des Indes* (Paris, 1781), 61, vol. XIII, 126-36; Saulière, "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks" [pt. 1], 91; Saulier, "Madurai and Tanjore," 786.

⁴⁶ Canter Visscher, *Mallabarse Brieven*, 68-9.

examples or noteworthy exceptions with regard to the chapters' themes. These states are primarily Mysore (in Chapters 3-6), Senji (3, 6), Shivagangai (2, 6, Epilogue), and Ariyalur (1, 6). The second reason for focusing on Ikkeri, Tanjavur, Madurai, and Ramnad is the availability of voluminous, diverse, and mostly unexplored sources for these kingdoms, described in detail in the following section.

Sources

In contrast to its medieval period, south India's early modern history can be researched with large quantities of primary sources created not only by local actors but also by external parties.⁴⁷ Both of these bodies of source materials comprise various sub-groups. Local sources include epigraphic records, literary texts, and what little remains of state administration, as well as visual materials and objects, such as works of art, architecture, archaeological findings, and coins. Among the external sources are records and maps of European mercantile powers, accounts and drawings of foreign travellers, and documents of Christian missions. Most of these categories can be further divided according to individual source creators, such as specific courts, trading companies, missionary orders, and private persons. Several of the sets of materials thus distinguished still remain unpublished and have hardly been used for research. Further, they all present their own historiographic challenges, for example with regard to accessibility, interpretation, and linguistic variety.

Therefore, any researcher of Vijayanagara's heirs must make a balanced choice from this wealth of sources. Besides all sorts of published materials, the present study chiefly uses two distinct but complementary bodies of unpublished sources, one of local origin and one of foreign provenance. Both cover all selected Vijayanagara successor states, are of considerable size, and have been little explored so far. They comprise, first, south Indian literary works found among the translated so-called Mackenzie manuscripts, and second, the archives of the Dutch East India Company. Having very different backgrounds—assorted erudite

⁴⁷ For a survey of sources for the Nayaka kingdoms in the Tamil region, see Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 334-40. For published inscriptions and literary texts, see also Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 147. For (inexhaustive) overviews for the individual kingdoms, see: Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikṣvāki*, 5-11; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, ch. 1; B.S. Shastri, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations 1498-1763*, ed. Charles J. Borges (New Delhi, 2000), 315-20; V. Vriddhagirisān, *The Nayaks of Tanjore* (Annamalainagar, 1942), 3-8; C.K. Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic* (Annamalainagar, 1944), 5-17; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 33-9; K. Seshadri, "The Sēṭupatis of Ramnad" (unpublished dissertation, University of Madurai, 1976), 1-4; S. Kadhirlvel, *A History of the Maravas, 1700-1802* (Madurai, 1977), ch. 1.

or artistic prose and poetry versus an interrelated set of business records—these two collections greatly differ in content, style, structure, purpose, and intended audience. Consequently, they provide two divergent kinds of information, which often offer context and nuance to one another. Especially when events or people are referred to in both these local and external materials—whether they confirm, complement, or contradict one another—one can compare the sources' various viewpoints and thus better appreciate their value.

As said, only for the early modern period is it possible to study pre-colonial south Indian courts and dynasties with the help of extensive sets of local as well as foreign source materials, allowing for historiographic richness and depth not possible for previous phases of the region's past. As such, the findings of the present work can have implications for the historiography of earlier Indian courts and dynasties, by necessity based solely or chiefly on local sources, providing less diverse perspectives. Thus, considering the conclusions in the following chapters, Indian court politics before the early modern period—particularly aspects like successions to the throne, the power of courtiers, court protocol, and relations between courts—may have been different from what historians have hitherto concluded.

The rest of this section is concerned with the two main sets of sources used for this research: the translated Mackenzie manuscripts and the archives of the Dutch East India Company.⁴⁸

Literary texts produced at and around the courts and temples of Vijayanagara and its heirs were composed for cultured and polyglot audiences that included royals, courtiers, scholars, artists, priests, and visitors. The contents and styles of these works are very diverse, their structures and meanings can be complex, and they are scattered over many places. To begin with, they date from different phases in a period of nearly half a millennium: between the mid-fourteenth and early nineteenth centuries. They were written in at least five languages (from two language families), in equally as many scripts: Kannada, Marathi, Sanskrit, Tamil, and Telugu. The courts in question were all multilingual, and almost none of these languages was confined to just one kingdom.⁴⁹ Further, the texts were inscribed on dried palm leaves, carved in stone and metal, written on paper, or orally transmitted.

⁴⁸ For the use of south Indian inscriptions, works of art, and court administration, see Chapters 2 and 5.

⁴⁹ For extreme multilingualism in literary texts from Tanjavur, see: Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Multilingual Dramas at the Tanjavur Maratha Court and Literary Cultures in Early Modern South India," *The Medieval History Journal* 14, 2 (2011); Radhika Seshan, "From Folk Culture to Court Culture: The *Kuravanji* in the Tanjore Court," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65 (2004). For linguistic variety in inscriptions of Vijayanagara and its successors, see Emmanuel Francis, "Imperial Languages

Works pertaining to courts and dynasties appeared in several forms, for instance *vaṃśāvaḷis* (family histories), *charitras* or *caritramus* (biographies, chronicles, historical tales), *kaifiyats* (local histories, town records, often reconstructed at the end of the early modern period), *bakhairs* (narratives, memoirs), and other genres.⁵⁰ Some south Indian chronicles even have come to us in versions recorded by Portuguese and Dutch merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵¹ Still, many texts must have been lost, while those that remain are kept at different locations, in south India and elsewhere, with various degrees of accessibility. Only part of these have been published, mostly in their original language, and occasionally in English translation, in the latter case often offering just a summary or excerpts.⁵²

A large body of texts, however, is available in manuscript English translations, which belong to the well-known but only partly explored Mackenzie collections. About the turn of the nineteenth century, Colonel Colin Mackenzie served as the first surveyor-general of India, appointed after the British East India Company came to control substantial parts of south India in the last decades of the eighteenth century. In the years around 1800, Mackenzie and his team of local assistants—most prominently the Brahmin Kavali brothers Venkata Borayya and Venkata Lakshmayya—acquired numerous texts in various Indian languages. Ranging from

and Public Writings in Tamil South India: A Bird's-Eye View in the Very *Longue Durée*,” in Peter C. Bisschop and Elizabeth A. Cecil (eds), *Primary Sources and Asian Pasts* (Berlin/Boston, 2021), 168–77.

⁵⁰ For discussions of literary genres, see: Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 334–8; idem, *Textures of Time*, 19–23, 226–8; Phillip B. Wagoner, “From Manuscript to Archive to Print: The Mackenzie Collection and Later Telugu Literary Historiography,” in Thomas R. Trautman (ed.), *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (Oxford, 2009), 197–8; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton/Oxford, 2001), 86–9; idem, *The Hollow Crown*, 75–6; Rama Sundari Mantena, *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India: Antiquarianism and Philology, 1780–1880* (New York, 2012), 4, 125, 131, 180–1; Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia*, 83–93; Nobuhiro Ota, “Bēḍa Nāyakas and Their Historical Narratives in Karnataka during the Post-Vijayanagara Period,” in Noboru Karashima (ed.), *Kingship in Indian History* (New Delhi, 2004) 190 (n. 1). See also BL/AAS, MT, class VII, no. 23: “Chronological account of Bijayanagar,” ff. 140v–1, for eighteenth-century descriptions of some genres.

⁵¹ See the chronicles on Vijayanagara by Fernão Nunes (c. early 1530s)—published in Portuguese in David Lopes (ed.), *Chronica dos Reis de Bisnaga: Manuscripto inedito do seculo XVI* (Lisbon, 1897), and in English in Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar): A Contribution to the History of India* (London, 1900), 291–395—and on the Nayakas of Madurai by Adolph Bassingh (1677), published in Dutch and English in Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 283–365. The Dutch original was also published in Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 8th book, 285–301. On request of Ceylon's Dutch Governor Jan Schreuder, Bassingh's account was updated in 1762 by G.F. Holst to include the last decades of Nayaka rule and Madurai's subsequent history. See NA, VOC, no. 3052, ff. 1896–975; no. 11306, ff. 0–155. See also Jan Schreuder, *Memoir of Jan Schreuder 1757–1762*, ed. E. Reimers (Colombo, 1946), 37.

