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Sanjay Subrahmanyam. *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. 336 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-06705-9.

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Sanjay Subrahmanyam's work is an intriguing and detailed investigation of encounters between different cultural and religious groups at court in the early modern period. He demonstrates how these intimate courtly interactions manifested themselves into larger events, often being misconstrued or misrepresented by contemporaries and historians as conflicts begat from cultural misunderstandings or unfamiliarity. Rather, as he expertly shows, the confrontations and exchanges sprang directly from the close contact which the different groups experienced while at court. In short, he attempts to "focus on how courtly encounters were the crucial site for forging of mutual perceptions and representations in Eurasia" (p. xiv). In this regard, the work is a great achievement.

Subrahmanyam opens his work noting that it is an experiment, far removed from his training as an economic historian. Formed from the Mary Flexner Lecture Series which he delivered at Bryn Mawr in 2009, the book definitely exhibits some rough edges. However, if this is the level of scholarship that Subrahmanyam's experiments deliver, than more of the same please. Three excellent chapters buttressed between an introduction and a conclusion will offer the reader plenty of insightful analysis and intriguing concepts with which to grapple.

The introduction displays Subrahmanyam's familiarity with the historiography and methodology of historical cultural interactions. He focuses on concepts such as Thomas Kuhn's "incommensurability" and the converse idea of "commensurability." He notes that previous scholars have tended to think of cultures in structuralist terms, where cultures were a homogeneous totality, and thus either entirely compatible or incompatible with other groups. The main thrust of his introduction is that what usually happens between cultures is "approximation, improvisation, and eventually a shift in the relative positions of all concerned" (p. 29). Unfortunately, as he attempts to form a thorough methodology to tie together the different lectures into a coherent whole this straightforward idea often times gets hazy as he unnecessarily delves too deep into the details of the historiography.

It is in the main three chapters that Subrahmanyam demonstrates his true talents as a historian. This is already evident in the first chapter, "Courtly Insults," which examines a well-known battle in southern India in 1565 between the Vijayanagara Empire and an alliance of Deccan sultanates. He leads the reader through a detailed and exhaustive examination of the relevant primary sources, in order to show how the sources which have received the most attention have attempted to portray the conflict in terms of religious confrontation. The underlying idea of these previous works was that there was an unfamiliarity between the different courts and that "in ideological terms, it was the hatred on the part of Muslims for gentiles" which led to the battle (p. 69). After a closer analysis, however, Subrahmanyam discovers numerous courtly insults between the leaders, convincingly demonstrating that the Vijaynagara leader "may have been many things to the sultans, but he was certainly not a stranger" (p. 102).

In the second chapter, "Courtly Martyrdom," Subrahmanyam continues his impressive source analysis. In this section he demonstrates how some Portuguese used the ideology of martyrdom in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in an attempt to stiffen the boundary between Christianity and Islam, which was somewhat porous due to economic pragmatism and the need for trade. He notes, "Death by basilisk was … surely part *topos* and part nightmare; above all, it was a measure of the fact that martyrdom was not simply a relic of the distant past, but a pressing reality when the lines between the cultures–even courtly cultures–of Muslims and Christians became too blurred for comfort" (p. 153). In sum, martyrs were meant to be a deterrent to further contact and integration.

"Courtly Representations," the final chapter, turns the focus towards understanding the influence of artis-

tic depictions of Asian courts on European culture. Noting that most research has looked at European influence in Asia, Subrahmanyam attempts to "complete the circle." For instance, he notes that large number of Indian paintings began arriving in Europe after 1640, mainly through the Dutch Republic, showing up in places such as Rembrandt's studio. Nevertheless, the dialogue extended beyond trade in paintings, as evidenced by Dutchman Willem Schellinink's depictions of the Mughal court. These artistic works were clearly outside of the traditional realist style of seventeenth-century Netherlands, and depicted concepts clearly borrowed from Mughal painters, such as the composite camel which features on the book jacket.

The most telling example for Subrahmanyam's argument is a theological debate at Nur-ud-Din Jahangir's court in 1610. In this debate the Mughal 'Abdus Sattar was able to raise some poignant and incisive critiques of Christianity, specifically the Trinity, which would have been far beyond a person with only superficial knowledge (p. 166). These impressive examples which Subrahmanyam meticulously culled from the sources are undoubtedly the highlight of this impressive work and will undoubtedly leave the most lasting impression.

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