

Court Protocol and Insults

Around early September 1674, when Madurai had eliminated Tanjavur's Nayaka dynasty and temporarily occupied the kingdom, this invader also threatened the Dutch settlement at Nagapattinam. Madurai's *Daḷavāy* (general) and regional Governor Kavita Nayaka appeared with 1,400 horsemen and 3,500 foot soldiers on the outskirts of the port. VOC records do not mention the *daḷavāy*'s motives for this siege, but his goal probably was to make the Company accept a new trade agreement more favourable to Madurai than the earlier treaty had been to Tanjavur's Nayakas.

With fewer troops at his disposal, the Dutch military commander, Lieutenant Davidt Butler, had received strict orders from his superiors not to move beyond the confines of Nagapattinam and just defend it from within its enclosure. But Butler, said to have fought “among the Muscovites,” was not impressed by Madurai's army and ignored the instructions. Armed with a gun, a double-edged stick (*pedarm*), and a short spear, he stormed towards the approaching enemy. In no time, he mowed down nine of Madurai's “bravest assailants,” while his thirty or so followers caused several dozen casualties, including the *daḷavāy*'s brother. Although these few Dutch soldiers were rapidly closed in by their opponents and some of them fell, they continued to offer fierce resistance. This, and advancing VOC reinforcements, so the Dutch wrote, caused panic among Madurai's forces, who quickly withdrew and made no further attempt to attack Nagapattinam.

In fact, *Daḷavāy* Kavita—brother-in-law of Madurai's king and considered the kingdom's most powerful person—visited the port soon after to settle the conflict with the VOC. But, although the Dutch thus won this confrontation, commander Butler had not survived it. Subsequently, however, an exceptional south Indian honour befell the dead VOC lieutenant. Despite their hasty retreat, the Madurai troops had taken the trouble to sever Butler's head and take it with them, while leaving some of their own killed and wounded men behind on the battlefield. As the Dutch were later notified by Kavita's envoy, Butler's head was shown to the *daḷavāy*, who wished to see the face of such a valiant warrior. Kavita next ordered the head to be embalmed and perfumed with incense, after which it was wrapped in silk and returned to the Dutch with great reverence, accompanied by drummers and horn-blowers.¹

¹ NA, VOC, no. 1298, ff. 389v-90, 400-1: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Sept. 1674.

This event demonstrates two matters. First, it shows the great value attached to protocol and honour in south India. The *daḷavāy*'s desire to see a dead but highly admired enemy, the hazardous effort to secure his head, and the extensive ritual to pay respect to it—these all signified the importance of marks of distinction. Second, this occasion indicates that foreigners could be part of south India's systems of protocol and honour. The fact Butler was a Dutchman was no reason for Kavita to deny him the deference and ceremonial due to great warriors of Indian origin. Also, the ritual transfer of Butler's head to the VOC suggests that the Dutch were supposed to understand the value of this ceremony. In south India, severing the head of one's enemy was a widespread custom, performed to manifest one's military and political power.² It therefore seems that Madurai's seizure of Butler's head was also meant as an act of triumph over this fearful adversary. Yet, at the same time, such a great soldier evidently deserved to be honoured, even if he was European.

Given their significance, the central question of this chapter is how court protocol and related aspects of honour reflected and shaped other elements of court politics. Protocol and honour can be regarded as symbolic expressions of establishing, confirming, altering, or ending relationships between rulers, courtiers, and others with political power.³ Hence, protocol and honour often were manifestations of matters discussed in the other chapters: royal legitimation practices, power struggles at court, and inter-state relations. Indeed, protocol could display nuances not expressed in other ways, like subdued tensions, private preferences, and unuttered grievances. But it could also influence political developments and personal contacts, for better or for worse. For instance, diplomatic insults and humiliating ceremonies, intended primarily to indicate existing hierarchies

² Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 53-4. The best-known case may be the beheading of Vijayanagara's ruler Rama Raya in 1565. See the section on Vijayanagara. Another example is found in a text saying that after Vijayanagara's courtier Gobburu Jagga Raya was defeated around 1616, his head was put in a palanquin and sent to his home. See Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 280. In 1645, referring to a clash between Senji's Nayakas and General Tubaki Krishnappa Nayaka, the Dutch wrote that the heads of dozens of killed people were removed "as a sign of triumph." See Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1644-1645* (The Hague, 1903), 334. The VOC reported in 1673 that the heads of Tanjavur's Vijayaraghava Nayaka and his son Mannarudeva were brought to Madurai's Chokkanatha Nayaka, maltreated, and shown to the imprisoned Setupati of Ramnad, probably Surya Tevar. See the section on Tanjavur's Nayakas in the Epilogue and Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 311. For other instances, see: Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 173; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 86; Jeyaraj and Young, *Hindu-Christian Epistolary Self-Disclosures*, 265; Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 146; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 77-8; Dodamani, *Gaṅgādevī's Madhurāvijayam*, 20-1; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," f. 183.

³ See also Duindam, "The Court as a Meeting Point," 87-9.

or discordance, could trigger or prolong conflicts or even lead to escalations. Considering this aspect of protocol, the present chapter aims at providing a view of courts that complements the findings in other chapters.

There are few or no studies of court protocol and insults in the successor states, but some historians have considered these matters for Vijayanagara. They point to the significant role diplomatic humiliation played in the empire's relations with the Deccan sultanates, but leave open the question of whether such breaching of protocol generated or reflected conflicts.⁴ This chapter argues that, at the courts of Vijayanagara's heirs, insults were mostly expressions rather than causes of political tensions.

Below follows first an overview of sources for the study of protocol and honour in Vijayanagara and its successors. Based on south Indian texts, this section then discusses various elements of south Indian court ceremonial and the purposes these served. The chapter's central sections deal with the individual courts and examine local manifestations of protocol—which either adhered to or breached the required procedures—analysing what these signified and how they were related to political developments and interactions. This part contains only a selection of what the various sources have to offer, covering recurring and therefore typical situations as well as remarkable single occasions. The chapter's conclusion compares the courts and looks for general patterns.

South Indian sources like inscriptions and literary works seem to contain limited information on protocol in Vijayanagara's successor states. Local materials that do include references often pertain to Vijayanagara itself or earlier polities. But the VOC archives abound with descriptions of court ceremonial and the role of honour, especially in Vijayanagara's heirs. Apparently incorporated into south India's ritual world, the Dutch were frequently confronted with these aspects of court politics. In particular, reports of VOC embassies—but also letters exchanged with the courts, accounts of court missions to Dutch settlements, and many other VOC documents—extensively refer to welcoming rituals, procedures at royal audiences, gift-giving, seating arrangements, forms of address, diplomatic insults, and so on.

Obviously, these documents portray events as experienced and interpreted by “outsiders,” but as Madurai's honouring of Davidt Butler's head suggests, the ceremonial practised at Indo-Dutch encounters was chiefly based on south Indian notions and customs. Except during meetings at large VOC establishments, such as Nagapattinam, Tuticorin, and Colombo, nothing of the described protocol indicates

⁴ See for instance: Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, ch. 1, especially 102; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 135-6, 268-9, 299, 311-13.

it was partially adjusted to European conventions.⁵ It is therefore likely that these Dutch accounts are illustrative of south Indian ceremonial in general, although one may wonder if the Dutch fully grasped all subtleties of the protocol and insults they encountered, such as the ambiguity of the treatment meted out to Butler. We return to this question at the end of the chapter.

Indian texts on specific dynasties, like chronicles and inscriptions, contain comparatively few explicit references to court protocol and honour, but several south Indian works relate to these matters in a more general way, directly or indirectly. One relevant political manual is the twelfth-century Sanskrit *Mānasollāsa*, composed by Someshvara III of the Chalukya dynasty of Kalyana, Vijayanagara's distant predecessor. It describes the way kings were to hold court, detailing the actions, positions, and roles of courtiers and visitors in the royal audience hall and how these reflected the bestowal of honours. The audience hall served both as symbol of the ruler's sovereignty and as the prime meeting place for participants in the kingdom's politics. One's status was manifested here in physical proximity to the king and permission to sit down. Located near the throne and allowed to sit—thus enjoying most prestige—were first princes, and next royal priests, the ruler's ministers and companions, and provincial and tributary lords or their representatives. Although the king's personal attendants, like whisk- and betel-bearers, his swordsmen or bodyguards, and palace women were situated closer, beside and behind him, they had to stand. Lower-ranked courtiers, placed further from the king than the abovementioned groups, were not permitted to sit either.

Honours and authority were also demonstrated in the audience hall through eloquent verbal interaction, bowing or prostration before the king, and exchanging presents. Such gifts could take the form of services, privileges, cash, or goods such as clothing, ornaments and jewellery, animals, land, and emblems. Services included symbolic duties—like attending to the king—performed by people not generally residing at court. All such protocol, described in the *Mānasollāsa* (III 1132-50, 1161, 1203-7, 1225-44, 1674-96) and other pre-Vijayanagara texts, served to express respect, loyalty, benevolence, recognition of hierarchies, and so on.⁶

Vijayanagara's best-known political discourse, the *rāja-nīti* ("king's policy") section in Krishna Raya's *Āmuktamālyada* (IV 204-85), contains little on protocol

⁵ For similar conclusions with respect to Indo-Portuguese and Dutch-Mughal relations, see respectively: Melo, "Seeking Prestige and Survival"; Guido van Meersbergen, "The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies in Mughal South Asia, 1608-1717," *The Historical Journal* 62, 4 (2019); idem, "Kijken en bekeken worden: Een Nederlandse gezant in Delhi, 1677-1678," in Lodewijk Wagenaar (ed.), *Aan de overkant: Ontmoetingen in dienst van de VOC en WIC (1600-1800)* (Leiden, 2015), 205-11.

⁶ Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, 111-32; Basava Raja, "The Central Government under the Chālukyas of Kalyāṇa," 95-6. See also Ronald Inden, "Hierarchies of Kings in Early Medieval India," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 15, 1-2 (1981), 103-22.

and related aspects of honour.⁷ But several other works from this period—such as the Kannada *Channabasava purāṇa* composed in 1585 by the Vijayanagara priest Virupaksha Pandita (VII 3-5, 8, 12-18)—describe seating positions in the audience hall. Largely agreeing with the *Mānasollāsa*, some of these make a further distinction between the king's left and right. While the former side was reserved for palace women according to a late-fifteenth-century text, the latter was often associated with the chief minister, subordinate rulers, officials, and famous scholars, possibly indicating a higher status.

Some works refer to royal gifts, which could be presented to everyone in the audience hall or to individuals, for instance a victorious general or an eloquent poet, and which comprised jewellery, garments, vehicles, lands, and *tāmbūla* (betel-leaves and areca-nuts). Other honours bestowed by kings included musical performances, elephant rides around town, permission to travel by palanquin, ministerial posts, retinues of personal attendants and military troops, and even marriages to princesses.⁸

Among texts of Vijayanagara's successor states, the early eighteenth-century Sanskrit *Śivatattva ratnākara* by Ikkeri's King Basavappa Nayaka I deals extensively with protocol. Having much in common with the *Mānasollāsa*, it discusses the distribution of people in the audience hall at length. The king on his throne formed the centre, in relation to which the status of others was indicated. Palace women were positioned closest to the king and in this text had permission to sit beside and behind him. Also near the throne, but standing, were the betel-bearer and swordsmen. Next came princes, royal priests, and ministers, followed by provincial governors and subordinate rulers, all sitting before the king or to his far left and right. At a further distance were lower officers, poets, musicians, magicians, and the like. An additional category consisted of rulers seeking refuge, who had to prostrate themselves before the king until being summoned to get up. All these groups were expected to be aware of their position in relation to the ruler and behave in a modest, dignified way (VII 1:6-71).

The *Śivatattva ratnākara* also treats the importance of gifts, deemed the best tools for kings to show benevolence and secure the loyalty of various people, including ministers, other servants, and potential allies. The text distinguishes several types of gifts, including lands and their produce, villages and ports, horses and

⁷ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, "A New Imperial Idiom," 90-107; Krishna(Deva) Raya, *Sri Krishna Deva Raya: Āmuktamālyada*, 313-36; Rangasvami Sarasvati, "Political Maxims of the Emperor-Poet," 64-77.

⁸ Dallapiccola and Kotraiah, *King, Court and Capital*, 39-41, 59-60, 145-6, 154; Virupaksha Pandita, "Channa-Basava Purāṇa of the Lingaits," ed. G. Würth, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* XXIV, VIII (1865), 128.

elephants, ornaments and jewellery, and royal privileges like the use of parasols and seats (V 12:76-98).⁹

The Sanskrit *Śukranīti*, possibly dating from the nineteenth century, underscores the ideas presented in earlier works. Although some details differ, once again the royal audience hall and the placement of various people around the king are extensively described. Further, it emphasises the value of kind speech, etiquette, and gifts, which all contribute to cordial relations—for instance between the king and his servants—while insults result in great hostility (I 217-50, 287-8, 353-63; V 7, 44-5, 47-8).¹⁰

Some other literary texts also refer to protocol and honour, although less explicitly. One example is the Tamil poem *Rāmappaiyaṇ ammāṇai*, which recounts the mid-seventeenth-century war between Madurai's General Ramappaiya and Ramnad's ruler Dalavay Setupati. This work points to specific moments at which honours were bestowed and gifts presented. These occasions can be classified as recognising someone's status and power, encouraging people to take certain action, commencing and ending missions, and beginning and concluding negotiations.¹¹

Although the events in the *Rāmappaiyaṇ ammāṇai* mostly have military connotations, this categorisation can be applied more broadly to systems of honour and protocol at south Indian courts. Thus, together with the other discussed texts, this work suggests that many situations demanded ceremonial. Taking the form of gifts, rituals, rhetoric, or other manifestations, protocol was necessary whenever parties met or otherwise communicated in order to establish contacts, pay homage, confirm relationships, mark special moments, hold deliberations, ask favours, or express dissatisfaction.¹²

Given the similarities between the *Mānasollāsa*, *Śivatattva ratnākara*, *Śukranīti*, and other texts, the significance and nature of this protocol appear to have remained mostly unchanged during the existence of Vijayanagara and its heirs. Furthermore, the importance of protocol and honour meant that violations could have far-reaching consequences.

⁹ Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 49-50, 402-6. For suggestions that the *Sivatattva Ratnākara* was partly inspired by the *Mānasollāsa*, see, for instance, Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 30, 32, 39, 47, 53, 66 (where AC refers to the *Abhilaṣitārtha cintāmaṇi*, as the *Mānasollāsa* is also known).

¹⁰ Shukracharya, *The Śukranīti*, 58-67, 76, 96-8, 566, 574-5.

¹¹ Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 19-25, especially 22.

¹² See also: Mahalingam, *South Indian Polity*, 57-62, 65, 75-7; Scharfe, *The State in Indian Tradition*, 86-7.

Vijayanagara

Sources on the Vijayanagara court refer to protocol and honour in several instances, all related to the above identified situations that require ceremonial. One early reference to the arrangement of people in the audience hall comes from the Timurid ambassador Kamaluddin Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi. He briefly mentions that in 1442 Deva Raya II was seated amidst a crowd of courtiers, standing left and right of him in a circle, while the ambassador himself was honoured with a seat close to the emperor.

The Portuguese merchant Domingo Paes left a long description of Krishna Raya holding court around 1520, during the Navaratri festival. Beside the emperor sat what probably were close male relatives (“men who belong to his race”), including several fathers-in-law, who were local kings and chiefs themselves. Also near to the ruler, but standing, were personal attendants—holding his betel-leaves, sword, and other emblems—and Brahmin priests. Next came what Paes calls “captains” and “nobles,” probably courtiers with military and administrative ranks. Others included soldiers and dancing women.¹³ While this maybe was an uncommon audience, taking place during a festival, the distribution of people around the emperor largely agrees with notions found in political treatises. No doubt, in Krishna Raya’s audience hall, too, closeness to the king and permission to sit served as symbols of prestige.

Both local and external sources mention other ceremonial occasions at the Vijayanagara court. During the reign of Achyuta Raya (1529-42), the Portuguese trader Fernão Nunes wrote that among the greatest honours the ruler could bestow on courtiers were presenting them with ornamented fans, jewellery, and scarves, and allowing them to kiss his feet. Several south Indian texts state how emperors and high ministers honoured servants, poets, and subordinate chiefs—including rulers of the empire’s heirs—with gold, jewels, land, animals, clothes, umbrellas, palanquins, titles, and all sorts of privileges.

The Telugu poet Allasani Peddana is said to have been invited by Krishna Raya to sit together on the royal elephant. The emperor even personally carried a palanquin in which the poet was seated and, following an outstanding poetic improvisation, put a “hero’s anklet” around his foot. According to the *Rāyavācakamu*, after an exceptionally rapid mobilisation of the imperial army, the courtier Appaji alias Saluva Timmarasu was awarded by Krishna Raya with the *saptāṅga* of honour, the

¹³ Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, pt. I, 30-1; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 269-70; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 247. The *Rāyavācakamu* describes in detail who are present while Vira Narasimha (r. c. 1503-9) holds court, but omits to mention their spatial distribution and, therefore, who are most prominent. See Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 77-9, and this chapter’s section on Madurai.

seven worthy gifts: cap, ornamental shirt, necklace, pearl earrings, golden-yellow shawl, fragrant musk, and *tāmbūla* (betel-leaves and areca-nuts).¹⁴

References to rulers presenting garments often denoted the *khil'at* ceremony, widely practised in the Islamic world and adopted by the Vijayanagara court. In this audience ritual, clothes, in particular long robes, served as the main presents to bind the donor (for instance a king or a chief) and the recipient in a reciprocal relationship. By accepting and wearing the dress, the latter attained honour while the former acquired recognition. In Vijayanagara such clothing came to take prominence over traditional audience gifts.¹⁵

Additionally, Vijayanagara's rulers gave presents to servants before military missions to encourage them and secure their loyalty, but also to demonstrate respect. One local work, included in the Mackenzie manuscript translations, describes in detail how Vijayanagara's Generalissimo Rama Raya honoured his commanders and troops with gifts just before the famed battle with the Deccan sultanates in 1565:

... he presented them with rich gifts & presents out of his jamdar-cana (wardrobe or treasury) of the most valuable cloths, silk & embroidered vests & jackets, atalash salas, & other costly stuffs with shawls of the various kinds called zaffaranee, lackee, goolabee & suffaid [different colours], printed chintzes of bunder & woollen cloths of various kinds as jancaroodee, sultanee, callapee, laharee & suffaid, wrought, embroidered & silk sashes & flowered hachadoms [silk cloths] & jewels, pearl toorayes [turban jewels] & chains, bracelets of precious stones & moohan-maala [necklaces], pattuks [gold necklaces with medals and jewellery] & various jewels of diamonds, emeralds, topazes, rubies, coral, onyx, pearl, goomakada & neelum [probably turquoises], with arms of all the various kinds of Hindoo construction ... [including shields, discuses, curved swords, sabres, clubs, bows

¹⁴ Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 376; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 63, 66, 144, 152-3, 241-2; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 103-4, 150-1; Narayana Rao and Shulman, *Classical Telugu Poetry*, 241-3; Narayana Rao, "Coconut and Honey," 160; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 104-6 (see also 159); Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 151, 166, 172-3; BL/AAS, MG, no. 11, pt. 12: "Kyfyat of Bellary," f. 86 (compiled at Bellary in 1801 by Mackenzie's assistant Borayya Kavali Venkata with information from "respectable native authority," see: f. 84; Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 106-8). See also Allasani Peddana, *The Story of Manu*, xxv-vi, xxxvii.

¹⁵ Stewart Gordon, "A World of Investiture," in idem (ed.), *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* (New York, 2001); Phillip B. Wagoner, "Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, 4 (1996), 866. For the adoption in south India of court culture from the Islamic world, see Chapter 5. For the *khil'at* ritual at both Muslim- and Hindu-ruled courts in late medieval and early modern India, see Stewart Gordon, "Robes of Honour: A 'Transactional' Kingly Ceremony," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 33, 3 (1996).

and arrows, and iron chains]. Besides these, he distributed from his arsenal to the troops arms complete of the 32 known ayoodums [weapons]. He arranged them & recommended to the royal army courage, bravery, discretion, honor & fidelity, & settled annual & monthly allowances for their families.¹⁶

Although this account and several other mentioned texts date from long after the events they depict and may exaggerate or invent matters, they amply demonstrate the great value attached to honour, gifts, and ceremonial.

While such passages give an idea of the protocol to be observed, certain elements transpire especially clearly in cases where it was breached—deliberately or not—and where people were offended. Already for the first phase of Vijayanagara's Sangama dynasty, literary works refer to diplomatic insults, which often concerned the empire's intense and tumultuous relationship with the Bahmani sultanate. In his Persian *Tārīkh-i firishta* (early seventeenth century), the Bijapur chronicler Muhammad Qasim Firishta refers to earlier texts saying that during the reign of Bukka (c. 1355-77) political conflicts with the Bahmani rulers were expressed through ceremonial humiliations.¹⁷ Around 1366 Bahmani envoys were reportedly dispatched to Vijayanagara with a draft on the empire's treasury, issued by the allegedly drunk Bahmani Sultan Muhammad I as a reward to musicians at his own court. In response to this offence, Bukka had the main Bahmani ambassador paraded on a donkey around the capital, after which he declared war.

About half a century later, another diplomatic insult intensified a conflict. Again according to Firishta, when Vijayanagara's Emperor Deva Raya I was forced to make peace with the Bahmanis following a war around 1406, he had to offer his daughter in marriage to Sultan Firuz. But after the latter had celebrated his wedding in the Vijayanagara capital, Deva Raya accompanied him only a few miles out of the city. This greatly offended Firuz and led to further discord, which was probably the reason that in 1423 Crown Prince Deva Raya II escorted the Bahmani Sultan Ahmad I all the way to Vijayanagara's border following peace negotiations at the imperial capital. However, when in the early sixteenth century Krishna Raya conquered Gulbarga, former capital of the now defunct Bahmani sultanate, he proclaimed a son of the last sultan the new Bahmani ruler and then had himself referred to as

¹⁶ BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 5: "Ram-Rajah Cheritra," f. 172 (original spelling retained). See ff. 176-8, 190 for gifts by Rama Raya to his women, other relatives, and envoys. See also Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 214, 218, 236. For this text, see also below.

¹⁷ For recent discussions of Firishta and his work, see: Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 45-56, 70-1, 78-80; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 279-85; Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India* (Cambridge (MA)/London, 2020).

“establisher of Yavana [Muslim] rule.” Thus, Krishna Raya both declared his control over the region and humiliated Vijayanagara’s erstwhile opponents.¹⁸

The often deliberate breaches of protocol played an equally influential role in the relations Vijayanagara’s Tuluva and Aravidu houses maintained with the Bahmanis’ successors, in particular Bijapur and Ahmadnagar. As Fernão Nunes relates, after Krishna Raya won a battle against Bijapur in 1520, he disgraced an ambassador sent by that sultanate to claim back the lost territories. First, the emperor made the envoy wait for a month before granting him an audience. Next, Krishna Raya let him know he was willing to comply with Bijapur’s requests, provided its sultan, Ismail Adil Shah, came to Vijayanagara to kiss the emperor’s foot. While this was an honour to imperial courtiers, it would be an unacceptable submission for sovereign rulers. Informed of Krishna Raya’s condition, Ismail diplomatically replied he would happily comply with it, were it not for the fact he could not legally enter another ruler’s realm. In response, Krishna Raya suggested to meet at the common border to solve this problem and straightaway marched to Bijapur to confront the sultan. Showing the strong value attached to protocol—or, in this case, the great importance of avoiding a dishonourable ritual—Ismail chose to flee and leave his capital undefended rather than be forced to kiss the emperor’s foot. As Nunes’ account concludes, only when Krishna Raya withdrew his army did the sultan return home. But although Ismail had managed to evade a most embarrassing encounter, he was still deeply disgraced.¹⁹

Perhaps inspired by Krishna Raya, his military commander and son-in-law Rama Raya continued this policy of insult when he assumed power. He disgraced the Deccan sultans and their envoys time and again, thereby increasing or even creating tensions. Probably because of their far-reaching consequences, Rama Raya’s diplomatic offences figure in many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts, in such diverse languages as Kannada, Telugu, Persian, Marathi, and Dakhani.

Matters were still very positive when in the late 1550s Rama Raya and Bijapur’s Ali Adil Shah cemented their mutual interests with the help of ceremonial. According to both Firishta and the Bijapur courtier Rafi al-Din Ibrahim Shirazi in his Persian chronicle *Tazkirat al-mulūk* (early seventeenth century), during

¹⁸ Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Ferishta’s History of the Dekkan from the First Mahummedan Conquests ...*, ed. Jonathan Scott (Shrewsbury, 1794), vol. I, 23-4, 85-8, 101-2; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 32-9, 57-62, 69-70; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 28-30, 49-50, 56-7; Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 78; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 244, 247-9; Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age*, 163.

¹⁹ Richard M. Eaton, “‘Kiss My Foot,’ Said the King: Firearms, Diplomacy, and the Battle for Raichur, 1520,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009), 306-8; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 349-58; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 268, 311-13; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 141-2.

a visit by the Bijapur sultan to Vijayanagara to condole with Rama Raya on the death of a son, he was received with great honours. Banquets were held, gifts were exchanged, and Ali was even admitted to the imperial harem and referred to by Rama Raya's wife as her own son. But, in a repetition of the early 1400s, when the sultan departed he was not accompanied back far enough by his host, resulting in strong and lasting bitterness—which certainly did not fade when later Rama Raya did not permit Ali's officers to sit down in his presence.

In the following years, Rama Raya kept on employing humiliating protocol, sometimes leading to escalations of mutual insults. After Rama Raya had conquered Ahmadnagar's capital in 1561, Firishta informs us, he let Sultan Husain Nizam Shah know that one of the conditions for peace was that Husain visit him and eat *pāṇ* (betel-leaf and areca-nut) from his hand. Since the latter had no choice but to obey, Rama Raya thus made the Ahmadnagar sultan kiss his hand as it were. Utterly disgraced, Husain immediately washed his hands in water after this encounter, an offence that Rama Raya returned by washing his hands as well.

Bijapur's chroniclers may have overstated these dishonourable practices of their lords' opponents, but even some sources from Vijayanagara itself mention its degrading conduct. The Telugu work *Narasabhūpālīyam*, by the court poet Bhattu Murti, states that after Rama Raya's brother Venkatadri defeated Bijapur, he forced the sultan to prostrate before him and with his head touch his feet before peace would be restored.²⁰

A last example of Rama Raya's politics of humiliation concerns the visit of a Bijapur envoy to Vijayanagara shortly before 1565. South Indian texts contain various accounts of this event. One version, recorded by Mackenzie's assistants in the capital region, runs thus:

... towards the conclusion of his reign, he [Rama Raya] was persuaded by some worthless wretches to provoke the resentment of all the Mussulman [Muslim] princes by some acts highly insulting to their religion. At last, a certain Mahaldar [*mahaldār*, envoy] coming to the Rajah on behalf of Aly Adil Shah Badsha of Beejapore [Sultan Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur] on some particular occasion, he happened to encounter near the public hall of audience a

²⁰ Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 77-87; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 135-6, 159 (n. 52), 268-9, 285 (n. 75), 299; Eaton, "Kiss My Foot," 308-9; idem, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 96-7; Rafi al-Din Ibrahim Shirazi, "A Portrayal of Vijayanagar by Rafiuddin Shirazi in Tadhkirat al-Muluk," ed. Parveen Rukhsana, in P. Shanmugam and Srinivasan Srinivasan (eds), *Recent Advances in Vijayanagara Studies* (Chennai, 2006), 236-7; Rafi al-Din Ibrahim Shirazi, "History of Vijayanagara in *Tazkirat al-Muluk* of Rafiuddin Shirazi," ed. Abdul Gani Imaratwale, in Shrinivas Ritti and Y. Subbarayalu (eds), *Vijayanagara and Kṛṣṇadēvarāya* (New Delhi/Bangalore, 2010), 106-7; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 224-5; Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 115-18; Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 209-12; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 291-2.

herd of swine, which were brought to be given to some Dommary [Domra caste] players (actors).²¹ These creatures being held in abhorrence by Mussulmen, the Mahalldar, as he could not avoid them at the time, immediately shut his eyes to avoid the hateful sight & asked pardon of his God for his ... offence. Rama Rayaloo [Rama Raya], seeing what passed, ridiculed him for his behaviour, [and] observed jestingly that the Mussulmen need not despise the food of the lower caste of Hindoos when they [Muslims] were wont to eat the fowls, which fed upon seeds taken out of the excrement of men & beasts.

Not satisfied with these indiscreet words, he [Rama Raya] caused a number of hogs [pigs reared for meat] to be shut up in one certain place where they were plentifully fed with Joaree [*juār*, millet]. On the following day, he caused a number of fowls to be sent into the same place & introduced the Mussulman officer to behold them feeding on the seeds in the hog's dung, in evidence of what he had said, & ridiculed him publicly & all of his religion. The Mahalldar lamented the affront & insult ... offered to his religion, & returning to his master [the Bijapur sultan], acquainted him of the affront put upon him by the Carnatic [Karnataka, Vijayanagara] people & urged him to punish Rama Rajah for the insult ...²²

A largely similar story is found in the Kannada and Marathi versions of the better-known *Rāmarājana bakhairu*. All variations of the account continue by relating how after the humiliation of the Bijapur envoy the Deccan sultans united to attack Vijayanagara, leading to the killing of Rama Raya and the sacking of the capital in 1565.²³

Other texts link this attack to the disgraceful treatment of a thirsty Muslim traveller—variously called “fakir” or “sayyid”—who arrived in Vijayanagara city from Delhi. Either because he used a covered city well, dived into a lake, or put his finger in a bowl with buttermilk, Rama Raya had his finger cut off or made him eat mutton secretly mixed with pork. Indeed, had not the sultans of Bijapur, Golkonda, and Ahmadnagar begged for his life, the Muslim traveller would have been beheaded.

²¹ Members of the low-status Domra caste were often musicians. See Henry Yule and A.C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: The Anglo-Indian Dictionary* (London, 1886), 322.

²² BL/AAS, MG, no. 11, pt. 3b: “History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy,” ff. 19-20 (original spelling retained) (see also Mackenzie, “History of the Kings of Veejanagur”).

²³ For a discussion of several of these versions (in Kannada, Marathi, and English), see: Guha, “The Frontiers of Memory,” 283-5; idem, *History and Collective Memory in South Asia*, 148-50. See also: Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 81-2; Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 36-9; Chekuri, “Between Family and Empire,” 153-60. For English translations of (parts of) the Marathi and Kannada versions, see: BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 5: “Ram-Rajah Cheritra” (from Kannada and Marathi, see f. 195); Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 204-42 (from Kannada); Sumit Guha, “Literary Tropes and Historical Settings: A Study from Southern India,” in Rajat Datta (ed.), *Rethinking a Millennium: Perspectives on Indian History from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century: Essays for Harbans Mukhia* (Delhi, 2008), 110-18 (from Marathi and Kannada).

Yet another work has it that Rama Raya caused the war with the sultanates by “affronting their religion by killing a hog on the tomb of a Mussulman.”²⁴

All discussed texts likely date from long after Rama Raya’s reign and contain historical inaccuracies, like portraying the Deccan sultans as servants in Vijayanagara or involving Delhi’s Mughals in the battle of 1565. Still, together with Firishta’s and Shirazi’s writings, they suggest that, among other causes, honour and protocolar insults were seen as elemental factors in the growing tension between Rama Raya and the sultans, resulting in the destruction of Vijayanagara city and Rama Raya’s decapitation—the latter probably by Ahmadnagar’s greatly dishonoured Sultan Husain Nizam Shah himself.