⁵² For such publications, see the references in the sections dealing with the individual dynasties.

palm-leaf documents kept in palaces and temples to inscriptions and oral traditions recorded on the spot, they were collected to obtain a clearer picture of the region's political past. Including dynastic chronicles, town and temple histories, laudatory poems, royal proclamations, and the like, these texts could help the colonial administration judge the validity of claims of local rulers to titles, honours, privileges, land, real estate, revenues, etc.⁵³ The majority of the collected documents are still kept at various places in south India.⁵⁴

In addition, Mackenzie's staff prepared English translations of many hundreds of texts—mostly of a political and dynastic nature, it seems—which were later shipped to London.⁵⁵ Of some of these manuscripts, original versions in Indian languages seem unavailable, because they have become lost or texts were directly recorded in English. Thus, those materials may be the only extant copies of certain works.⁵⁶ In any case, several hundred of the English-language manuscripts, translated from all abovementioned languages, pertain to the dynasties and courts of Vijayanagara and its heirs, both great and small, direct and indirect.⁵⁷ This set of texts allows a comparative study of a large number of underexplored local sources, from various linguistic backgrounds and concerning several states, within a reasonable amount of time.

Taken together, Mackenzie's manuscript translations, other materials published or summarised in English, and secondary literature discussing relevant texts, constitute a sizeable body of local sources on court politics. Still, researching these works involves several difficulties. The translations of Mackenzie's assistants are sometimes of doubtful quality, regularly containing quaint English and illegible handwriting, and should be used selectively and with caution. Moreover, part of the texts Mackenzie gathered—in their original languages as well as their English translations—were corrupted or even fabricated for the occasion. Collected by the British to determine the historical positions of south Indian kings and chiefs, these

⁵³ In addition to the previous and following notes, see Mantena, *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India*, 44, 60–85.

⁵⁴ Most of the texts in Indian languages collected by Mackenzie are found in the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (GOML) at the University of Madras (Chennai).

⁵⁵ English translations were sometimes made as soon as the originals were acquired during expeditions. See BL/AAS, MT, class XII (letters and reports, from local agents collecting texts, traditions, etc.), no. 9: "Monthly memorandum & report of C.V. Lutchmia to Major C. Makinzee S.M.S. of the progress made in collection of historical materials" (1804), ff. 82v, 89, 96.

⁵⁶ For examples of possibly unique text versions, see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 9–10, 17, 29–32, 36–9, 52, 85–6, 400.

⁵⁷ These manuscript translations are now kept in the British Library (Asian & African Studies department), London, divided into several sub-collections. Three of these include texts concerning Vijayanagara and its successor states: Mackenzie General, Mackenzie Miscellaneous, and Mackenzie Translations.

documents were partially compiled by those rulers with an agenda to impress Company officials, to the extent that some texts came to resemble petitions. They can thus contain inflated claims with regard to descent, status, property, past events, and whatever else supported power aspirations.⁵⁸

The question is, however, which parts of these texts may have been relevant to the colonial administration. Passages describing late-eighteenth-century political developments could certainly be of interest to British functionaries. But it seems unlikely that stories composed much earlier were largely re-invented or modified to convince the British of current political claims. The bulk of most works appears to consist of original textual sections. This particularly applies to stories in which the latest events occurred before the British gained power and to texts concerning states and dynasties already vanished by this time. The works that do include petitions to the colonial administration (usually at the end of a narrative) chiefly derive from minor chiefs, such as the Palaiyakkarars, who wielded some local power when Mackenzie collected his materials, rather than the main Vijayanagara successor states, most of which no longer existed in that period.

It has been suggested that *kaiḥyats* (local histories) in particular contain sections adapted or invented with contemporary political targets in mind, as they were partly compiled at the request of the British and based on contributions by local informants. But perhaps for this very reason, the narrative accounts in some *kaiḥyats* actually claim to relate historical events instead of legendary tales. Thus, part of this genre and most texts in other styles are considered original in the sense that they remained largely unadjusted when collected or contain authentic memories.⁵⁹ At any rate, even if some passages were (re)constructed at that time, these still reflect politico-cultural ideas of the royal houses these works deal with. Consequently, all these materials at least provide us with notions of dynastic self-perception.

⁵⁸ Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, xxvii; David M. Blake, "Introduction," in Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, xlvii, l-iii; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 30, 86, 91, 100-4; idem, *The Hollow Crown*, 76-7; idem, "Colin Mackenzie: Autobiography of an Archive," in Thomas R. Trautman (ed.), *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (Oxford, 2009), 30-2, 35, 38; Rama Sundari Mantena, "The Kavali Brothers: Intellectual Life in Early Colonial Madras," in idem; Wagoner, "From Manuscript to Archive to Print," 190-1; Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia*, 109-17; Simmons, *Devotional Sovereignty*, 109-14. See also Pushkar Sohoni (ed.), *The Great Inscription at Tanjore: Bhṃsaḥsavaṃśacaritra* (forthcoming).

⁵⁹ Wagoner, "From Manuscript to Archive to Print," 197-8; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 76-8; Mantena, *The Origins of Modern Historiography in India*, ch. 4, especially 125-33, 136, 141, 149; Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial India* (Ranikhet, 2012), 59, 64, 141; Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 203; Janaki Nair, "Eighteenth-Century Passages to a History of Mysore," in Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee (eds), *History in the Vernacular* (Ranikhet, 2008), 70; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 206-7.

Besides authenticity, there are issues of content and context. First, many literary works include sections that might be considered imaginary rather than historical. We thus read of superhuman powers, natural miracles, magical spells, divine interventions, and so on. But although these descriptions could be labelled as historically inaccurate, they reflect traditions, beliefs, and perceptions apparently deemed essential elements of these stories. Therefore, they must not be excluded from historical analyses but regarded as relevant information.

Further, while this study concerns courts and dynasties, several texts rather pertain to areas, towns, persons, castes, temples, and so on, and therefore have a different perspective. Of course, these entities overlap and the focus of stories sometimes shifts. Tales of heroes become chronicles of dynasties, and in turn change into histories of kingdoms, towns, or regions. These varying viewpoints tie in with the question of who composed these works and for what purpose. Many texts were written or sponsored by members of royal houses, court poets, temple priests, or subordinated chiefs, and thus represent their opinions and agendas. In many other instances, the authors or patrons have not been ascertained, but such works were often produced by classes of literary men connected to the courts, including secretaries, scribes, and accountants, and known, for example, as *karaṇams* or *kaṇakkuppillais*.⁶⁰

Still, sometimes it is not even clear when and where texts were first collected and their context is entirely obscure. In those cases, one often remains in the dark about the composers' goals and ideas. Stories about dynasties could have been produced by succeeding royal houses seeing themselves as heirs to their predecessors and glorifying them to enhance their own status. Texts linking kings to specific deities may have been compiled by monastic orders devoted to those deities with the aim of stressing their own importance. Whenever the author's background, position, or motives are unknown, one must try to work with the components of the story itself to contextualise it and attain some idea of the creator's viewpoint.

In addition to the perspectives of Indian writers and their benefactors, there are accounts of developments in Vijayanagara and its heirs produced by Europeans. These records often appear to describe how events unfolded in practice—or at least how they were observed and interpreted by Europeans—and are mostly quite

⁶⁰ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 11, ch. 3; Raman, *Document Raj*, 12, 38, 59–60; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "History and Politics in the Vernacular: Reflections on Medieval and Early Modern South India," in Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee (eds), *History in the Vernacular* (Ranikhet, 2008), 52–6, of which a slightly modified version is found in idem, "Notes on Political Thought in Medieval and Early Modern India," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009); there, see 201–5.

precisely dated. In fact, they are regularly the only truly contemporary sources available. Therefore, these “foreign” reports form a valuable addition to the local materials. As far as European materials are concerned, this study is largely based on the archives of the Dutch East India Company, also known under its Dutch acronym VOC.⁶¹ For long periods in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this company maintained coastal trading stations in all Vijayanagara successor states considered here, and in the area governed by the empire’s final Aravidu dynasty.

The Dutch started appearing in south Indian waters around the turn of the seventeenth century.⁶² Soon, they secured permission from the Nayakas of Senji and the imperial Aravidu house to set up trading posts on the south-eastern Coromandel Coast, consecutively at Teganapatnam in 1608 (followed after two years by Tiruppapuliyar) and at Pulicat in 1610.⁶³ Regular contacts with the other successor states commenced only several decades later.⁶⁴ In the southern Tamil zone, the VOC first settled on the shores of Tanjavur in 1644 and Madurai in 1645 when it opened factories in Tirumullaivasal and Kayalpatnam, respectively. Relations with these Nayaka courts grew closer after the Dutch conquered the

⁶¹ Archival materials of the VOC (*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, “United East-Indies Company”) are stored at various repositories. Most important for Vijayanagara and its heirs are the archives of the Company directors in the Dutch Republic—especially the series of *overgekomen brieven en papieren* (OBP, letters and papers received from Asia)—kept at the National Archives in The Hague (for all states), and to a lesser extent those of the Malabar establishment (for Ikkeri), stored at the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai, and of the Ceylon establishment (for Madurai and Ramnad), kept at the Department of National Archives in Colombo.

⁶² For general overviews of the Dutch in India, see: George Winius and Markus Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified: The VOC (The Dutch East India Co.) and Its Changing Political Economy in India* (Delhi, 1991); Jos Gommans, *The Unseen World: The Netherlands and India from 1550* (Amsterdam, 2018); Heert Terpstra, *De Nederlanders in Voor-Indië* (Amsterdam, 1947); Om Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India* (Cambridge, 1998); Pieter C. Emmer and Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Dutch Overseas Empire, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 2021), chs 3, 7–8.

