We review the results of `near-field cosmology’ studies using the globular cluster (GCs) systems to study nearby massive galaxies. GCs trace major star formation events over all epochs, are relatively robust and offer a unique probe of the outer halos of galaxies. We also present a new technique and our survey to study galaxy halo starlight directly. Our data support a picture in which galaxies grow from a compact `seed' at high redshift (akin to `red nuggets’) via the hierarchical accretion of low mass galaxies into the massive red sequence galaxies we see today. We also discuss a particularly remarkable case which touches on several `hot' issues, ie interactions, dark matter, supermassive black holes, and the growth of red nuggets.