

Stallions of the Indian Ocean

Horse Trade in the 16th Century Deccan



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PROJECT MAUSAM

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts



- cultural routes and maritime landscapes
- shared knowledge systems and the spread of ideas along these routes that impacted both coastal centres and their hinterlands
- re-connect and re-establish communications between countries of the Indian Ocean world
- important phase of world history from the African, Arab and Asian-world perspectives



Padrão dos Descobrimentos

Monument to the Discoveries

Prince Henry the Navigator
Sagres | Maritime School
Vasco da Gama
Africa | Asia
Luís de Camões
The Lusiadas

VI.5

*...As ondas navegavam do Oriente,
Já nos mares da India, e enxergavam
Os tálamos do Sol, que nasce ardente:
Já quase seus desejos se acabavam.*

They were launched now on the waters of
the Indian Ocean, with their eyes fixed on
the cradle of the sun where it rises
resplendent in the East.



Aśva in India

"an essential element of the institution of South Indian kingship, with both practical and symbolic functions."

(Rubies 2000: 150)

Aśva-śāstra? A knowledge system that had to be imported?
Like the horses themselves, knowledge about equine care and breeding seems to have been imported as well.

Śālihotra, Nakula, Artha-śāstra, Aśva-śāstra (13th century)

Pedro Cabral — “In this kingdom there are many horses and elephants because they wage war, and they have them so taught and trained that the only thing which they lack is speech, and they **understand everything like human being.**” (Rubies 2000: 184)