Indeed, even after Rama Raya’s death, protocol, humiliating or not, remained important with respect to his body. Reminding us of the Dutch Lieutenant Davidt Butler, Ikkeri’s chronicle *Keḷadīṇṇa vijayam* claims that Rama Raya’s head was sent to the holy city of Benares on the Ganga River, while according to another tradition it was brought to Ahmadnagar and regularly displayed as a trophy, covered with oil and red pigment.²⁵

Such disgrace did not befall Europeans visiting the Vijayanagara court, but those contacts, too, were governed by both the observance and breaching of protocol. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, several embassies were dispatched by the Portuguese and the Jesuits to the Tuluva and Aravidu emperors and vice versa. Reports by the former two parties about these Indo-European encounters refer to the same diplomatic ceremonial as was observed between south Indian parties. Thus, Portuguese envoys to Krishna Raya (r. c. 1509-29) and Venkata (r. 1585-1614) were welcomed with all due respect, being awaited at the capital by high officials, escorted by elephants, camels, horses, and kettle-drummers, and lodged in comfortable buildings.

It has been argued that since a king’s body was considered sacred, very few people were permitted to touch or even come near him.²⁶ But at audiences with the Vijayanagara emperors, the Portuguese were permitted to approach them very closely and sit down. As Domingo Paes wrote, Krishna Raya even touched his Portuguese visitors, thereby greatly honouring them. Presents to the Portuguese

²⁴ BL/AAS, MG, no. 10, pt. 4b: “Bijanagar,” ff. 69-70; no. 10, pt. 5: “Traditionary notices of the history of the country,” ff. 78-9 (collected at Harihara in 1800); MT, class I, no. 18: “The Keefeyet of Panoocundah,” ff. 52-3; MG, no. 3, pt. 1: “Sketch of the general history of the peninsula,” f. 48; Guha, “The Frontiers of Memory,” 281-2.

²⁵ Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 243; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 269, 285 (n. 77).

²⁶ Amin Jaffer, “Diplomatic Encounters: Europe and South Asia,” in Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500-1800* (London, 2004), 78.

included jewellery, lands, royal-style garments, cloths, food, and other marks of distinction. Vira Narasimha (r. c. 1503-9) sent gifts not only to the Portuguese in Goa but also to the royal family in Portugal itself, proposing (in vain) that the Portuguese prince marry the emperor's only sister to strengthen the bond. In the mid-1540s, Rama Raya paid homage to the Portuguese by delegating a very high military commander as ambassador, together with an extensive retinue of courtiers and servants.

The Portuguese returned all these honours largely in a similar manner. They welcomed Vijayanagara's envoys with cannon fire, escorts, and music, placed them in chairs on canopied platforms, held pompous parties, and presented them and the emperors with gifts like horses, cloths, and exotic musical instruments. Luso-Vijayanagara diplomacy was not always cordial, however. Audiences to Portuguese ambassadors were sometimes considerably delayed or the emperor would simply ignore them. During a mission in 1510, the Franciscan Friar Luís do Salvador was entertained by prominent courtiers but is thought not to have been received by Emperor Krishna Raya himself.

Around the turn of the seventeenth century, during the reign of Venkata, the Jesuits maintained close relations with the court and encountered similar protocol. In 1598 Simão de Sa and Francesco Ricio visited the capital Chandragiri and were awaited by prominent courtiers, including a nephew of the emperor's brother-in-law Gobburi Oba Raya, together with elephants and horses. The emperor and Oba Raya himself received the Jesuits with great kindness, giving them silk cloths, land (to build a church on), and a golden palanquin—the last present no doubt a very high mark of distinction. In 1604 the Jesuit Alberto Laerzio was welcomed at the capital Vellore by Venkata in much the same way, being lodged in a house adjacent to the palace, treated with exquisite food, permitted to sit down right beside the imperial throne, and sent away with great honours.

The Flemish diamond trader Jaques de Coutre visited the court in the early 1610s. As he wrote, he presented the emperor—most likely still Venkata—with coral and enjoyed a long, informal conversation with him. Later, the Fleming met with what he called the ruler's cousin or nephew "Gopol Raya," probably Gobburi Oba Raya. De Coutre received from him a long tunic and high cap, both worked with gold, and was told that these royal garments were the highest honour that could be bestowed on someone. Continuing the reverence, on his departure he was placed in a palanquin, accompanied by horn-blowers.²⁷

²⁷ Henry Heras, "Early Relations between Vijayanagara and Portugal," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XVI, 2 (1925), 66, 69, 72-4; idem, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 57-64, 68, 435-7, 459, 465-7, 473-7; idem, "Venkatapatiraya I and the Portuguese," 315; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 251-3; Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, "Notes on Portuguese Relations with Vijayanagara, 1500-1565,"

Finally, during the four decades the Dutch were active in Vijayanagara, they recorded comparable experiences with imperial protocol. In May 1610, envoys Arend Maertssen and Abraham Fontaine embarked on a mission to Venkata, seeking approval to establish a trading station at the port of Pulicat. They found the emperor in what probably was the village of Kaveripakkam (“Caueri Pacque”), some 25 miles east of Vellore. Although he welcomed them with a procession of horsemen and foot soldiers, he declined to meet them personally there and departed to Vellore that night. As courtiers informed Maertssen and Fontaine, it would be a disgrace for the emperor to grant an audience in this village. He wanted the VOC ambassadors to visit his capital and see what they described as “his magnificence and royal state, his superb castles and antique edifices.”

Reaching Vellore on 27 May and securing an audience with Venkata on the 30th, the envoys obtained permission to settle at Pulicat, but only, as they wrote, because they had appeared in person before the emperor. Had they not paid this homage, the urgent Portuguese requests to the court to keep the Dutch away, supported by gifts and large donations of money, would have made Venkata decide against the VOC.

A Dutch mission to Vellore in August of the same year initially proceeded less smoothly. The ambassadors, Hans Marcellis and Abraham Fontaine, had to wait twelve days near the palace until Venkata received them, despite an effort to attract his attention by shouting at him when he appeared before his people. They presented the emperor, the queen, and some officials with two Ceylonese elephants, sandalwood, mace, porcelain cups, textiles, and cash. Probably because of a conflict between the emperor’s brother-in-law and the captain of the royal guard, the envoys were only granted their farewell audience a month later. But then the mission took a more positive turn. Not only were the VOC’s privileges at Pulicat confirmed, the ambassadors were also given two rings and a village,²⁸ and placed in palanquins to be paraded around town, escorted by elephants, musicians, and “nobles” (*edelluijden*). Although further visits and donations to Gobburi Oba

in Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Sinners and Saints: The Successors of Vasco da Gama* (Delhi, 1998), 17-29; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 185-93, 322-7; Pinto, *History of Christians in Coastal Karnataka*, 25-6, 32-41, 46-7; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 45-7; idem, *Courtly Encounters*, 13-14; Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 58-62; De Coutre, *Aziatische omzwervingen*, 166, 173, 196; S. Jeyaseela Stephen, *Expanding Portuguese Empire and the Tamil Economy (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries)* (New Delhi, 2009), 201. For Venkata’s diplomatic relations with the Mughals, Bijapur, and the English, see for example Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. II, 68-9, 72-4, 90-1.

²⁸ This village, called “Averipaqqe” and about “one hour” from Pulicat, may have been Avurivakkam, three miles west of the port. Three more villages near Pulicat were donated by the courtier Gobburi Jagga Raya to the Dutch ambassador Wemmer van Berchem in December 1612 or January 1613. See Van Dijk, *Zes jaren uit het leven van Wemmer van Berchem*, 27-8.

Raya and other courtiers were necessary to obtain the papers confirming the new agreements, this embassy eventually proved successful.²⁹

During later Dutch embassies—to Venkata in December 1612, Ramadeva in October 1629, and Sriranga III around April 1645—the envoys were received with similar ceremonial, being presented with palanquins, lands, and what they called “tasserijffen” (*tashrif*s), a term of Arabic origin for marks of honour.³⁰ Only for the mission of 1629 is a specific (albeit not extensive) report available, giving an idea of how it proceeded. At the first audience with Ramadeva, on 26 October, ambassador Carel Reijniersz presented the VOC’s gifts, which included an Arakanese elephant, round mirrors, a Japanese suitcase, three paintings of which one depicted “Prince Hendrick” (probably Stadtholder Frederik Hendrik of the Dutch Republic), and what probably were two Chinese bed canopies (*Chineese verhemelten*), all gratefully received. The second meeting, two days later, focused on negotiations related to the ongoing Luso-Dutch competition at nearby Pulicat and St. Thome. The third and last audience, on the 31st, was largely ceremonial again, the emperor signing a new grant, presenting the envoy with honours, bidding him farewell, and placing his hand in that of the Brahmin accompanying the Dutch as a sign of his sincerity.³¹

Vijayanagara’s rulers also visited the VOC in Pulicat a few times, such as in 1643 and 1646, when the touring Sriranga III was honoured with a cannonade. The former visit was announced only some days in advance, giving the Dutch little time to prepare suitable gifts. They eventually managed to gather presents worth 2,800 guilders, including two very mediocre Persian horses of which they felt rather ashamed. Still—although the VOC’s gifts during missions to the court could amount to almost twice as much (5,100 guilders in 1645)—the emperor accepted everything with appreciation and issued a new grant. The Dutch had evidently followed the ceremonial to his satisfaction. The VOC sometimes also sent presents as part of its correspondence with the court, like horses, a gold necklace, mirrors, and binoculars, besides the usual spices and textiles. The English estimated that one of these

²⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1055, ff. 103-4, 149, 167-76, 189-90: letters from Pulicat and Vellore to Banten and Masulipatam, May, July, Sept.-Nov. 1610, Pulicat proceedings (*resolutie*), Aug. 1610; Terpstra, *De vestiging van de Nederlanders aan de kust van Koromandel*, 122-5, 129-32; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 20-2; Mac Leod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. I, 93-7; Jeyaseela Stephen, “Rise and Decline of Pulicat,” 2, 14.

³⁰ For *tashrif*, see the section on Tanjavur in Chapter 5.

³¹ On earlier missions to Vijayanagara and also Senji, the Dutch received “hands of sandal” from the rulers, perhaps denoting hands of sandalwood, which may similarly have functioned as an assurance. See: NA, VOC, no. 1055, ff. 77, 102-3, 275; no. 1056, ff. 151-1v: letters from Tiruppapuliyar, Pulicat, and Masulipatam to Banten (?), May 1610, Oct. 1613, treaty concluded with Senji, Mar. 1610; Mac Leod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. I, 92-3; Van Dijk, *Zes jaren uit het leven van Wemmer van Berchem*, 25.

Dutch donations cost some 4,000 *pagodas*, around 20,000 guilders,³² seemingly a fortune for mere flattering,³³ but yet considered a worthwhile investment.³⁴

This overview of protocol and related matters of honour in Vijayanagara allows a few tentative conclusions. First, many elements remind us of the regulations and recommendations in works like the *Mānasollāsa* and *Śivatattva ratnākara*, for example the way status was expressed by proximity to the king and permission to sit down, the significance of mutual gifts, and the value attached to how people were received and dismissed. Second, the contacts between Vijayanagara and its sultanate neighbours show that insults reflected tensions but could also heighten or even create these and thus influence political developments. Third, the empire's relations with European powers suggest that foreigners were largely incorporated into south India's systems of protocol and honour. Ceremonies experienced by the Portuguese, the Jesuits, and the Dutch appear more or less similar to those practised among south Indian parties. Nothing seems to indicate that the Vijayanagara court adjusted its protocol when dealing with Europeans.

Successor States

To gain a picture of the role of protocol and honour at the courts of Vijayanagara's heirs, there are hardly such comprehensive local accounts as Firishta's *Tārīkh-i firishta* on Vijayanagara and the Deccan sultanates. Dynastic chronicles and other texts of the successor states generally contain brief and isolated references to these matters. Dutch records, however, provide much more detail on court protocol for

³² For exchange rates in early modern south India, see, for example: Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce*, 295, 306, 318-20; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 109-10; Subrahmanyam, "The Portuguese, the Port of Basrur, and the Rice Trade," 47; s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, lxxxvii-ix; Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 551 (n. 20); NA, VOC, no. 1268, f. 997v; no. 1343, f. 85; no. 2130, ff. 23-3v; no. 2197, f. 578; letters from Pulicat, Nagapattinam, and Cochin to Batavia, Sept. 1668, July 1679, Mar. 1729, list of gifts presented in Coromandel, 1729-30.

³³ The purchasing power of 20,000 guilders in 1642 equalled that of 249,000 euros in 2018. See iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

³⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1056, ff. 151-2; no. 1100, ff. 65v, 77-7v; no. 1151, ff. 776-6v; no. 1156, ff. 249v-50; no. 1161, ff. 988-8v; letters from Masulipatam and Pulicat to Banten and Batavia, Aug. 1613, Dec. 1629, June 1643, May 1645, report of mission to Vijayanagara, Oct. 1629, lease by Sriranga III concerning Pulicat, May 1646; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1636* (The Hague, 1899), 124-5, *idem*, *anno 1643-1644*, 244, *idem*, *anno 1644-1645*, 346; Van Dijk, *Zes jaren uit het leven van Wemmer van Berchem*, 24-8; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 22-3, 36-7, 52; Mac Leod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. I, 127, 489, vol. II, 174, 179-80, 186; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 312; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1642-1645*, 81.

these kingdoms than for Vijayanagara. The following pages contain a representative selection of what those documents offer, combined with what can be derived from south Indian sources. All sections begin with a discussion of audience rituals, gifts, welcoming and departure ceremonies, eloquence, and other marks of honour. The second part of each section deals with breaches of protocol and how such insults both reflected and influenced political relations.

Nayakas of Ikkeri

As discussed in this chapter's introduction, the *Śivatattva ratnākara* of Ikkeri's Basavappa Nayaka I (r. 1697-1713) specifies how people in the audience hall must behave and be positioned when the king holds court. Unfortunately, the Dutch did not dispatch any mission to Basavappa and no VOC documents relate how his audiences actually proceeded. But between the 1650s and 1730s the Dutch sent about a dozen embassies to other Ikkeri rulers, usually to renew treaties or complain about violations of agreements. Lengthy reports of five of these missions are still available. In addition, the travellers Pietro Della Valle and Peter Mundy left accounts of Portuguese and English embassies to the kingdom in the 1620s and 1630s.³⁵ None of the texts seems to cover all aspects of the ceremonial encountered during such trips, but by combining the reports a reasonable impression of Ikkeri's court protocol can be gained.

Starting with royal audiences, a series of such meetings is described in the diary of a VOC embassy to Somashekara Nayaka II in 1735, undertaken to restore relations with Ikkeri after a military confrontation.³⁶ An abridged version of the relevant passages runs as follows:

On 9 February, Corijn Stevens and Abraham Gosenson, like nearly all VOC envoys middle-ranking employees, arrived at the capital Bednur with five local assistants, two interpreters (for Kannada and Portuguese), fourteen soldiers, and several dozen men carrying their palanquins and gifts. One week later, the ambassadors were called for their first meeting with Somashekara Nayaka. In the late afternoon two horses sent by the king—soberly and badly decked out, according to Stevens—appeared before the lodging of the envoys, who then dispatched fifty-two porters with presents for the Nayaka to the court. A little later, escorted by

³⁵ NA, VOC, no. 1268, ff. 1113-17; no. 1406, ff. 909v-33; no. 2232, ff. 3593-8; no. 2354, ff. 1491-632: reports of missions to Ikkeri, Mar.-May 1668, Apr.-May 1684, Oct.-Dec. 1731, Jan.-Mar. 1735; TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 1-84: report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1738; Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India*, vol. II, 246-57, 263; Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, vol. III, pt. I, 81-9.

³⁶ For this clash, see: NA, VOC, no. 2320, ff. 1507-698: report concerning a conflict between the Dutch and Ikkeri, c. 1734; Galletti, Van der Burg, and Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar*, 144-5.

Dutch soldiers and the king's two horses, chief ambassador Stevens followed in a palanquin, alone since Gosenson had fallen ill.

Around 6 o'clock in the evening, Stevens reached some kind of country estate (called "hosarmoni," perhaps a Dutch corruption of the Kannada words *hosa aramane*, new palace), about one hour from the main palace, where the Nayaka was temporarily holding court.³⁷ Between two rows of horsemen, the Dutch envoy was guided by the court merchant Gana Sinai to a tent and told to wait. When the VOC's gifts had been lined up in another tent, where the audience would take place, the court's Secretary Chanappayya informed Stevens that the presents were inadequate and urged him to add extra cash. Upon the ambassador's reply that he was not qualified to do so and that these were the most precious gifts the Dutch could gather, Chanappayya let the matter rest. By then, the king had arrived in the audience tent and told Gana Sinai to fetch the VOC envoy. Coming within the ruler's sight, Stevens had his soldiers present their arms and—being ordered to remove his cow-leather shoes, which were not to be shown to the Nayaka—he entered the tent.

Somashekara sat on a raised throne covered with golden cloth.³⁸ Behind him stood a crowd of servants (*menigte van dienaren*), while beside him sat "some state lords and highly ranked persons" (*eenige rijxgrooten en staaten*). Standing before the Nayaka together with Secretary Chanappayya, merchant Gana Sinai, and a few interpreters, Stevens saluted the king. The latter enquired about the health of the VOC's governor-general and councillors at the Company's headquarters in Batavia and asked whether the envoy had brought a letter from them. Stevens answered that they were all perfectly healthy but that he had no letter because the king had not responded to earlier letters. Somashekara expressed his happiness about the wellbeing of the VOC's directors but then fell silent. The envoy now said he had been delegated with valuable gifts as a sign of the Company's benevolent intent and wished to raise some points on his superiors' behalf, for which he sought the king's permission. The Nayaka replied this was a ceremonial audience and the VOC's interests would be considered later. Next, Stevens was asked to step slightly backwards and sit on a carpeted bench as the king was to inspect a military parade.

The ambassador saw several elephants with their drivers passing by the tent and honouring the Nayaka, followed by horsemen—creating a chaos, according to Stevens—and foot soldiers and other servants. Meanwhile, Somashekara had some of the VOC's gifts brought to him, including large glass and porcelain jugs and various textiles such as silk-like cloths (*armozijnen*), Persian velvet, and cloth worked with silver (*pasement*). The remainder of the gifts, in which the king seemed less interested, consisted of other textiles, spices, sugar,

³⁷ Perhaps this was the Kumbathi Mahal, built by Shivappa Nayaka I near Bednur. See P.M. Veerendra, "Royal Farmhouse of Keladi Rulers is a Shambles," *The Hindu* (16 Dec. 2019). It may also refer to the palace built by Somashekara II himself at "Banglegadde." See Subhadra, "Art and Architecture of the Keladi Nayakas," 333-4.

³⁸ For a full translation of the description, see the section on Ikkeri in Chapter 5.

rosewater, and nuts. After two hours had passed and the procession had ended, Somashekara wanted the Dutch soldiers to demonstrate their rifles and set off six volleys. When this was completed, about forty dancing girls (*baljaer meiden*) appeared to give a performance. Thereupon the Nayaka let Stevens know, through Secretary Chanappayya, that the envoy could now mention to the secretary the reasons for his mission.

Rising up and walking a few steps towards the king, Stevens brought up various issues, concerning money promised to the VOC in an agreement signed by Ikkeri's General Raghunatha Odduru, the confiscated cargo and papers of a stranded Company ship, and the court's overall adherence to the Dutch-Ikkeri treaties. Following a brief and private chat between Chanappayya and the Nayaka, the ambassador was informed that these issues would be discussed at another audience. After requesting—and being promised—that he would not be made to stay in Bednur longer than a few more days, Stevens and his retinue were presented with betel-leaves, dried areca-nuts, and flowers on behalf of the king. Finally, around 9 o'clock, the envoy returned to his lodging, escorted by four royal servants carrying torches.³⁹

Despite Stevens' request that matters be dealt with rapidly, the ambassadors had to spend four more weeks in Bednur before they secured a second and final audience. Presents worth 265 guilders given to Secretary Chanappayya and Treasurer Devappayya in an effort to gain their support, hardly speeded things up. But Stevens still met the king twice before the farewell audience, when Somashekara passed by the envoys' residence and they were expected to stand outside to greet him. At the first of these encounters, Stevens had his soldiers present arms, while around fifty horsemen, some elephants (tusked and non-tusked) with bells and banners, and a camel carrying two drums rode by.

Then Someshekara appeared, seated on a non-tusked elephant in a canopied, open chair, covered with red cloth, with a servant sitting directly before and behind him. His elephant was surrounded by female dancers, musicians, and several courtiers on horseback. One of them was Secretary Chanappayya, who rode towards Stevens, alighted from his horse, and served as an interpreter when Stevens asked the Nayaka whether he was still in good health and if he would let him return home soon. Somashekara affirmed both questions and presented the ambassador with betel and flowers on a copper bowl. Stevens then wanted his men to set off three volleys, but this was discouraged by some courtiers. When the Nayaka reached his palace, however, he was saluted there with three gunshots.

Six days later, Somashekara passed the envoys' house again, accompanied by the same entourage but this time sitting on a black horse. Stevens now stood outside together with his recovered companion Abraham Gosenson. After an exchange of the usual courtesies, the Nayaka remarked he remembered Gosenson from an earlier embassy, whereupon he personally handed over a few flowers to the envoys and had his assistants give them betel. Somashekara then proceeded, but after about twenty steps a servant came back saying that the

³⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2354, ff. 1519, 1526, 1536-50, 1630-2: report of mission to Ikkeri, Feb.-Mar. 1735.

king fancied the parasol (*sommereel*, from *sombareere*)⁴⁰ Stevens was carrying. The ambassador immediately offered it to the Nayaka, who let his attendant hold the Dutchman's parasol—a symbol of royalty in India—over his head.⁴¹

After several delays, the farewell audience took place on 17 March. In the afternoon, once more two royal horses arrived—in Stevens' opinion looking "indescribably bad"—and around 6 o'clock Stevens and Gosenson went by palanquin to the outlying country estate, where they had to sit in a separate tent again. Following a one-and-a-half hour long wait, they were guided by the merchant Gana Sinai to another tent for what was called a "secret conference." Somashekara now sat on a throne covered with velvet, behind which stood Treasurer Devappayya and only around five servants, while Secretary Chanappayya was standing "not far from" the king. Having greeted the Nayaka, Stevens enquired about his wellbeing, but Somashekara did not reply, instead letting his secretary ask whether the envoys had really come in friendship. At their reply that their gifts were proof of their sincere intentions, a debate ensued on the VOC's military actions in the previous year and the agreement it had allegedly forced upon Ikkeri's General Raghunatha Odduru. As this discussion, in which Somashekara also joined, led nowhere, the Nayaka at one point just declared that Stevens and Gosenson could return home the next day. They were presented with flowers, betel, areca, and cloths, and then escorted back to their lodging by four of the king's servants.⁴²

Although none of these audiences was held at Bednur's main palace, reports of other embassies to Ikkeri make clear that the experiences of Stevens and Gosenson were typical for the protocol on such occasions. The functions of the various audiences, the kinds of gifts, and the welcome and departure ceremonies were largely the same at all embassies. As for audiences, Dutch and other accounts show that European missions to Ikkeri generally included two to four such meetings, which each served different goals. Initial audiences were mostly ceremonial: the court welcomed ambassadors, who then presented their gifts. As Ikkeri's courtiers assured VOC delegates in 1738, giving presents at the first meeting was an ancient and essential practice. The traveller Pietro Della Valle was told by the Portuguese that opening audiences were not meant to discuss business. At final meetings, rulers commonly gave presents to ambassadors and formally dismissed them, sometimes after talks about requests or grievances of either party. If other audiences took place—which was often the case—these were generally devoted to negotiations between the court and envoys, with fewer formalities.

⁴⁰ For *sombareere* or *sombreer*, deriving from Portuguese, see: Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, 21; Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 851. I also thank Jorge Flores for discussing this term with me.

⁴¹ NA, VOC, no. 2354, ff. 1550-5, 1560-2: report of mission to Ikkeri, Feb. 1735.

⁴² NA, VOC, no. 2354, ff. 1593-604: report of mission to Ikkeri, Mar. 1735.

Dutch gifts to Ikkeri's rulers during embassies usually comprised both large quantities of bulk goods, like textiles and spices (often cloves, nutmeg, and mace), and smaller numbers of more valuable items, such as animals, weapons, jewellery, and exotic objects. Among the presents for Somashekara II in 1738 were a tusked elephant and a dog that could do tricks. Although satisfied, the Nayaka kept asking to be sent more curiosities, like greyhounds, other skilful (preferably curly-haired) dogs, a white elephant, silver plates (round and square), gilded mirrors, Chinese gold necklaces, enough pearls to cover a throne, and especially all sorts of glassware—like lamps, lanterns, and jugs—accompanied by a Dutch glassblower, who, once arrived in Ikkeri, should produce glass tableware, a glass house, and a glass elephant saddle (see illustration 11). Although the VOC could not possibly comply with these demands, exquisite and exceptional presents were evidently considered particularly appropriate for south Indian kings.⁴³ Thus, at two Dutch embassies to Ikkeri in the 1660s and 1680s, the costs of gifts amounted to around 2,500 guilders, nearly as much as was spent for Vijayanagara's Emperor Sriranga III in 1643.⁴⁴

As for counter-gifts during embassies, besides the aforementioned betel-leaves, areca-nuts, and flowers, envoys of all European powers regularly received clothes to put on in the ruler's presence. VOC ambassadors in the 1660s and 1680s wrote that Ikkeri's monarchs hung around them a "covering robe" (*deckleet*) or "honour robes" (*eerkleden*)—in one case worth 16 *pagodas*, about 80 guilders, according to the ever cost-conscious Dutch. As the English envoy Peter Mundy remarked about a similar occasion, this happened "after the countrie manner." These were no doubt references to the incorporative *khil'at* ritual.

Another common royal gift of sorts to envoys was a small sum of money, which the VOC sometimes referred to as *gastos* or *guastus*, a term probably deriving from Portuguese. This seems to have been a symbolic reimbursement of the ambassadors' expenditures. Thus, in 1660 or 1661 Dutch envoy Leendert Lenartsz received 50 *pagodas* from King Venkatappa II, another honour said to follow the "land's manners" (*lants manieren*). When around the same time a representative of the Ikkeri court departed after a visit to the Dutch at Vengurla, they presented him "according to the land's usage" with a little gift they called "rice money." In 1681 in neighbouring Mysore, ambassador Jan van Raasvelt was given some cash by King Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar, too, now termed "betel money" and amounting to 20 *pardaos*.⁴⁵

⁴³ For similar Portuguese experiences, see Melo, "Seeking Prestige and Survival," 690-1.

⁴⁴ The purchasing power of 2,500 guilders in 1660 equalled that of 24,500 euros in 2018. See <https://doi.org/10.24415/9789400604162> <https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agh> - Open Access - 

⁴⁵ NA, VOC, no. 1236, ff. 192, 204-5, 496; no. 1240, f. 532; no. 1268, ff. 1113-17; no. 1379, f. 2351v; no. 1406, ff. 909v-33; no. 2232, ff. 3593-8: letters from Barkur, Vengurla, and Cochín to Batavia, Jan.-Feb., Apr.

verhalen verfolge Zijn Hooght
 dat voor hem een glaseblazen
 mag werden outboden, inso
 foo veel stof, dat Zijn Hooght,
 alles na Zijn genoegen kan
 laten maken als groote potten,
 en schalen, ja zelfs een huys waan
 van dwalcken, en pilaren inde
 van glas fullen moeten. Zijn een
 phellagie op een oliphant daan Zijn
 Hooght op Lande handten Linnen,

Illustration 11: Part of the report of the Dutch mission to Ikkeri in April 1738, describing Somashekara Nayaka II's desire to obtain glass objects: "therefore His Highness requested that a glassblower may be summoned for him, with so much material, that His Highness can have everything made to his pleasure, like big jars and dishes, yes, even a house of which the beams and pillars also will have to be glass, [and] a platform on an elephant on which His Highness would be able to sit," *Nationaal Archief*, The Hague, archives of the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, no. 2435, ff. 2240v-1 (courtesy *Nationaal Archief*, source: www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2435/file).

The welcoming and seating arrangements at audiences described by envoys Stevens and Gosenson in 1735 are also rather similar to what other Europeans reported about Ikkeri. As Pietro Della Valle wrote, in 1623 the Portuguese ambassador João Fernandez Leitão was escorted to his first audience by local soldiers,

1661, Dec. 1662, May 1682, reports of missions to Ikkeri, Mar.-May 1668, Apr.-May 1684, Oct.-Dec. 1731; TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 1-84: report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1738; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1661* (Batavia/The Hague, 1889), 97; Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India*, vol. II, 253, 257; Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, vol. III, pt. I, 83, 88. For a discussion of Della Valle's account, see Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 359-63.

musicians, dancing women, and the Brahmin Vitula Sinai, himself a former envoy of Ikkeri. The most important men in Fernandez's retinue were granted the privilege of riding on horseback until the palace-fort's third gate, while King Venkatappa I was waiting beyond the fourth gate. For his second meeting, Fernandez was fetched by dancers and a palanquin.

In 1636 or 1637 the English envoy Mundy was also honoured with dancing men and women—as well as a play about “some antient history of those parts”—and in 1738 the escort of the VOC delegates Renicus Siersma and Joannes Mooijaart included another ambassador of Ikkeri, Sube Sinai. Upon entering the audience hall, envoys commonly greeted the rulers by taking off their hats, kneeling (perhaps only occasionally), and presenting gifts. Mundy and his companion Thomas Robinson, who carried the English letter to King Virabhadra on his head, also kissed the Nayaka's hand.

The European ambassadors generally found the king, or queen, sitting on a raised, carpeted, and canopied platform, resting on cushions or a chair, and surrounded by important courtiers, personal attendants, and, as Mundy wrote, dancing and singing women. Only the most prominent officials were seated, beside or behind the king. In 1623, just one courtier, probably Ikkeri's chief minister, was sitting, at some distance on Venkatappa I's right. In 1738, Chief Minister Devappa and General Raghunatha Odduru sat beside Somashekara II, but placed one step lower. All other local people had to stand, including soldiers, dancers, bearers of the king's fan, fly-whisk, betel, and spittoon, and even important men like ambassador Vitula Sinai.

European envoys were always invited to sit down, usually on a carpet or a carpeted bench. Whereas Siersma and Mooijaart were seated before the king, Fernandez was placed on his right-hand side, while Mundy sat “two yards away” from the Nayaka. Further, Fernandez was asked to sit under the king's canopy, but his entourage had to sit outside the canopied area. At initial audiences the king often continued his welcome with enquiries about personal matters, like the well-being of the ambassadors and their superiors in Asia and Europe, and questions about general political affairs.⁴⁶

Much of the protocol encountered by Europeans during embassies was also adhered to in other instances. For example, Ikkeri's kings received presents from other south Indian rulers on all sorts of occasions. The *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvaḷi* and *Śivatattva ratnākara* relate that Vijayanagara's emperors honoured the Nayakas with palanquins, horses, weapons, jewels, betel, the privilege of being escorted

⁴⁶ NA, VOC, no. 2232, f. 3596: report of mission to Ikkeri, Nov. 1731; TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 2-4, 9: report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr. 1738; Della Valle, *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India*, vol. II, 247-57, 263; Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, vol. III, pt. I, 81-3, 88.

with a torch (“mashull”) during daytime, an enemy’s head, and royal insignia such as yak-tail fly-whisks (“chouries”), umbrellas, and the shell (“sankoo”) and discus (“chakrum”) emblems. The Nayakas received these gifts when summoned to the imperial capital, before and after assisting Vijayanagara in battle, and as a reward for providing protection.