⁶³ Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 1, 55, 78–81, 83–5; Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 2.2, ed. F.W. Stapel (The Hague, 1932), 225–9; Heert Terpstra, *De vestiging van de Nederlanders aan de kust van Koromandel* (Groningen, 1911), 85–158; Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel 1605–1690: A Study in the Interrelations of European Commerce and Traditional Economies* (The Hague, 1962), 19–21; S. Jeyaseela Stephen, “Rise and Decline of Pulicat under the Dutch East India Company (AD.1612–1690),” *The Historical Review: A Bi-Annual Journal of History and Archaeology* (New Series) X, 1–2 (2002), 2–3, 14, 20–2.

⁶⁴ The VOC maintained no relations with the Wodeyar court of Mysore, save for a brief period in the 1670s–80s. See the conclusions of Chapters 3–4, and: Lennart Bes, “Thalassophobia, Women’s Power, and Diplomatic Insult at Karnataka Courts: Two Dutch Embassies to Mysore and Ikkeri in the 1680s” (unpublished paper, 2014); Binu John Mailaparambil, “The VOC and the Prospects of Trade between Cannanore and Mysore in the Late Seventeenth Century,” in K.S. Mathew and J. Varkey (eds), *Winds of Spices: Essays on Portuguese Establishments in Medieval India with Special Reference to Cannanore* (Tellicherry, 2006), 211–20.

major ports of Nagapattinam (in Tanjavur) and Tuticorin (in Madurai) from the Portuguese, both in 1658.⁶⁵ In that same year, the first treaty was signed between the VOC and the Sethupatis of Ramnad, where the Company established a small trading lodge at the port of Kilakkarai in 1690, after an earlier, short stay at the port of Adirampatnam from 1674.⁶⁶

In Tanjavur, Madurai, and Vijayanagara, the main commodities purchased by the VOC comprised various types of textiles, exported to the Dutch Republic and the South-east Asian archipelago. In addition, the Gulf of Mannar off Madurai's and Ramnad's littoral was the site of regular and highly lucrative pearl fisheries—this shore was hence known as the Fishery Coast—monitored by the VOC after it had become the main maritime power in the region. Apart from commercial motivations, the Company valued a continuous presence in Ramnad for strategic reasons since that kingdom controlled one of only two sea passages of some size between the Indian mainland and Ceylon, the Pamban Channel. Although Dutch-Ramnad agreements stipulated that only the VOC was allowed to use this route, a nearby stronghold proved necessary for the Company to help enforce this agreement to at least some degree.⁶⁷

On the western Kanara Coast, as Ikkeri's shore was called, the VOC set up a small station at the port of Basrur (near Kundapura) about 1660, following a treaty with the kingdom's Nayakas in 1657. Besides some pepper, Ikkeri provided the Dutch principally with rice, needed to feed their numerous personnel on the Malabar Coast and Ceylon further south.⁶⁸ In addition, around 1637 a more northern factory

⁶⁵ Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "The Politics of Commerce in the Coastal Kingdoms of Tamil Nad, 1650-1700," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 1 (1971); idem, "The Dutch East India Company and the Kingdom of Madura, 1650-1700," *Tamil Culture* X, 1 (1963); Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 56-7; Markus Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast: Cross-Cultural Contacts between the Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century" (unpublished dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999), 203-10, 240-8; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, "Tirumala Naik, the Portuguese and the Dutch," *Indian Historical Records Commission: Proceedings of Meetings*, vol. XVI (Delhi, 1939); Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 1, 455-7, vol. 2 (The Hague, 1931), 123-8, 137-9, 142-9; Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 1st book, 3-4, 8th book, 234-5. For the VOC's initial contacts with Tanjavur's Bhonsle court, see Nikhil Bellarykar, "Conflict and Co-operation: Preliminary Explorations in VOC – Tanjavur (Maratha) Relations during 1676-1691," *Prag Samiksha* 5, 9 (2017).

⁶⁶ Bes, "The Sethupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 549-51; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, "Commercial Policies of the Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram 1660-1690," in R.E. Asher (ed.), *Proceedings of the Second International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies*, vol. 2 (Madras, 1968); Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 429 (n. 33); Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 2, 113-14.

⁶⁷ See the literature mentioned in the previous footnotes. See also Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast 1650-1740* (Delhi, 1986).

⁶⁸ Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 2, 104-13; Canter Visscher, *Mallabaarse Brieven*, 69; Bes, "Thalassophobia, Women's Power, and Diplomatic Insult"; K.G. Vasantha Madhava, "The Dutch in Coastal Karnataka 1602-1763," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* 73, 3-4

was founded at Vengurla on the Konkan Coast, again largely for strategic purposes, situated as this town was just north of Portuguese-ruled Goa. While Vengurla initially fell under the Bijapur sultanate and was later conquered by the Maratha King Shivaji Bhonsle, it lay close to Ikkeri's territories and its resident Dutchmen maintained contacts with this kingdom until at least the late 1670s.⁶⁹

Through all those coastal settlements, by the mid-seventeenth century the VOC had become deeply engaged with these states, regularly exchanging embassies, correspondence, and commodities with the courts. This involvement lasted until Vijayanagara's successor dynasties were dethroned—in Madurai around 1739, in Ikkeri in 1763—or came to be fully dominated by the British and the Mughal successor state of Arcot from the 1770s on, as happened in Tanjavur and Ramnad. None of the other European powers in south India (Portuguese, Danes, French, and British) maintained such continuous relations with all these dynasties during this period.⁷⁰

Keeping a close watch on the inland courts from their factories, the Dutch generally compiled extensive accounts of local political and dynastic developments. Largely unexplored and unpublished, these records have much to add to our often limited knowledge of such events, sometimes even basic facts like the years in which incidents took place. Relevant types of documents in the VOC archives include correspondence between several Dutch settlements in south India and Ceylon, letters from those establishments to the Company's Asian headquarters in Batavia (on Java) and directors in the Dutch Republic, proceedings or minutes of Company meetings (*resoluties*), final reports or memorandums of departing VOC officials for their successors (*memories van overgave*), various papers concerning embassies exchanged between the Company and the courts, and correspondence with the kingdoms' rulers and courtiers. In the latter category, the many letters received from courts and their representatives in fact embody south Indian perspectives within this corpus of Dutch sources, albeit in translated and perhaps misinterpreted form.⁷¹

(1982), 2-5; B. Shreedhara Naik, "European Trade and Politics in Medieval South Canara," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 69 (2008), 367-9; Rao, *Craft Production and Trade in South Kanara*, 158-61; Pius Fidelis Pinto, *History of Christians in Coastal Karnataka (1500 – 1763 A.D.)* (Mangalore, 1999), 97-103.

⁶⁹ Om Prakash, "The Dutch Factory at Vengurla in the Seventeenth Century," in A.R. Kulkarni, M.A. Nayeem, and T.R. de Souza (eds), *Medieval Deccan History: Commemoration Volume in Honour of P.M. Joshi* (Bombay, 1996); Tycho Walaardt, "Peper of Portugezen: Een geschiedenis van de Hollandse factorij Vengurla in de nabijheid van Goa in de zeventiende eeuw" (unpublished MA thesis, Leiden University, 1999); Ishrat Alam, "The Dutch East-India Company Trade at Vengurla in the Seventeenth Century," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 64 (2003).

⁷⁰ For a survey of European settlements in South Asia during this period, see Joseph E. Schwartzberg *et al.*, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (New York, 1992), 50.

⁷¹ The mentioned VOC factories were part of three regional Company establishments (*kantoren*). Basrur came under the Malabar *kantoor*, headquartered in Cochin. Nagapattinam was part of the

Among all these documents, the dozens of lengthy reports and diaries of the Company's diplomatic missions contain a particular wealth of information on such subjects as relations between people at court, royal display, and court protocol. Surveying the known VOC embassies to Vijayanagara's heirs, counting only those involving Dutch envoys rather than local brokers, one finds the following minimum numbers and periods: Ikkeri, twelve (1657-1735); Tanjavur, seven (1645-1764, nearly all falling in the period of the Bhonsle dynasty); Madurai, four (1645-89); and Ramnad, thirteen (1658-1759). There were also encounters between the Dutch and monarchs during the latter's tours of their kingdoms, as happened at least twice in Ikkeri (1729-38), four times in Tanjavur (1725-41), and no fewer than nine times in Madurai (1705-31).⁷² In addition, the successor states of Mysore and Senji received respectively one (1681) and about three (c. 1608-44) Dutch embassies. Finally, there were at least five VOC missions to Vijayanagara's Aravidu rulers (1610-45) and three visits by them to the Dutch (c. 1629-46).⁷³ Detailed reports are not available for each

Coromandel *kantoor*, seated until 1690 and after 1781 at Pulicat, and between these years at Nagapattinam itself. Tuticorin and its dependency Kilakkarai belonged to the Ceylon *kantoor*, based in Colombo. Vengurla formed a separate unit until it was put under the Surat *kantoor* in 1673 and under Malabar in 1676. For the VOC's administrative structure in South Asia and its archival organisation, see Jos Gommans, Lennart Bes, and Gijs Kruijtzter, *Dutch Sources on South Asia c. 1600-1825*, vol. 1, *Bibliography and Archival Guide to the National Archives at The Hague (The Netherlands)* (New Delhi, 2001).

