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Somsen, Q.O,

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Asserting Princely Power in Hesse-Kassel and the Dutch Republic

The Courts of Landgrave Wilhelm IX and Stadholder Willem V in Comparison (c. 1770-1806)

Asserting Princely Power in Hesse-Kassel and the Dutch Republic - Quinten Somsen

This dissertation offers a revealing comparison between the courts of Stadholder Willem V (t. 1766–1795) in the Dutch Republic and Landgrave Wilhelm IX (r. 1785–1806/1821) in Hesse-Kassel. While their courts were comparable in size, structure, and international status, the stadholder and landgrave operated within entirely different political systems.

The Dutch Republic had a decentralised and representative form of government, whereas the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel held strong centralised authority. How did these divergent political environments determine the role of these princely courts?

The book examines the courts' institutional structures and expenditure, daily court life and sociability, the distribution of appointments and favours, as well as the careers, networks, and political involvement of the court elites. The comparison uncovers a markedly distinct dynamic — offering surprising new insights into the political role of princely courts in a transformative age.

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