Ikkeri’s kings also donated gifts to other rulers in various situations, for instance to express gratitude or acknowledge their supremacy. Thus, the *kaifyat* of the Harapanahalli principality states that after its chief Dassappa Nayaka declared allegiance to Ikkeri, the Nayaka gave him an elephant, banners, horses, and other valuables. And when around 1664 Mysore defeated Ikkeri and Somashekara I sued for peace, he sent elephants, horses, robes, and jewels to the Wodeyar court. Additionally, people staying at the court could receive gifts from the king after great achievements. According to the Sanskrit text *Vaiyākaraṇabhūṣaṇa* of the Benares-based scholar Kondabhatta, Venkatappa I awarded Kondabhatta’s visiting father Rangojibhatta with the honour of using a palanquin after the latter defeated an opponent in a religious debate.⁴⁷

Presents exchanged between Ikkeri and the Dutch on other occasions than embassies largely served the same purposes—and partly consisted of the same items—as gifts between Indian parties did. Upon concluding the first Dutch-Ikkeri treaty, in March 1657, Shivappa I presented the VOC with cardamom, pepper, pickle (“aetchiaer”), and rice. His successor Venkatappa II honoured the highest Dutch official in Asia, the governor-general at Batavia, with a diamond ring and robes of honour, while Someshekara II showed his deference for the governor-general by personally wrapping and sealing a present for him. Ikkeri’s letters to the VOC were also often accompanied by cloths.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: “Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum,” ff. 64-5, 66-7; no. 11, pt. 15a: “Kyfyat of Harponelly,” f. 126 (compiled in 1800 or 1801 by assistants of Mackenzie, see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 111-12); Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 347; Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. I, 221-2; P.K. Gode, “The Contact of Bhaṭṭoji Dikṣita and Some Members of His Family with the Keḷadi Rulers of Ikkeri – Between c. A. D. 1592 and 1645,” in idem, *Studies in Indian Literary History*, vol. III (Pune, 1956), 205. For some of the terms for royal gifts mentioned here, see: Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 184-5, 214-15, 601; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* (Delhi, 1966), 64-5.

⁴⁸ For these and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1224, f. 89; no. 1231, f. 515; no. 1233, ff. 595-5v; no. 1234, f. 127v; 1236, f. 431; no. 1240, ff. 531-2; no. 1274, f. 185v; no. 2432, f. 147: correspondence between VOC and Shivappa Nayaka, June 1656, Apr. 1659, reports of *Commandeur* Adriaen Roothaes, June 1660, May 1661, letters from Colombo to Gentlemen XVII or Batavia, from Vengurla to Batavia, from Cochín to Basrur and Batavia, Apr. 1661, Dec. 1662, Sept. 1670, May 1738; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1656-1657* (The Hague, 1904), 164; Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 2, 104-13.

Likewise, the VOC felt obliged to honour Ikkeri's monarchs and courtiers with gifts in various situations, including royal weddings and successions to the throne. When in April 1722 Somashekara II married the daughter of the courtier Nirvanayya, the Dutch sent presents to the king, his brother, Nirvanayya himself, and his brother, together costing 122 guilders. Around early 1662 the VOC presented the recently enthroned Bhadrappa with commodities worth over 500 guilders. Although this king wrote to the governor-general that he considered "true friendship the principal matter in gifting," presents were essential to keep relations friendly. This became clear when in 1674 court merchant Narayana Malu suggested to the Dutch they dispatch an envoy to Ikkeri with gifts for certain prominent courtiers to win them over. As Narayana argued, the previous embassy was six years ago and he could no longer exert his influence with only "idle words and empty hands."⁴⁹

Visits by Ikkeri's kings and courtiers to Dutch settlements also required gifts and ceremonies. In 1703, when Basrur's VOC lodge re-opened after a closure of several years, Ikkeri sent an eminent courtier named Nagappayya to renew the Dutch-Ikkeri treaty. The VOC welcomed him and his retinue of about one hundred men with betel-leaves, areca-nuts, and dancing women both on his arrival and departure. But Nagappayya also insisted on receiving gifts for himself, the king, and the latter's father Mariyappa Chetti, who in fact ruled the kingdom. The Dutch were reluctant to do so, whereupon Nagappayya threatened not to sign the new agreement, forcing them to present spices, sandalwood, and sugar. When the courtier Nirvanayya called at Basrur on several occasions in the 1720s, the VOC honoured him with gun salutes, female dancers, and gifts, each time costing around 150 guilders. And in 1729 King Somashekara II—together with his queen, Crown Prince Basavappa, and several courtiers—visited the Dutch factory too, necessitating the VOC to spend over 200 guilders on presents and dance troupes. As the Dutch wrote, it was essential to honour the king and his entourage "after all old customs" to maintain their "respect for the Company."⁵⁰

Finally, protocol also governed correspondence between Ikkeri and the VOC. Only some examples remain because the Dutch, to avoid repetition, usually left out

⁴⁹ For these and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1240, f. 544; no. 1299, ff. 352v-3; no. 1582, f. 497; no. 1598, f. 131; no. 1977, ff. 110-11; no. 2834, ff. 76-6v; letters from Vengurla and Cochin to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, May 1662, Dec. 1674, Oct., Dec. 1696, May 1722, Mar. 1754; DNA, DCGCC, no. 3396, f. 1: letter from Bhadrappa Nayaka to Batavia, 1662. For gifts and missions sent by the Portuguese to new Ikkeri kings, see Shastry, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 160, 222.

⁵⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1694, ff. 54-5, 57-8, 60-2, 77-8, 84; no. 1928, f. 68 (3rd numeration); no. 1942, ff. 266v-7; no. 1977, f. 90; no. 2130, ff. 53, 323v-4v, 499v-502: correspondence between Cochin and Ikkeri, report on renewed trade in Ikkeri, with memorandum of expenses, Mar.-Apr. 1703, letters from Cochin to Batavia, Mar. 1719, Apr. 1722, Apr. 1729; Cochin proceedings, Nov. 1719, Jan. 1729; s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, 362-3.

ceremonial parts from the copies they made of these documents. But the surviving written courtesies suggest these largely consisted of standard phrases. At least four VOC letters to Somashekara II and Basavappa II, dating from between the 1730s and 1750s, begin as follows:

To the great mighty monarch and lord Ghelada [Keladi] ... [personal name], king of the widely extending realm [*rijk*] of Cannara, holding court at Bidroer—whom are wished all sorts of pleasures, together with a fortunate reign over his subjects and an everlasting victory over his enemies, besides peace and quiet as well as contentment in this world for many long days—this letter of respect and affection is being written ...⁵¹

In addition, one of these letters ends thus:

May God guard Your Highness for long years for the benefit of his realm and subjects, while [we], after kind salutation, remain Your Highness' obedient servants ...⁵²

Further, the VOC likely used special paper for letters to Ikkeri's rulers—and other kings—to pay respect to them. The original documents sent to the Nayakas have been lost. Obviously, these are not found in the Company archives, which only contain copies on ordinary paper. But the very few original Dutch letters to south Indian rulers that still exist, received by the kings of Cochin in Malabar, are extensively embellished with gold-leaf floral patterns.⁵³ Rulers of powerful states like Ikkeri were probably honoured with similarly decorated paper.

Little has survived, too, of the written courtesies sent by the court to the Dutch, but these were equally polite. In 1647, King Shivappa concluded a letter by saying: "May God spare Your Honours in health for many years." In 1689, Ikkeri's pretender to the throne Sadashiva informed the VOC he was in good health and desired to know the state of health of the Dutch commissioner-general. In 1731, the courtier Nirvanayya used a comparable phrase.⁵⁴ Clearly, like during royal audiences, health

⁵¹ NA, VOC, no. 2435, f. 2270; no. 2462, ff. 618-18v: letter from Cochin to Somashekara Nayaka II, June 1738, Jan. 1739; TNA, DR, no. 404, ff. 121, 155: letters from Cochin to Basavappa Nayaka II, June 1745, Dec. 1751 (translation mine).

⁵² TNA, DR, no. 404, f. 161: letter from Cochin to Basavappa Nayaka II, Dec. 1751 (translation mine).

⁵³ For original letters to the kings of Cochin, see Regional Archives Ernakulam (Kochi), Dutch Records, no. D 64: letters from Batavia to Cochin's kings, c. 1706-89. For reproductions, see: Lennart Bes, "Gold-Leaf Flattery, Calcuttan Dust, and a Brand New Flagpole: Five Little-Known VOC Collections in Asia on India and Ceylon," *Itinerario: International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction* 36, 1 (2012), 93; Van der Pol, *The Dutch East India Company in India*, 166.

⁵⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1170, f. 697; no. 1236, f. 204; no. 1463, f. 437v; no. 2187, f. 222: letters from Shivappa Nayaka and Sadashiva to Vengurla and the Dutch commissioner-general, May 1647, Feb. 1689, letters

often figured in expressions of deference, which enquired about one's wellbeing or wished someone good health. Although no examples remain of correspondence between Ikkeri's Nayakas and other Indian rulers, it seems this custom was a regular part of south Indian protocol.

The Ikkeri court used protocol not only to convey good intentions and build relationships, but also to express annoyance and humiliate other parties. All aspects considered above—seating arrangements, gifts, reception and departure rituals, the tone of conversations and correspondence, and so on—could and frequently would be employed to communicate negative sentiments, by breaching the protocol. Again, only a selection of cases can be discussed, aiming at being representative for court insults in Ikkeri.

The Dutch were regularly confronted with such offences, the most common of which probably was the recurring postponement of audiences during embassies. The reports of nearly all VOC missions to Ikkeri abound with complaints about endless delays of meetings with the monarch or courtiers, and the resultant obligation for envoys to spend weeks or even months in the capital. Illustrative is the embassy to Queen Chennammaji in 1684. The diary of ambassador Jacob Wilcken, some of whose experiences are related in Chapter 3, is dominated by days passed in lethargy and frustration as promised audiences were cancelled over and over again. Yet, it may be worthwhile to describe Wilcken's stay at Bednur in detail to give an idea of its progress—or rather the lack of it:

Wilcken arrived at the capital in the evening of 9 April. That night, however, Ikkeri's General Krishnappayya, the envoy's main contact person, was busy receiving an ambassador of the Golkonda sultanate. Therefore, the next morning Wilcken sent servants to inform Krishnappayya of his arrival and his wish not to be kept at Bednur too long since the ships waiting for him in the port of Basrur had to leave soon, because of imminent weather changes. The general replied he did not feel well but would invite Wilcken for a meeting that evening. As no invitation came, the following day the envoy sent servants to Krishnappayya again. They were refused entry, however, which Wilcken considered very unusual but attributed to the general's dealings with the Golkonda ambassador. The next afternoon, the Dutch envoy dispatched his interpreter to Krishnappayya, but he was not granted a meeting either.

Only the following morning, the interpreter was admitted to the general and told him Wilcken's stay had been fruitless so far, while things could no longer be postponed. Krishnappayya put his hand on his chest, declaring he would take care of everything and go

from Barkur to Batavia, from Nirvanayya to Cochin, Feb. 1661, Sept. 1731. Dutch letters to the rulers of the adjacent Sonda kingdom contain similar expressions. See NA, VOC, no. 1274, ff. 180-80v: Basrur diary extract, July 1670.

to court right away to arrange the matter. The following day, 14 April, Wilcken himself went to the general's house early in the morning and waited four hours until he could speak with him. Krishnappayya then explained that yesterday at court he had mentioned the envoy's visit and today would discuss it further. That evening Wilcken met the general again and could finally explain the objectives of his mission—a toll decrease and an open rice market—upon which Krishnappayya stated he would arrange an audience with Queen Chennammaji for tomorrow.

The following day, on Krishnappayya's advice, the VOC's interpreter waited almost the entire day near the fort-palace to see if a meeting with the queen would materialise, but the general was busy entertaining the Golkonda ambassador. On the 16th the interpreter was told that Wilcken should be patient for two more days, until the Golkonda ambassador departed. The Dutch envoy, figuring this was a pretext because the Golkonda ambassador was unlikely to leave soon, now turned to Governess Maribasvama for support. He sent his interpreter to her, together with a Brahmin to improve the chance of getting access. The governess was however "washing herself," as the mission report has it,⁵⁵ and postponed the meeting. Wilcken then went to Krishnappayya's house but found the door closed as the general was having dinner with the Golkonda ambassador and his wife.

The next morning, Krishnappayya suddenly informed Wilcken he should get to the fort and be ready to meet the queen. But after waiting for three hours, the envoy was asked to go to the house of Governess Maribasvama and discuss matters with her. When the governess appeared, after another one and a half hours, they had a long but fruitless talk about the VOC's requests, which ended with the ambassador asking to be granted at least a quick farewell audience with the queen. The following four days proceeded in the same manner. Wilcken and his interpreter had several encounters with Krishnappayya and Maribasvama, at which grievances about the VOC's behaviour were aired, the envoy was advised to have more patience, or the queen was said to have fallen ill.

Eventually, on 22 April, nearly two weeks after his arrival, and following another long wait at the fort, Wilcken secured his first audience with Chennammaji. After presenting his gifts—comprising merely some spices for the queen—the envoy discussed the VOC's demands with the attending courtiers, but was told matters could only be settled when the court merchant Siddabasayya returned to the capital. This would supposedly happen within a few days, but it soon turned out it would not. Wilcken let General Krishnappayya know he was not going to wait for Siddabasayya since the Company's ships could no longer postpone their departure, and if therefore the VOC's wishes were not honoured, the general should at least provide him with a letter stating the envoy had actually appeared at court. Krishnappayya promised Wilcken that another audience would be granted that same evening or early next morning, but for several days nothing happened apart from more deliberations with the general. Finally on 27 April, Wilcken was again received by the queen, now accompanied by her minor adopted

⁵⁵ This and other mentions of "washing" in Dutch records probably refer to religious ceremonies.

son, Basavappa I. Following an unproductive discussion and another request by Wilcken to be granted a farewell audience soon, the meeting was concluded.

Already the next morning, the envoy went to see Krishnappayya and pleaded for his support to arrange a rapid departure. The general suggested it might happen tomorrow, but as this would be a Saturday and therefore a “washing day in the fort,” Wilcken knew the court would not convene. The envoy now asked why he was kept at the capital so long and if someone else was behind it. The general kept quiet and then denied this suggestion with a vague excuse, adding that Wilcken would surely be given a farewell audience. The next day, the envoy sent his interpreter to Krishnappayya, who stated it was a full moon today but that Wilcken would be able to travel to Basrur tomorrow morning without delay. That following morning, on 30 April, the envoy went to the general, ready to take his leave from the queen. Krishnappayya turned out to have left Bednur that night, however, to intercept the Golkonda ambassador, who had quietly gone home without informing the court.

This was the last drop in the bucket of Wilcken’s frustrations. Straightaway, he and his party quickly and silently departed from the capital. But after a few hours of travelling, a court servant came hurriedly after them, requesting them in the queen’s name to return to Bednur for an audience that evening or the next morning. When Wilcken declared he was unwilling to do so, a heated argument ensued, which ended with the court servant threatening to stop them by force and close a gate they were about to pass. The envoy could now only follow the servant back to the capital, although he refused to be escorted into town as if he and his men were “crooks or thieves” (*schelmen of dieven*).

Finding himself in Bednur once more, Wilcken noted nothing had changed. Governess Maribasvama informed him she considered his sudden departure rather dishonourable and two watchmen were appointed to prevent the envoy from escaping again. Meanwhile, Krishnappayya had also returned and let Wilcken know that matters would be promptly arranged and that some courtiers opposing the VOC would be of no harm anymore. After several more meetings with the general and the governess, Wilcken eventually secured a third audience with Chennammaji on 4 May, after a seven-hour wait at the fort. Krishnappayya now came with a new proposal regarding the VOC’s wishes. When the envoy responded he was not authorised to accept it, the general said he would write to the Company’s directors in Cochin and wait—together with the envoy—for their reply. This was unacceptable to Wilcken, whereupon it was decided that the envoy could leave two days later with letters of the court for Cochin.

While during the following days the weather deteriorated and Wilcken worried about the ships still waiting for him, he kept reminding Krishnappayya to prepare the letters for Cochin and arrange a farewell audience. His suggestion that he leave now and the letters be sent later, was strongly rejected. Soon after, Wilcken noticed that all roads out of the capital were guarded. On 7 May, he was informed that the queen could not yet authorise (*siapen, chop?*)⁵⁶ the letters as today was an inauspicious day, while on the 8th he was told the queen suffered from a

⁵⁶ Literally: seal or print. See Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 207-9.

swelling on her cheek and could not receive him. Nevertheless, Wilcken was asked to go to the fort, where he, after a few hours, was received by Krishnappayya and Governess Maribasvama, while the queen sat in a nearby room. The general explained that the letters were ready and would be authorised that night, so the envoy could collect them tomorrow morning and leave. Wilcken then requested permission to depart already and leave his interpreter behind to obtain the letters, which was granted to him. A robe of honour (*deckleet*) was now brought in from the queen's room for the envoy, but he refused to wear it. Strongly urged to accept the robe since it was given by the king, Wilcken grudgingly put it on. Following a hasty goodbye, he immediately left the capital, almost a month after he had arrived there.⁵⁷

In this account, Wilcken's frustrations could have driven him to overstate matters, but it does not seem he misunderstood the local protocol. Clearly, he was humiliated by the court's disregard for the expected procedures. Not only had the envoy to wait constantly for audiences and thus prolong his sojourn in Bednur, but explicit promises were allegedly also broken. When Wilcken no longer accepted this and terminated his mission—as the Golkonda ambassador apparently did as well—he claims he was in effect taken hostage and even accused of acting dishonourably himself.

Obviously, this treatment was not an isolated event but part of a long-lasting confrontation between the court and the VOC. Tension had arisen after Ikkeri increased toll duties and the Dutch objected to them. In the years prior to Wilcken's mission, the VOC already dispatched several embassies to negotiate more favourable trade conditions, but these yielded little result, even though 2,632 guilders were spent on gifts for one of these trips. The Dutch lamented the court's lack of respect for their employees and letters. Indeed, relations deteriorated to a point that the VOC resolved that if Wilcken's mission was also a failure, the Basrur factory might be closed.

The breaches of protocol during this embassy appear to have both reflected the existing disagreements and further spoiled the relationship. Wilcken was maltreated by the court from the beginning, but his meagre gift of some spices to the queen only—itsself meant to show the VOC's discontent—no doubt worsened matters. Thus, it seems, ensued an escalation: more postponements followed; Wilcken then departed without permission; the court next confined his movements; and at the end he initially refused to undergo the *khil'at* ritual. After the mission, this ceremonial stand-off reinforced the commercial dispute. In the mid-1680s, as the insulted Dutch minimised contact with Ikkeri, their trade at Basrur often came to a virtual standstill, a situation profitable to neither the Dutch nor the court.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1406, ff. 909v-33; report of mission to Ikkeri, Apr.-May 1684.

⁵⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1373, ff. 343-3v, 352v-3, 354v, 361; no. 1379, ff. 2327v-8, 2351v-7v; no. 1383, ff. 723-3v; no. 1388, ff. 1908, 1935v, 1945; no. 1396, ff. 655v, 729; letters from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, Batavia,

While the delays during Wilcken's embassy can perhaps be attributed to internal disagreements at court, postponed audiences were also common during several other Dutch missions, when competition between courtiers seemed less pervasive. In 1658 and 1682, envoys were forced to stay at Bednur for several months until they secured a departure audience. In 1668 the ambassadors had to pretend to abort their mission, too, openly leaving the capital in their palanquins, before a farewell audience was arranged. Their patience was further tried when promised documents did not materialise and they had to hunt down King Somashekara I at the elephant stables to collect the papers and have them signed. In 1731 the envoy was told that if he intended to discuss grievances, he simply would not be granted an audience. He had to wait three weeks for a meeting with Somashekara II and was not allowed to mention the reason for his visit. When he still attempted to do so, the audience was terminated. Finally, when in 1738 ambassadors made clear they grew tired of waiting, the rowers they had hired to sail off were pressured by the court into withdrawing their service. Only when other rowers proved easily available, an audience was instantly organised.⁵⁹

Court insults in Ikkeri could take multiple forms, as is demonstrated by the experiences of ambassadors Stevens and Gosenson in 1735, at least as they reported them. Having arrived at Basrur on 10 January, the next day they sent an interpreter to Bednur to announce their visit and ask for palanquins to get them there. But although it took just two or three days to reach the capital and a welcoming letter from the court arrived on the 19th, by 6 February still no palanquins had appeared. Thus, Stevens and Gosenson were forced to arrange palanquins themselves. When almost halfway, they ran into eighteen palanquin-bearers sent by the court but without palanquins. After replacing the hired porters with these men, the envoys arrived at Bednur's outskirts the following afternoon. There, they were stopped by courtiers who in the name of Secretary Chanappayya asked how they had dared to pass the so-called King's Gate, two hours from Bednur, without authorisation. Amazed, Stevens and Gosenson answered that the courtiers must certainly be aware of the written permission granted to them some weeks before. Undeterred, the courtiers replied that the ambassadors' lodging would be ready only by tomorrow and they had to spend the night in a church. But only after two more days, they

Vengurla, and Basrur, Nov. 1681, Feb.-Mar., May, Dec. 1682, Apr., Nov.-Dec. 1683, Jan.-Feb., July 1684; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. IV, 577, 735, 824, vol. V, 61, 142, 239.

⁵⁹ For these and other examples, including Portuguese and English cases, see: Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III, 222-3; NA, VOC, no. 1268, ff. 113v-16; no. 1379, ff. 2328, 2351v; no. 2232, ff. 3593-8; reports of missions to Ikkeri, Apr. 1668, Oct.-Dec. 1731, letter from Cochin to Gentlemen XVII, Nov. 1681; TNA, DR, no. 257, ff. 46-9; diary of mission to Ikkeri, May 1738; Shastri, *Goa-Kanara Portuguese Relations*, 132, 135-6; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1651-1654: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office, Westminster* (Oxford, 1915), 75-6.

could enter their residence, which turned out to be devoid of any furniture and foods, forcing the envoys to gather their own provisions.

During the remainder of their sojourn at Bednur, various other insults followed—alternating with marks of honour—including long-delayed audiences, complaints about the VOC's “worthless” gifts, and refusals to speak with the Company's interpreters. Further, Secretary Chanappayya told the envoys' palanquin-bearers not to serve them anymore. Stevens and Gosenson attributed some humiliations to disputes and misunderstandings between Chanappayya and King Somashekara II. But it also became clear that the court was still annoyed by a recent military confrontation with the Dutch, when they had supported Ikkeri's opponent Kannur and allegedly forced Ikkeri's General Raghunatha Odduru into signing a degrading agreement. Thus, the envoys' experiences during this mission were another instance of protocol—or the breaching thereof—reflecting political issues.⁶⁰

During the following decades, tensions between Ikkeri, Kannur, and the VOC continued to be expressed through violations of protocol, also by the Dutch themselves. In January 1738, at a meeting in Cochin with Ikkeri's envoy Dogu Sinai, the Dutch declined a gift sent by Raghunatha Odduru, calling the general a swindler (*bedrieger*). During a mission to Ikkeri later in 1738, envoys Siersma and Mooijaart refused betel and flowers from a courtier, much to his dismay.⁶¹ Finally, referring to a border conflict between Ikkeri and the Ali Raja of Kannur, a Dutch letter of 1755 offers a rare glimpse of insults exchanged among south Indian rulers themselves, with their political repercussions. These seem to have differed little from humiliations meted out between Ikkeri and the VOC:

... about this [the border conflict], he, Adij Ragia [Ali Raja], had sent his writers to the Bidroerse [Bednur's] court several times and had very seriously persisted in that. But eventually seeing the fruitlessness of this, and [seeing] that at the end of the passed summer time his letters about that matter, sent to the king of Canara [Ikkeri], were thrown on the ground with much scorn by the latter's state Governor [*rijksbestierder*] Dewapa [Devappa], and [seeing that] the deliverers of these were treated very disdainfully through words and deeds—all this has made him, Adij Ragia, resolve to ... send vessels and troops with orders to, while lurching at one or another port of the mentioned Canara coast, demand satisfaction ..., first amicably, but if that bears no fruit, then with force ...⁶²

⁶⁰ NA, VOC, no. 2187, f. 168; no. 2231, f. 2882v; no. 2354, ff. 1493-604: letter from Cochin to Batavia, May 1731, document concerning the Kanara Coast, Jan. 1732, diary of mission to Ikkeri, Jan.-Mar., 1735.

⁶¹ NA, VOC, no. 2433, ff. 511-14: “indigenous” diary (*inheems dagregister*), Jan. 1738; TNA, DR, no. 257, f. 35: diary of mission to Ikkeri, Apr. 1738.

⁶² NA, VOC, no. 2857, ff. 131v-2: secret letter from Cochin to Batavia, Oct. 1755 (translation mine).

In conclusion, the cases above suggest several patterns. To begin with, the protocol discussed here—chiefly on the basis of Dutch sources—largely agrees with ideas in Indian treatises on statecraft. All ceremonial served to acknowledge mutual relations, express gratitude, or persuade one another. Precisely because of these roles, protocol was frequently violated, by ignoring established norms (like postponing audiences) or even turning conventions into offensive acts (such as throwing letters down rather than accepting them respectfully). Further, protocol both reflected and influenced relations. The contacts between Ikkeri and the VOC are a clear example of a relationship in which diplomatic humiliations mirrored but also helped shape its volatile character. This is not surprising because the Dutch usually dispatched embassies to Ikkeri only when they wanted to complain, for instance about ignored treaties, unanswered letters, or military threats. The tensions that consequently characterised these missions must have significantly contributed to the frequent insulting of VOC envoys—the court assuming that its message was as clear to the Dutch as it would be to local parties.

Nayakas of Tanjavur

Compared with Ikkeri, there is little material to reconstruct and analyse protocol at Tanjavur's Nayaka court. South Indian texts appear to be scarce and it seems there are especially few sources, local or foreign, on the ceremonial practised when the king held court. A work like the Telugu *Raghunāthanāyākābhyudayamu*, describing a typical day in the life of Tanjavur's Raghunatha Nayaka, devotes little attention to meetings with courtiers and how they were positioned and honoured in the audience hall. Dutch records are also limited, chiefly dating from the brief period between the VOC's first settling in Tanjavur in 1644 and the fall of its Nayaka house in 1673. For the seventeenth century's early decades, however, there are references to protocol in accounts of other European powers.

Two reports of what may be the best documented European mission to these Nayakas have quite a bit to offer. As recorded by both the Danish ambassador Ove Giedde and the Icelander Jón Ólafsson, serving the Danes in Tanjavur, in October 1620 Raghunatha Nayaka welcomed a Danish embassy at his capital with a palanquin, an escort of courtiers and elephants, ornamented gateways, clean-swept streets, decorated palace buildings, and soldiers lining the entire route from the town walls to the audience hall. The king soon granted an audience, at which he reportedly rested on pillows on a stepped platform, with a prominent Brahmin sitting at his feet, perhaps Govinda Dikshita. Envoy Giedde initially had to stand about three metres away from the Nayaka, but was later invited to sit on one of the steps. In the following days, Raghunatha honoured Giedde and his retinue with personal attention, entertaining them with games, tours, ceremonies, and a display of the royal treasures. Yet, it took

several weeks before he granted a second audience, making the ambassador complain about being forced to wait. Notwithstanding, at their departure the Nayaka accompanied the Danes out of town and presented them with gifts.

The relatively close contacts this dynasty seemingly maintained with European visitors also transpire from the work of the Portuguese chronicler António Bocarro, compiled in the 1630s. He writes that the Nayaka treated Portuguese mercenaries rather intimately, allowing them to sit down and wear their hats in his presence and just call him *Senhoria*, or Your Lordship.⁶³ Further, Raghunatha Nayaka's elevated seating in the audience hall is confirmed by Roland Crappe, a Dutchman in Danish service who after a naval clash with the Portuguese in 1619 was protected by the Nayaka and thus initiated Giedde's embassy. In the report of his visit to the Tanjavur court around November of that year, Crappe describes how Raghunatha had "me sit at the foot of a large stairway along which one climbs up to him."⁶⁴

Among the earliest encounters of the Dutch East India Company with Tanjavur must have been their embassy in early 1645, dispatched to secure better trading privileges. The few remaining documents on this trip say little about protocol but state that envoy Adriaen van der Meijde presented Vijayaraghava Nayaka with valuable gifts. Yet, he spent no less than two months in the capital before he found out the Company's wishes would not be complied with, despite daily assurances of the opposite.

More detailed is a report of the magnate Chinanna Chetti, delegated to Vijayaraghava by the Dutch in September 1658, following their seizure of Nagapattinam. Chinanna was welcomed by courtiers, provided with a comfortable residence, and granted an audience the day after his arrival. Having presented the VOC's gifts, Chinanna and his entire retinue received robes of honour (*eer cleeden*). He was given more robes after he sent presents to the Nayaka's "chief concubine" (*opperste concubijn*) because she gave birth to a daughter. Although it became clear during Chinanna's mission that Tanjavur disagreed with the VOC on the jurisdiction over Nagapattinam, the concluding audience already took place a few days later, whereupon another robe of honour was sent to the Dutch.

⁶³ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 59, 61, 66; Esther Fihl, "Shipwrecked on the Coromandel: The First Indian-Danish Contact, 1620," in idem and A.R. Venkatachalapathy (eds), *Beyond Tranquebar: Grappling across Cultural Borders in South India* (New Delhi, 2014), 244-8; Ólafsson, *The Life of the Iclander Jón Ólafsson*, vol. II, 15-17, 21, 25; Ramanujam, *Unheard Voices*, ch. 1; Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*, 90.

⁶⁴ RA, *Tyske Kancelli, Slesvig-holsten-lauenburgske Kancelli (1618-1659), Diverse akter verdr. det ostindiske kompagni og Guinea* (German Chancellery, Schleswig-Holstein-Lauenburg Chancellery (1618-1659), Various documents concerning the East Indian Company and Guinea), no. A171, ff. 3-5: report of voyage to Tranquebar by Roland Crappe, 1621. See also: Ramanujam, *Unheard Voices*, ch. 1; Fihl, "Shipwrecked on the Coromandel," 230-1, 235-43, 248-51, 254 (n. 6).

Combining the gifts that Chinanna brought to court with those donated afterwards—together including three elephants, three horses, 10,000 *reals* (23,333 guilders) in cash, four gold necklaces, five rings with rubies and sapphires, over a hundred mirrors, twelve swords, lacquer ware, textiles, and spices—the VOC spent 36,765 guilders on this embassy.⁶⁵ Considering that the presents of a mission in 1652 amounted to just 2,584 guilders but still greatly pleased Vijayaraghava, this was a formidable sum, only justifiable by the subsequent treaty in which Tanjavur recognised the VOC's control over Nagapattinam.⁶⁶

No further Dutch records on audience ceremonies seem to remain. There are however several documents describing protocol in other situations, such as the exchange of presents. Tanjavur's Nayakas demanded to be honoured with gifts on a regular basis, as illustrated in a letter sent in 1654 by Vijayaraghava to the VOC after a conflict about merchandise at the port of Karaikal. The Nayaka suggested here that the dispute had arisen because "your people are not waiting at the gates of my court with presents every time." Following this hint, he stated explicitly that the Dutch should send envoys with gifts over and over again. The same message was conveyed to the Danes and the English, the latter of whom complained in the 1620s that "the Naick or king [is] very covetous, expecting very great presents yearly."

Consequently, all European powers frequently dispatched gifts to the court to ensure business proceeded smoothly. Between the 1620s and 1660s, the Portuguese, the English, the Danes, and the Dutch variously presented the Nayakas with Persian carpets, Japanese objects, elephants, horses, all sorts of cloths, weapons, cash, sandalwood, and spices. In 1624, the Danes gave Raghunatha two ornamented bronze cannon and a bed of cypress or cedar wood. Whereas these gifts were accepted gratefully—the cannon reportedly being placed in the king's bedroom—in 1669 Vijayaraghava flatly rejected the presents offered by the Danes. As the Dutch wrote, the Nayaka deemed their value of about 1,000 guilders too low for his status. Insulted, he refused to let the envoys of the Danes return home and blocked all access to their settlement at Tranquebar, until they drove the besieging troops away.