⁷² From at least the 1690s to the 1730s, the Nayakas of Madurai made frequent inspection tours to the kingdom's southern Fishery Coast (including pilgrimage sites at Tiruchendur and Punnaikayal). See also Chapters 4-5. In addition to the sources mentioned there, see: NA, VOC, no. 1478, f. 1156; no. 2185, ff. 997-1023v; no. 8935, ff. 708-18: letter from Tuticorin to Jaffna, July 1690, (extracts of) correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, May-June 1721, Apr.-June 1731, and report of meeting with the Nayaka at Tuticorin, May 1731; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI (The Hague, 1976), 445-6, vol. VII, 369, 567, vol. VIII, 19. For references to these trips in local sources, see: Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLVI, 186; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 229-30, 366 (no. 222), 368 (no. 230).

⁷³ For lists of VOC records on some of these encounters—in the National Archives at The Hague for all courts, the Tamil Nadu Archives at Chennai for Ikkeri, and the Department of National Archives at Colombo for Madurai and Ramnad—see: Gommans, Bes, and Kruijtzter, *Dutch Sources on South Asia*, vol. 1, 194-6, 244-51, 255, 312-13; Lennart Bes and Gijs Kruijtzter, *Dutch Sources on South Asia c. 1600-1825*, vol. 3, *Archival Guide to Repositories outside The Netherlands* (New Delhi, 2015), 219, 297. For various missions in the early seventeenth century, see: the first few volumes of H.T. Colenbrander *et al.* (eds), *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India anno ... [1624-82]* (Batavia/The Hague, 1887-1931); Terpstra, *De vestiging van de Nederlanders aan de kust van Koromandel*, 85-6, 118, 124, 129-32; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, chs II-III; N. MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie als zeemogendheid in Azië* (Rijswijk, 1927), vols I-II. Documents of embassies to Madurai in 1668, 1677, and 1689 have been published and translated in Vink, *Mission to Madurai*. For missions to Ramnad in 1731, 1736, and 1743, see Bes, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 34-6, 47-9, 64-71. For missions to Mysore in 1681 and Ikkeri in 1684, see Bes, "Thalassophobia, Women's Power, and Diplomatic Insult." This survey does not include several

mission, however, as is the case with all embassies to Senji and Nayaka-ruled Tanjavur, and all but one to Vijayanagara.

Apart from what VOC envoys personally observed during their missions and what rulers and courtiers chose to write to the Dutch, the Company received much information from spies, interpreters, merchants, local authorities, personal contacts, gossips, and so on. While this knowledge was thus frequently acquired indirectly and no doubt filtered by VOC employees, it often comprised south Indian views on events and some of the informants in question were well-connected to court circles. Further, while Portuguese often served as the *lingua franca* between these parties and the VOC, several Dutchmen lived in south India for many years and used native languages to communicate.⁷⁴

However, the VOC records often omit to say how information was gathered, or who was responsible for compiling descriptions of regional developments, and we cannot determine how knowledgeable or biased Dutch officials and their Indian informers were in individual cases. Such documents are frequently anonymous or were collectively signed by Company personnel. The abovementioned embassy reports are among the few types of VOC records that can be attributed to specific employees—in this case the envoys—and thus provide a more personal perspective. But a drawback of these accounts is that there were few or no Company servants accompanying the ambassadors who were able to verify their reports.

All this compels us to be critical of the information in the Dutch archives, the more so because it regularly differs from what local sources purport. For example, political events and relationships at court presented as harmonious in south Indian texts are often depicted as much less peaceful in Company records (see Chapters 2-3). Indeed, VOC sources generally describe the courts of the Vijayanagara successor states as characterised by constant rivalry and periodic violence. But while in those instances Dutch documents thus downright contradict local materials, in other cases the two bodies of sources rather support or complement one another, especially with regard to more cultural aspects of court politics, like protocol and royal representation (see Chapters 4-5).

embassies to Mysore under Haidar Ali Khan and Tipu Sultan (1761-99), for which see J. van Lohuizen, *The Dutch East India Company and Mysore* (The Hague, 1961).

⁷⁴ For Dutchmen speaking Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, or Malayalam, see: NA, VOC, no. 1756, ff. 1199v, 1203; no. 2015, f. 614; no. 2147, ff. 4835v, 4840; no. 2351, f. 3999; no. 2386, f. 167; no. 2956, f. 1242: report of Madurai Nayaka's visit to Tuticorin, July 1708, reports of missions to Ramnad and Tanjavur, Apr. 1724, Nov. 1735, July 1759, Nagapattinam proceedings (*resoluties*), Mar. 1730, Oct. 1735; Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 8th book, 237-8; Gijs Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India* (Leiden, 2009), 224; A.G. Menon, "Colonial Linguistics and the Spoken Language," *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics* 32, 1 (2003), 80-2.

One reason that the VOC reported on regional politics in great detail was to be aware of the changing balance of power at courts, so it could approach the right people for trade concessions and other privileges. Also, Company officials needed to explain to their superiors how political events might lead to disorder, affect commerce, and lower profits. It of course happened that such officials (including ambassadors) exaggerated their accounts about supposedly arrogant rulers, cunning courtiers, and uncooperative local authorities. For example, claims by VOC employees that unreasonable behaviour of Indian parties hindered the Company's activities could actually serve to conceal mismanagement, corruption,⁷⁵ or diplomatic blunders on the part of the Dutch.

But the fact that the VOC archives comprised business administration—and documents would therefore be forwarded to other functionaries who checked and used them—means that matters could not be portrayed in too fanciful a manner. The VOC's policies with regard to the courts were based on its own documentation, and unreliable or fabricated information would soon reveal itself as such because of the Company's ongoing, intense relations with the courts. Further, if local news proved false later on, this would usually be mentioned and corrected in subsequent reports.

Still, VOC records were often prejudiced or derogatory. The Dutch greatly disliked political instability, since this hampered their trade. Thus, they habitually condemned the turmoil ensuing from local power struggles, inter-state wars, and their own disputes with the courts. They frequently attributed such developments to “effeminate,” “oblivious,” or “fickle” kings, and “merciless,” “greedy,” or “deceitful” courtiers.⁷⁶ These designations demonstrate the general inclination of the Dutch to regard Indian people as alien and inferior. Some common European stereotypes of Asia, however, like its alleged endemic violence and insatiable lust, are not really

⁷⁵ In the Vijayanagara successor states, corruption under the VOC seems to have been mostly of a relatively small scale. For two rare severe cases, in Ramnad and Ikkeri respectively, see: Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 541, 571; NA, VOC, no. 1299, ff. 350-2: letter from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, Dec. 1674.

⁷⁶ For some examples (among many), see: NA, VOC, no. 1227, f. 116v; no. 1251, f. 751; no. 1268, ff. 1114v, 1115v; no. 1333, f. 111; no. 1615C, f. 643v; no. 1835, ff. 285, 288; no. 2015, ff. 598, 601; no. 2229, f. 2035; no. 2291, 509; no. 2354, ff. 1583-4; no. 2386, f. 67; no. 2925, f. 842; no. 8955, f. 244: letters from Pulicat to Ceylon, from Tuticorin to Colombo, from Nagapattinam and Colombo to Batavia, June 1658, Oct. 1678, Aug. 1713, Aug. 1732, July 1733, Feb. 1758, report of mission to Travancore, Madurai, and Ramnad, Mar.-Oct. 1665, reports of missions to Ikkeri and Ramnad, May 1668, Feb. 1699, Apr. 1724, Mar. 1735, report on Malabar, May 1732, Nagapattinam proceedings, Nov. 1735; DNA, DCGCC, no. 2704, ff. 20-20v: final report of Tuticorin's chief Johannes Ferdinandus Crijtsman, June 1757; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 309, 353; Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, vol. 5, 8th book, 162; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Forcing the Doors of Heathendom: Ethnography, Violence, and the Dutch East India Company,” in Charles H. Parker and Jerry H. Bentley (eds), *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World* (Lanham/Plymouth, 2007), 143.

standard in the Company's archives. Not all rulers are depicted here as oriental despots terrorising their subjects and indulging in their harems, and far from every court official is portrayed as a sly king-maker plotting to eliminate his rivals.

Again, these documents were supposed to serve as trustworthy and confidential business records, not as personal travel accounts aimed at attracting a wide audience by way of sensational stories about an exoticised Asia. Overall, it appears that while VOC servants tended to use condescending terms for local groups as a whole—such as rulers, courtiers, Hindus (“heathens”), and Muslims (“Moors”)—they were more nuanced when they referred to individual people, of whatever background or position. They downright despised certain Indians but sincerely respected others and even maintained relations of friendship or intimacy with some.⁷⁷

Yet, the Dutch obviously viewed much in south India through a homemade lens, and matters related to dynasties, courts, and states are likely to have been construed and labelled on the basis of European political notions and terminology. Therefore, it is not always certain what VOC records exactly refer to when they use words such as *vorstje* (“little king”), *vrijheer* (“free lord”), *keijzerrijk* (“empire”), *natie* (“nation”), and *independent*, to name a few cases. A term like “little king” may not have had the same connotations in the VOC context as it has in modern historiography on south India. This further underscores the necessity to be careful with these materials, and beware of, for instance, simplifications, misinterpretations, exaggerations, mistaken identities, or forged stories.

However, it appears that with regard to court politics in the Vijayanagara successor states, the Dutch largely strove to pursue a pragmatic, non-intervening policy. In all these kingdoms, the VOC basically remained a trading company: it certainly commanded economic and military power but it never managed or even tried to attain political control beyond a few coastal settlements, let alone dominate states. Although the Dutch obviously had their preferences for certain courtiers, pretenders to the throne, and court merchants—those considered “friends of the Company”—the VOC refrained from seriously supporting or opposing these people. Indeed, the Company's higher officials sometimes explicitly warned their subordinates not to get involved in these kingdoms' power struggles.⁷⁸ As far as can be concluded from the VOC sources, the Dutch never attempted to influence

⁷⁷ For friendships of a VOC servant in Ikkeri with a local governor and the prominent merchant Narayana Malu, see: NA, VOC, no. 1288, ff. 638-8v: letter from Cochin to Batavia, July 1672; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III (The Hague, 1968), 911. For an intimate Dutch-Indian relationship in Ramnad, see Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 571.

⁷⁸ See, for example, NA, VOC, no. 2403, ff. 1969-9v: letter from Colombo to Tuticorin, Apr. 1737. See also: NA, VOC, no. 1324, ff. 402-2v: letter from Nagapattinam to Colombo, Dec. 1677; Hendrick Becker, *Memoir of Hendrick Becker, Governor and Director of Ceylon, for His Successor, Isaac Augustyn Rumpf*, 1716, ed. Sophia Anthonisz (Colombo, 1914), 34; Arasaratnam, “The Politics of Commerce,” 13.

developments at the courts, apart from occasional (and usually fruitless) requests to replace local court representatives at ports where the Company was active.⁷⁹

Further, once political and dynastic events had passed and the new state of affairs became clear, there was little reason for the Dutch to record things differently from what they thought were the actual circumstances. The VOC had no real interest in the outcome of competition at the courts other than the wish that the people in power, on or behind the throne, would adhere to the standing trade agreements. Therefore, by and large, the Dutch adopted a practical approach, trying to cultivate relations with whoever could promote their interests.⁸⁰ Because of this combination of a relatively disinterested stance and rather direct access to information, the VOC reports on political developments in these kingdoms can be considered comparatively factual.⁸¹

⁷⁹ It is doubtful whether the VOC was able to interfere with political developments in these kingdoms at all. This would require large-scale inland military operations, entailing high costs without guarantee of satisfactory results. Even a Dutch attempt in 1746 to occupy the relatively small Rameshvaram island off the Ramnad coast, because of a trade conflict, became a failure. See Lennart Bes and Crispin Branfoot, "From All Quarters of the Indian World": Hindu Kings, Dutch Merchants and the Temple at Rameshvaram" (forthcoming), and the section on Ramnad in Chapter 4.

⁸⁰ The VOC did not pursue a neutral policy in various other Asian regions, such as on India's south-western Malabar Coast and in the South-east Asian archipelago, where it was sometimes actively involved in political struggles. For overviews of relations between Asian courts and the VOC, see: Emmer and Gommans, *The Dutch Overseas Empire*, pt. III; Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Peter Rietbergen (eds), *Hof en handel: Aziatische vorsten en de VOC 1620-1720* (Leiden, 2004); Jurrien van Goor, "Merchants as Diplomats: Embassies as an Illustration of European-Asian Relations," in idem (ed.), *Preclude to Colonialism: The Dutch in Asia* (Hilversum, 2004); idem (ed.), *Trading Companies in Asia 1600-1830* (Utrecht, 1986); Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (eds), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie* (Leiden, 2002); Robert Ross and George D. Winus (eds), *All of One Company: The VOC in Biographical Perspective* (Utrecht, 1986); Adam Clulow and Tristan Mostert (eds), *The Dutch and English East India Companies: Diplomacy, Trade and Violence in Early Modern Asia* (Amsterdam, 2018).

⁸¹ For Dutch or European perceptions of India and the value of Dutch primary sources for researching India's history—mostly concerning the Mughal empire—see: Manjusha Kuruppath, *Staging Asia: The Dutch East India Company and the Amsterdam Theatre, c. 1650 to 1780* (Leiden, 2016), 13-23, 33-59, 129-48; James D. Tracy, "Asian Despotism? Mughal Government as Seen from the Dutch East India Company Factory in Surat," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3, 3 (1999); Guido van Meersbergen, "Ethnography and Encounter: Dutch and English Approaches to Cross-Cultural Contact in Seventeenth-Century South Asia" (unpublished dissertation, University College London, 2015), passim, in particular ch. 1 and Conclusion; idem, "Writing East India Company History after the Cultural Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century East India Company and Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 17, 3 (2017); Kruijtzter, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth-Century India*, 11-17; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 14-17; idem, *Mission to Madurai*, 35-7, 86-124; Subrahmanyam, "Forcing the Doors of Heathendom"; Jos Gommans and Jitske Kuiper, "The Surat Castle Revolutions: Myth of an Anglo-Bania Order and Dutch Neutrality, c. 1740-60," *Journal of Early Modern History* 10, 4 (2006), 384-9; Jos Gommans, "Rethinking the VOC: Two Cheers for Progress," *BMGN – Low Countries*

While the Mackenzie manuscript translations and the VOC records together appear to serve as a balanced combination of sources, exhaustive research of even this selection has proved unfeasible. Whereas all possibly relevant translated Mackenzie manuscripts have been consulted (though not all used) for this work, the vast VOC archives contain so many documents on late Vijayanagara and in particular its heirs that these cannot be studied in their entirety by a single scholar. Consequently, for the latter materials, the focus lies mostly on epochs of notable local political developments or intense Indo-Dutch interaction, which occasions usually produced extensive reports and correspondence. This research therefore generally covers periods surrounding successions to thrones, diplomatic missions, conflicts, and the like. In addition, a number of phases in between such dynamic times have also been studied in detail, so as to gain insight into court politics during quieter stages, which witnessed more stability and continuity in the kingdoms.⁸²

Historiography

Scholars in fields as diverse as history, archaeology, religious studies, Indology, anthropology, and art history have written extensively about Vijayanagara, much less about its successors, and very little about these states from a comparative perspective. Works pertaining to the empire include a large number of political and dynastic histories, source publications, collections of miscellaneous papers, and monographs and articles on topics ranging from politics, warfare, and economy to architecture, literature, and religion. Moreover, this Vijayanagara library is frequently being added to.⁸³

Historical Review 134, 2 (2019); Carolien Stolte, "Onbekend en onbemind: Over de 'anonimiteit' van lokale medewerkers in zeventiende-eeuws India," in Lodewijk Wagenaar (ed.), *Aan de overkant: Ontmoetingen in dienst van de VOC en WIC (1600-1800)* (Leiden, 2015); Jorge Flores, "'I Will Do as My Father Did': On Portuguese and Other European Views of Mughal Succession Crises," *e-Journal of Portuguese History* 3, 2 (2005), 10-13, 17-18. For some long-term perspectives, see: Joan-Pau Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes, 1250-1625* (Cambridge, 2000), for example 28-34; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires, 1500-1800* (Cambridge/London, 2017); idem, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges* (New Delhi, 2005), 17-22, 43-4, 243-4; Peter Rietbergen, *Europa's India: Fascinatie en cultureel imperialisme, circa 1750-circa 2000* (Nijmegen, 2007).

⁸² Besides many individual years, more or less continuous periods I have studied in detail in the VOC archives include: for Ikkeri, 1660s-80s, 1730s, 1750s; for Tanjavur, 1660s-90s, 1720s-40s; and for Ramnad, 1720s-50s. See also the overview of consulted sources at the end of this work. Dutch records on Madurai and Ramnad from the 1650s-90s are extensively analysed in Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast."