There is less information about Tanjavur's counter gifts. In the early seventeenth century, Raghunatha honoured the Danes with exquisite cloths, garments, carpets, swords, daggers, and bows, while a courtier offered them a pig, goats, and other food stuffs. In 1624, the Danes were given a portrait of the Nayaka and a bed

⁶⁵ The purchasing power of 36,765 guilders in 1658 equalled that of 386,500 euros in 2018. See iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

⁶⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1156, ff. 341-1v; no. 1231, ff. 149, 150v-1, 164, 278, 632, 720v-1: letters from Pulicat to Batavia, between Admiral Van Goens and Pulicat, from Chinanna Chetti to Van Goens, list of gifts for Tanjavur's Nayaka, Mar. 1645, Sept., Nov. 1658, Jan. 1659; Colenbrander *et al.*, *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia ... anno 1644-1645*, 339; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. II (The Hague, 1964), 599.

with ivory decorations, its estimated value a staggering 100,000 guilders. In the same year, they received two civet-cats, one of which, according to Jón Ólafsson, had sweet-smelling testicles when dead, whereas the other produced well-scented excrement while alive—the latter being sixty times as costly as the former. In marked contrast, after the Dutch sent some gifts to Vijayaraghava in 1656, he presented Governor Laurens Pit with just a robe of honour, its worth thought not to exceed 2 *reals* or 5 guilders.⁶⁷

More is known about the way European companies treated ambassadors from the Nayaka court. Ólafsson reports that in late 1623 a prominent Tanjavur courtier visited the Danes with a retinue of seven servants, all travelling by palanquin, and twelve heavily armed soldiers displaying their martial skills and shouting. Welcomed with three volleys of the lined-up Danish garrison and three gunshots, the envoy explained he had come to purchase a large quantity of lead. The Danes replied they were happy to oblige him, but only if the Nayaka send a written specification of the exact weight and price. Greatly offended, the envoy left at once, without further ceremonial, to relate the incident to his king. Equally affronted, Raghunatha exchanged a few increasingly angry letters with the Danes, after which he declared they had broken the treaty and ordered his general to lay siege to the Danes at Tranquebar. It took Danish reinforcements to make the Tanjavur troops withdraw after several months. In March 1624 the Nayaka general visited the Danes again, now to conclude peace. Accompanied by 500 servants and nine palanquins, he was greeted with a cannonade, three volleys, blowing trumpets, and hoisted flags.⁶⁸

While the Danes thus initially failed to pay deference to the king and his ambassador, leading to military retaliation, another Tanjavur envoy actually feared the Dutch were not given enough respect during a mission to them in 1664. This was ambassadress Vengamma, discussed in Chapter 3. She presented her Dutch hosts at Pulicat with a golden flag and a robe of honour, and, she explained, had planned to bring dancers and musicians to underscore her esteem for the Company. She had even provided them with new clothes, but they had run away fearing they would

⁶⁷ For these and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1203, ff. 594-5; no. 1214, ff. 291v-2; no. 1229, f. 884v; no. 1231, f. 640; no. 1270, f. 495; no. 1277, f. 1472: correspondence between Vijayaraghava Nayaka and Pulicat, Feb., Apr. 1654, July 1656, letters from Pulicat and Nagapattinam to Batavia and Gentlemen XVII, Jan., July 1659, Sept. 1669, Feb. 1670; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1624-1629*, 19; BL/AAS, MM, no. 158: treaties of Tanjavur with the Danes and the French, ff. 5-10; Jeyaseela Stephen, *Expanding Portuguese Empire and the Tamil Economy*, 125; Prakash, *The Dutch Factories in India ... Vol. II*, 201-2, 220 (n. 22); Fihl, "Shipwrecked on the Coromandel," 240-1; Ólafsson, *The Life of the Iclander Jón Ólafsson*, vol. II, 182-3, 190; Ramanujam, *Unheard Voices*, ch. 1; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. III, 98; Vridhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 103.

⁶⁸ Ólafsson, *The Life of the Iclander Jón Ólafsson*, vol. II, 173-82.

be shipped to Batavia. Although the Dutch hardly cared about this omission and honoured Vengamma with three gunshots, they did think her gifts were barely worth this salute. Nevertheless, at her departure they gave her a fine cloth and 25 *pagodas* (over 100 guilders) as “travel money,” probably the same symbolic reimbursement referred to in Ikkeri as *gastos*, “betel money,” and “rice money.”⁶⁹

The Dutch showed more reverence to the *kaul* (written agreement) obtained in December 1658 from Vijayaraghava to formalise their control over Nagapattinam. Engraved on a silver plate and personally blessed by the Nayaka, the document was welcomed outside the port's gates by four members of the local VOC council on horseback, accompanied by Dutch soldiers, three elephants, and an huge delegation of the town's prominent merchants and other inhabitants. Following local custom, the *kaul* was proclaimed in all the “heathen” (*gentieffse*, “Hindu”) streets—no doubt to demonstrate the Company's legitimate possession of the port—and next brought “with great triumph” into the VOC's fort, while the king was honoured with three cannonades from seven guns.⁷⁰

Such extensive ceremonial is rarely found in descriptions of Nayaka Tanjavur itself. One comparable case concerns the honour befalling Vijayaraghava's *guru* (preceptor). As a Jesuit letter from 1659 states, every December this man was paraded around town in a magnificent palanquin carried by palace women and preceded by another palanquin containing his slippers. Moreover, the Nayaka himself walked in front, swinging incense and paying homage to his *guru* continually. But Vijayaraghava also knew how to humiliate dignitaries. That is suggested by a Tamil text relating that when Madurai's King Chokkanatha Nayaka sent a delegate to ask for the hand of Vijayaraghava's daughter, the Tanjavur ruler had the Madurai envoy mounted on a donkey, branded with a red mark (“chona moodra”),⁷¹ flogged, and sent off. As this work claims, this grave diplomatic affront was the direct cause for Chokkanatha's invasion of Tanjavur and thus led to the end of the kingdom's Nayaka dynasty.⁷²

Finally, the VOC archives contain some instances of written courtesies exchanged between the Dutch and these Nayakas. A letter to Vijayaraghava of 1656 ended with the words: “May God protect Your Honourable Highness' person and wide-existing family with long years of health and all desired fortunes.” In 1674,

⁶⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1246, f. 1514; no. 1248, ff. 1968-71: letters from Pulicat to Batavia, June-July 1664.

⁷⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1231, ff. 260v, 633: letters from Nagapattinam to Van Goens, from Pulicat to Batavia, Dec. 1658, Jan. 1659. For similar French-Mughal and Nayaka cases, see Raman, *Document Raj*, 147.

⁷¹ Probably a corruption of *śoṇa mudrā* (red seal, stamp, or mark). I thank Paolo Aranha and Nikhil Bellarykar for suggesting this translation.

⁷² Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 160-1; Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 159; BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 8: “The Cheritee or actions of the Vadaka-Rajahs of Tanjore, Trichinopully & Madura,” f. 73. See also BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 24: “The Kyfeyat of Aachoota Bhoopal Naiq,” ff. 185-6.

after the Nayakas' fall, Vijayaraghava's son Chengamaladasa—seeking support to regain his ancestral throne—began a letter to the Dutch saying he was healthy and asking about the condition of the VOC's Admiral Rijcklof van Goens. The latter replied he was most joyful at the prince's wellbeing and concluded with the wish that God would guard him and grant him victory. In the same vein, in 1620 Raghunatha wrote to the Danish king that Tanjavur was prospering and he hoped to receive similar news from Denmark.⁷³ Although few in number, these cases imply that this court's correspondence also called for eloquence, generally expressed by enquiring about each other's health and fortune.⁷⁴

Although there are few sources on protocol at Tanjavur's Nayaka court, the examples above suggest it had much in common with other courts. As elsewhere, close links existed between protocol, on the one hand, and political and commercial matters, on the other. Insults—possibly reflecting smouldering tensions—easily escalated into mercantile conflicts and military clashes, and even, according to one tradition, the extinction of Tanjavur's Nayakas. Gifts appear to have been particularly valued in this kingdom. Prominently figuring in European records, presents to the court had to meet high standards before trade privileges were granted. Indeed, in one instance, the VOC's expenses on gifts exceeded any amount ever spent on presents for Vijayanagara's emperors. While the types of European gifts to these Nayakas were mostly the same as for other dynasties, the counter gifts of this court were seemingly dominated by robes of honour, presented on various occasions and to people of different ranks. On the whole, however, protocol in Nayaka-ruled Tanjavur appears to have been similar to that in Vijayanagara and Ikkeri.

Bhonsles of Tanjavur

Far more information is available on Tanjavur's protocol under the subsequent Bhonsle dynasty, especially in Dutch records. With regard to royal audiences, there are at least eight surviving reports of VOC embassies to the Bhonsles, visiting the ruler in the capital or the pilgrimage town of Tiruvarur. Dispatched between the late 1670s and mid-1760s, spanning the period from Ekoji I to Tuljaji II, these missions were usually undertaken to congratulate newly installed kings or greet them during tours of their kingdom, and so they often proceeded in a cordial manner.

⁷³ NA, VOC, no. 1214, f. 292v; no. 1302, ff. 614v, 617: letter from Pulicat to Vijayaraghava Nayaka, July 1756, correspondence between Chengamaladasa and Nagapattinam, June 1674; Ramanujam, *Unheard Voices*, ch. 1.

⁷⁴ See also this chapter's section on Tanjavur's Bhonsles for an example of these Nayakas addressing the Dutch.

Below we zoom in on the account of a Dutch embassy to Shahaji I, undertaken in 1688, because we also have a local portrayal of Shahaji's court, with which it can be compared. The latter is found in the laudatory Sanskrit poem *Śāhendra vilāsa*, composed by Sridhara Venkatesa (alias Ayyaval) under Shahaji's patronage. It describes how Shahaji enters his audience hall with a retinue of women and sits down on the throne, surrounded by ministers, vassals, poets, scholars, and musicians (VI 17-46). The text mentions two officials as being seated: Tryambaka Makhi, considered Tanjavur's most powerful courtier by the Dutch for some time, and his nephew Anandaraya (or Ananda Rao Peshwa), a celebrated *daḷavāy* (general). Elsewhere in the poem, the king is attended by musicians, female dancers, and carriers of his betel, spittoon, parasol, fly-whisk, and white silk cloth. Moreover, while Shahaji proceeds to his palace, town damsels cast eager looks at him (III:11-19; IV:52-8).⁷⁵

Much less glorifying, but still quite positive, is the report of the VOC mission to Shahaji's court in 1688. The Dutch sent this embassy to convey their long overdue congratulations on his accession to the throne, but also to complain about the permission given by Tanjavur's regent of the "northern lowlands," Ragoji Pandidar, to the French to settle in the kingdom. The report includes two descriptions of Shahaji holding court in his audience hall, summarised below:

VOC ambassador Arnoldus Soolmans reached Tanjavur town on 18 November and had his first audience already the next day. Escorted by "chancellor" Koneri Pandidar, regent of the "southern lowlands" Baboji Pandidar, and musicians, he was brought from his lodging to a courtyard in the palace. Shahaji still being in his residence, Soolmans had to sit and wait some time until the king appeared, together with his younger brothers (and future successors) Sarabhoji and Tukkoji. When Shahaji sat on his throne, the envoy was ushered to the ruler's right side and graciously welcomed. Sitting on Shahaji's left side was Ragoji Pandidar, regent of the "northern lowlands." Before Soolmans sat down, he personally handed over a letter of the Dutch to the king.

After exchanging pleasantries, the envoy politely brought up the VOC's objections to the French presence in Tanjavur, running counter to the Dutch-Tanjavur treaty. Thereupon, Shahaji told the silent Ragoji Pandidar to order the French to depart. Soolmans next showed the VOC's gifts to the king, including a cockatoo with a silver chain, a lory parrot from Maluku with a golden chain, a gold necklace, silverware, two pistols, a "curiously designed" fan, cloths, spices, rosewater, sandalwood, a copper-gilded fountain crafted for the occasion, and what may have been two little dogs. Also presented were two elephants and some Persian horses, which comprised the annual "recognition" gifts the Dutch had to honour Tanjavur's rulers with. Although Shahaji complained about the small size of one elephant and the old age of

⁷⁵ Śrīdhara Venkatēśa, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, 7-9, 11-12.

one horse, he was satisfied with the presents, particularly admiring the other horses and the fountain. When four hours had passed, the king gave Soolmans what probably were a cloth and some headgear, both made with gold thread (*gouden took, dito toepetij*),⁷⁶ and with his own hands offered the envoy betel-leaves and areca-nuts, thereby concluding the audience.

Several gifts and some pressure on the courtiers Koneri Pandidar and Baboji Pandidar were needed before Soolmans secured his second and final audience, two-and-a-half weeks later, on the evening of 5 December, at the same location. Again placed on Shahaji's right-hand side, the envoy was given some food, after which he—on Koneri's and Baboji's advice—presented the king with two more gold necklaces and silk, much to his pleasure. After a request for exotic weaponry,⁷⁷ Shahaji honoured Soolmans by putting on him, with his own hands, a kind of cloak, and giving him a silken cloth and betel. Then the king stood up, extended his hand, wished the ambassador a good trip back home, and ordered Baboji to escort Soolmans out of the palace. There, an elephant was waiting to parade him around the fort, still dressed in the king's cloak, accompanied by music and hundreds of people.⁷⁸

Together, the *Śāhendra vilāsa* and the Dutch account of 1688 sketch a picture reminding us of ideas found in Indian political treatises. Clearly, at the Bhonsle court, too, one's position in relation to the king and permission to sit down signified one's eminence. The report of envoy Soolmans specifically states he was seated on Shahaji's right-hand side at both audiences. If the king's right side really indicated a higher status than his left side—implied by some texts from the Vijayanagara period—this means Shahaji twice bestowed a great honour on the Dutchman.⁷⁹ That was perhaps exceptional because Dutch accounts of audiences with Ekoji I and Ekoji II in 1676 and 1735 say the envoys had to sit in front of the king, in the latter case at a distance of about 18 feet.

That great reverence could be shown to some ambassadors also transpires from physical contacts with the Bhonsles. Since a king's body was deemed sacred and few could touch or get close to him, envoys usually presented letters to rulers

⁷⁶ "Took" may derive from the French *toque*, little hat or beret. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion. The Dutch seem to have used the term for a kind of turban or piece of cloth. See also H. Dunlop (ed.), *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Oostindische Compagnie in Perzië*, vol. I (The Hague, 1930), 811. For "toepetij," possibly referring to a hat, see Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 935.

⁷⁷ Shahaji's requests comprised two "curious" shields, some "curious" swords (*houwers*), and a "calessie," perhaps a corruption and diminutive of *kuras*, breastplate or suit of armour. I thank Jos Gommans for this suggestion. See also NA, VOC, no. 1361, f. 474v: report of VOC envoy Viraraja Ayyan at Tanjavur, Aug. 1680.

⁷⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1463, ff. 185v-6v, 205-15: letter from Nagapattinam to Gentlemen XVII, Dec. 1688, report of mission to Tanjavur, Nov.-Dec. 1688.

⁷⁹ The *Bhōṃṣale vaṃśa caritra* also suggests that the king's left and right were reserved for different groups of people. See Ranade, "Comparative Study of Tanjore Marathi (1750-1850 A.D.) and Modern Marathi," 50-1.

indirectly via courtiers. Yet, as Soolmans claimed, he gave his letter directly to Shahaji, he received betel straight from the king's hands, a cloak was put on him by the ruler personally, and Shahaji may even have offered him a handshake.⁸⁰ These were not isolated events. In 1676, Ekoji I himself handed over a silver *kaul* (written agreement) and betel to the Dutch ambassadors. In 1735, Ekoji II concluded an audience by presenting the VOC envoys with a bowl of fruits, saying he had laid his own hands on these. According to the Dutch, this gesture “signified the strongest proof of extraordinary affection and was regarded as a blessing [*zeegeninge*].” Indeed, Ekoji II's last words to his guests were that he hoped no other envoys than they would return to him in future because he could speak with them “mouth to mouth,” probably indicating one or both of them spoke Marathi.⁸¹ Judging from these cases, European ambassadors could be held in high esteem by the Bhonsles. However, at south Indian courts an act like taking betel from a king's hand, although honourable, was also considered a demonstration of subordination—something the VOC envoys failed to mention in their reports.⁸²

The Dutch missions to the Bhonsles point to various other aspects of protocol at this court. First, these embassies comprised few audiences. Soolmans' visit was the only one by a Dutchman (rather than an Indian delegate of the VOC) that included two encounters with the king. Every other mission consisted of just one audience, at which envoys were both welcomed and dismissed, gifts presented, and negotiations—if any—conducted, all within one session. Consequently, there were no subsequent meetings that could be endlessly postponed, and even the first audience was usually granted quickly. Further, Dutch gifts were generally similar to what Soolmans brought in 1688 and to what the VOC presented at other courts. Besides the usual spices, jewels, cloths, arms, and cash, these included exotic animals and rare European devices, like binoculars, eyeglasses, and watches.⁸³

Although the amounts spent on gifts during embassies fluctuated, some long-term patterns can be discerned. Recently installed monarchs, who had to

⁸⁰ Jaffer, “Diplomatic Encounters,” 78. For a possible handshake and hugs between the king of Kandy and Dutch envoys in the early seventeenth century, see: Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, “Uitwisseling van staatsieportretten op Ceylon in 1602,” in Lodewijk Wagenaar (ed.), *Aan de overkant: Ontmoetingen in dienst van de VOC en WIC (1600-1800)* (Leiden, 2015), passim, especially 165-70, 177-8; Obeyesekere, “Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas,” 163.

⁸¹ NA, VOC, no. 1329, ff. 1172v-4; no. 2386, ff. 165-7: reports of missions to Tanjavur, Dec. 1676, Nov. 1735.

⁸² Ali, “The Betel-Bag Bearer,” 541-3. See also this chapter's section on Vijayanagara.

⁸³ For Danish gifts during an embassy in 1735 to congratulate the newly installed Ekoji II—including horses from Aceh, silver tableware, rosewater sprayers, Chinese silk, and European curiosities—see: Josefine Baark, “The *Tranquebar Palampore*: Trade, Diplomacy, and ‘a Little Amusement’ in an Early Modern Indo-Danish Textile,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 52, 1 (2018), 76; Larsen, “En dansk Gesandtskabrejse i Indien,” 59.

Sept 1874

L. A. Carter

1 - Golden Pheasant	Winged 131 1/2	1063.2	1063.2	8
2 - Silver Pheasant	Winged 66	260.---	260.---	---
2 - Golden Pheasant	Winged 27	155.5	155.5	---
2 - Domestic Duck	Winged 66 1/2	302.7	302.7	8
2 - Royal Pheasant	Winged 55 1/2	300.9	300.9	---
21 - 1 Turkey	Winged 222 1/2	1399.7	1399.7	8
1 - 1 Turkey	Winged 26 1/2	156.16	156.16	---
15 - 1 Turkey	Winged 11	120	---	---
30 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
30 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
30 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
100 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
1 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
1 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---

1178.10 1/2 1063.16

L. A. Carter

1 - Silver Pheasant	Winged 131 1/2	1063.2	1063.2	8
2 - Golden Pheasant	Winged 66	260.---	260.---	---
2 - Golden Pheasant	Winged 27	155.5	155.5	---
2 - Domestic Duck	Winged 66 1/2	302.7	302.7	8
2 - Royal Pheasant	Winged 55 1/2	300.9	300.9	---
21 - 1 Turkey	Winged 222 1/2	1399.7	1399.7	8
1 - 1 Turkey	Winged 26 1/2	156.16	156.16	---
15 - 1 Turkey	Winged 11	120	---	---
30 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
30 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
30 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
100 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
1 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---
1 - 1 Turkey	Winged 10	150	---	---

1178.10 1/2 1063.16

Illustration 12: List of gifts (with costs in guilders) presented to Pratapasimha Bhonsle of Tanjavur (*Aan den Vorst*) and “supreme ordain-it-all” Annappa Rao Shetke (*Aan Annappa Chetke opperste albeschik*) during their visit to the Dutch at Nagapattinam in May 1741, among other items including four gold necklaces, four silver candles, rosewater, spices, a hundred pounds of sandalwood, and cloths for the former, and a silver betel-box for the latter, *Nationaal Archief*, The Hague, archives of the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, no. 2539, f. 2490 (courtesy *Nationaal Archief*, source: www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/archief/1.04.02/invnr/2539/file).

be congratulated, were given presents costing between 3,000 and 5,400 guilders, whether the Dutch met them at the capital or elsewhere. On other encounters outside the capital, usually at Tiruvarur, the value never exceeded about half of that.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1316, ff. 315, 331; no. 1329, f. 1172v; no. 1621, f. 35v; no. 1638, ff. 9-10; no. 1778, f. 95; no. 1819, ff. 38-8v; no. 2024, f. 195; no. 2031, ff. 439-41, 1299; no. 2147, ff. 4833v-4v, 4837; no. 2166, ff. 398-9; no. 2386, ff. 66-7, 70-1; no. 2538, f. 1414; no. 2539, ff. 2487-8, 2490; no. 3108, ff. 97-8: letters from Nagapattinam to Van Goens and Batavia, Nov.-Dec. 1676, Dec. 1698, Jan. 1700, May 1709, May 1712, May, Oct. 1725, July 1741, reports of missions to Tanjavur, Dec. 1676, Feb. 1764, lists of gifts for the Tanjavur king, Apr. 1725, Apr. 1730, May 1741, Nagapattinam proceedings, Mar. 1730, Nov. 1735.

A special case was Pratapasimha's visit to the Dutch at Nagapattinam in 1741, when he received gifts worth over 4,000 guilders (see illustration 12).⁸⁵ On average, these amounts were lower than what was spent for Vijayanagara's emperors, but quite a bit higher than what the few available numbers suggest for expenses in Ikkeri. The latter inequality may be related to the different reasons the Dutch generally sent embassies to Tanjavur (honouring new kings) and Ikkeri (lodging complaints), but it is also possible they held Tanjavur's Bhonsles in higher esteem than Ikkeri's Nayakas.

As under Tanjavur's Nayakas, in between embassies gifts also played an essential role in Dutch-Bhonsle relations. A VOC report from 1679 concerning the Tanjavur region states that south Indian kings had to be honoured with presents according to their status (*qualiteijt*), as they paid a great deal of attention to gifts, making sure not to give more than what they received. A Dutch letter of some years later complains about court representatives employing all possible means—including “improprieties” (*onbetamelijke middelen*)—to obtain presents from the VOC. Giving in to this had bad consequences since “their greedy mind [*hebsugtig gemoet*] is never satisfied, but always calls for more,” or as the Dutch put it in 1688: “gold is their idol [*afgod*].”

Still, in 1738 Governor Elias Guillot of the Coromandel Coast wrote to his successor Jacob Mossel that regents and other courtiers should receive presents regularly, or even annually, to keep them on the VOC's side. Following local custom, Guillot explained, gifts were essential for example during visits and “remarkable incidents,” yet this should not evolve into habitual events. In 1744, Mossel in turn urged his successor to limit irregular gifts since these caused expectations of yearly presents. As he concluded, the VOC could hardly abolish gifts that had grown customary without damaging its interests.⁸⁶

Whether these men exaggerated or not, the Dutch had to honour the court with presents in all kinds of situations and courtiers frequently reminded them of this.⁸⁷ To begin with, as part of the Dutch-Tanjavur agreements, the VOC was

⁸⁵ The purchasing power of 4,000 guilders in 1741 equalled that of 40,300 euros in 2018. See iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

⁸⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1349, f. 1405; no. 1384, f. 87; no. 2443, ff. 2676, 2772-4; no. 2631, ff. 516-17: report by Jan Sweers about the Tanjavur region, May 1679, letter from Pulicat to Batavia, Mar. 1683, final reports (*memorie van overgave*) of Coromandel Governors Elias Guillot and Jacob Mossel, Sept. 1738, Feb. 1744; ANRI, BC, no. 150e (unpaginated, entry of 30 June): Nagapattinam diary extract, June 1688. See also Martin, *India in the 17th Century*, vol. 2, pt. II (New Delhi, 1985), 1212.

⁸⁷ For some examples, see NA, VOC, no. 1361, ff. 474-4v, 480; no. 1369, f. 1531; no. 1499, ff. 75v-6; no. 2147, ff. 4833v-4v; no. 2334, ff. 182v-3; no. 2399, ff. 301-2; no. 2443, f. 2035; no. 2538, f. 265 (following f. 273); no. 2661, ff. 244v-6; no. 3108, ff. 24-5: report of VOC envoy Viraraja Ayyan at Tanjavur, Aug. 1680, letters from Nagapattinam and Pulicat to Batavia, Sept. 1680, July 1681, Aug. 1691, Oct. 1735, Oct. 1737,

to present the king annually with 4,200 *pardaos* (c. 8,400 guilders), one large or two small elephants, and, from 1688 onward, two Arab horses. Technically, these were not gifts but a “recognition” in exchange for the VOC’s possession of some land around Nagapattinam.⁸⁸ Actual gifts were donated equally often, required to complement meetings and letters. Whenever courtiers, local governors, “regents of the lowlands,” or their representatives called at Nagapattinam, the VOC variously presented them with elephants, weapons, jewels, and so on, sometimes totalling 700 guilders. A Tanjavur envoy named Viliyandu Khan (“Biliendoechan”), sailing in 1721 to Jaffna on Ceylon to select elephants from the VOC’s stables, received the usual spices, rosewater, sandalwood, and betel, as well as 840 guilders in cash. Based on a daily amount of 15 guilders, multiplied by the fifty-six days Viliyandu Khan stayed in Jaffna, this was probably another case of the reimbursement ambassadors received from their hosts.

Other events that required gifts included marriages and births in the royal house or courtiers’ families, appointments of officials, and local festivals. Between the 1720s and 1740s, for example, the Dutch sent presents for the weddings of Kings Pratapasimha and Tuljaji, the *sūbadār* of Mannargudi, and “ordain-it-all” Imam Khan Kurush Sahib, or their relatives, sometimes worth hundreds of guilders.⁸⁹ The VOC also presented gifts when Tiruvarur’s *Sūbadār* Ivaji Pandidar became prime minister in 1735 and ambassador Bavadi Nayaka was appointed “state governor” (*rijksbestierder*) in 1750, in the latter case amounting to over 1,000 guilders. The arrival of a new Dutch governor in Nagapattinam could be reason for distributing presents, too. In 1698, upon the installation of Dirk Coomans, the VOC spent 1,171 guilders on a gold necklace and other items for Shahaji and his chief minister, probably to win their goodwill. With regard to festivals, in 1700 the VOC was asked to honour Shahaji with a delegation and gifts because of the so-called *spade feest*

Sept. 1738, Nov. 1746, Nagapattinam proceedings (with correspondence with the Tanjavur court), Mar. 1730, Sept. 1740, letter from Tuljaji II’s uncle to Nagapattinam, Feb. 1764.

⁸⁸ For a survey of elephants and horses presented to Tanjavur between 1677 and 1730, see NA, VOC, no. 2166, ff. 205-8: final report of Governor Dirk van Cloon, Mar. 1730. For the early treaties between the VOC and Tanjavur’s Bhonsles, see Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerland-Indicum*, vol. 3 (The Hague, 1934), 34-9, 446-50.

⁸⁹ For these and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1835, f. 313v; no. 1957, ff. 1229, 1239-40v, 1258-60; no. 2024, f. 195; no. 2076, f. 1347; no. 2198, f. 13 (2nd numeration); no. 2243, f. 558; no. 2244, f. 766 (2nd numeration); no. 2386, ff. 943-4; no. 2412, ff. 371-3 (1st numeration), ff. 62, 273-4 (2nd numeration); no. 2427, ff. 465-5v; no. 2443, ff. 311-12, 314 (2nd numeration); no. 2471, f. 1225; no. 2506, ff. 85-6; no. 2594, f. 497; no. 2744, f. 519; no. 2764, f. 25; letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Aug. 1713, Oct. 1725, Sept. 1731, June 1737, Oct. 1743, Oct.-Nov. 1749, letters from Jaffna to Colombo, May, July 1721, list of gifts presented in Coromandel, 1726-7, 1730-2, 1734-9, Nagapattinam proceedings (extract), Aug. 1738, Sept. 1740; ANRI, BC, no. 150e (unpaginated, entry of 30 June): Nagapattinam diary extract, June 1688. See also Martin, *India in the 17th Century*, vol. 2, pt. II, 1399, 1434, 1459, 1527.

(“shovel festival”), celebrated in September or October. This probably referred to Vishvakarma Puja, when tools were worshipped and blessed.⁹⁰ On both this occasion and what was termed “new year’s day,” the Dutch also gave presents to Nagapattinam’s prominent residents and military chiefs.

Besides such recurrent occasions, all sorts of other opportunities were seized to claim gifts. In 1700 the VOC was requested to send presents to Baboji Pandidar because of his injuries sustained in a battle. In 1709, when *Sūbadār* Annaji Pandit intermediated in a conflict with the court, the Dutch felt compelled to present him with 2,500 guilders. And in 1713 the *Havalddār* (local commander) Ranga Pandidar obstructed Nagapattinam’s water supply, forcing the VOC to give him 100 guilders to end the blockade. Indeed, it was well-nigh compulsory to present gifts and failing to do so caused offense, as illustrated by Jan Sweers’ inspection tour in 1679 of weaver’s towns in Tanjavur. The Dutchman deliberately bypassed Tiruvarur to avoid meeting Baboji Pandidar, who would expect expensive presents. Instead, he visited the nearby village of Vijayapuram, whose local chief was satisfied with a modest gift.⁹¹

The court obviously also donated gifts to the VOC. Tanjavur’s presents during the Dutch embassy of 1688 were largely similar to gifts at other missions. In 1676, Ekoji honoured the envoys with robes of honour, belts, turbans, a white parasol, a palanquin, and a fan. Demonstrating south India’s hybrid court culture, the first items belonged to ceremonial originating from Muslim-ruled courts, while the latter ones traditionally symbolised Indian kingship.⁹² Later VOC envoys received robes, turbans, and gold-striped belts as well.⁹³ In fact, the court sent such items to the Dutch yearly, in exchange for their annual money and animals. Although the Dutch certainly understood this was a mark of honour, they were hardly

⁹⁰ I thank Pius Malekandathil, Sukhad Keshkamat, and Pierre Moreira for discussing the meaning of *spade feest* (at which arms may have been worshipped too). See also: Constance A. Jones, “Vishwakarma Puja,” in J. Gordon Melton *et al.* (eds), *Religious Celebrations: An Encyclopedia of Holidays, Festivals, Solemn Observances, and Spiritual Commemorations* (Santa Barbara/Denver/Oxford, 2011), vol. 1, 908; Rogerius, *De open-deure tot het verborgen heydendom*, 135-6.

⁹¹ NA, VOC, no. 1349, f. 1402; no. 1411, f. 120v; no. 1621, f. 35v; no. 1633, f. 144v; no. 1778, ff. 97-8; no. 1835, ff. 290v-iv; no. 2317, f. 192; no. 2387, ff. 322-3; no. 2764, f. 237: report by Jan Sweers about the Tanjavur region, May 1679, “news register” from Nagapattinam, Feb. 1685, letters from Nagapattinam to Pulicat and Batavia, Dec. 1698, Oct. 1700, May 1709, Aug. 1713, May 1750, list of gifts exchanged in Coromandel, 1732-3, Nagapattinam proceedings, June 1736. See also other annual lists of gifts exchanged in Coromandel.

⁹² See Chapter 5 for court ceremonial deriving from Muslim-ruled polities.