⁸³ For overviews of Vijayanagara's historiography, see: Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 2-12, 147-51; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Aspects of State Formation in South India and Southeast Asia, 1500-1650," *The Indian*

While V.S. Naipaul stated that the empire is little remembered, this is even truer for its heirs, which have received a fraction of the scholarly attention paid to Vijayanagara. A few works deal with the histories of the individual dynasties, supplemented with publications concerning art, literature, and relations with European powers, among other subjects. The output of new studies concerning these kingdoms has increased in the last decades, but much research still needs to be done and large bodies of primary sources remain uncharted, including much of the Dutch materials. The dynastic historiography is outdated, having been written mostly between the 1920s and 1970s and hardly updated since then.⁸⁴ The number of works comparing the successors to one another or to its parental state, the main subject of this study, is downright small.

In consequence, historiographic debates are mostly limited to Vijayanagara and rarely concern its offshoots. Three main discussions have dominated the imperial field, which are briefly considered here. The first deals with the issue of whether Vijayanagara was a “Hindu” bulwark, deliberately constructed against invasions in the name of Islam. The empire has long been seen (and continues to be seen) by several historians as the last place where Hinduism and Indic civilisation flourished in all their purity, fiercely defended against alleged destructive pressures

Economic and Social History Review 23, 4 (1986), 357-66; idem, “Agreeing to Disagree: Burton Stein on Vijayanagara,” *South Asia Research* 17, 2 (1997); idem, *Courtly Encounters*, 38-43; Anila Verghese, *Archaeology, Art and Religion: New Perspectives on Vijayanagara* (New Delhi, 2000), ch. 2; Guha, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia*, 147-52; Christopher Chekuri, “Between Family and Empire: Nayaka Strategies of Rule in Vijayanagara South India, 1400-1700” (unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2005), ch. 1; idem, “Fathers’ and ‘Sons’: Inscribing Self and Empire at Vijayanagara, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” *The Medieval History Journal* 15, 1 (2012), 141-3; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, “Ideologies of State Building,” 213-15; Ota, “A Reappraisal of Studies on *Nāyakas*”; Aniruddha Ray, “The Rise and Fall of Vijayanagar – An Alternative Hypothesis to ‘Hindu Nationalism’ Thesis,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 64 (2003); S. Chandrashekar, “Robert Sewell’s Vijayanagara – A Critique,” in Shrinivas Ritti and Y. Subbarayalu (eds), *Vijayanagara and Kṛṣṇadēvarāya* (New Delhi/Bangalore, 2010); Anila Verghese, “Introduction,” in idem and Anna Libera Dallapiccola (eds), *South India under Vijayanagara: Art and Archaeology* (New Delhi, 2011), 1-5; and the two bibliographies in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallemand (eds), *Vijayanagara – City and Empire: New Currents of Research*, vol. 2 (Wiesbaden, 1985), 1-65. For historiographic surveys of the Kannada and Tamil regions, focusing on research by Indian scholars, see: Suryanath U. Kamath (ed.), “Special Number on Karnataka Historiography,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* LXXX, 1-4 (1989); N. Subrahmanian, *Tamilian Historiography* (Madurai, 1988).

⁸⁴ For (partially outdated) overviews of the historiography of individual successor states, see: Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 11; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, vii-ix; Shastri, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 320; Vriddhagirisana, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 1-3; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 4-5; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions*, 143-63; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 29-33. For Madurai and Coromandel as well as the historiography of Euro-Indian relations, see also Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 2-14.

from Muslim-ruled states.⁸⁵ But, as explained earlier, various recent studies argue that Vijayanagara did actually undergo and even actively looked for Perso-Islamic influences from preceding and neighbouring sultanates.⁸⁶ This new perspective does not seem to have yet been discussed by supporters of the former viewpoint. Chapter 5 of the present study investigates this borrowing from the Islamic world by the successor states.

Another dispute concerns the question whether Vijayanagara's founding dynasty came from a Kannada-speaking background and sought to associate itself with the earlier Hoysala kingdom in the western Deccan, or stemmed from a Telugu-speaking environment and looked for connections with the erstwhile Kakatiya state in the Deccan's east.⁸⁷ Although this debate was brought about by regional patriotism now somewhat vanished, links with older polities continue to be researched. In the past few decades, primary sources dating from various periods in the empire's history have been analysed for royal legitimization efforts based on assumed relations with earlier dynasties. These studies suggest that ties were also forged with houses other than the Hoysalas and Kakatiyas.⁸⁸ As discussed in Chapter 1, it appears that over the course of time rulers claimed links with several

⁸⁵ Among many other works, see: K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and N. Venkataramanayya (eds), *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I (Madras, 1946); Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I; S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *South India and Her Muhammadan Invaders* (London, 1921); and, more recently, Suryanath U. Kamath, *Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara and His Times* (Bangalore, 2009), 1-9; Shrinivas Ritti and B.R. Gopal (eds), *Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers*, vol. I, *Inscriptions of the Rulers of the Sangama Dynasty (1336 A.D. – 1485 A.D.)*, pt. 1 (New Delhi, 2004), li-iii.

⁸⁶ See the references in the historical background section of this chapter and in Chapter 5.

⁸⁷ For studies supporting the Kannada claim, see: Henry Heras, *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History* (Bombay, 1929); Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire*; S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar et al. (eds), *Vijayanagara Sexcentenary Commemoration Volume* (Dharwar, 1936), reprinted as *Vijayanagara. History and Legacy* (New Delhi, 2000); S. Srikantaya, *Founders of Vijayanagara* (Bangalore, 1938); and also, more recently: Dikshit, *Early Vijayanagara*; idem, "The Foundation of Vijayanagar," *The Karnataka Historical Review* XXVI (1992), 1-2; Kamath, *Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara*, 6. For works championing the Telugu cause, see: N. Venkata Ramanayya, *Vijayanagara: Origin of the City and the Empire* (Madras, 1933); idem, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty of Vijayanagara* (Madras, 1935). For perhaps more impartial views, both concluding in favour of the Hoysala connection, see: Vasundhara Filliozat (ed.), *l'Épigraphie de Vijayanagar du début à 1377* (Paris, 1973); Hermann Kulke, "Mahārājas, Mahants and Historians: Reflections on the Historiography of Early Vijayanagara and Sringeri," in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallemand (eds), *Vijayanagara – City and Empire: New Currents of Research*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1985); and especially idem, *History of Precolonial India*, 106.

⁸⁸ For examples, see: Phillip B. Wagoner, "Retrieving the Chalukyan Past: The Stepped Tank in the Royal Centre," in Anila Verghese and Anna Libera Dallapiccola (eds), *South India under Vijayanagara: Art and Archaeology* (New Delhi, 2011); idem, "Harihara, Bukka, and the Sultan: The Delhi Sultanate in the Political Imagination of Vijayanagara," in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamic South Asia* (Gainesville, 2000); Cynthia Talbot,

earlier kingdoms, including Muslim-ruled states, to legitimise themselves in the eyes of varying audiences. Indeed, already in the 1510s the Portuguese official Tomé Pires suggested that different regional backgrounds and identities did not exclude one another in Vijayanagara, simply noting that “the king is a heathen of Kanara [Kannada area], and on the other hand he is a Kling [person from the Telugu region, or more generally Coromandel].”⁸⁹

A third debate pertains to Vijayanagara’s political structure. Over the years, scholars have used several non-Indian models to characterise the empire’s organisation, with mixed results. Among other classifications, it has been described as “centralised” (a war-state with strong military control and tributary governors), “feudal” (a paramount king among petty chiefs holding fiefs), and “segmentary” (replicating political units on different levels, with a ritual sovereign centre being exemplary rather than coercive). While some theories have now been discarded, this discussion continues, for example with suggestions to consider Vijayanagara’s political set-up on south Indian terms and an increasing appreciation of changes during the empire’s long existence and spatial variation within its enormous realm.⁹⁰ The present study has little to contribute to these ideas, as it is concerned with political relations at the courts of the relatively small heirs rather than with imperial political structures. Nevertheless, connections of the successor dynasties with their formal overlords as well as subordinate chiefs and governors are treated in several places in this research.

As said, with regard to the central subject of the present work—a comparative survey of court politics in Vijayanagara’s heirs—both the output of studies and historiographic debate have been limited so far. Apart from some general remarks

“The Story of Prataparudra: Hindu Historiography on the Deccan Frontier,” in the same volume; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, ch. 4.

⁸⁹ Tomé Pires, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to China, Written in Malacca and India in 1512-1515 ...*, ed. Armando Cortesão (London, 1944), vol. I, 64; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 207-8. “Kling” (or *keling*) was the Malay term for Indians from the Coromandel Coast and was therefore used in Melaka, where Pires wrote his work. See also: Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (New Delhi, 1980), 394; Velcheru Narayana Rao, “Coconut and Honey: Sanskrit and Telugu in Medieval Andhra,” in idem (ed.), *Text and Tradition in South India* (Ranikhet, 2016), 152-6.

⁹⁰ For the centralised, feudal, and segmentary approaches respectively, see for instance: Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*; Noburu Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagar Rule* (New Delhi, 1992); Stein, *Peasant State and Society*. For a survey of these views, see Ota, “A Reappraisal of Studies on *Nāyakas*.” For alternative approaches and general overviews, see: Subrahmanyam, “Aspects of State Formation,” 366-77; Morrison, “Coercion, Resistance, and Hierarchy”; Chekuri, “‘Fathers’ and ‘Sons’”; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 80; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, ch. II; Hermann Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000-1700* (Delhi, 1995).

and a few comparisons in the field of art and architecture,⁹¹ the only studies that deal with this topic to a certain extent focus on the main Nayaka states in the Tamil region: Madurai, Tanjavur, and Senji. This body of pioneering research has appeared in the past three decades in mostly collaborative publications by a small number of scholars from various disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds.⁹² They argue that Nayaka kingship in the Tamil zone was profoundly different from previous political forms, calling it “an exotic departure” from earlier south Indian kingship.⁹³ Developments accompanying this shift are thought to have ranged from economic changes, such as increasing commerce and monetisation, to social and cultural transformations, with growing attention to the individual and the body.

These scholars regard as typical for the Nayaka dynasties the lack of claims to high-caste status and legitimising genealogies. Nayaka kings actually prided themselves on belonging to the low-caste Shudra *varṇa* (caste category) instead of the

⁹¹ See: Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 130-9; B. Surendra Rao, “State Formation in Mysore: The Wodeyars,” in R. Champakalakshmy, Kesavan Veluthat, and T.R. Venugopalan (eds), *State and Society in Pre-Modern South India* (Thrissur, 2002), 181; George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States* (Cambridge, 1995); Crispin Branfoot, “Imperial Memory: The Vijayanagara Legacy in the Art of the Tamil Nayakas,” in Anila Verghese (ed.), *Krishnadevaraya and His Times* (Mumbai, 2013); Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, ch. 2; Amita Kanekar, “Stylistic Origins and Change in the Temples of the Ikkeri Nayakas,” in Anila Verghese (ed.), *Krishnadevaraya and His Times* (Mumbai, 2013).

⁹² This concerns the research by Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, working together in various combinations. Their studies first appeared in several articles from the late 1980s on, the earliest mostly included (partially or entirely) in the collaborative works *Symbols of Substance* (1992) and, to a lesser extent, *Textures of Time* (2001), as well as in Subrahmanyam’s *Penumbra Visions* (2001). Articles in these monographs (in slightly revised versions) relevant for the present study are: Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, “History, Biography and Poetry at the Tanjavur Nāyaka Court,” *Social Analysis* 25 (1989); idem, “The Powers of Parody in Nāyaka-Period Tanjavur,” in Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom, and Margaret A. Mills (eds), *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions* (Philadelphia, 1991); Sanjay Subrahmanyam and David Shulman, “The Men Who Would Be King? The Politics of Expansion in Early Seventeenth-Century Northern Tamilnadu,” *Modern Asian Studies* 24, 2 (1990); David Shulman and Velcheru Narayana Rao, “Marriage-Broker for the God: The Tanjavur Nāyakas and the Maṇṇārkuṭi Temple,” in Hans Bakker (ed.), *The Sacred Centre as the Focus of Political Interest* (Groningen, 1992); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “The Politics of Fiscal Decline: A Reconsideration of Maratha Tanjavur, 1676-1799,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 32, 2 (1995); idem, “Reflections on State-Making and History-Making in South India,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XLI, 3 (1998); idem, “Recovering Babel: Polyglot Histories from the Eighteenth-Century Tamil Country,” in Daud Ali (ed.), *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1999); David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Prince of Poets and Ports: Cītakāṭi, the Maraikkāyars and Ramnad, ca. 1690-1710,” in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallement (eds), *Islam and Indian Regions*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1993). With the exception of the last work, this study uses the revised editions in the abovementioned monographs.

⁹³ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 56.

high-ranking Kshatriya or warrior *varṇa*. At the same time, the Nayakas assumed a divine status and were presented as human incarnations of their gods. The king was no longer only submissive to the deity as the latter had become much more dependent on the former. Indeed, the king could be considered to have become god himself. As these scholars suggest, all this changed the role of Brahmins at court. Their importance as ministers, advisors, or recipients of gifts would have decreased.⁹⁴

Also, the notion that power and authority at Indic courts generally derived from the mutual dependence between king and Brahmin, is deemed inapplicable to the Nayaka states. In brief, that notion holds that the Indian king, traditionally a Kshatriya warrior, was prone to commit violence. He therefore needed the Brahmin, belonging to the highest *varṇa*, to sanction his reign. In turn, the Brahmin relied on the king for protection and subsistence.⁹⁵ However, arguing that under the Nayaka dynasties king and deity had become one, some of the abovementioned scholars working on Vijayanagara's successors reason that the king now no longer depended on the Brahmin's sanctioning. Thus, in this new construction of south Indian kingship, Brahmins were just servants of the god-king, like everyone else.⁹⁶

Further, according to these scholars, portable wealth, mobility unhindered by ties to specific lands, and personal, loyal linkages to higher authorities were all new elements in the founding of the Nayaka kingdoms. Another proposed notion is that these states were eternally "becoming," suggesting they never completed the full cycle of state formation, maturity, and decay, as illustrated by the Nayakas' continuous referring to their (former) Vijayanagara overlords and their general unwillingness to proclaim full sovereignty. Besides, Nayaka court culture laid great emphasis on physical enjoyment (*bhoga*), particularly of eroticism and food,

⁹⁴ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 223-9; Velcheru Narayana Rao, "Multiple Literary Cultures in Telugu: Court, Temple, and Public," in idem (ed.), *Text and Tradition in South India* (Ranikhet, 2016), 62-3.

⁹⁵ For this notion, see for instance: Louis Dumont, *Religion/Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology* (Paris/The Hague, 1970), 43-5, 63-9; J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago/London, 1985), 111-12, 125-7, 141-2, 152-6; J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden, 1966), 62-7; David Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton, 1985), chs II-III; André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-Century Maratha Svarājya* (Cambridge, 1986), 17-19; Darryl Dinnell, *Śāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā: An Imperial Tantric Manual from Vijayanagara* (unpublished MA thesis, McGill University, 2011), 28-32, 100-6; Karashima, *A Concise History of South India*, 91-2.

⁹⁶ Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 224; Narayana Rao, "Coconut and Honey," 167. For the more classical king-Brahmin interdependence still found in Vijayanagara under Krishna Raya, see Narayana Rao, "Coconut and Honey," 154. But see also Dinnell, *Śāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*, passim, especially ch. 3.

instead of military achievements. This focus manifested itself for instance in literature—where the king triumphed in bed rather than in war—in the performance of religious deeds—involving the feeding of Brahmin priests rather than donations of land and goods to temple deities—and in art—which portrayed the Nayakas not in refined or trim shapes but as heavier figures, often sporting protruding bellies.⁹⁷

The studies setting forth these arguments have opened up the field and set a standard for subsequent research on the Vijayanagara successor states. But ground-breaking, wide-ranging, and inspiring though they are, these studies still leave many questions unanswered. First, the major heirs in the Kannada area, Ikkeri and Mysore (as well as smaller offshoots), remain largely unexplored from a comparative perspective. Second, the mentioned research on the successors in the Tamil zone focuses on general Nayaka concepts of kingship and literary court culture rather than on a comparison of more prosaic matters like dynastic developments and day-to-day court politics.

Our knowledge of such basics is as yet relatively limited, however, and these data have been far from systematically analysed. It might thus be said that for the history of Vijayanagara's heirs, many bones still need to be added to the flesh as it were, instead of the other way round, as is often the case with political historiography. The present study aims at doing precisely that: looking at both the Tamil and Kannada regions, it provides much new basic information on the successor courts, portraying rulers, successions, courtiers, coalitions, conflicts, diplomatic encounters, ceremonies, and so on. But it also attempts to go further than that and evaluate these matters, discussing patterns and variations, trying to explain these, and comparing the successors with one another.

The abovementioned body of research on the Tamil Nayaka kingdoms has initiated some minor debate on Vijayanagara's legacies among its heirs, revolving around the question of how much kingship in the successor states differed from that in earlier polities. In response to the suggestion that the Nayaka period signified a new phase, it has been put forward there was actually a strong ideological continuity between the Nayakas of Madurai and previous dynasties. In this view, some of the allegedly new elements, such as vertical ties with other royal houses, already existed in the Vijayanagara period. Likewise, it has been claimed that certain earlier aspects of dynastic politics, for example the emphasis on genealogical credentials, did not disappear but still played a significant role for Madurai's Nayakas.⁹⁸ Thus, such continuities, rather than striking changes, would have

⁹⁷ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 223-9.

⁹⁸ Wagoner, "Harihara, Bukka, and the Sultan," 313-14; Crispin Branfoot, "Dynastic Genealogies, Portraiture, and the Place of the Past in Early Modern South India," *Artibus Asiae* LXXII, 2 (2012), 376;

typified Nayaka kingship—a view that the outcome of the present study largely underwrites.