⁹³ NA, VOC, no. 1329, f. 1174; no. 2031, f. 1122; no. 2166, f. 395; no. 2197, f. 581; no. 2386, f. 166; no. 2539, f. 2484; no. 3108, ff. 93, 105; reports of missions to Tanjavur, Tiruvarur, and Naguru, Dec. 1676, Mar.-Apr. 1725, Mar.-Apr. 1730, Nov. 1735, May 1741, Feb. 1764, list of gifts exchanged in Coromandel, 1729-30, Nagapattinam proceedings, Feb. 1764.

impressed. They registered the received garments as merchandise—their value generally estimated at 30 to 60 guilders—that could be sold and thus compensate their expenses on gifts. Marathi letters from Tuljaji II to the Danes also mention cloths (*cādara*) “with flowery work,” shawls “bright as the moon” (*mahatābī*), and turbans “embroidered with gold” (*maṇḍila*)—all given by the king “out of love and in agreement with the custom.” Only seldom were European powers presented with other kinds of presents. One rare example concerns three falcons given to the Dutch in 1680 by the then Prince Shahaji.⁹⁴

Gifts exchanged between the Bhonsles and other Indian parties were more diverse. The chronicle *Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra* relates that the kings and their ancestors received presents from the Muslim dynasties to whom they owed allegiance at different moments. Thus, the rulers of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, and Arcot variously honoured the Bhonsles with war animals, arms, cloths, golden and silver drums, a throne, and an exotic bird. Texts like the *Śāhendra vilāsa* and *Pratāpasimhendra vijaya prabandha* state that the Bhonsles themselves presented gifts to their courtiers, poets, and messengers bringing news of victory, which besides the abovementioned items included land and, in one case, the privilege to use a palanquin, an umbrella, and three different musical instruments. According to the VOC, Shahaji I even bestowed his own palanquin and other marks of honour (*eertekenen*) on the regent of the “northern lowlands,” Ragoji Pandidar, while Shahaji II sent nine elephants, fifteen horses, and jewels worth 15,000 *pardaos* to Arcot to sue for peace.⁹⁵ As all examples show, vast amounts of money were spent

⁹⁴ For the Danish letters, see Strandberg, *The Moḍi Documents from Tanjore in Danish Collections*, 114–15, 136–7, 296, 305. For gifts to the Danes, see also Larsen, “En dansk Gesandtskabrejse i Indien,” 66–7. For Dutch examples, see NA, VOC, no. 1329, f. 1291; no. 1355, ff. 148v–9; no. 1803, f. 303v; no. 1835, f. 314; no. 1849, f. 421v; no. 1990, f. 151v; no. 1997, f. 23; no. 2007, f. 335v; no. 2043, f. 139; no. 2065, f. 227v; no. 2076, f. 1349; no. 2092, ff. 55–5v; no. 2135, ff. 149, 152 (3rd numeration); no. 2220, ff. 262v–3; no. 2243, ff. 562, 739; no. 2244, f. 768 (2nd numeration); no. 2289, f. 112; no. 2304, ff. 323–3v; no. 2317, ff. 192–3; no. 2334, f. 185; no. 2351, ff. 3999–4000; no. 2386, f. 169; no. 2387, f. 163; no. 2412, f. 374 (1st numeration), f. 103 (2nd numeration); no. 2442, ff. 61–2; no. 2443, ff. 314, 446 (2nd numeration); no. 2538, ff. 1556, 1657; no. 3108, ff. 104–5; report on Tirumullaivasal, Mar. 1677, letters from Nagapattinam to Colombo and Batavia, Oct. 1680, Sept. 1711, Aug. 1713, Nov. 1714, May, Oct. 1723, Oct. 1726, Oct. 1727, Oct. 1728, Feb., Oct. 1732, Mar. 1733, Oct. 1734, Oct. 1735, lists of gifts exchanged in Coromandel, 1726–33, 1735–8, Nagapattinam proceedings, Oct.–Nov. 1735, Mar., Oct. 1736, Oct. 1737, Nov. 1738, Feb., June 1741, Feb. 1764.

⁹⁵ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: “The historycal account of the Tonjore,” ff. 33v–4, 55–5v, 120; MG, no. 10, pt. 13: “Marhatta account of the first establishment & progress of the English government at Madras,” f. 226 (see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 80, 96); Ramakrishna Kavi Pandit, *Pratapasinghendra Vijaya Prabandha*, 33; Śrīdhara Venkatēśa, *Śāhendra Vilāsa*, 16; NA, VOC, no. 1448, f. 324; no. 2455, ff. 524–4v: letter from VOC envoy Rangappa to Nagapattinam, Feb. 1689, report by Tanjavur envoy Jaganatha Pandidar, June 1739.

on gifts in Tanjavur, both by Europeans and by the court. Presents were seemingly indispensable to maintain relations both within and without the kingdom.

Other important elements of protocol were welcome and departure ceremonies. Dutch ambassadors travelling from Nagapattinam to Tanjavur town were generally first welcomed by the governors of Mannargudi or Tiruvarur, halfway and at one-third of the route respectively. Near the capital, courtiers awaited them and accompanied them to their lodging—usually a house, sometimes a temple—provided with food and other necessities. After audiences, often still dressed in robes of honour and turbans, they were escorted by courtiers and musicians. Following a meeting with Ekoji I in 1677, envoys Thomas van Rhee and Pieter Outshoorn Sonneveld were guided out of the palace “amid singing and as many as twenty musical instruments,” placed on elephants, given fans and white umbrellas, and paraded around town amidst numerous curious onlookers. Later, they received betel and areca from Ekoji and turbans from *Qiladār* (fort-commander) Sayyid and were taken on a tour of the capital’s fortifications before courtiers, drummers, and horn-blowers accompanied them out of town for half an hour.⁹⁶

On their part, the Dutch staged their embassies as rather grandiose affairs. The expenses for a mission to Tuljaji II in 1764 included the hiring and feeding of a retinue of 555 servants—among whom seventy-eight palanquin-bearers, 200 gift-carriers, twenty-five European and 210 non-European soldiers, four drummers, seven horn-blowers, six torch-bearers, one interpreter, one Brahmin, five cooks, and one barber—costing approximately 2,200 guilders for ten days.⁹⁷ Thus, the VOC showed its reverence for the court, but no doubt also wanted to display its power.

Two events demonstrate well how the VOC in turn welcomed visitors from Tanjavur. One was a call of Baboji Pandidar, “regent of the southern lowlands,” at Nagapattinam in June 1688. Quite exceptionally, an extensive Dutch description of this encounter remains, even though this was a meeting on a relatively low diplomatic level, usually not reported in detail to the Company’s higher echelons. Sections of the account are summarised below:

When reaching the town of Sikkal, close to the VOC’s territories, Baboji Pandidar was greeted by a middle-ranking Dutch functionary, Jan Sweers, supervisor of the lands around Nagapattinam. The settlement’s highest official, commander Floris Blom, and his councillors, seated on horseback, were waiting for the regent at Puthur, on the port’s outskirts, to escort him into town. But Baboji

⁹⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1329, ff. 1169v-72, 1174-6v; no. 1463, ff. 205-8; no. 2386, f. 164; no. 3108, ff. 88-90: reports of missions to Tanjavur, Dec. 1676-Jan. 1677, Nov. 1688, Nov. 1735, Feb. 1764.

⁹⁷ For this and other examples, see NA, VOC, no. 2031, ff. 1119-23; no. 2166, ff. 391-5, 400-1; no. 3108, ff. 102-4: reports of missions to Tiruvarur, Mar.-Apr. 1725, Mar.-Apr. 1730, lists of expenses for missions to Tiruvarur and Tanjavur, Apr. 1730, Feb. 1764.

sent messengers to Blom stating that the regent would not enter the Company's lands unless the commander came to meet him outside these territories. Considering Baboji's prominence, Blom complied. Finding Baboji standing amidst his entourage, the commander exchanged some courtesies with him, whereupon the regent made Blom accompany him "by the hand" to his palanquin. After the commander next sat down in his own palanquin, Baboji insisted that Blom go first. When the procession passed the Oranje Gate in the outermost wall, seven guns were fired, while the arrival at Nagapattinam proper was marked by a cannonade of thirteen guns.

At the commander's residence, Blom personally guided Baboji into the meeting room, where the VOC's officials sat on the table's left side and the regent, his brother, a brother-in-law, and a nephew on its right side, with Baboji and Blom facing each other. The regent presented the commander with a cloth and what was possibly a turban ("tooke"). The latter was also given to all other members of the VOC council. After some pleasantries, negotiations started, concerning a few debated clauses in the recently drawn-up but not yet signed Dutch-Tanjavur treaty. At the end of the meeting, Blom presented the guests with gifts (including gold necklaces and rings, a sword, cloths, and spices), honoured them with betel, sprinkled them with rosewater, and exchanged more courtesies with them. Last, the entire council escorted the regent and his retinue through the inner town walls, where they were saluted with fifteen gunshots, and beyond the Oranje Gate, marked by the firing of nine cannon.⁹⁸

Again—now on the level of a regional official instead of a king—one notices the great value attached to protocol and the hierarchy it signified. As a prominent courtier, Baboji refused to enter the land of what was no doubt seen as a subordinate power without being received by a high-ranking person. Also, Blom had to escort the regent to his palanquin, precede him in the procession, and seat him at the meeting's room right side—all indicating the two men's different statuses. Following this ceremonial was essential to safeguard the VOC's interests.

This held especially true when in May 1741 the Dutch at Nagapattinam hosted their most distinguished guest ever: King Pratapasimha. There is no specific report of this reception, but some idea of how it proceeded transpires from other documents, especially the list of the VOC's expenses on this occasion. The king's visit was part of a trip to the pilgrimage centre of Tiruvarur and the port of Naguru, site of an important Muslim shrine. The Bhonsles called at these places regularly,⁹⁹ but Pratapasimha's stay at Nagapattinam was a one-time event.

⁹⁸ ANRI, BC, no. 150e (unpaginated, entry of 30 June): Nagapattinam diary extract, June 1688.

⁹⁹ For royal visits to Tiruvarur, see the previous paragraphs. For royal visits to Naguru, see NA, VOC, no. 1508, f. 554; no. 1621, f. 35v; no. 1778, f. 95; letter from Baboji Pandidar to Nagapattinam, Dec. 1692, letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Dec. 1698, May 1709. For the Bhonsles' relations with the Naguru shrine, see also S. Chinnaiyan, "Royal Patronage to Islam in Tanjore Maratha Kingdom [as Gleaned from Modi Records]," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65 (2004), 371.

When the king announced he wished to visit the town to meet Governor Jacob Mossel and worship the deity “Tiagaruasgia Swanie” (probably Tyagaraja at the Kayarohanasvami Temple),¹⁰⁰ the VOC council discussed how to receive him appropriately. As this meeting’s notes make clear, different scenarios were considered, depending on the direction from which Pratapasimha would arrive. In any case, the king would be escorted to the governor’s residence along a route guarded by soldiers between the town wall and the inner fortress’ gate and lined with clerks within the fortress. He would also be requested not to enter the town with more than 200 horsemen.

A letter sent to Batavia some months later suggests that the VOC’s thorough preparations worked out well. Arriving in the afternoon of 27 May, Pratapasimha was received at the town wall with a lengthy cannonade and shown around Nagapattinam’s main streets. Inside the fort, Governor Mossel led him by the hand into his residence and onto a purpose-built throne. While the VOC council sat down on chairs on one side, Tanjavur’s courtiers were seated on a raised platform on the other side. When after about two hours the meeting ended, Mossel presented the king with gifts and guided him, again by the hand, to the fort’s bulwarks and the inner courtyard, where they said goodbye. A Dutch junior merchant (*onderkoopman*) accompanied Pratapasimha to the town’s Oranje Gate where the king was honoured with a specially made horse-drawn carriage. After showing his appreciation, he departed from Nagapattinam.

The long list of expenses for this event suggests the VOC tried its best to host Pratapasimha in a befitting manner, with all due pomp and circumstance. The throne, which included a canopy and a footrest, was constructed partly of scarlet, Persian velvet, silk, forty small mirrors, four chains, and gold paper, worth nearly 670 guilders. The carriage was made of the same cloths, as well as red leather, 10,000 “leaves of Chinese gold,” silver, copper, dyestuffs, and other materials, costing 1,178 guilders. Among the expenses were also a small crown with fake pearls, two horses, triumphal arches at all town gates, several shelters (“pandaals”), renovations on the king’s temporary lodging, 2,608 pounds of gunpowder (for gunshots and fireworks), and three clothed rowing vessels, manned by sailors dressed up for the occasion. Combining these purchases (over 5,000 guilders) with the gifts for Pratapasimha and his retinue (about 6,000 guilders), the VOC had spent more than 11,000 guilders.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Shrines*, 100-1.

¹⁰¹ NA, VOC, no. 2538, ff. 1413-16, 1615-17, 1629-32; no. 2539, ff. 2483-4, 2490-4: letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, July 1741, Nagapattinam proceedings, May 1741, report of mission to Naguru, May 1741, list of expenses on the Tanjavur king’s visit to Nagapattinam, May 1741. See also *Beknopte historie*, 98. For *pandal*, see Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 665-6.

Since the king appeared satisfied with his reception, the Dutch had probably followed the required protocol correctly, even though it included several unique elements. One was the extent of the cannonades, totalling no fewer than 362 gunshots.¹⁰² In 1688, regent Baboji Pandidar was received and sent off with a total of forty-four gunshots, and when Tanjavur's ambassador Viliyandu Khan called at Jaffna in 1721, he was politely denied a cannonade, although he specifically asked for it and was highly regarded by the Dutch. However, this refusal was accepted by the envoy and did not affect the outcome of his mission.¹⁰³

Finally, with regard to protocol in Dutch-Tanjavur correspondence, little more can be said about the Bhonsles than about the Nayakas. The former seem to have sent just a few letters to the VOC in their own name and generally let functionaries take care of this.¹⁰⁴ The surviving letters signed by these rulers—only some of which the Dutch fully translated, including their formal opening and concluding sections—contain few of the civilities found in the correspondence with the Nayakas of Tanjavur and Ikkeri. In 1689, the Dutch Commissioner Hendrik Adriaan van Rhee de let Shahaji I know that he was in a state of good health, although without asking about the king's condition. Maybe this was a diplomatic blunder, or possibly the Company was reacting to an earlier statement by Shahaji about his wellbeing. For in correspondence with the French at Pondicherry in 1739-40, Shahaji II and Pratapasimha regularly mentioned they were healthy and enquired after the French governor's condition.

Yet, letters of the court to the Danes suggest that often only officials asked about the addressee's health, the rulers perhaps considering this below their status.¹⁰⁵ However, correspondence from Tanjavur's courtiers to the VOC has a rather sober tone, too, although here the Dutch also often left out standard passages in their translations. Letters from Baboji Pandidar around 1690 contain some examples, the regent enquiring after the health of VOC chiefs and saying he was fine himself. The Company's replies occasionally include similar phrases, wishing that God protect Baboji's health and fortunes.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² About seventeen shots were fired when the king arrived at and departed from the town limits, 124 while he traversed the inner town, 141 when he reached and left the central fort, and eighty at various other occasions.

¹⁰³ NA, VOC, no. 1957, ff. 1221-2, 1231: correspondence between Jaffna and Colombo, May 1721.

¹⁰⁴ Letters with royal signatures were considered special marks of honour. See Raman, *Document Raj*, 147.

¹⁰⁵ Strandberg, *The Moḍi Documents from Tanjore in Danish Collections*, 57, 285, 287, 294. For an example of the silken letter bags, decorated with a gold-brocade lotus pattern, with which the Tanjavur court honoured the Danes when writing to them, see Louise Sebro, "You Ask Me Who Is King...", in Esther Fihl (ed.), *The Governor's Residence in Tranquebar: The House and the Daily Life of Its People, 1770-1845* (Copenhagen, 2017), 101.

¹⁰⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1448, f. 319v; no. 1454, ff. 1017-17v; no. 1463, f. 427v; no. 1518, ff. 884-5, 887v-8v: correspondence of Shahaji I and Baboji Pandidar with Nagapattinam, Aug. 1688, Jan., July 1689, Apr.

Still, despite this relative lack of written courtesies, in the Tamil version of the Dutch-Tanjavur treaty of 1676, Ekoji I appears to have addressed the VOC's Admiral Rijcklof van Goens in an exceptionally exalted way, referring to him as "maharaja" (*maharāṣa*), a title also used for the king himself in this document. This seems another illustration of how Europeans were incorporated into south India's systems of honour and protocol. Nevertheless, in the Telugu version of a treaty of 1658, Tanjavur's Vijayaraghava Nayaka had not been willing to pay homage to Van Goens' similarly named father in such terms, just calling him "admiral" (*amarāḷ*).¹⁰⁷ Possibly, Vijayaraghava was annoyed because he had to acknowledge the VOC's recent take-over of Nagapattinam from the Portuguese—which the Nayaka initially contested—while the newly established Ekoji may have wished to build up a harmonious relationship with the Company.

Not all diplomatic encounters between the Bhonsles and the Dutch proceeded as smoothly as Arnoldus Soolmans' mission to Tanjavur and Pratapasimha's visit to Nagapattinam. At this court, too, insults occurred with some regularity. Perhaps the most extreme case concerned a VOC embassy to Sarabhoji in January 1712. Sent to congratulate the king on his accession to the throne, Joan van Limburg and Hendrik Wijnhout arrived with gifts for the ruler and his courtiers worth 5,400 guilders. Notwithstanding, the envoys claimed the mission was characterised by "disdain" (*kleen agtinge*) and "continuous torments" (*gedurige quellingen*). It proved impossible to meet any courtiers, apart from one Santoji Dada Salanke. Regarded as one of the king's favourites, he was willing to meet the ambassadors only once, when he refused to discuss arrears in rice deliveries to the VOC by a court regent. Instead, he stated that the gifts for Sarabhoji were insufficient and should be added to with two elephants and four horses before an audience would be granted. This was unacceptable to the envoys, and so, without meeting Sarabhoji or achieving anything else, they were eventually forced to leave the capital, hastily and like refugees, as the account phrased it.

1692; *Lettres & conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry*, 74, 80, 83, 90-2, 129, 132, 138 (see also 67, 75, 81, 133-4 for Tanjavur officials writing and enquiring about health). See also NA, VOC, no. 1416, ff. 1242v-3: letter from a Tanjavur general to Kayalpatnam, May 1685. Here, the general enquires after the Dutch addressee's health too and wishes him good fortune. The general's name has been rendered as "Pavasij Pandijden," possibly a corruption of Baboji Pandidar. For a letter by Tanjavur court officials to the VOC from 1788, wishing Coromandel's Dutch governor the blessings of the goddess Lakshmi, see Nikhil Bellarykar, "Two Marathi Letters from the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia: A Snapshot of Dutch-Maratha Relations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Coromandel," *Itinerario* 43, 1 (2019), 20-3.

¹⁰⁷ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (ed.), "Two Negapatam Grants from the Batavia Museum," *Indian Historical Records Commission: Proceedings of Meetings*, vol. XIV (Delhi, 1937), 40-8; Menon, "Colonial Linguistics and the Spoken Language," 77-9.

Although the gifts were taken home again, the trip still cost over 1,400 guilders. Blaming the king's "malicious ministers" for this failure, the VOC felt deeply offended. When court delegates later visited the Dutch to discuss the matter, the latter flatly refused the presented robes of honour. Also, they resolved to no longer send the annual "recognition" elephants and money. Subsequently, the court doubled the toll on goods brought into Nagapattinam and rumours abounded that Sarabhoji prepared an attack on the port, both of which put considerable pressure on the VOC and its local trade associates. In the same period, however, Tanjavur had to deal with a larger crisis, as Arcot was forcing tribute from the kingdoms in the region. Probably as a consequence, an armed confrontation between Tanjavur and the Dutch did not take place, although it took years to restore relations to normalcy.¹⁰⁸

While the embassy of 1712 with its aftermath was a clear case of diplomatic humiliation escalating into a fully-fledged political conflict with economic and military elements, insult was relatively rare under the Bhonsles. And in the few instances protocol was actually breached, this generally did not have far-reaching consequences. Apart from the mission in 1712, only two other embassies, in 1676-7 and 1764, caused some annoyance for the Dutch. These respectively concerned a long delay at Mannargudi, where court representatives demanded money before the envoys could proceed to the capital, and the absence of anyone welcoming them in both Tiruvarur and Tanjavur town, because all officials were attending a festival. Other than that, missions proceeded fast and smoothly under the Bhonsles.

A few minor diplomatic humiliations occurred in between embassies, mostly related to political disputes. In 1679, for instance, angered by an attack on its factory at Tirumullaivasal, the VOC did not honour Ekoji with a gift when his son Shahaji got married. Besides, the elephant it selected for that year's "recognition" presents to the king was "misshapen" (*wanschapen*) as it had only seventeen nails, considered a bad omen.¹⁰⁹ Ekoji was clearly offended by both actions. He refused the elephant and later complained to a VOC representative about the Company's disrespect for his son's wedding, saying that all chiefs ("Pelliagaars," Palaiyakkarars), and even the Nayaka of Madurai, his enemy, had sent ambassadors and gifts on that occasion. Perhaps as revenge, in 1683 the king declined a specially made painting depicting the Dutch Prince of Orange with a battle in the background. Excusing

¹⁰⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1819, ff. 38-43v; no. 1835, ff. 247, 285-92; no. 1849, ff. 316-22; no. 1863, ff. 303-5, 354; no. 1884, ff. 135-40; letters from Nagapattinam to Batavia, May 1712, Mar., Aug. 1713, Aug. 1714, Aug., Nov. 1715, final report of Coromandel Governor Daniel Bernard Guilliams, Feb. 1716.

¹⁰⁹ The treatise *Śukraniti* also warns against elephants with less than eighteen nails (IV:VII 33-4). See Shukracharya, *The Śukraniti*, 478.

himself, Ekoji—a general who spent much of his life waging wars—claimed he did not enjoy watching brutal military scenes.¹¹⁰

A final case of insult with commercial repercussions concerns a French encounter with the Bhonsles in 1688. As both the Dutch and the English reported, the French arrived in Tanjavur hoping to set up a trading lodge and therefore sent an ambassador with leopards, birds, and other gifts for Shahaji I, regent Ragoji Pandidar, and the latter's son. Despite this gesture and a six-months' sojourn of a Brahmin representative of the French at the capital, the mission yielded mixed results. The ambassador's urgent but highly unusual request that the king receive him standing was not complied with. Instead, he was dismissed with a "very petty honour robe" (*seer gering eerkleet*) and permission to settle was granted without the special privileges enjoyed by the Dutch.¹¹¹

The incidents discussed above demonstrate that in Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur, too, there were close ties between court protocol and political, economic, and military developments. Protocol could both reflect and affect such events. In several respects, ceremonial at this court was similar to that at other courts. But under the Bhonsles, gifts in particular appear to have been important, figuring in VOC documents over and over again as essential tools to open doors, show appreciation, facilitate business, win over courtiers, and soften tensions.

Another aspect of protocol that stands out is the close, even physical, contact the Bhonsle rulers allowed. Seemingly unhindered by notions about the king's body being divine and unapproachable—perhaps a legacy from the family's past at Muslim-ruled courts—Ekoji I, Shahaji I, Ekoji II, and Pratapasimha all personally handed over objects to VOC ambassadors, touched the envoys, or allowed Dutchmen to guide them by the hand. Furthermore, the court's fast handling of VOC missions is striking, often involving just one audience that was usually granted quickly and dealt with all stages of embassies—welcome, negotiation, dismissal—at once.

¹¹⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1329, ff. 1169v-71v; no. 1351, f. 2342; no. 1361, ff. 474-4v, 480v; no. 1384, f. 259v; no. 3108, ff. 88-9: reports of missions to Tanjavur, Dec. 1676, Feb. 1764, letters from Nagapattinam and Pulicat to Batavia, Oct. 1679, Sept. 1680, Oct. 1683, report of VOC envoy Viraraja Ayyan at Tanjavur, Aug. 1680; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 19-21; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 137-70. For other Asian rulers disliking Dutch paintings of war scenes, see: Jos Gommans, "The Embarrassment of Political Violence in Europe and South Asia c. 1100-1800," in Jan E.M. Houben and Karel R. van Kooij (eds), *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History* (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1999), 287-8, 310-11; Emmer and Gommans, *The Dutch Overseas Empire*, 115.

¹¹¹ For this and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1448, ff. 326-6v, 334-4v; no. 1454, f. 1017v; no. 1508, ff. 554-60; no. 2506, ff. 58-60: Tamil letter received at Nagapattinam, Feb. 1689, letter from Nagapattinam to Pulicat, Feb. 1689, correspondence between Baboji Pandidar and Nagapattinam, Aug. 1688, Dec. 1692, Jan. 1693, Nagapattinam proceedings, Aug. 1740; H. Dodwell (ed.), *Records of Fort St George. Letters to Fort St George for 1688* (Madras, 1915), 71.

Altogether, one gains a picture of a court that in many ways was rooted in traditional, local ideas on protocol, but in some cases adopted a more practical attitude than other courts—a difference possibly related to the Bhonsles' west Indian origins and their former service under several sultanates. This pragmatism did not mean that diplomatic humiliations did not occur. The denial of an audience during the VOC embassy of 1712 was an affront so flagrant that it never happened in the other kingdoms. By and large, however, especially compared to Dutch-Ikkeri relations, contacts between the Bhonsle court and the VOC were quite harmonious. Here, both parties used protocol chiefly to evade conflicts, rather than create them.

Nayakas of Madurai

While a fair number of both south Indian and European sources deal with protocol in Madurai, few concern royal audiences. Only some reports of Dutch missions to this court remain, and there are hardly any local accounts of such occasions that are easily accessible. The latter include the Telugu *Rāyavācakamu*, which, although it pertains to the Vijayanagara court, was probably composed at Madurai and may reflect customs prevailing under the Nayakas. This text describes the ruler holding court in the audience hall and summoning his courtiers and servants to his throne in groups. These include priests, military commanders, ministers, scholars, subordinate chiefs, musicians, and other officials. Only the priests are clearly stated to be allowed to sit because of their exalted status. Besides, they are honoured with gifts of land and seem the only people whom the monarch receives standing. The *Rāyavācakamu* mentions the military commanders in particular as having to stand, while one courtier, an inspector, prostrates himself before the ruler.¹¹²

These few “indirect” references are complemented by European accounts. Extensive descriptions of ceremonial in the audience hall are found in the report of a VOC embassy to Muttu Virappa Nayaka III in June–September 1689, dispatched to renew the Dutch–Madurai treaties. Envoy Nicolaes Welter reached the capital Tiruchirappalli on 6 July, accompanied by twelve palanquin-bearers, eight luggage-carriers, sixteen soldiers, one interpreter, one cook, two torch-bearers, one parasol-carrier, and nine people to collect food for and take care of the gift-animals. In abridged form, the report's sections dealing with the audiences run as follows:

Already one day after his arrival, Welter secured a meeting with the king. Escorted by a courtier, the ambassador marched from his lodging to the capital's fortress, passing six gates before reaching the palace. There, in a room with an open front, Muttu Virappa sat on a carpet placed on a platform half a metre high and covered with a dome supported by pillars, against one of

¹¹² Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 77–9.

which the ruler was leaning.¹¹³ Behind him and to his left sat some “greats of the court” (*hoffs-grooten*), whereas “assorted servants” (*verscheijde bediende*) stood on both sides. None of these men said anything unless the king told them to. The Nayaka spoke only Telugu (“Baddegas,” *vaḍuga* or northern), which some courtiers translated into Tamil (“Mallabaers”).¹¹⁴

Welter approached Muttu Virappa and greeted him respectfully, whereupon the Nayaka made the ambassador stand two steps away from him. Welter explained the reason for his visit and presented the VOC’s letters and gifts. The latter included a tusked elephant, a Persian horse, two Bengal civet-cats, a knife, a compass, a magnifying glass, two binoculars, four Japanese fans, six mirrors, fruits, textiles, spices, sandalwood, and rosewater. The king enquired after the wellbeing of Welter’s superiors in Tuticorin and Colombo and the Company as a whole. After his reply that all were in good health and a few more pleasantries, the envoy noticed that meanwhile a small silver rapier he carried on his side had been quietly unsheathed and handed over to Muttu Virappa, who had been ogling at it. Although quickly returned, it was soon taken again and not given back. Indeed, the king requested to have the sheath and accompanying belt as well, which Welter consented to. Muttu Virappa then announced this was only a welcoming audience and no business would be discussed, even though the envoy asked for this repeatedly. The Nayaka terminated the meeting by giving a coat and turban to Welter, urging him to wear these on the way to his lodging. As the king explained, this was a custom in his kingdom. Also presented with betel-leaves prepared by Muttu Virappa himself, Welter departed, dressed in what was no doubt a robe of honour and escorted by a large number of courtiers.

Two more audiences followed during Welter’s mission. On 18 July, the envoy met Muttu Virappa in a room deeper inside the palace, without any courtiers but with two interpreters. Welter now honoured the king with a small cabinet and some pocket pistols. Although private possessions of the envoy, these had attracted Muttu Virappa’s demanding attention. When Welter again attempted to discuss some pressing issues, the king declared that today was an inauspicious day for such matters. The Nayaka then expressed his desire to receive more “curiosities” befitting his regal status and ended the encounter by giving betel-leaves to the ambassador. Welter was granted a departure audience only five weeks later, on 22 August, after a three-hour wait at the palace. During the envoy’s farewell statement, Muttu Virappa turned away to talk to a courtier. After his speech, the envoy received a gold necklace with small stones and a painted cloth and was informed that all the VOC’s requests would be honoured. With the presentation of betel and areca to Welter and the exchange of some final courtesies, this last meeting was concluded.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ For literal translations of this and other passages in the report, see the section on Madurai in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁴ In Dutch records, the term “Mallabaers” (“Malabari”) often refers to Tamil or matters TAMILIAN, despite its obvious associations with Malabar (Kerala) and Malayalam.

¹¹⁵ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 16, 382-3, 385-6, 408-11, 450-4, 465-7, 504-5, 536-40, 549-50, 576.

This is probably the only Dutch description of audience ceremonial in Madurai's capital that proceeded more or less properly. It is striking, however, that at none of the three meetings with the king there was room for negotiation. The Nayaka was solely interested in prestigious exotic presents—or so suggested the unhappy Welter—and left all business to be conducted by his courtiers in between audiences.

The account of a Jesuit embassy to Tiruchirappalli around 1700 provides other details on Madurai's protocol, particularly the honours that might befall visitors. The envoy, Father Bouchet, did not meet the monarch, Queen Mangammal, but was received by the powerful *Daḷavāy* (general) Narasappa Ayyan, considered the queen's favourite and called "prince-regent" by the Jesuits. Bringing gifts that included a two-foot-high globe with Tamil script, Bouchet was welcomed with great reverence. As the account goes, Narasappa rose and greeted the Jesuit as someone would salute his master: joining hands and bringing them to the forehead. Responding like a master to his subordinate, Bouchet opened his hands and extended them to the *daḷavāy*. The latter invited the envoy to sit with him on a sofa too small for two people. This was thought to be deliberate, since Narasappa's subsequent effort to make Bouchet comfortable and the physical contact between them—the *daḷavāy* even placed his knees on those of the Jesuit—were marks of honour. Later, Narasappa put an eight-foot-long piece of gold brocade on Bouchet's head and sprinkled him with sweet smelling water, regarded as signs of respect befitting ambassadors.¹¹⁶

Besides audiences at the capital, the Dutch documented encounters with the Nayakas while they toured their kingdom, visiting temples and subordinate chiefs.¹¹⁷ At least eight reports of such meetings, near the VOC settlement at Tuticorin, survive, all dating from the early eighteenth century. These describe the protocol in the temporary camps where the Dutch were expected to greet the rulers. One account relates an audience with Queen Mangammal in 1705:

On 14 July, Mangammal appeared at the village of Melur, on Tuticorin's outskirts, with her minor grandson and future successor Vijayaranga Chokkanatha and a retinue of courtiers, 300 horsemen, 1,200 foot soldiers, drummers and horn-blowers, six elephants, twenty-six camels, and four wagons carrying luggage. That afternoon, the VOC sent Huijbert Driemondt, who spoke Tamil or perhaps Telugu, to the queen with presents. Hastily put together when Mangammal's

¹¹⁶ Lockman, *Travels of the Jesuits*, vol. I, 460-8 (reproduced in Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 308-12); Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 230-2.

¹¹⁷ For Jesuit descriptions of retinues of Tirumalai Nayaka (r. c. 1623-59) during temple visits or meetings with kings (which included his main queen, a betel-bearer, elephants, courtiers, singing girls, eunuch guards, royal arms and insignia, and military troops, see Saulière, "The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks" [pt. 1], 93, 95.

unexpected visit was announced, the gifts included Japanese lacquer ware, magnifying glasses, and two gilded mirrors apart from the usual items, together costing 1,061 guilders.¹¹⁸ While the queen was honoured with fifteen gunshots from the VOC's fort, Driemondt went to the royal camp in a palanquin, accompanied by one Dutch and eleven Asian soldiers, an interpreter, and thirty-one people to carry the gifts, wearing turbans for the occasion.

At Melur, the envoy found Mangammal seated on a raised platform covered with carpets and surrounded by her principal courtiers. After some courtesies, she ordered Driemondt to sit down on another raised, carpeted platform about three steps away. Presenting the gifts, the envoy expressed the hope that the mutual friendship would never cease to flourish. Following a brief discussion in Telugu ("Tellingas") between Mangammal and *Daḷavāy* Kasturi Ranga Ayyan, the latter said that all would be fine. Driemondt then stood up, bowed before the queen, and informed her that several decorated Dutch vessels were ready to sail near the shore to entertain her, as she had requested. Next, Mangammal honoured the envoy with cloths, a turban, and betel prepared and touched by her personally.¹¹⁹

After Mangammal had thus formally ended the audience, the meeting continued with several courtiers visiting the Dutch fort at Tuticorin. Here they were welcomed with two rows of soldiers, chairs in the VOC chief's room, enquiries after the queen's health, a tour of the building, a cannonade, gifts, betel, and the sprinkling of rosewater. Mangammal herself stayed behind, however, declaring it was inappropriate for women to visit the fort.¹²⁰

Other meetings near Tuticorin proceeded similarly. In July 1708, Vijayaranga Chokkanatha also honoured the Dutch with betel first touched by his own hands. While the Nayakas always donated robes and turbans on these occasions, the VOC often gave exotic objects in return. In June 1711, it presented Vijayaranga Chokkanatha with a self-playing organ, deemed the best gift in years by him. At

¹¹⁸ The purchasing power of 1,061 guilders in 1705 equalled that of 13,300 euros in 2018. See iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

¹¹⁹ The importance of handling betel properly transpires from a tradition about Mangammal's incorrect conduct in this regard and its consequences. As an early English translation of one Tamil text goes: "As she [Mangammal] was one day chewing beetle, happening forgetfully to receive the beetle with her left hand, she manifested great sorrow for the deed. And in order to secure herself from the evils attending it, she ordered avenues to be established from Cassi [Benares] to Cape Comorin and along the road to Ramisverom [Rameshvaram], and moreover built additional Chittrums [*cattirams*, pilgrim rest houses], bestowed alms daily in great liberality to numerous persons and proper places for the accommodations of travellers & every article of consumption were provided for them." See BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 33. See also: Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 35-7, 224; BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 6a: "History of the former Rajahs of the Tellugoo nation who ruled over Paundium Mundalom"; BL/MMC, AM, no. 18021, "History of Kurtakull."

¹²⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1706, ff. 1040-50v, 1054v-60: Tuticorin diary extract, July 1705, letter from Tuticorin to Colombo, July 1705.

all these audiences, the rulers sat on exquisite carpets on raised platforms under canopies and torches, surrounded by courtiers, some of them also seated. Behind the king stood young women—fanning him and providing betel—who in July 1717 were described as dressed “quite nicely [*aardig*] but very lightly [*ligtvaardig*].” The VOC envoys were usually treated with respect. In 1711, after the ambassador saluted the Nayaka with his hat off, he was allowed to put it on again and sit on a carpeted chair left of the king’s platform. This was a new privilege as envoys had hitherto been seated on a carpet with crossed legs.¹²¹

The report of an audience with Vijayaranga Chokkanatha in June 1720 is particularly relevant. It explains how courtiers were positioned around the king literally in descending order: first the *Pradhāni* (finance minister) Sambu Ayyan and some others to the king’s right and on the same carpet as him; next court merchant Sundardasu Ayyan on the carpeted stairs leading to the king’s platform; and last “land regent” (local governor) Kumara Svami Mudaliyar on a carpet on the floor. This account also reveals that courtiers could disagree on the required protocol, in this case on the time envoys were made to wait before meeting the king.¹²² As the VOC’s local clerk Muttu Virappa Pillai reported after a preparatory visit to the royal camp:

... some of the courtiers being together, [court merchant] Soenderdasoe Aijen would have said to the pardanie Samboe Aijen: “why do we let those people (denoting ... the [Dutch] chief) wait so long and not make them appear before His Highness?” And thereupon the pardanie would have asked: “when the envoys of the Theuver [Tevar, Setupati of Ramnad] and Tansjour [Tanjavur] come to the king, don’t they have to wait too?” And Soenderdasoe replied to that: “that is very different because these [the Dutch] are merchants,” upon which Samboeaijen responded to Soenderdasoe Aijen: “you are also a merchant, now go stay with that other merchant [the Dutch chief] until an audience will be granted” ...¹²³

Clearly, the different positions of *Pradhāni* Sambu Ayyan and court merchant Sundardasu Ayyan during the audience also manifested themselves in this discussion.

Turning to protocol on occasions other than royal audiences, various sources refer to gifts and marks of honour exchanged between Madurai’s Nayakas and other Indian rulers, with varying aims. Some chronicles say that the emperor

¹²¹ NA, VOC, no. 1756, ff. 1194-204v; no. 1893, ff. 1048-8v: Tuticorin diary extract, July 1708, extract of letter from Tuticorin to Colombo, July 1717; DNA, DCGCC, no. 3355 (unpaginated, entry of 2 June): diary of mission to Madurai representatives at Tuticorin, Jan.-June 1711.

¹²² NA, VOC, no. 1941, f. 935: Tuticorin diary extract, June 1720.

¹²³ NA, VOC, no. 1941, ff. 933v-4: Tuticorin diary extract, June 1720 (translation mine).

of Vijayanagara presented the first king, Vishvanatha, with jewellery, clothes, trophies of subjugated enemies, royal insignia, the image of the goddess Durga, and the Madurai kingdom itself to reward him for his loyalty and military feats. Recognising Vishvanatha's royal status, the Pandya king provided him with the realm's regalia.¹²⁴

Vishvanatha himself honoured his Minister Ariyanatha Mudaliyar with jewels, garments, and privileges, and distributed animals and money to Brahmins. To secure support of the subordinate Palaiyakkarars, he gave them palanquins, titles, and permission to use fly-whisks, fans, umbrellas, torches, shells, and musical instruments, among other gifts. In return, they threw golden and silver flowers at Vishvanatha and tore off pieces of clothing in his presence. When Tirumalai Nayaka married a sister of Tanjavur's Vijayaraghava Nayaka, he received his fellow king at Tallakulam (facing Madurai across the Vaigai River) and escorted him to his capital. After the festivities, Tirumalai honoured Vijayaraghava with presents and then, says the text, formally gave him permission to leave.

Some gifts to other rulers were related to the threat they posed. Reflecting the ever growing power of Madurai's offshoot Ramnad, in the course of the seventeenth century the Nayakas donated to the Setupatis garments, land, animals, titles, permission to celebrate festivals, a golden replica of a defeated enemy's head, and even Madurai's own royal palanquin, all to thank them for military services and—unsuccessfully—keep them loyal.¹²⁵ In the 1660s Chokkanatha Nayaka was forced to give horses, jewels, and cash to Mysore after its troops had advanced as far as Tiruchirappalli. Finally, around 1700 Queen Mangammal sent jewels and cash to the Mughals to acknowledge their supremacy and win their support in a conflict with Udaiyarpalayam.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 7-9, 13-15; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 98-100, 103; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 48-9, 52; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 21-iv, 24-4v.

¹²⁵ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 48, 57-9; no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 178, 182-3; MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 29, 31v; class III, no. 82: "Account of the Rajas who held the government of Madura," ff. 113-13v; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 7, 10, 35, 42, 44-6, 52-3, 62, 102-3, 110, 122, 128, 132-4, 151-2, 154, 161-2, 167, 173, 224; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 27-9, 33; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 92, 104-6. For the implications of Tirumalai Nayaka's gifts to Raghunatha Tirumalai Setupati in the 1650s, which included the Nayakas' golden lion-faced palanquin and Tirumalai's own name, see Chapter 6 and: Richard H. Davis, "Indian Art Objects as Loot," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, 1 (1993), 34-6; Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 30-1; Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 548.

¹²⁶ Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore*, vol. I, 230; Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, vol. III, 411; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 205-6. For examples concerning Travancore and

The gifts Madurai's Nayakas exchanged with Indian parties were largely similar to presents to and from European powers, both at royal audiences and on other occasions. One example in the latter category concerns a meeting of the VOC official Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede with delegates of Madurai and Ramnad at Tuticorin in 1665. Mediating in a conflict between the kingdoms, Van Rheede first spoke to Madurai's General Tirumalai Kulantha Pillai, who offered the Dutchman a robe of honour and golden and white cloths. Some weeks later, other representatives presented him with gifts from King Chokkanatha, including a Persian horse and golden arm and finger rings, crest-jewels, and necklaces. Declaring that the Nayaka sent such presents only to his best friends, the envoys urged Van Rheede to wear the robe and jewels right away and then publicly announced the Dutch-Madurai friendship.¹²⁷

The court apparently wished to treat the Dutch as close friends, but the gifts were no doubt also meant to oblige them to choose Madurai's side in the dispute. While in this case the VOC remained neutral—like in most clashes between Indian kingdoms—gifts were often employed to appease people and win them over. In 1658, after their conquest of Tuticorin from the Portuguese, the Dutch honoured Tirumalai Nayaka with two elephants and a horse, hoping these would help them secure their new possession and conclude a treaty. Around 1675, the Dutch considered offering gifts worth about 50,000 guilders, thinking this might grant them permission to build a fort at Tuticorin. Around 1688, as a token of friendship, Muttu Virappa Nayaka III sent the VOC a necklace with a monkey-shaped pearl and a jewel composed of many different gems, valued at 5,000 guilders. Pragmatic as ever, the Dutch later presented the jewellery to the king of Siam.

Although it is often unclear how much the VOC spent on presents for the court, lists of gift expenses during the Nayakas' visits to Tuticorin are still available. In the early eighteenth century these costs varied between 1,500 and 3,000 guilders, rising to over 4,300 guilders in later decades. On average, these numbers exceed those for Ikkeri and Tanjavur. The reasons for this are generally not stated in VOC documents, but in 1675 the Dutch wrote that the Nayaka of Madurai "has always been considered the greatest among his neighbours, as he also possesses a truly large and beautiful land." So Madurai's size and power, besides the considerable profits the Dutch made on its Fishery Coast, may have played a role in the Company's flattering of its rulers.¹²⁸

Arcot, see NA, VOC, no. 1756, ff. 1216-16v; no. 1803, f. 103v: report of mission to Madurai's general, Aug.-Sept. 1708, letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, July 1711.

¹²⁷ NA, VOC, no. 1251, ff. 741-3, 756: report of mission to Travancore, Madurai, and Ramnad, Mar.-Oct. 1665; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 255-6.

¹²⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1227, ff. 332-2v: Tuticorin proceedings, Jan. 1658; HRB, no. 542 (unpaginated, 1st document, c. halfway, after the section "Teuverslant"): description of Ceylon, Madurai, south Coromandel, Malabar, and Kanara by Rijcklof van Goens, Sept. 1675; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*,

Another way of conducting diplomacy in Madurai was to maintain close relations with the kingdom's second node of power: the seat of the provincial governor or "land regent" at Tirunelveli. Soon after the Dutch captured Tuticorin, a few dozen miles away, Governor Vadamalaiyappa Pillai presented them with marks of honour ("tasserijff"), in return for which they sent cloths and spices. In March 1670, however, the VOC dispatched envoys to him, then encamped near Tuticorin, to settle a conflict. On Vadamalaiyappa's demand, the delegation was headed by Ceylon's Governor Rijkclouf van Goens himself, an exceptional diplomatic gesture.¹²⁹ A summary of this mission's report, abounding with descriptions of protocol, runs thus:

Bringing cloths, spices, rosewater, sandalwood, and a gilded mirror, Van Goens was received by Vadamalaiyappa in his palanquin just outside his camp. With an entourage of elephants, oxen, horsemen, foot soldiers, horn-blowers, and drummers, he accompanied the Dutchmen to a purpose-built structure decorated with cloths and flowers, where they could rest and eat. Next, they moved to Vadamalaiyappa's nearby lodging, at the entrance of which the "land regent" again heartily welcomed Van Goens and escorted him to a platform of two feet high. There, both governors sat down, enquiring after one another's health, expressing their happiness to meet "after so many years of longing," and exchanging other courteous words (*courtoise woorden*).

Appearing to be in his fifties, sporting a grey beard and hair around a "stately face" (*stadigh van tronie*), wearing a white turban, and as a Brahmin commanding great respect, Vadamalaiyappa chose his words carefully and modestly. Thus, the conversation ended quickly. Van Goens invited Vadamalaiyappa to visit Tuticorin the following day, while the latter presented the Dutch with betel, areca, robes of honour, and ninety-nine pieces of textile—a customary number on such occasions, representing a "sacrifice." After Vadamalaiyappa had seen the Dutchmen off outside his residence and they were well on their way back, his son and some others came galloping after them, to accompany them to their destination. A bit later Van Goens urged them to return, thanking them for this honour.

The next morning Vadamalaiyappa and his retinue arrived at Tuticorin, awaited by Van Goens in his palanquin at a distance of two gunshots from the town. Saluted with a cannonade, the "land regent" was led into the VOC's meeting room and seated at the table's most prominent place. After the usual mutual compliments, the relations between Madurai and the Dutch were extensively discussed in a friendly manner. The encounter was concluded with more gifts to

vol. IV, 95, vol. V, 217, vol. VI, 169-70, 368-9, 445-6, 554, vol. VII, 369, 567, 727, vol. VIII (The Hague, 1985), 19, vol. IX, 272, 389; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 103-73; Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 550 (n. 17).

¹²⁹ I know of only one other high-ranking VOC official travelling to meet prominent south Indians: Ceylon Governor Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff, who met the kings of Cochin and Travancore in 1739. See Wagenaar *et al.*, *Gouverneur Van Imhoff op dienstreis*, 115-16, 133-4.

Vadamalaiyappa—including a gold necklace, three mirrors, and 250 guilders—and some of his companions. Following many more pleasantries, the “land regent” was guided out of the building by Van Goens and escorted a bit further by Tuticorin’s chief (*opperhoofd*) Laurens Pijl and other Dutch officials. But then Vadamalaiyappa went back and thanked Van Goens once more for the honours shown him. He was so full of praise and enthusiasm, that “the whole country seemed delighted and hoped for a better century.”¹³⁰

These two receptions suggest that Indo-Dutch diplomatic meetings mostly proceeded according to standard rules, regardless of whether they took place in a courtier’s residence or a VOC settlement. The only difference seems to have concerned the seating arrangements. Whereas Vadamalaiyappa and Van Goens sat together on a raised platform in the former’s camp, they sat at a table with their subordinates in Tuticorin. Other rituals, such as welcoming and departure ceremonies, gifts, and courtesies, were largely similar on both occasions. In any case, despite everyone’s good intentions and expectations of a bright future, later in 1670 Vadamalaiyappa was imprisoned by the court, and although he was soon reinstated, this started his career’s decline. But subsequent Tirunelveli governors remained important figures throughout the VOC’s presence in Madurai, as suggested by the regular and valuable gifts they received from the Dutch.¹³¹

Vadamalaiyappa also provides us with an instance of eloquence practised in Madurai. The VOC’s remaining correspondence with the court contains few examples of the pleasantries that were doubtlessly exchanged. But the great importance of this element of protocol is underscored by the very first clause in the Dutch-Madurai agreement of 1690, stipulating that in their letters Dutch and Nayaka officials were to address one another courteously. The taste for eloquent language is clearly demonstrated by the wit courtiers sometimes used to convey messages, whether positive or negative.

Thus, during the Dutch embassy to Madurai in 1668 (discussed below), Vadamalaiyappa showed his disapproval of the VOC’s wish for quick profit by telling ambassador Hendrik Adriaan van Rhee: “Wise men do not plant a tree in order to immediately eat its fruits, but only after the passing of time when it has reached full maturity, having been watered and allowed to grow.” Accordingly, Vadamalaiyappa suggested, the VOC should cultivate its friendship with Madurai

¹³⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1227, ff. 333-3v; no. 1231, f. 163; no. 1274, ff. 187-203v, 304; Tuticorin proceedings, Jan. 1658, letters from Admiral Van Goens to Pulicat, from Colombo to Gentlemen XVII, Sept. 1658, Jan. 1671, report of mission to land regent Vadamalaiyappa Pillai, Mar. 1670; Vink, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 294-7.

¹³¹ DNA, DCGCC, no. 38, f. 198; Colombo proceedings, July 1703; NA, VOC, no. 1762, f. 872; no. 8958, ff. 700-1: report of Kandyan mission to Madurai, Apr.-June 1708, letter from Tuticorin to Colombo, Oct. 1732.

and exercise patience before the relationship would bear fruit.¹³² Undeterred and returning the eloquence, Van Rheede replied that the Dutch had already planted a tree in Madurai long ago, which the VOC's opponents had cut down, however, nearly killing its gardeners in the process. But the Company was now growing a new tree—protected with arms (a reference to the territory conquered by the Dutch from the Portuguese)—whose fruits would eventually be consumed throughout the kingdom.¹³³

Like eloquence, other aspects of protocol could be used—or rather, breached—to express dissatisfaction, often causing great offence, sometimes with serious consequences. One example of humiliations meted out between Madurai and other courts concerns the visit of a Mughal ambassador to Tiruchirappalli in the late 1680s. The VOC reported that after an initial meeting with Muttu Virappa Nayaka III, the envoy waited eight months without securing another audience. Described in more detail in Chapter 5, local texts refer to Muttu Virappa's insulting of Mughal representatives, too, relating that he refused to receive a slipper sent by the Mughal with the proper respect and thus acknowledge the emperor's supremacy. Instead, in a very degrading act, the Nayaka put on the slipper himself and had the Mughal delegation beaten up and thrown out of the kingdom.¹³⁴

A diplomatic clash between Madurai and the Kandy kingdom on Ceylon also figures in both local and VOC sources. The Dutch wrote in 1710 that the Kandyan king sent ambassadors with six elephants and eleven chests with other presents to Madurai to propose a marriage with a daughter of Chengamaladasa, the last scion of Tanjavur's Nayakas, now living in Tiruchirappalli. Kandy's envoys had already arrived in Madurai during the reign of Queen Mangammal, who agreed to the proposal on the condition she be presented with elephants and jewels. But when she was succeeded by Vijayaranga Chokkanatha in 1707, courtiers had allegedly stolen the gifts and the new king now claimed Chengamaladasa's daughter. The Kandyan ambassadors were eventually forced to flee to the VOC settlement at Nagapattinam without the requested bride, taking along another woman instead.¹³⁵

In some contrast, a chronicle on Kandy states that its envoys asked for a relative of Vijayaranga Chokkanatha himself to marry their lord. Highly affronted because

¹³² The use of gardening as a metaphor for politics appears to have been common in India. See Sarangi, *A Treasure of Tāntric Ideas*, 300, 303.

¹³³ Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 3, 528; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 5, 41–2, 192–3, 248.

¹³⁴ Around 1693 a Madurai envoy at Senji was reportedly beaten with “Muslim” and “Hindu” sandals. See Martin, *India in the 17th Century*, vol. 2, pt. II, 1484.

¹³⁵ Perhaps this event led to the rumour that Queen Mangammal had fled to Nagapattinam in 1707. See the section on Madurai in Chapter 2.

he regarded the Kandyan king's caste as lower than his own, the Madurai Nayaka refused the gifts and removed the ambassadors from his palace.¹³⁶ This text was probably composed in south India rather than in Kandy itself, which may explain why it portrays Vijayaranga Chokkanatha's conduct more positively than the Dutch records do.¹³⁷ But both versions show how missions between courts could end in untimely and disgraceful departures by envoys.

Such was also the fate of VOC ambassador Hendrik Adriaan van Rheede, visiting Madurai in February-July 1668 to seek permission to erect fortifications at Tuticorin. Parts of his diary are summarised below:

Van Rheede reached Tiruchirappalli's outskirts on 6 March, with gifts worth over 13,000 guilders and a retinue of some Dutch assistants, two elephant drivers, and fifty-two local soldiers. The next day, he sent a messenger to *Pradhāni* Vadamalaiyappa Pillai. Receiving a reply that today and tomorrow were inauspicious days, only in the afternoon of the 9th Van Rheede was welcomed and escorted to his temporary lodging by what he called "one of the Pillai's humblest of servants riding a cripple horse."

After this reception, the next six weeks were spent waiting for an audience with Chokkanatha Nayaka and conducting tedious negotiations with Vadamalaiyappa about the VOC's desired privileges. Not only did these encounters yield no results, Van Rheede also had to wait before meetings began, was not welcomed at Vadamalaiyappa's residence, and had to sit on an old, worn-out carpet. Further, the *pradhāni* refused to speak to the envoy's messengers, some of his soldiers were beaten up, his lodging was attacked, and the VOC flag was thrown in the mud. Van Rheede regarded these as deliberate efforts by Vadamalaiyappa to humiliate the Dutch. On 10 April, he noted about the latter incidents:

... everyone speaking of the event found this treatment highly curious and not customary among ambassadors of foreign rulers. These are normally greatly honoured, unless the decision had been made to wage war against them, but they are usually expelled from the

¹³⁶ Indeed, a letter of 1817 by a certain Marriott at Vellore to one Macleod, both British officials, states that no marital connections had been established between Madurai and Kandy for over a century. The current head of Madurai's expelled Nayaka line (probably Bangaru Tirumalai, see the Epilogue's section on Madurai) would however be happy to provide Kandy's royal family with a wife, provided the British return the Madurai kingdom to him. But, as Marriott concluded, "this being impracticable, the business went no further." See BL/AAS, MM, no. 109, pt. 58: "Singala-Dweepum & Candy," f. 4.

¹³⁷ NA, VOC, no. 8925, ff. 144-50: reports by envoys from Kandy, Feb. 1710; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, 623, 696; Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 479-81 (n. 264); BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 68-9; Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 205-8, Appendix, 45-7. For a slightly different version of the Dutch account, see Stein van Gollenesse, *Memoir of Julius Stein van Gollenesse*, 6-7, and also 14, 44. See also: Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, 33-8; Obeyesekere, "Between the Portuguese and the Nāyakas," 168.

country unceremoniously, though not abused. Thus, the common man rumoured that the Neijk [Nayaka] sought only discord. I do not doubt that the Pulle [Vadamalaiyappa Pillai], by inciting the Company's spiteful enemies, directed this work ...¹³⁸

Van Rheeде also wrote it would be best to just depart if he wished to avoid further affronts, feeling he had every right to do so. But he feared this would be taken as an insult too and could even lead to war. He therefore stayed on and kept waiting for a royal audience. In the next days, even some of Madurai's courtiers began to question the treatment meted out to Van Rheeде. When one of his assistants visited Vadamalaiyappa, he witnessed the following scene:

... a servant there of the lord Neijk's brother Aatsijindapa [Achyutappa] ... asked the Pulle whether it was not a shame to keep the people and ambassadors of foreign rulers for so long. The Pulle replied that these people had come uninvited, which is why they found so little time, and if they had announced their coming they would have been informed of the obstacles and told to wait for a better opportunity ... [the servant] retorted: we have always been informed and have known of their coming. If that had been inconvenient to the lord Neijk, one should have stopped them on the way and make them turn around rather than letting them run around. It could serve as a deterrent to them and other rulers to send ambassadors and honour [*vereeren*] the lord Neijk. The Pulle went that far to seek a reason for sweetening the humiliation [*versmadingh*] with some justice.¹³⁹

Other courtiers who frowned upon the humiliations included the king's brother-in-law Tubaki Anandappa Nayaka and councillor and former General Chinna Tambi Mudaliyar. At one point, even the king asked Vadamalaiyappa why matters took so long. Thus, the envoy finally secured an audience with Chokkanatha on 21 April, a month-and-a-half after his arrival.

According to Van Rheeде, his arrival for the audience lacked any dignity, Vadamalaiyappa turning his back to him and the palace's entrance being crowded with "rude" people. After some waiting, the envoy was brought before the king and made to sit on a carpet on the floor. He offered Chokkanatha the VOC's letter and gifts, comprising two elephants, two Persian horses, a bird of paradise, a diamond ring, forty-two assorted glasses, a large mirror, a featherbed, and some pistols, guns, and knives, besides the usual spices, cloths, rosewater, and sandalwood. The Nayaka, sitting on a cushion, was especially pleased with the glasses, using them to play with two young children sitting beside him. Seated behind the king were Chinna Tambi Mudaliyar and Vadamalaiyappa, the latter starting the meeting by enquiring after the well-being of Van Rheeде's superiors and the Company. But the hall was so noisy and congested that the envoy could not reply or even see the Nayaka. Fearing to be crushed, he had to request for some space before he could properly address Chokkanatha. Although this was quickly arranged,

¹³⁸ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 181-2, 239 (translation by Vink).

¹³⁹ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 187-8, 244 (translation by Vink and myself).

the conversation lasted very briefly and ended with the king saying all negotiations would be taken care of by Vadamalaiyappa. While the commotion in the hall grew again, the Nayaka presented Van Rhee with a golden chain, two bracelets with red stones that “looked nice and cost little,” a robe of honour, and betel and areca. Chokkanatha then spotted a diamond ring worn by the ambassador, asked to see it, put it on his finger, and never returned it. The king then accompanied the Dutchmen outside to inspect the VOC’s donated elephants and returned inside without a further word.

The consultations with Vadamalaiyappa after this audience were delayed twice and yielded no results anyway. Van Rhee was also informed there would be no further audiences with Chokkanatha because the envoy was considered to have taken his leave when he presented his gifts. Despite repeated requests to be formally dismissed and not be forced to depart “humiliated and despised” (*met versmadingh en veraghtingh*), Van Rhee was received by neither the king nor Vadamalaiyappa again. When several courtiers sympathetic towards the VOC declared there was nothing they could do, on 5 May the ambassador returned to Tuticorin.

There is no way to tell if the offended Van Rhee exaggerated his experiences in his account, but within a year, the very thing he had tried to prevent still happened: a big military clash between Madurai and the Dutch. This was another example of political tensions manifesting themselves in diplomatic insults that subsequently contributed to a war. For the dishonourable reception of Van Rhee seemed largely orchestrated by Vadamalaiyappa, who resented the VOC’s increasing power in Madurai’s coastal strip, which functioned as his own power base.¹⁴⁰

In turn, the humiliation of the Dutch envoy, together with the rejection of his requests, caused great indignation among his superiors. Much against the court’s wishes, the Company now built fence around the Tuticorin factory. This led to a nine-month siege by Madurai’s forces, ended by several Dutch sorties—one headed by Van Rhee himself—that left hundreds of the Nayaka’s soldiers dead. Eventually, peace was reached under conditions not entirely favourable to the Dutch, but one reason for them to accept this was that they felt their status was restored through this victory.¹⁴¹

The subsequent decades saw other diplomatic frictions between the court and the VOC, although these usually lead to irritation rather than serious discord. When Vijayaranga Chokkanatha Nayaka passed by Tuticorin in 1720, he informed the Dutch he would receive their local chief for an audience only if he would bring

¹⁴⁰ See also Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 46.

¹⁴¹ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 16–17, 144–8, 152–4, 167–8, 173, 179–82, 188–97, 214–17, 219–20, 228–9, 233, 237–9, 244–53; idem, “Encounters on the Opposite Coast,” 258–70. While the VOC claimed it had killed over a thousand of the Nayaka’s troops, the English wrote 200 men were lost by Madurai and 100 by the Dutch. See Foster, *The English Factories in India 1668–1669*, 283.

twice as many gifts as during the previous meeting. Since the Nayaka's visit was unexpected, the VOC had difficulty gathering decent presents, but still spent 2,400 guilders for the king and 1,400 guilders for his courtiers. Nevertheless, the Dutch chief had to wait more than one hour for the audience and was then seated on a bare plank, while it was complained the gifts did not include Melaka sandalwood. Although the encounter ended with the usual courtesies—such as robes of honour and enquiries after each other's health—the next year the Nayaka again asked to be honoured with proper presents this time. He even dispatched a prominent courtier to convey this message and discuss the tents and canopy to be erected for him. Vijayaranga Chokkanatha's visit was however cancelled when his only son suddenly died. When the king returned to Tuticorin in the following years, there were no more serious complaints about the VOC's gifts.¹⁴²

All in all, protocol in Madurai had much in common with that in the other kingdoms, but also differed in some ways. The variety of the discussed audience locations underscores the importance of seating arrangements here, whether at the central court, in royal encampments near Tuticorin, or at the residence of the Tirunelveli governor. As for gifts, one striking aspect involves the regular occasions on which VOC ambassadors were urged to actually put on the received robes of honour, turbans, and jewellery.¹⁴³ It seems Madurai sought to give these events a public character, as the envoys had to return to their lodging or attend official announcements while wearing these clothes and ornaments. Perhaps, the court was keen on the *khil'at* ritual to show its superiority over the Dutch. Also noteworthy are the repeated references to donated betel first touched by the Nayakas themselves. Muttu Virappa III, Mangammal, and Vijayaranga Chokkanatha all honoured VOC ambassadors this way. That physical contact expressed deference is further suggested by the kind of seating *Daḷavāy* Narasappa Ayyan offered to the Jesuit Bouchet, making them sit very closely together.

Some aspects of protocol in Madurai really stand out. Unlike at other courts, these Nayakas were hardly or not at all involved in negotiations with VOC envoys. All kings—and one queen—just engaged in courteous conversations or else asked for gifts. Again, this dynasty may have seen itself as too illustrious to confer on political and commercial issues with Dutch merchants, although in that case it would

¹⁴² For these and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1762, f. 872; no. 1941, ff. 919-21, 925-9, 933-7v, 943-5; no. 2185, ff. 998v, 1017-17v; no. 8935, ff. 716-17: report of mission to Madurai by local agents, Apr.-June 1708, letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, June 1720, June 1721, June 1731, Tuticorin diary extract, June 1720, May 1731, list of gifts presented during Nayaka's visit, June 1720, correspondence with Madurai representatives, May 1721; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VII, 727, vol. VIII, 19.

¹⁴³ See, besides the examples given before, NA, VOC, no. 1941, ff. 937-7v: Tuticorin diary extract, June 1720.

seem strange that someone as eminent as Vijayanagara's Emperor Ramadeva did not mind talking about prosaic matters with VOC envoys. At any rate, in Madurai such issues were left to courtiers and nobody here performed this task with more determination than *Pradhāni* and "land regent" Vadamalaiyappa Pillai. But although he conducted the actual negotiations, contacts with him were also governed by elaborate, court-like protocol. This underlines the status of this courtier—and of the governor's seat at Tirunelveli in general—as Madurai's second political node.

The VOC's experiences with Vadamalaiyappa further show that insult was employed to express annoyance but could easily be replaced with courteousness if this better served one's purposes. Although Vadamalaiyappa sabotaged the embassy to Tiruchirappalli in 1668, declining the Company's demands and breaching the protocol, two years later—after the clash following that mission—he received Dutch envoys at his residence with all due honours, accommodating nearly all their wishes. Either the VOC's success in the war or Vadamalaiyappa's now precarious position at court made him change his behaviour with respect to both the protocol and the more prosaic issues to be discussed.

Thus, while political tensions could lead to diplomatic insults, the resultant indignation was not allowed to escalate if that proved counterproductive. Each party had to find a balance between pride and pragmatism. In this light, it is not surprising the VOC reported at least twice on disagreements between Madurai's courtiers about how to treat Dutch envoys. The question of whether protocol should be used to create harmony or discord must have been regularly debated. As Dutch-Madurai relations were relatively cordial, save for some serious but isolated clashes, both sides apparently chose to largely avoid humiliating one another.

Setupatis of Ramnad

This was not the case in Ramnad. This kingdom's contacts with the Dutch were often turbulent, both politically and diplomatically. As a consequence, VOC records deal extensively with protocol, especially the reports of the many embassies exchanged between the Setupati court and the Dutch. Because of the frequent disputes, the present section pays much attention to insult. In fact, we can consider ourselves lucky with this tumultuous relationship and the resultant mass of information, as few local sources refer to protocol.

The latter materials say little about meetings in the audience hall, for instance. One rare example is a Tamil text concerning the Setupatis' caste, the Maravars, which survived in various forms and under different names.¹⁴⁴ One version, titled

¹⁴⁴ Besides the editions mentioned below, what seems to be another version is found in Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 74-5 (here called *Maravar cati vilakkam*).