Finally, the political and dynastic historiography on individual Vijayanagara successor states has so far mostly aimed at bringing together basic facts and establishing chronologies. In several such studies, historians portray kings as the most powerful figures at court, or even as absolute rulers, whose position was rarely challenged. Court politics are commonly presented as essentially static and harmonious.⁹⁹ Consequently, successions to the throne would have mostly proceeded peacefully, courtiers usually served as loyal functionaries in clearly demarcated offices, and court protocol was widely adhered to since everyone basically acknowledged their place in the court's hierarchy. Thus, on the whole, one's position, status, and power at court—including the king's—were supposedly largely fixed, both in relation to other parties and in time. As the following chapters demonstrate, this research comes to different conclusions.

Secondary literature dealing with individual heirs of Vijayanagara has generated little historiographic discussion about court politics, either in general or on the specific themes of the present research: foundation myths, successions, courtiers, court protocol, influences from the Islamic world, and mutual relations. As explained in the respective chapters, some of these subjects have hardly been analysed at all, while others have been problematised to some extent but still have produced little debate. Moreover, almost none of these themes have been treated in a comparative manner. With the exception of the Conclusion, the following chapters therefore engage in debates with existing historiography to a limited degree. Indeed, this research intends to initiate such discussions.

Given the *status quaestionis* sketched here, a systematic and comparative study of court politics in the Vijayanagara successor states may prove a significant contribution to the historiography of early modern south India. This work hopes to fill some of the current lacunae, through both its comparative approach and its selection of themes, regions, and sources.

idem, "Heroic Rulers and Devoted Servants: Performing Kingship in the Tamil Temple," in idem (ed.), *Portraiture in South Asia since the Mughals: Art, Representation and History* (London/New York, 2018), 174.

⁹⁹ For some examples, see: Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 53; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 163; Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 168; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 77; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 238; M. Aseem Banu, "Polity under the Nayaks of Madurai (1529-1736)" (unpublished dissertation, Madurai Kamaraj University, 1981), 16-18, 26; Seshadri, "The Sēṭupatis of Ramnad," 183; and also: Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 93-4; Madhao P. Patil, *Court Life under the Vijayanagar Rulers* (Delhi, 1999), 50, 58. See also Emma J. Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 10.

Structure

This research addresses various aspects of court politics, with a chapter devoted to each. With the exception of Chapter 6, all chapters are organised largely in the same manner. The opening sections introduce the central topic, problematising it, discussing sources and historiography (if any), and explaining the chapter's internal structure. Subsequently, the chapters' central sections focus on the various states and dynasties, always in the same order: first Vijayanagara and next, in more detail, its heirs Ikkeri, Tanjavur—under the Nayakas and the Bhonsles respectively—Madurai, and Ramnad. All these regional sections end with partial conclusions. The chapters' final sections compare the successor states with one another and with the empire and draw general conclusions. This choice for thematic chapters with regional subdivisions, rather than a fully thematic or regional structure, aims at producing both distinct descriptions of individual courts and comparative analyses of the specific research topics.

The chapters' subjects are closely related and follow from one another. Chapters 1 and 2 and the Epilogue together comprise dynastic histories, looking at the origin, all successions, and demise of each royal house, respectively. Chapters 3 and 4 adopt a less exhaustive and dynasty-centred approach and analyse the roles of courtiers and court protocol, investigating both particular events and long-term patterns. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 zoom out spatially and consider connections between courts, respectively treating influences from Muslim-ruled polities and discussing relations of the successor states among themselves and with Vijayanagara.

More specifically, Chapter 1 concerns dynastic foundations and foundation myths. Each royal house presented stories of its origin to its subjects and other courts. Both the actual foundations and the ways these events came to be depicted over the course of time were essential elements of court politics. Thus, this chapter considers the historical beginnings of Vijayanagara and its heirs, but especially focuses on their origin myths, since these stories served to legitimise the rise to kingship. In order to compare the royal houses, this study identifies motifs that are found in all or most origin stories but manifest themselves in different forms. These include claims to exalted descent, martial skills, divine interventions, natural miracles, real or imagined links to earlier dynasties, acquisition of wealth and royal symbols, cultivation of land, and dynastic continuity.

Essential for such continuity, all dynasties faced the question of succession. Succession practices took various forms and Chapter 2 discusses this diversity by making three comparisons, which all demonstrate great differences: the discrepancy between formal succession principles and actual succession struggles; the contrast between the portrayal of successions in local texts and in European accounts; and the distinct succession practices under each dynasty. The chapter

treats every succession in Vijayanagara and the selected heirs, with those after 1500 examined in detail. Our knowledge of many of these occasions has been limited so far, but European and particularly Dutch records contain extensive references to them. Thus, this chapter also presents updated chronologies and genealogies of the successor houses. As such, it takes up the call of a few decades ago for a much needed revision of the dynastic histories of the successor states.¹⁰⁰

Closely linked to dynastic succession was the influence of courtiers, a term used here in its broadest sense. Chapter 3 is devoted to this diverse group, which comprised numerous contenders for power, both inside and outside the court: people holding official governmental positions, members of the dynasty's extended family, local governors and chiefs, tax-farming magnates and traders, and so on. Operating in rivalling but fluid factions, they could all play a significant role in court politics and thus share in (or take over) the ruler's power. Their influence depended on several factors, such as their formal ranks in the political system, patronage networks, family ties, personal skills, financial means, and mere luck. Based on both local and external sources, this chapter looks at the official functions at each court, traces the careers of individual courtiers, and investigates which people were in actual control. Unlike in Chapter 2, an exhaustive overview is not possible here. Therefore, this chapter considers a selection of cases that both clearly emerge from the sources and together reveal general patterns by including illustrative examples as well as notable exceptions.

The same selection criteria are followed in Chapter 4, which concerns court protocol and insult. These can be regarded as manifestations of attempts to forge, confirm, strengthen, or strain relations between parties at court. Thus, they shed more or a different light on power struggles, inter-state contacts, and diplomatic encounters. On the surface, relationships may have appeared harmonious or at least "courteous," but certain ceremonial—or the departure from it—hinted at the opposite. Humiliating ritual or breach of protocol could indicate hierarchical or discordant relations, but might also assume a life of its own and worsen contacts. This chapter first identifies on what occasions ceremonial was practised and what purposes it served. Next follow descriptions and analyses of protocol and diplomatic insult at each court, examining underlying meanings and effects on relationships. Accounts of Dutch embassies to these kingdoms and missions by the courts to VOC settlements form a major source for this chapter. While Indian texts on protocol are mostly of a normative character, Dutch reports contain numerous references to how it proceeded in practice, describing audience rituals, gift-giving, welcoming and departure ceremonies, eloquence, diplomatic humiliations, and so on. Since protocol during these cross-cultural encounters appears to have been

¹⁰⁰ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, xi.

largely based on south Indian customs, it is likely to be representative of local ceremonial in general.

A specific aspect of court protocol—or, more broadly, court culture—concerned influences from the Perso-Islamic world, discussed in Chapter 5. As mentioned, Vijayanagara was affected by politico-cultural ideas and practices from earlier and contemporaneous sultanate courts. This was for instance expressed in court ritual, governmental and military organisation, royal representation in art and texts, and alleged ties to Muslim dynasties. The central issue of this chapter is to what extent Vijayanagara's receptivity to the sultanates' political culture was maintained by its heirs—which mostly bordered Muslim-ruled states and became tributary to them—and how this reflected broader political developments. Aspects of Perso-Islamic influence considered here are dynastic titles, royal dress, and, to a lesser degree, the role of the archetypical sultan of Delhi in court literature. Besides literary works and Dutch records, this chapter is based on inscriptions and works of art (paintings and sculptures) commissioned by the royal houses.

Chapter 6 also treats connections between courts, but looks at the successor states' relations among themselves and with Vijayanagara. Analysing Indian and European sources, this chapter investigates both the heirs' perceptions of each other in literary texts and their multi-faceted, ambivalent coexistence in day-to-day politics. An attempt is thus made to answer the question of whether Vijayanagara's successors regarded themselves as some kind of politico-cultural collective because of their common past and ongoing close, mutual involvement.

The Conclusion reflects on the previous chapters for an overall comparison of the successor states with one another and the empire. Combining the findings in all chapters for each kingdom and considering similarities and differences, this section formulates the central conclusions of this research—pointing to the dynamic nature of these courts and the continuities with earlier periods—and juxtaposes these ideas against the existing historiography.

This study ends with an epilogue about the divergent fortunes of the imperial and successor houses after the demise of their states, or at least their power, showing that neither Vijayanagara nor its offshoots were “completely wiped out”—as V.S. Naipaul phrased it—but in fact left a legacy, traces of which survive until the present day. The chapter that now follows, however, discusses the very beginnings of these dynasties.