Maravar jāti kaifiyat, details how Ramnad's king was supposed to be greeted by different chiefs, most of them belonging to the seventy-two Palaiyakkarars in Madurai or the eighteen Palaiyakkarars in Tanjavur. The latter, as well as the rulers of Shivagangai and Pudukkottai, acknowledged the Setupati's superior status by standing before him and joining their palms at chest height. Other chiefs—those bearing the *nāyaka* title and considered to be of lower castes—prostrated themselves and then stood with folded arms, not permitted to sit. Still other chiefs, including several Maravars, did not pay homage to the king at all. In these cases, the Setupati himself showed respect by rising up and offering seats.¹⁴⁵ Whether the *Maravar jāti kaifiyat* describes actual ceremonies or rather served to bolster the Setupatis' claim to an exalted status, the text demonstrates the importance rulers attached to honour and the protocol embodying this.

Other portrayals of audiences in Ramnad are found among the murals in the audience hall itself, the Ramalinga Vilasam. These paintings, near the hall's south-east corner, date from Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati's reign (1710-25) and depict him as he holds court, consulting with courtiers and receiving visitors.¹⁴⁶ It is not clear who are displayed besides the Setupati himself. One image shows him seated on a carpeted platform together with an eminent figure, perhaps also a king, surrounded by standing functionaries. Immediately below, the Setupati sits on a carpet with a prominent courtier and, probably, an infant prince, officials standing on both sides (see illustration 13). Another mural here shows the king with a queen and a young prince as he speaks with European visitors, everyone being seated (see illustration 18 in Chapter 5).

An adjacent set of murals depicts war scenes. In one of these, the Setupati sits on a platform while men with swords stand around him, probably an image of the king consulting with military commanders. A painting elsewhere in the palace also shows the seated Setupati welcoming Europeans, who are now standing, as are two courtiers behind the king (see illustration 19 in Chapter 5).¹⁴⁷ Together these murals show that at audiences in Ramnad, too, people's positions indicated their status. In

¹⁴⁵ Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 238; Taylor, "Marava-Jathi-Vernanam," 357.

¹⁴⁶ For an extensive discussion of some of the murals in the Setupati palace, see the section on Ramnad in Chapter 5.

¹⁴⁷ Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 78 (fig. 37), 94, 96, 122 (fig. 63), plates 5, 12 (between 112-13); R. Nagaswamy, "Mughal Cultural Influence in the Setupati Murals of the Ramalinga Vilasam at Ramnad," in Robert Skelton *et al.* (eds), *Facets of Indian Art: A Symposium Held at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (New Delhi, 1987), 208, 210 (figs 12-13); Anila Verghese, "King and Courtly Life as Depicted in the Murals in Ramalinga Vilasam, Ramanathapuram," in *idem* and Anna Libera Dallapiccola (eds), *Art, Icon and Architecture in South Asia: Essays in Honour of Devangana Desai*, 2 vols (New Delhi, 2015), 476, 478-9 (fig. 34.2); and personal observation (Apr. 2012). For online images of most of the palace's murals, see: southindianpaintings.art/monuments/ramanathapuram.



Illustration 13: Mural depicting Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati of Ramnad holding court, Ramalinga Vilasam (main hall, south wall), Ramanathapuram, c. 1720 (photo by C. Ganesan, courtesy John and Fausta Eskenazi, source: southindianpaintings.art/monuments/ramanathapuram).

all paintings the king is sitting, whereas almost everyone else is standing. The few seated people were apparently bestowed a rare honour.

Reports of VOC embassies to Ramnad underscore and complement what is suggested by local sources. One example concerns the mission of Joan Richard François (van der Hooge) and Johan Hendrik Medeler in June–July 1759, dispatched to make the Setupati Sella Tevar confirm a recent treaty. In the previous few years, the Dutch–Ramnad relationship had seriously deteriorated. Accusing the court of violating agreements, the VOC had confiscated boats from Ramnad, whereupon the court had done the same with Dutch ships and overland mail. In a rapid escalation, the Dutch next refused to issue sea passes to Ramnad’s vessels, the court then stationed extra soldiers near Kilakkarai’s VOC factory, and the Company subsequently also sent reinforcements. This stand-off ended when in June 1658 Ramnad’s troops attacked the Dutch lodge, took all merchandise, and imprisoned the VOC employees with their families in the capital.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ NA, VOC, no. 2923, ff. 215–30v; no. 2925, ff. 841–919; no. 2957, ff. 1588–91: letter from Colombo to Batavia, Jan. 1759, correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, Jan.–Dec. 1758, Feb.–May 1759;

Although they were later released and a new treaty was drawn up, relations were still very sour when envoys François and Medeler reached Ramanathapuram on 26 June of the following year. To show their indignation, the Dutch did not send official gifts with this embassy, a rare and unmistakable way to make a diplomatic point. In contrast, probably to atone for its treatment of Kilakkarai's VOC staff and properties, the Ramnad court tried to host the Dutch ambassadors in the most honourable manner possible, as a summary of the embassy's diary indicates:

Already four days after their arrival, François and Medeler secured their first audience. The day before, a courtier had visited them in their lodging to ask how they wished to be received at the palace. The envoys replied that, first, they were to be escorted from their residence by two distinguished courtiers, soldiers, flying flags, and music. Next, all guards at the fort's gate and a double row of soldiers at the central square had to present arms. Finally, two other courtiers should accompany them to the audience hall, where a carpet was to be spread out for them.

The following afternoon everything largely proceeded like François and Medeler had demanded. Two courtiers—one on horseback, one in a palanquin—arrived at their lodging, bringing more than a hundred fully armed soldiers and musicians. The subsequent parade was headed by these courtiers, followed by Ramnad's troops, the VOC's Asian soldiers and the musicians, two silken flags of the Dutch prince, the envoys in their palanquins with the Company's European soldiers, and some minor gifts for the Setupati. These presents were deliberately placed at the procession's end to indicate they were personally brought by the envoys rather than formally sent by the VOC.

When François and Medeler reached the fort's gate, the guards presented arms, while the central square was filled with not one but two double rows of soldiers, the first holding banners, the other matchlock rifles worked with silver. Alighting from their palanquins, the envoys were awaited by a double line of men carrying long spears with black plumes, meant to proclaim the Setupati's status whenever he moved around. At the palace gate stood more soldiers, holding guns. In the main courtyard, François and Medeler were welcomed by two courtiers embracing them "in the land's manner."¹⁴⁹ Here, the envoys finally appeared before King Sella Tevar, who sat leaning against a cushion on a slightly raised, carpeted platform, inside a pavilion ("mandoe") consisting of two canopies, one worked with silver and gold, the other made of red silk, and both resting on four silver pillars of about eight feet high.¹⁵⁰

Schreuder, *Memoir of Jan Schreuder*, 42-5; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. XIII (The Hague, 2007), 73, 179, 298, 435-6.

¹⁴⁹ For a modern description of the route François and Medeler probably followed, see Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 132 (fig. 65), 134 (fig. 67), 144-6, 157 (fig. 85), 160-1.

¹⁵⁰ For literal translations of part of this passage and another short excerpt of the mission's diary, see the section on Ramnad in Chapter 5.

Next to the Setupati, on his right-hand side, sat a relative of his, named Ramasvami Tevar. Seated on carpets on the floor were, on the right, *Pradhāni* (financial minister) Damodaram Pillai with a few other courtiers, and, on the left, some “distinguished youngsters” adopted by the king to be raised at court. Other officials stood on the right, partly under the canopies sheltering the king and partly among all sorts of other people, free to gather there. François and Medeler first went under the canopies and greeted Sella “in the country’s way,” by bowing a little and touching their hat with their right hand. They were then made to sit on a carpet on the left, a few steps before the canopies, but had their own carpet and two pillows placed over it. Thus seated, they enquired after the health of the king, who in turn asked about the well-being of the envoys’ superiors in Colombo and Tuticorin and expressed his happiness about their visit.

François and Medeler now wanted to get to business and began explaining the VOC’s view on toll duties. They were soon interrupted by a courtier, saying it was not customary to negotiate during a first meeting and they had better show their presents to the Setupati. Replying they had primarily come to talk about pressing issues, they nevertheless presented a small gift worth 200 guilders. Although they emphasised this was not a present of the VOC but just a private gift, to follow local conventions, it was clearly deemed wholly insufficient. Yet, while François and Medeler once more attempted in vain to discuss tolls, they were honoured with cloths and headdresses (“tooke,” “toepettij”) worked with gold and probably a parasol (“talpa”),¹⁵¹ which effectively ended the audience. The ambassadors were then brought to the palace gate by four courtiers and again embraced by them. With an escort and soldiers—an estimated 500 to 600 men—lining the route in the same way as before the meeting, the envoys returned by palanquin to their lodging.

The next evening, the Setupati invited François and Medeler for a display of fireworks, part of the wedding celebration of a prominent courtier’s relative. Guided by a courtier, flags, and music, they arrived at a square near the town gate where thousands of people had congregated. Sella Tevar was sitting in the same double-canopied pavilion, set up under a tree. After some courtesies, the envoys were asked to sit on a carpet on the king’s right. As during the welcome audience, the Setupati was surrounded by several courtiers, now differently positioned. On his lap, Sella held a “rather light-skinned and finely chiselled [*welbesneden*] naked—but decked with many gold jewels—little boy of the Waduga [*vaḍuga*, northern, Telugu]¹⁵² caste, adopted to be educated ... whom he kissed very often.” Seated to the king’s right was his relative Ramasvami again, and to his left, a bit backwards, sat an “important Pathan [Pattani]” (perhaps a warrior of Afghan origin), who carried a shield and a sword. Sitting before the Setupati, still under the canopies, was a similarly armed man (referred to as “Rascha”), while closer to the king, also on his left, sat *Pradhāni* Damodaram Pillai.

¹⁵¹ See: Baldaeus, *Naaauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel*, 2nd pt., 102; Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 892.

¹⁵² See Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 33.

During the subsequent amicable conversation between Sella, François, Medeler, and François' son, who spoke Tamil, a courtier presented the Dutchmen with betel and areca on silver plates. Seeing this, the Setupati immediately offered them his own betel and areca of the finest quality. The evening proceeded with two hours of fireworks, which, despite an array of rockets (*vuurpijlen*), jumping jacks (*voetsoekers*), fire wheels (*vuurraden*), and burning paper animals, failed to impress the ambassadors. Thereupon, the bridegroom and the courtier related to him honoured the king by placing before his feet two copper bowls with betel and golden sachets (rumoured to contain 3,000 *pagodas*) and prostrating themselves, just outside the pavilion. After an exchange of pleasantries, a prominent official escorted the envoys back to their lodging.

The following days were spent sending presents to and negotiating with various courtiers, receiving food gifts from the Setupati, and attending more wedding festivities. Despite some delays and minor disagreements, François and Medeler were already granted a departure audience about a week later, in the evening of 9 July. The welcoming ceremonial was largely the same as at the first audience, but this time Sella was accompanied by fewer courtiers. Once more, Ramasvami was seated right of him, next to his cushion, while *Pradhāni* Damodaram sat in front, still under the double canopy. Sitting on the left again were a Pathan, situated slightly behind the king, another armed man, placed more to the front, and some young Brahmins, singing and playing an elongated instrument with copper strings, perhaps a *viṇā*. The carpet on which the envoys sat was now positioned closer to the canopies.

After the usual courtesies, the changed clauses of the new treaty were read out by the VOC's interpreter in Tamil and Dutch, whereupon François and Medeler rose and presented two copies of the treaty, with the Company's seal, on a silver plate to the Setupati. Sella personally took them and signed them with a silver pen, rifles and guns being fired. Next, the *pradhāni* handed over the royal signet ring to another courtier, who stamped both papers with it. One copy was returned to the envoys, again on a silver plate, while the other was passed among the courtiers.

After both parties had congratulated one another, Sella asked if the VOC soldiers could fire some volleys, which request was executed with the court closely following the corporal's commands. François and Medeler now declared that the ratified agreement obliged all to observe the mutual friendship in perpetuity, which the king and courtiers fully agreed with. Then, headdresses, parasols, and gold necklaces were brought and, after the Setupati touched the objects, given to and put on the VOC ambassadors by the *pradhāni* and another official. Thus, after two hours and yet more courtesies—even the king bowed his head—the audience was concluded. With the same grand escort as before, but now preceded by a large tusked elephant, the envoys returned to their residence, to travel back to Kilakkarai the same night.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ NA, VOC, no. 2956, ff. 1222, 1226v-7v, 1232v-65v: diary of mission to Ramnad, June-July 1759.

This mission doubtlessly witnessed the most splendid reception Ramnad ever honoured the Dutch with, as the latter themselves acknowledged.¹⁵⁴ Since it appears to have met all requirements of refined south Indian diplomacy, it may give an impression of how embassies between friendly courts proceeded. The guards of honour, the quick succession of audiences, the positioning in the audience hall, the king's personal attention, the many counter gifts—all this indicated the court wished to show full respect. This mission further demonstrates that the Dutch, too, knew how envoys should be paid homage in south India. Asked how they wanted to be welcomed, the envoys straightaway explained in detail what they expected. True enough, all demands were granted without objection.

At the same time, this embassy had much in common with other Dutch missions to Ramnad. The seating arrangements at audiences were rather similar to those during missions in 1731 and 1743. On the former occasion, the ambassador was seated on a carpet two steps away from the Setupati, Kattaya Tevar, together with the influential “regent of the lowlands” Labbai Nayinar Maraikkayar. During the latter embassy, Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati sat on a carpet, surrounded by bodyguards (*lijfftrawanten*) of the “royal caste” (*ragias kaste*). Below him, on both sides, were sitting “prominent princes and court notables,” while his relative Kadamba Tevar and *Daḷavāy* (general) Vairavanatha Servaikkarakar sat still a bit lower. The strong visible presence of armed men at audiences in 1743 and 1759 is striking, particularly during the latter mission, when they were seated close to the king. For none of the other kingdoms are there references to warriors in such prominent positions.¹⁵⁵

All Dutch embassies to Ramnad comprised two or, less often, three audiences. Only in the latter cases was there room for negotiations, generally during the second meeting, because the other encounters served as welcome and departure audiences. If business was discussed, mature, ambitious rulers like Kattaya and Kilavan Tevar often actively took part in the consultations. During embassies to weak, old, or infant kings, negotiations usually took place in between audiences and involved only courtiers.¹⁵⁶

The lack of official VOC gifts during the mission of 1759 was extraordinary. On all other trips, Dutch presents were considerable. Besides the standard spices, cloths, sandalwood, and rosewater, VOC envoys honoured the Setupatis and their

¹⁵⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2953, ff. 227-31: letter from Colombo to Batavia, Jan. 1760.

¹⁵⁵ For these and other examples, see NA, VOC, no. 1771, f. 1533; no. 2185, f. 1170v; no. 2599, ff. 2135v-6: diaries of missions to Ramnad, May-July 1709, Jan.-Feb. 1731, June-July 1743.

¹⁵⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1383, ff. 552-66v; no. 1615C, ff. 641-54v; no. 1771, ff. 1448-596; no. 2015, ff. 544-702; no. 2185, ff. 1167-87v; no. 2374, ff. 2041-76v; no. 2599, ff. 2107-62v; no. 2956, ff. 1222-69: diaries of missions to Ramnad, May-June 1683, Dec. 1698-Feb. 1699, May-July 1709, Feb.-May 1724, Jan.-Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, June-July 1743, June-Aug. 1759.

courtiers with elephants, horses, special guns and pistols (often double- and triple-barrelled ones), and mirrors. Quite exceptionally, gifts to this court regularly included grapevines, liquor, and drinking glasses. Lists of expenses during missions from the 1720s to 1740s show that the VOC generally set aside 1,000 to 1,200 guilders for the kings,¹⁵⁷ and around 200 for courtiers, considerably less than for other courts.¹⁵⁸ Apparently, according to the Dutch, Ramnad occupied a relatively low position in south India's political constellation. That is also suggested by the extent of retinues accompanying VOC embassies to Ramnad in this period, which probably never exceeded a hundred people, considerably fewer than for Tanjavur in these decades. There are no clear figures for missions to Vijayanagara, Ikkeri, and Madurai, but it seems the sizes of entourages sent to Ramnad and Ikkeri were somewhat similar.¹⁵⁹

The Dutch were expected to present gifts on occasions in between embassies, too, such as successions, all sorts of meetings, or when people had to be pleased to keep them on the VOC's side. Thus, upon their accessions to the throne, Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha and the infant Muttu Ramalinga received presents worth 830 and 164 guilders respectively. Sometimes the Dutch were reluctant to honour new Setupatis if their position seemed uncertain. Two years after Bhavani Shankara was installed, he asked the VOC to finally send gifts. The minor Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha, or whichever courtier acted in his name, made this request twice: upon his initial succession and after what probably was his formal inauguration when he reached some form of adulthood a few years later.¹⁶⁰ On the former occasion, he let the Dutch know that:

... after the death of my father I have succeeded in his place, which I have already informed Your Honour about. ... In such cases [successions], according to the old custom, my predecessors have been congratulated [by you] by way of delegating distinguished persons with gifts. But notwithstanding that I have stepped in the place of my father, now 7 to 8 months

¹⁵⁷ The purchasing power of 1,000 guilders in 1685 equalled that of 10,900 euros in 2018. See iisg.amsterdam/en/research/projects/hpw/calculate.php.

¹⁵⁸ NA, VOC, no. 1227, f. 333; no. 1625, ff. 47-8; no. 1771, ff. 1468-8v; no. 2015, ff. 689-92; no. 2185, ff. 1186-7v; no. 2374, ff. 2075-6v; no. 2599, ff. 2160-2v: Tuticorin proceedings, Jan. 1658, letter from Colombo to Kilavan Tevar, Dec. 1698, instructions for mission to Ramnad, May 1709, lists of gifts at missions to Ramnad, May 1724, Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, July 1743; DNA, DCGCC, no. 29, f. 28v: Colombo proceedings, May 1685.

¹⁵⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2015, ff. 693-4; no. 2185, ff. 1186-7v; no. 2374, ff. 2075-6v; no. 2599, ff. 2160-2v; no. 2956, f. 1222v: lists of expenses during missions to Ramnad, May 1724, Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, July 1743, diary of mission to Ramnad, June 1759.

¹⁶⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1788, ff. 1493v-5v, 1497-7v; no. 2068, f. 1382; no. 2337, ff. 1580v-1; no. 2559, ff. 1471-6; no. 3082, f. 1455: correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, Nov. 1710, June 1763, correspondence between Ramnad, Tuticorin, and Colombo, Nov. 1710, July 1727, Aug. 1735, Jan., May 1742.

ago, the mentioned delegation to me—to make the friendship grow—has not been noticed. And with what ideas this is not being done, I do not know ...¹⁶¹

Further, there was pressure to give presents to the kings if they, or their envoys, visited Dutch settlements. When in 1711 the Setupati unexpectedly arrived at Kilakkarai, the VOC was obliged to honour him without delay, hastily gathering a gift of cloths, a glass jug, and two copper compasses. In 1738, Ramnad's ambassadors to Colombo were presented with a gilded carriage, a horse, a cassowary, turkeys, and geese, all for the king. Courtiers received gifts in all sorts of situations too, for example when they (or their relatives) called at VOC settlements, celebrated weddings, promised to support the Dutch, or offered presents themselves. Often, hundreds of guilders were spent on these occasions.¹⁶²

The court offered gifts to the VOC in various situations as well. At audiences, envoys were honoured with gold-worked cloths and headdresses ("toepettij," "toequie," "chiale")¹⁶³ when welcomed, with gold necklaces when dismissed, and on some occasions with a crest-jewel or a parasol ("talpa") too. The jewels and clothes were usually put on the ambassadors, often after the Setupati had touched these items. Clearly, the *khil'at* ritual was frequently practised at this court.¹⁶⁴ Travelling to and from the capital, and in between audiences, ambassadors were also given garments and parasols, as well as various food stuffs, like sheep, goats, hens, vegetables, dairy products, sugar, and pastry. Ambassadors from Ramnad to the Dutch donated such items as well, once including a knife used by King Kilavan Tevar himself.

When prominent VOC officials called at Kilakkarai, they were presented with gifts, too. A special case was a brief stay of Ceylon's Governor Gustaaf Willem van

¹⁶¹ NA, VOC, no. 8972, ff. 2222-3: letter from Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati to Colombo, Mar. 1736 (translation mine).

¹⁶² For these and other examples, see: DNA, DCGCC, no. 32, ff. 164-6: Colombo proceedings, May 1692; NA, VOC, no. 1284, f. 1984; no. 1805, ff. 1048v, 1049v; no. 2224, ff. 1624v-5; no. 2245, ff. 327-8; no. 2308, ff. 2060v-1; no. 2337, ff. 1542v-3; no. 2445, ff. 1178-9; no. 2459, ff. 1629-30v; no. 2559, ff. 1487-90v, 1496, 1498v-9; no. 2621, f. 2209; no. 2666, ff. 2257, 2314v-15; no. 2757, ff. 1465v-6, 1474v-5: letter from Pulicat to Batavia, Sept. 1671, reports on receptions of Ramnad envoys, Feb.-Apr. 1711, May-July 1739, Apr. 1750, correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, Jan. 1711, Oct., Dec. 1731, Mar. 1734, Aug. 1735, Jan.-Mar., May-June 1742, Apr. 1744, Jan. 1750, letters from Colombo to the Setupati, from Shivagangai to the VOC, May 1738, Oct. 1746, report on meeting with Ramnad's military representatives on Rameshvaram island, Nov. 1746.

¹⁶³ For "chiale" and other corruptions of *sālū*, *śāl*, or shawl, see Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 706, 818-19, 824.

¹⁶⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1383, f. 560; no. 1771, f. 1503; no. 2015, f. 676; no. 2185, f. 1184; no. 2374, ff. 2058v-9, 2070v; no. 2599, ff. 2110, 2138-8v, 2156; no. 2956, ff. 1238v, 1262v: reports and diaries of missions to Ramnad, May-June 1683, May-July 1709, Feb.-May 1724, Jan.-Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, June-July 1743, June-July 1759; DNA, DCGCC, no. 29, f. 29: Colombo proceedings, May 1685.

Imhoff here in 1739. The court intended to honour this exceptional visitor with gold ware, textiles, cows, sheep, rice, and vessels, together worth 10,000 guilders—or so the Setupati claimed in a letter from 1742. However, due to a dispute (see below), Van Imhoff left before the gifts could be presented.¹⁶⁵

The presents to and from the Dutch were partly similar to gifts the Ramnad court exchanged with Indian parties. Local texts state that on various occasions in the seventeenth century the Setupatis received gifts from Madurai's Nayakas in return for military services. First restoring order in the Ramnad area and later defeating several enemies of the Nayakas, they were presented with robes, land, emblems of subdued adversaries, titles, privileges, rice from which the Madurai king had first eaten himself, and Madurai's royal palanquin. A palanquin was also given to Kilavan by a prominent Ramnad courtier, who first recognised him as the new Setupati. Sadaika Tevar I was honoured with a red parasol by pilgrims who were grateful for his protection of the route to Rameshvaram.¹⁶⁶ And in 1742 the Dutch were informed that Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati considered the king of Kandy "a great personality of high standing." He therefore sent him a whole set of royal gifts: a gold-clasped palanquin with curved bamboo, a silver throne to ride elephants, three kinds of kettle-drums to be placed on elephants, falcons and other birds, a field tent, a canopy with four silver-worked sticks, a bow and a quiver with gold-clasped arrows, and spears ("assegaaijen").¹⁶⁷

Finally, Dutch sources on Ramnad frequently mention the symbolic reimbursement given to envoys. Known in Ikkeri and Tanjavur as *gastos*, "rice money," and the like, in Ramnad it was commonly called "parrij" or "paddij." This may have been a corruption of "paddy," husked rice,¹⁶⁸ which would explain the term "rice money" and suggest that these remunerations traditionally consisted of rice or more generally food. Representatives of both the VOC and the court, regardless of

¹⁶⁵ For these and other examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1251, ff. 747, 755; no. 1756, f. 1219v; no. 1771, ff. 1487v, 1488v, 1529; no. 2015, ff. 570, 572, 577-9, 584-5, 591-2; no. 2185, f. 1171; no. 2186, ff. 1274-4v; no. 2308, ff. 2060v-1; no. 2374, f. 2073; no. 2559, ff. 1471-1v; no. 2599, ff. 2128v, 2135, 2139; no. 2757, f. 1458; no. 2956, ff. 1224-4v, 1226, 1228, 1250v, 1253v: report of mission to Travancore, Madurai, and Ramnad, Mar.-Oct. 1665, report of trip to Ramnad by local VOC servant, Sept.-Oct. 1708, diaries of missions to Ramnad, May-July 1709, Feb.-May 1724, Jan.-Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, June-July 1743, June-July 1759, letters from Kilakkarai and Tuticorin to Colombo, Aug. 1731, Mar. 1734, letter from the Setupati to Colombo, Jan. 1742, report on reception of Ramnad envoys, Apr. 1750; Coolhaas *et al.*, *Generale Missiven*, vol. VI, 624. For Van Imhoff's stay in Kilakkarai, see Wagenaar *et al.*, *Gouverneur Van Imhoff op dienstreis*, 168-75.

¹⁶⁶ For these and other examples, see: BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 178-9, 182-4; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 238; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 74; Taylor, "Marava-Jathi-Vernanam," 357; Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," 38-41.

¹⁶⁷ NA, VOC, no. 2559, ff. 1482v-3v: report on visit of Ramnad envoy, June 1742.

¹⁶⁸ See Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 650.

their rank, received small sums of cash from their hosts on many occasions. Dutch documents usually just speak of “the regular paddij,” but in one case it amounted to 15 *fanams*, roughly 4 guilders,¹⁶⁹ given to a south Indian VOC servant. According to the Dutch, who sometimes called it “board wages” (*kostgeld*), the money served as a sign of goodwill.¹⁷⁰

The Dutch mission report of 1759, discussed above, also provides many details on ceremonies encountered by ambassadors when travelling to and from the capital. Arriving from Tuticorin, envoys François and Medeler were first welcomed by local court representatives at Ramnad’s border, next in Kilakkarai, and then on the way from there to Ramanathapuram, being offered food and greeted in the king’s name. Escorted by a courtier with fifty soldiers and musicians from Kilakkarai onward, the ambassadors halted at Sakkarakottai, just south of the capital, to be received by two military commanders and over a hundred soldiers forming a double row. Under great public interest, François and Medeler were brought to their lodging in a procession headed by two bearers of the VOC flag, followed by Ramnad’s troops, musicians, the envoys in their palanquins flanked by courtiers on horseback and seven Dutch soldiers, and more local troops.

The ambassadors’ residence had been set up by the court in and around a rest house (“amblang,” *ampalam*), where they were met by another distinguished person. After a short conversation, they offered betel and areca, cloths, and cash to those who had welcomed them. That day more courteous messages and food stuffs were received from the Setupati and his courtiers. François and Medeler were also escorted by fifty soldiers and musicians at the end of the mission, when they left for Kilakkarai, marking the end of Ramnad’s diplomatic obligations.¹⁷¹

Arrivals and departures of other missions proceeded more or less similarly, although never as grandiosely as in 1759. After a welcome at the border, envoys were usually fetched in Kilakkarai by an eminent courtier, often the *rāyasam* (royal secretary), together with an escort. Another reception commonly followed when they neared the capital. On the way, they were sometimes honoured with guns, places to sleep, and sumptuous meals, for example roebuck. Once at Ramanathapuram, they were taken to their temporary residence, which could be rather pleasant and spacious. In 1743, the envoys were lodged in a compound with four earthen houses,

¹⁶⁹ For exchange rates between Ramnad *fanams* and other currencies in the early eighteenth century, see: Bes, “The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits,” 551 (n. 20); Barbara Mears, “Chiuli Fanams of Ramnad,” *Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society* 189 (2006), 13.

¹⁷⁰ NA, VOC, no. 1756, f. 1219v; no. 2337, f. 1542v; no. 2599, f. 2146; no. 2665, ff. 2005v, 2011; no. 2666, f. 2285v; no. 2925, f. 846v: reports of various missions to Ramnad, Sept.-Oct. 1708, June-July 1743, Sept. 1746, letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, Aug. 1735, May 1758, reports of meetings with Tanjavur envoys, Sept.-Oct. 1746, report of mission to Shivagangai, June 1746.

¹⁷¹ NA, VOC, no. 2956, ff. 1223-8, 1265-5v: diary of mission to Ramnad, June-July 1759.

a courtyard with a canopied bench, a stone well, a “caboose” (*kombuis*), some tents, and separate sleeping quarters for the interpreters and soldiers. In return for all these marks of distinction, ambassadors generally honoured their hosts by giving them betel and areca, sprinkling them with rosewater, applying sandalwood paste on them, and donating cloths and the aforementioned “parrij.”¹⁷²

Courteous though these gestures to the Dutch were, Ramnad bestowed greater honours on envoys of Indian rulers. Characteristically, whereas a local soldier sent in 1746 by the Dutch as messenger had to wait three days before being admitted to the king, a messenger from Tanjavur with a similar rank, arriving together with the VOC representative, was received almost immediately. And, as the VOC reported, when in 1724 a fully-fledged ambassador from Tanjavur, one Baluji Pandidar, approached Ramanathapuram, Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati himself welcomed him about a mile away from the capital.¹⁷³

The court’s treatment of Dutch envoys largely resembled the reception of Ramnad’s ambassadors at VOC settlements, and the protocol during the latter encounters was apparently mostly based on south Indian customs. Here, too, great value was attached to welcoming and departure rituals, gift-giving, and seating arrangements, although some details differed. Thus, Ramnad’s envoys—travelling by palanquin and escorted by soldiers, musicians, and parasol-bearers—were awaited near their destination by middle-ranking VOC servants, for example interpreters, together with soldiers, musicians, flag-holders, and local merchants. In Colombo, the VOC governor often granted as many as four audiences, at the first of which the envoys were received with two rows of soldiers presenting arms. In the governor’s meeting room, they were seated in chairs on the left side of the central table, with a special armchair placed on a separate carpet for the chief ambassador. Ramnad’s gifts were presented at the initial or second meeting without much ceremonial. After some courtesies, such as enquiries after each other’s health and that of the envoys’ superiors, the Dutch would quickly come to business.

The VOC concluded audiences by offering betel, areca, and rosewater to the delegates, after which they were escorted to their lodging by interpreters and other local Company personnel. These missions generally proceeded smoothly—at least according to Dutch reports—but some minor annoyance was vented in 1739, when Ramnad’s envoys requested that their two *kaṇakkuppiḷlais* (“cannecappels,” clerks) be permitted to sit on chairs. This was granted on the condition that the VOC’s

¹⁷² For these and other examples, see NA, VOC, no. 1615C, f. 641v; no. 1771, ff. 1487-8v, 1490v-1; no. 2015, ff. 570-80, 590-2; no. 2185, f. 1170; no. 2374, f. 2049v; no. 2599, ff. 2119-21, 2125v-30, 2134v-5; diaries and reports of missions to Ramnad, Feb. 1699, May 1709, Mar. 1724, Jan. 1731, Nov. 1736, June 1743.

¹⁷³ NA, VOC, no. 2015, f. 607; no. 2665, ff. 2009-10v; diaries and reports of missions to Ramnad, Apr. 1724, Sept. 1746.

kaṇakkuppiḷḷais also be allowed to sit when visiting the Ramnad court. At farewell audiences, the Company honoured the ambassadors with gifts, besides the usual betel, areca, and sprinkling of rosewater. As shown by an appreciative letter of the Setupati after the mission of 1739, embassies to the Dutch proceeding in this manner were considered appropriate by the court.¹⁷⁴

As for courtesies in letters between Ramnad and the VOC, the Setupatis were much more involved in this correspondence than other rulers, whose courtiers commonly conducted such communication. As elsewhere, the Dutch often left out the original pleasantries in their copies and translations of letters, replacing them with remarks like “the usual compliments,” so only a few full greetings are found in the archives. In some letters from around 1740, Ceylon’s Governor Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff typically honoured the Setupati thus:

To His Excellency the free lord [followed by royal names and titles], I [governor’s names and titles] wish all the blessing and prosperity of heaven ... Let me know if there might be something of [your] service, as well as the state of [your] health ...¹⁷⁵

The Setupati, in the case below Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha, generally returned these pleasantries as follows:

I am in a good state of health and please let me know the state of Your Honour as well ... The good and loyal friendship that I maintain with the ... illustrious company, I hope, will last as long as heaven and earth exist. And if something of Your Honour’s service might be here, please let this be known.¹⁷⁶

As the example above shows, the Dutch addressed the Setupati with less exalted phrases than they used for the other rulers, whom they called “king” (usually *vorst*) rather than “free lord” (*vrijheer*), and “highness” rather than “excellency.” In addition to the size of the VOC’s gifts and retinues accompanying ambassadors, this

¹⁷⁴ For these and other examples, see NA, VOC, no. 1805, ff. 1039-40, 1042v, 1044v, 1046v, 1048v; no. 2459, ff. 1617-23, 1627-30v; no. 2492, ff. 1471-2; no. 2757, ff. 1457-8v, 1466-6v: reports on receptions of Ramnad envoys, Feb.-Apr. 1711, May-July 1739, Mar.-Apr. 1750, letter from the Setupati to Colombo, Feb. 1740.

¹⁷⁵ NA, VOC, no. 8974, ff. 1289, 1295; no. 8980, ff. 584, 1586-7: letters from Colombo to the Setupati, Apr. 1738, Sept. 1740, Jan. 1741 (translation mine).

¹⁷⁶ NA, VOC, no. 8974, ff. 1989, 2005-6; no. 8980, ff. 1572, 1583: letters from the Setupati to Colombo, Mar. 1738, Nov. 1740 (translation mine). For other examples, see NA, VOC, no. 1274, f. 206; no. 1625, ff. 46, 48; no. 2308, f. 2076v; no. 8912, ff. 744-6: correspondence between Ramnad, Jaffna, and Colombo, Oct. 1670, Feb.-Mar. 1692, Dec. 1698, Apr. 1734. For an example in correspondence between Ramnad and the French, see *Lettres & conventions des gouverneurs de Pondichéry*, 342.

seems another indication of the lower status the Dutch attributed to the Setupatis, compared to other dynasties. However, Ramnad's house apparently accepted these designations and deemed them illustrious enough. Further, besides enquiries after each other's health in letters, the use of astronomical terms to denote infinity also derived from Indian tradition. Alongside heaven and earth, letters and agreements between Ramnad and the VOC especially mention the sun and the moon, hoping that their eternal nature would inspire everlasting friendship and observance of treaties.¹⁷⁷

Despite these phrases, relations between Ramnad and the Dutch were dominated by conflicts. Largely stemming from commercial competition, these disputes frequently assumed political and military dimensions and were reflected in breaches of protocol. Below follows a range of humiliating incidents, showing that the court employed all aspects of ceremonial to express dissatisfaction: the placement of ambassadors in the audience hall, the tempo of audiences, the exchange of gifts, the welcome, dismissal, and lodging of envoys, eloquence during meetings and in correspondence, and so on. These insults usually mirrored existing discord but could also worsen and accelerate matters.

One way Ramnad demonstrated annoyance was its reception of VOC envoys. When in November 1736, while Dutch-Ramnad relations were at a low, Wouter Trek arrived at the palace for his first meeting with Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati, he could not pass the gate as it was obstructed by a crowd of curious onlookers. Eventually escorted inside by the club-wielding captain of the palace guard, Ravuttan Servaikkarakar, Trek was brought before the king. The latter signalled that he could sit down, but no carpet had been spread out to sit on, even

¹⁷⁷ For examples, see: NA, VOC, no. 1302, f. 614; no. 2621, f. 2195; TNA, DR, no. 353, f. 54: letter from the Setupati to superintendent Rijklof van Goens on Ceylon, June 1674, correspondence between Ramnad and Tuticorin, Sept.-Oct. 1742, Aug. 1744; Heeres and Stapel, *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, vol. 4, 149, vol. 5, 507. For examples under the Chalukyas, Cholas, and Hoysalas, see respectively: Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 3; Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, 223; J. Duncan M. Derrett, *The Hoysalas: A Medieval Royal Family* (Oxford, 1957), 210-11. For Vijayanagara's dynasties, see (among many other instances): Filliozat, *l'Épigraphie de Vijayanagar*, 1-2, 6, 11-13, 15-16, and throughout the volume; Love, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, vol. I, 68; Foster, *The English Factories in India 1642-1645*, 306; Phillip B. Wagoner, "Fortuitous Convergences and Essential Ambiguities: Transcultural Political Elites in the Medieval Deccan," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, 3 (1999), 250; M.S. Nagaraja Rao, "Ahmadkhān's *Dharmaśāla*," in idem (ed.), *Vijayanagara: Progress of Research 1979-1983* (Mysore, 1983), 65; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce*, 87. For the period of the successor states, see: Vriddhagirisān, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 190; Ramakrishna Kavi Pandit, *Pratapasimhendra Vijaya Prabandha*, 33; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 138; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 160 (both concerning Madurai); Seshadri, "The Setupatis of Ramnad", 237; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 433; Ota, "Bēḍa Nāyakas and Their Historical Narratives," 183.

though this was a long-standing custom, as Trek wrote. He was forced to put down a carpet of his own, brought to place his gifts on. The court later denied him another honour since no courtier accompanied him back to his lodging.

Trek expressed his amazement during an intermediate visit by some courtiers—themselves complaining about the VOC's presents—who assured him of an appropriate treatment during the next audience. But at that meeting, again there was no carpet and once more the envoy had to use his own. Trek now became furious and let *Pradhāni* Ramalingam Pillai know that next time Ramnad would send envoys to Colombo they should bring their own chairs.¹⁷⁸ His indignation also clearly transpires from the derogatory opening lines of his report:

... at that confused and fickle court, irregularities [are] acknowledged to the highest degree. And zealously cherished by everyone are: slyness [*listigheijd*], deceit [*bedrog*], annoyance [*nijdigheid*], self-interest [*baatzugt*], distrust [*wantrouwen*], and more of such pernicious morals [*verderfelijke zeeden*], because of which all good qualities, yes, even shame [*schaamte*], honour [*eer*], and respect [*eerbiedigheijd*] for the king, are entirely banished.¹⁷⁹

If the court's aim had been to disgrace the Dutch, it had certainly succeeded. During the next VOC mission, in July 1743, again in a time of disagreements, Ramnad used similar tactics to show its irritation. This time, however, envoys Johannes Krijtsman and Francois Danens had prepared themselves. When they appeared before the Setupati and were invited to sit down, yet again no carpet had been put down. Instead, another, large carpet on which most courtiers were seated, was rolled out for the envoys to sit on. Meant no doubt as a counter-humiliation, Krijtsman and Danens now placed a carpet of their own—specially brought along for this purpose—on top of the courtiers' one. Then they sat down, asked the king about his health, passed the VOC governor's regards, and presented their gifts. But nobody returned the compliments with questions about the governor's wellbeing or other pleasantries.

As the mission report has it, the rest of this meeting and the following one also proceeded without the proper protocol. The first audience was abruptly terminated and at the second and last audience, the Setupati refused to greet Krijtsman and Danens. Their standard question at the end, whether there was anything else of the king's service, remained unanswered. Moreover, *Daḷavāy* Vairavanatha Servaikkarakar sneeringly said that only if Dutch ships would come from Batavia with elephants and horses and the envoys return to Ramanathapuram after three

¹⁷⁸ NA, VOC, 2374, ff. 2043, 2055v-6, 2059, 2060v-2v, 2066v, 2071: report and diary of mission to Ramnad, Nov. 1736. For this embassy, see Bes, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 47-9.

¹⁷⁹ NA, VOC, no. 2374, f. 2041v: report of mission to Ramnad, Nov. 1736 (translation mine).

months, the court might grant some of the VOC's wishes. The general added, almost eloquently:

On the island of Pambe [Pamban, Rameshvaram island], much Hollanders' blood being spilled by him [the *daḷavāy*], his Swami or god at Rammanacoil [Rameshvaram] had therefore ordered to allow the Hollanders to build a stone house at Kilkare [Kilakkarai] to live there and conduct trade. And if the mentioned god would now order him to place the Hollanders on that island, that would be taken care of by him ...¹⁸⁰

Vairavanatha was probably referring to the Dutch occupation of Rameshvaram island in 1690 and insinuated that more Dutch blood had to be shed before the VOC could set foot on the island again.¹⁸¹ This greatly offended Krijtsman and Danens, who replied that ships from Batavia might indeed appear with gifts, hinting at Dutch reinforcements to protect the factory in Kilakkarai or even occupy the island again. The dispute went on until this audience—and the mission for that matter—was also suddenly ended.¹⁸²

True enough, less than three years later the VOC did indeed attempt to conquer Rameshvaram island and held part of it between May 1746 and January 1747. While the embassy of 1743 was not the invasion's main cause, it had certainly contributed to the growing tensions in the subsequent years. The Dutch were highly insulted by the humiliation of their envoys and internal correspondence states they would show their resentment in due time. Their attack on the island was a failure, however. Besides a malaria outbreak among their soldiers, the presence of beef-eating infidels on the sacred island aroused the anger of several rulers, including those of Tanjavur, Shivagangai, and Travancore, and some Maratha chiefs. But most of all, the VOC army could not handle the guerrilla-like warfare of Ramnad's troops. Thus, with the military option gone, the Dutch had to fall back on diplomacy.¹⁸³

As part of this diplomacy, the VOC itself also regularly humiliated Ramnad, intentionally and unintentionally. The Dutch only became aware of the latter if the

¹⁸⁰ NA, VOC, no. 2599, f. 2154v: report of mission to Ramnad, June 1743 (translation mine).

¹⁸¹ For the Dutch occupation of the island in 1690, see: Bes and Branfoot, "From All Quarters of the Indian World"; Vink, "Encounters on the Opposite Coast," 364, 423-9.

¹⁸² NA, VOC, no. 2599, ff. 2109, 2136-6v, 2153, 2154-6: report and diary of mission to Ramnad, June-July 1743. For a description of this embassy, see Bes, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 64-71.

¹⁸³ Bes and Branfoot, "From All Quarters of the Indian World"; NA, VOC, no. 2599, ff. 2174, 2199v-214; no. 2665, ff. 1987-2012; no. 2666, ff. 2053-406: correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, July-Dec. 1743, papers concerning the expedition against Ramnad, Dec. 1745-Dec. 1746, correspondence between Tuticorin and Tanjavur and other papers concerning Tanjavur, July-Oct. 1746; Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 565-6; idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 72-81.

court complained about it. These offences were usually caused by what Ramnad perceived as a lack of respect from the Company. During the VOC mission in 1724, for instance, the court was affronted because the Company's letter to the king mentioned Ceylon's Dutch governor before the Setupati. Producing VOC letters from previous decades, courtiers showed the envoys that the Setupatis had always preceded Dutch governors. The current order was a disgrace, seen as suggesting the king was not a legal successor of his ancestors, which made him hesitant to acknowledge the VOC envoys as official delegates. Although the matter was not deemed serious enough to abort the mission, the court straightaway wrote to Colombo to convey its annoyance.

A somewhat similar case concerned the Dutch embassy in 1731, when the court was displeased by the status of the envoy, Reijnier Helmond. Whereas past ambassadors had occupied higher offices and were dispatched from the VOC governor's seat at Colombo, Helmond held the middle-ranking position of *resident* (local chief) at the nearby Kilakkarai factory. Again, this was no reason to send him away, but the Setupati, Kattaya Tevar, immediately informed the Dutch about his irritation. As he wrote, it was only because of the mutual friendship that he received a "factor" from Kilakkarai with the honours reserved for representatives from Colombo. In future he wished not to be confronted with such disdain anymore and instead given the respect his predecessors had enjoyed.¹⁸⁴

While these unintended insults proved of little consequence, other lapses had serious repercussions. In 1733, when Kattaya Tevar visited Kilakkarai, the local VOC official Wouter Trek honoured the king with gifts and a salute from a Dutch vessel, but did not give the presents himself. Although acceptable to former Setupatis, Kattaya was offended about the impersonal homage. He rejected the gifts and had them thrown down at the gate of the VOC's factory. The Dutch now felt disgraced as well and a long, bitter polemic ensued with the court. The mutual breach of protocol then acquired political and economic overtones. Ramnad closed off the strategic Pamban Channel to the Dutch and invited other European powers to the kingdom. With this, the VOC's worst fears came true and this escalation, from a ceremonial miscalculation to a commercial disaster, was certainly the last thing Trek had intended.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2015, ff. 608-12, 698; no. 2185, ff. 1058, 1060, 1174v-5: reports of missions to Ramnad, Apr. 1724, Jan. 1731, letters from the Setupati to Colombo and Tuticorin, Apr. 1724, Feb. 1731. For a detailed description of the mission in 1731, see Bes, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 34-6.

¹⁸⁵ NA, VOC, no. 2291, ff. 501-15, 519-27: correspondence between Tuticorin and Colombo, May-Sept. 1733. For more extensive descriptions of these incidents, see Bes, "The Setupatis, the Dutch, and Other Bandits," 567; and especially idem, "Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine," 41-2.

On other occasions, the VOC breached protocol deliberately. In 1709, its ambassadors refused food gifts of the “regent of the lowlands,” who belonged to Kilakkarai’s influential *periya tambi* family and was a long-standing opponent. The envoys’ superiors disapproved of this decision and attributed the embassy’s meagre results to it. Nevertheless, in 1731, during another conflict about the Pamban Channel, the governor at Colombo himself went so far as to return a letter from the Setupati unopened. Indeed, a message was sent to Kattaya Tevar telling him the governor had not even cast his eyes on the king’s letter.¹⁸⁶

Whereas this had little effect, at a confrontation in 1739 the Dutch managed to impress the court by breaching the protocol as much as Ramnad did. In March of that year, Ceylon’s Governor Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff travelled along the Fishery Coast to inspect the VOC factories. Although this was not an embassy to the region’s rulers, the Dutch still expected them to welcome the governor, albeit not personally. But upon Van Imhoff’s arrival at Mukaiyur (“Mukkur”), the first village in Ramnad’s territory, nobody received him. Furthermore, when he reached Kilakkarai, the court had not yet granted him permission to sail through the Pamban Channel. Normally, a request of Kilakkarai’s VOC official was sufficient for that, but now Van Imhoff himself was asked to seek approval in writing. Irritated, the governor sent someone to the Setupati to make his request verbally, which was countered by a letter repeating the court’s demand. Now really affronted, Van Imhoff rejected this letter and denied its messenger the usual “parrij” or reimbursement.

Although the court then gave permission to cross the Channel, the governor was not ready to forget the humiliation. When another messenger of the court arrived, Van Imhoff refused to let him sit, considering him just a courier, not an official delegate. The messenger walked out and said he could not convey his message if he was not seated. The Dutch replied they would not listen to him anymore even if he were standing and that he better not enter the building again. The messenger departed and the governor sent a furious letter to the court. Van Imhoff then sailed back to Ceylon via the Pamban Channel, despite sudden pleas by local officials and merchants to wait for court representatives now on their way with gifts and elephants to honour the governor. Thus, the Dutch won this ceremonial stand-off. The court evidently realised it had gone too far, because both a long letter and an embassy it later sent to Colombo were clearly attempts at reconciliation.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ NA, VOC, no. 1771, ff. 1486v-7, 1581v, 1583v; no. 2245, ff. 326-7: diary of mission to Ramnad, May 1709, correspondence between Colombo and envoys in Ramnad, June 1709, letter from Colombo to Tuticorin, Oct. 1731.

¹⁸⁷ NA, VOC, no. 2456, ff. 556v-65v, 703-4; no. 2459, ff. 1612-14v: report of the governor’s journey along the Fishery Coast, Mar. 1739, letter from the Setupati to Colombo, Apr. 1739. For an extensive description of this event, see Bes, “Friendship as Long as the Sun and Moon Shine,” 57-8. The report of

Ramnad was hardly ever apologetic in other cases where it breached protocol, for example when it refused gifts. In 1692, an envoy of the Setupati at Colombo declined an elephant the Dutch presented to the king since both the animal and its tusks were deemed too small. They sent the elephant anyway, hoping the Setupati would still receive it as it was offered as a “free gift without obligation” (*vrije gifte sonder verplighingh*), unlike most presents, which compelled the recipient to give or do something in return. Further, the court frequently disgraced south Indian VOC messengers, delaying meetings and giving them very small escorts. In 1731 Kattaya Tevar was reluctant to accept a letter brought by a local VOC clerk and refused to look at or talk to him. Another such messenger was not received by the Setupati at all—considered highly unusual—and was also denied his “parrij.”¹⁸⁸

Insults were especially encountered during fully-fledged VOC embassies. Besides humiliations at audiences, a common dishonour was the continuous postponement of such meetings. While this happened in all kingdoms, in Ramnad it seemed a standard treatment. The reports of all six missions between 1698 and 1743 complain about endless waits. Many embassies therefore took weeks or even months. Indeed, on most trips, the envoys threatened to terminate their stay hoping this would speed up matters. In 1709 they gave this warning no fewer than three times over a period of two weeks before they secured their final audience.¹⁸⁹ On other occasions, nobody escorted them back to their residence after an audience, or they were told to report to the court’s toll collectors to receive their “parrij,” which they flatly refused to do.¹⁹⁰

A last way the court humiliated Dutch ambassadors concerned their lodging. In 1709 they wrote:

... we were rather surprised when, having passed the town Ramanadawaram [Ramanathapuram], we had to march for another half an hour through thick thorn-bushes, [and] having finally reached our lodge, its doors were closed. Those having been opened after much knocking and shouting, inside we found a large number of faquiers and vagabonds [*landlopers*] of both sexes and strange figures [*wonderlijcke gedaentens*]. This made us lament strongly about that lodge—crawling with lice and all sorts of vermin, and

this trip has been published in Wagenaar *et al.*, *Gouverneur Van Imhoff op dienstreis*, with the Ramnad episode on 168-76.

¹⁸⁸ DNA, DCGCC, no. 32, ff. 86-7: Colombo proceedings, Mar. 1692; NA, VOC, no. 2186, ff. 1224v-5v, 1237v; no. 2308, ff. 2057-7v; no. 2693, ff. 1262, 1264: letters from Tuticorin to Colombo, Sept. 1731, Feb. 1734, Sept. 1747.

¹⁸⁹ NA, VOC, no. 1615C, ff. 641-54v; no. 1771, ff. 1485-543v; no. 2015, ff. 567-689; no. 2185, ff. 1167-85; no. 2374, ff. 2041-73v; no. 2599, ff. 2107-59: reports and diaries of missions to Ramnad, Dec. 1698-Feb. 1699, May-July 1709, Feb.-May 1724, Jan.-Feb. 1731, Nov. 1736, June-July 1743.

¹⁹⁰ NA, VOC, no. 2015, f. 595; no. 2599, f. 2146: diaries of missions to Ramnad, Apr. 1724, June 1743.

where not the least preparation or commodity had been made for our stay—and [made us] threaten to return to Kilkare right away ...¹⁹¹

Only when the fakirs and vagabonds were forced out and the place was cleaned, did the envoys decide to continue their mission. In 1724, too, the ambassadors were housed in small, dirty accommodation, forcing them to stay outside in the hot sun. They had to threaten to leave before a suitable rest house was arranged. In 1736, the lodging of the envoys seemed to reach the level of intimidation. When ambassador Wouter Trek neared Ramanathapuram—probably with the experiences of earlier delegates in mind—he sent a soldier ahead to inspect the residence prepared for him. The soldier returned saying it looked like an animal corral rather than a human dwelling. Trek then told the Ramnad courtier accompanying him that he would proceed no further until appropriate accommodation was arranged. When news came that a field tent had now been set up, the envoy continued his trip. But upon Trek's arrival, it turned out the residence was located right next to the fortress wall, from where a cannon, escorted by two soldiers, was aimed straight at his tent.¹⁹²

Considering all these incidents, Ramnad stood out among Vijayanagara's heirs when it came to insulting the VOC. If the Company's records are to be believed, at no other court was protocol breached so blatantly, frequently, and widely. This is not surprising because Ramnad's commercial interests were often at odds with those of the Dutch, and the VOC generally only dispatched embassies to complain. Further, the Ramnad court harboured relatively many competing parties, probably easily leading to disagreements about how to treat the Dutch. Consequently, there was ample room for annoyance on both sides, ventilated through insults first before violence was considered.

Many elements of protocol in Ramnad—seating arrangements, gifts, welcome and departure ritual, eloquence—were largely the same as elsewhere. Some presents exchanged between Ramnad and the Dutch were exceptional, however. Only Ramnad's rulers regularly received alcohol-related articles such as liquor, grapevines, and drinking glasses. In turn, this court was unique in that it offered lots of food stuffs, often including meat from sheep, goats, and fowl. The regular use of alcohol and meat may be related to the low status of the Setupatis' Maravar caste, for which the consumption of such "impure" goods was perhaps less of a taboo

¹⁹¹ NA, VOC, no. 1771, ff. 1491-1v: diary of mission to Ramnad, May 1709 (translation mine).

¹⁹² NA, VOC, no. 2015, ff. 582-3; no. 2374, ff. 2050-1: diaries of missions to Ramnad, Mar. 1724, Nov. 1736.

than for the castes to which other rulers belonged or aspired to belong. Indeed, Maravars also offered alcohol and meat to some of their deities.¹⁹³

All in all, protocol, and the breaching of it, was omnipresent in Ramnad—seemingly reflecting rather than shaping relations—and always called for more protocol. As ambassadors François and Medeler phrased it in their report of 1759: “sending of betel [leaves] and arreek [areca nuts] is surely a sign of homage [*eerbewijs*], but self-seeking [*eijgenbaat*] has created those ceremonies, as it always drags along a counter present [*contra present*].”¹⁹⁴ Thus, protocol often functioned as some kind of game everyone was supposed to take part in, as further transpires from the quarrelsome but still eloquent correspondence between the court and the VOC in 1742, concerning different interpretations of a treaty.¹⁹⁵ When the Dutch wrote it was “as clear as the sun shines in the afternoon” that they were in the right,¹⁹⁶ Sivakumara Muttu Vijaya Raghunatha Setupati replied:

But my patience is as large as the size of a mountain. Your Honour says that what he explains to me is as clear as the sun in the afternoon, but Your Honour does not consider that after the afternoon, that sun must set behind the mountain ...¹⁹⁷

Conclusions

Based on reports of VOC embassies to Vijayanagara’s heirs and other Indo-Dutch diplomatic encounters, one might well be able to compile a manual on early modern south Indian protocol. Such a work would explain that honourable people must be made to sit close to the highest present authority, shall be regularly offered suitable, valuable, and extraordinary gifts, have to be welcomed and dismissed by extensive retinues headed by distinguished persons, and are to be treated with personal attention and eloquence. Also, the manual should make clear when these guidelines need to be adhered to and when they are to be ignored, depending on the sort of message one wishes to convey.

In fact, this manual would have much in common with south Indian political discourses like the twelfth-century *Mānasollāsa* compiled under Kalyana’s Chalukyas and the eighteenth-century *Śivatattva ratnākara* of Ikkeri’s Basavappa

¹⁹³ Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. V, 43; S. Natarajan, “Society and Culture under the Setupatis,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 14 (1951), 170.

¹⁹⁴ NA, VOC, no. 2956, f. 1224v: diary of mission to Ramnad, June 1759.

¹⁹⁵ For disagreements between Asian courts and the VOC about treaties, see Subrahmanyam, *Courty Encounters*, 8–9.

¹⁹⁶ TNA, DR, no. 353, f. 65: letter from Tuticorin to Ramnad, Nov. 1742.

¹⁹⁷ TNA, DR, no. 353, f. 85: letter from Ramnad to Tuticorin, Dec. 1742 (translation mine).

Nayaka I. Notions in these treatises greatly resemble the practices encountered by the VOC at all courts. Clearly, Indo-Dutch diplomatic ceremonial was mainly based on Indian customs, and VOC records serve as useful sources for protocol in the Vijayanagara successor states as it was performed in practice, compensating to some extent for the scarcity of relevant Indian texts. Further, the similarities between contemporary and older south Indian works (spanning a period of six centuries) and also Dutch experiences, suggest that many manifestations of court ceremonial were widespread and long-lasting. Generally speaking, no great differences existed between Vijayanagara and its heirs or among the successors themselves. The imaginary VOC manual would apply to every court.

For most aspects of protocol, just the details sometimes varied. Only in Madurai did kings never participate in negotiations with VOC envoys. It was also here that much emphasis was laid on the *khil'at* ritual, as Dutchmen repeatedly had to put on received clothes in public. Both observations imply that Madurai considered the VOC to hold a relatively low standing and that it showed this condescension through ceremonial. At the same time, Madurai's rulers and courtiers did not object to close contact with European visitors, personally giving presents or sitting next to them, thus still showing their deference.

Actual physical contact between monarchs and ambassadors chiefly occurred at Tanjavur's Bhonsle court, where kings were happy to touch or be touched by Dutchmen. Bhonsle-ruled Tanjavur also stood out for the small number of audiences deemed sufficient to conduct business and complete all ceremonies. Further, both under the Bhonsles and the preceding Nayakas, gifts appear to have been particularly important, considering the continuous requests for them by Tanjavur's rulers and courtiers.¹⁹⁸ Finally, Ramnad differed from other courts with regard to the kinds of exchanged presents, frequently including meat and alcohol.

Besides these minor variations, differences between the kingdoms, as experienced by the VOC, principally concerned the extent to which protocol was deliberately breached. Humiliations of the Dutch were more common in Ikkeri and Ramnad than elsewhere, no doubt related to the fact the VOC usually dispatched embassies to these courts when irritations had arisen over violations of treaties. By contrast, diplomatic meetings in the other kingdoms chiefly served to congratulate new rulers or occurred during royal tours, giving little reason to insult one another. It therefore appears that protocol and deviations from it generally did not so much affect relations as they mirrored them. There were several cases of humiliations

¹⁹⁸ The British also complained about the pressure in Tanjavur to present gifts constantly. See Raman, *Document Raj*, 174. For similar Portuguese experiences in south India, see Melo, "Seeking Prestige and Survival."

assuming a life of their own and worsening disputes, but insults commonly reflected underlying political or economic tensions.

It must be emphasised that breaches of protocol were rarely caused by protocolar misunderstandings. On the contrary, to effectively offend others one had to be well aware of what was considered honourable and what humiliating in south India. The often deliberate insults between courts and Europeans only show that the latter were very familiar with local protocol and usually knew when and how it was violated.¹⁹⁹ Indeed, it can be argued that the Dutch followed the rules even when they intentionally broke them, as this was a common way to express resentment, just as south Indian parties both adhered to and breached protocol for different purposes. Instances of mere misunderstanding were rather seldom, and even rarer were those that led to indignation and serious clashes. For example, the VOC's efforts to resell received robes of honour do not indicate that the Dutch could not appreciate their symbolic value. VOC officials obediently participated in the *khil'at* ceremony, knowing its aim was to cement a hierarchical but reciprocal relationship. Alongside this function, the clothes were considered goods that could be traded. Obviously, to the Dutch adherence to protocol and commercial pragmatism were not mutually exclusive.²⁰⁰

As in the previous chapter, the sole Dutch embassy to Mysore in 1681 provides a useful counterpoint to the other courts. While envoy Jan van Raasvelt must have had some idea of the ceremonial he was to encounter—based on experiences in adjacent kingdoms like Ikkeri and Madurai—the Wodeyar court was clearly not used to receiving European visitors. During his first night in the capital Srirangapatnam, Van Raasvelt and his assistants were paraded before *Daḷavāy* (general) Kumarayya, the king's brother-in-law Balayya, and other dignitaries who wished to have a look at these foreigners.

During the first audience, the next afternoon, King Chikkadevaraja asked his guests if they were real “Hollanders” and requested Van Raasvelt to tell him about the “state, rules, intercourse, and life” of the Dutch people. The king further wished to know how many ships, cannon, personnel, towns, and fortresses the VOC controlled. The envoy's reply greatly pleased Chikkadevaraja, who remarked that the Company, contrary to his initial belief, was also a “mighty king.” At the end of

¹⁹⁹ For discussions of intercultural understanding—often referred to as commensurability—at early modern Asian courts, see for example: Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 1-33; Van Meersbergen, “The Diplomatic Repertoires of the East India Companies.”

²⁰⁰ For some debate on European perceptions of Indian court gifts in the early modern period, see: Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, 1996), 18-19; William R. Pinch, “Same Difference in India and Europe,” *History and Theory* 38, 3 (1999), 399-405. See also Fihl, “Shipwrecked on the Coromandel,” 241.

this meeting, Van Raasvelt and everyone in his retinue, including the lowest local servants, were given robes of honour, a privilege usually reserved for the highest representatives.

At the second audience, on the following day already, Chikkadevaraja first glanced over the Dutchmen from head to toe and then made Van Raasvelt recite the Dutch version of the VOC's letter to him. When the envoy began reading it aloud, the king started laughing, explaining he was not familiar with this language, although it sounded pleasant to him. He hoped Van Raasvelt was not offended, because he was only curious to hear a Dutch version of his own names and titles. Chikkadevaraja being contented with the way he was addressed, Van Raasvelt had to repeat it several times. The king then insisted the envoy also read the letter in Portuguese and the VOC's interpreter translate it into what was probably Malayalam (*Mallabaars*). Still young, the latter felt intimidated and confused, failing to produce a proper translation. Chikkadevaraja next wanted his guests to sing Dutch songs, which they tried to evade by claiming they were bad singers.²⁰¹ Undeterred, the king had some musical instruments brought in to help them, but now *Daḷavāy* Kumarayya intervened and managed to change the conversation subject.

Other incidents further illustrate the somewhat unusual and awkward but probably well-meant reception of the Dutch in Mysore. Most courtiers were reluctant to accept gifts and at the end of his stay Van Raasvelt was asked what would be an appropriate royal gift to his superiors. All in all, the court appears to have harboured good intentions—welcoming the envoy with a horse and a parasol (*som-bareere*) and dismissing him with a “state parasol” and a torch (*flambauw*)—but occasionally it seemed at a loss about how to treat its guests.²⁰² Thus, the VOC's experiences in Mysore are a good example of what protocol looked like when there merely was some misunderstanding between a south Indian court and the Dutch. Some ceremonies in Mysore were slightly odd but certainly not insulting, as they were chiefly caused by unfamiliarity with the Dutch. Deviations from protocol at the other courts clearly happened for different, more serious reasons and, as a result, often had grimmer manifestations and consequences.

This chapter's section on Vijayanagara is largely based on south Indian sources and mainly concerns relations within the court and with adjacent sultanates. In contrast, Dutch records are the main sources for the sections on the successor states and so these parts chiefly deal with relations between the courts and the VOC. But

²⁰¹ Jesuit visitors to Chikkadevaraja were also asked questions about Europe and requested to sing. Unlike the Dutch, the Jesuits were happy to comply with the latter wish. See Ferroli, *The Jesuits in Mysore*, 95-6, 108.

²⁰² NA, VOC, no. 8985, ff. 104v-17: report of mission to Mysore, Jan. 1681.

the many similarities between Vijayanagara and its heirs with respect to protocol and honour imply that the findings for Indo-Dutch contacts in the successor states apply to inter-Indian contacts there, too. Thus, one can assume that between kings and courtiers, among courtiers, and between courts, protocol was also employed to initiate, affirm, or damage relationships. The few available references to such local relations—found in both south Indian and European sources—further indicate that protocol usually was either observed or intentionally breached to express respectively satisfaction and anger in the successor states.

The continuity in this regard between Vijayanagara and its heirs also suggests that the findings of this chapter are relevant for courts that preceded the empire. Thus, when the first diplomatic pleasantries and insults were exchanged between Vijayanagara and the Bahmani sultanate, protocol had probably long served as a tool to convey approval or annoyance between parties at Indian courts. It would therefore seem likely that already at the time a text like the twelfth-century *Mānasollāsa* was composed, its guidelines on court ceremonial could be followed as well as ignored. In any case, we may conclude that in early modern south India protocol played a significant role in various aspects of court politics: dynastic foundations, successions to the throne, the power of courtiers, and (as Chapter 6 demonstrates) relations between states. Protocol was also an important element of the subject of the next chapter: Islamic influences on court culture.