Krishnadevaraya

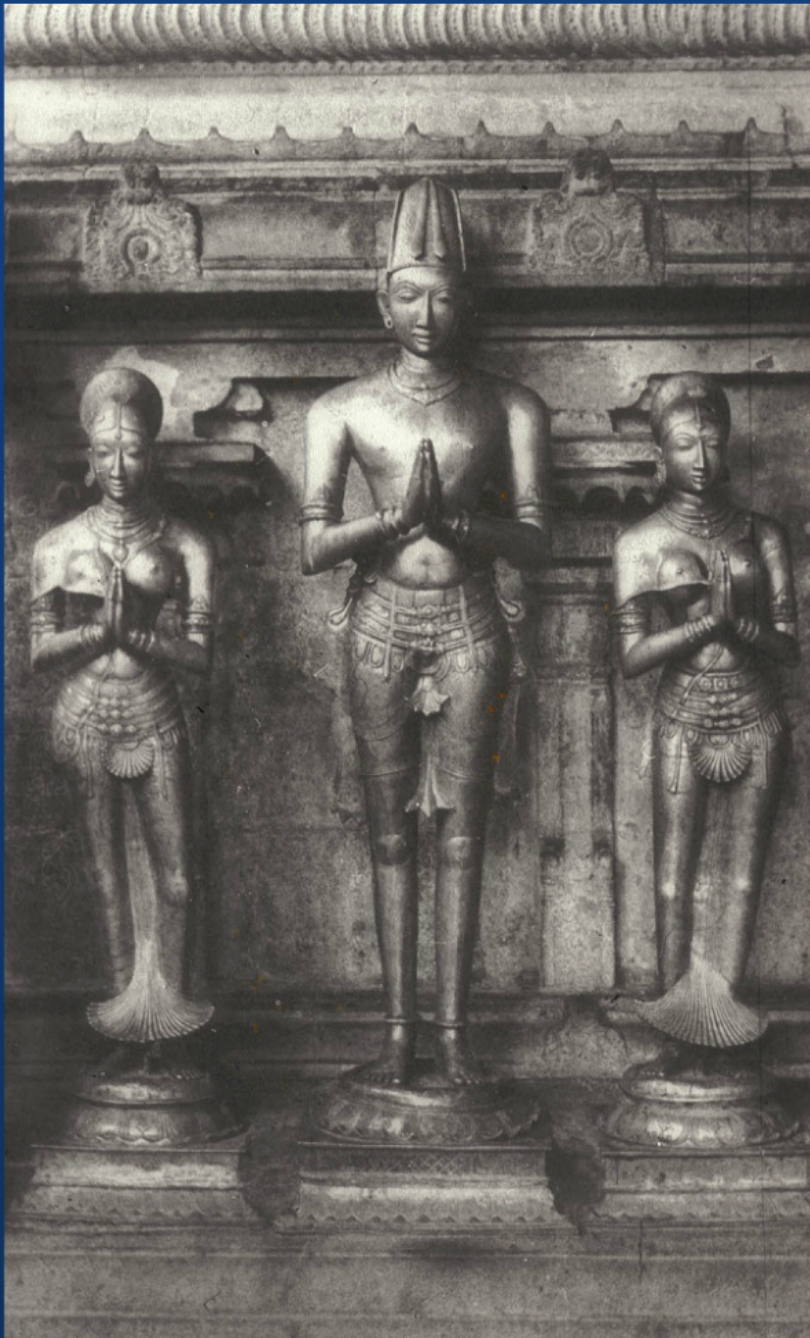
r. 1509-1529

Āmuktamālyada
circa 1520

A Forgotten Empire
(A Contribution to the History of India)
Robert Sewell 1900

Domingo Paes - horse-trader
in the company of Cristovão Figueiredo
circa 1521

Fernao Nuniz - 3 years in Vijayanagar
trading in horses
circa 1531



*“From Ormuz are carried many horses to India,
of great price, for they are of the **best breed of all**.”*
Commentaries IV.186

Ormuz

He caused horses to be brought from Oromuz and Adeem into his kingdom and thereby gave **great profit to the merchants**, paying them for the horses just as they asked. He took them dead or alive at three for a thousand pardaos, and of those that died at sea they brought him the tail only, and he paid for it just as if it had been alive. PAES 504-5

II.29

*Soldiers need two stirrups to mount their tall stallions
but as the horses gallop and begin to crouch
their riders become scared as their feet graze the ground.
‘Which of these two is worse? And what becomes of us?’
think the proud warriors as they feign exhaustion,
humbled twice over by these **mighty swift steeds**
from Persia, Balkh, Herat and Khotan.*



No Proper Fodder

Marco Polo — “Here are no horse bred; and thus a great part of the wealth of the country is wasted in purchasing horses.” poorly fed with “**boiled rice and boiled meat**, and various other kinds of **cooked food**” no proper fodder and “they all die off” (Yule, Book III.17)

Athanasius Nikitin — “Horses are fed on **peas**; also on **kichiris**, boiled with sugar and **oil**; early in the morning they get **shishenivo**, Horses are not born in that country, but oxen and buffaloes; and these are used for riding, conveying goods, and every other purpose.” (*Travels of Athanasius Nikitin* in Major 2011: III, 10).





Financing Horse Trade

Marco Polo — “revenue is spent buying horses, which do not breed in India and must be **continuously imported**. They **do not know how to keep them**, and the merchants exploit the situation...horses breed poorly...they eat flesh and rice.”

Montecorvino — “Horses are scarce, **reserved for the king and lords**.”

(Rubies 2000: 60)

Varthema — “And you must know that a horse is worth at least 300, 400, and 500 pardaus, and some are purchased for 800 pardaus, because horses are not produced here, neither are there any mares found there, because **those kings who hold the seaports do not allow them to be brought**.”

(Rubies 2000: 149)



The Imperial Budget

IV.238

*Even if it is big, a quarter of the budget
should go to the king's gifts and pleasures,
half to maintain a powerful military
and a fourth to the treasury vault.*

The King every year buys **thirteen thousand horses of Ormuz**, and **country-breds**, of which he chooses the best for his own stables, and he gives the rest to his captains, and gains much money by them; because after taking out the **good Persian horses**, he sells those which are country-bred, and gives five for a thousand pardaos, and they are obliged to pay him the money for them within the month of September; and with the money so obtained **he pays for the Arabs** that he buys of the Portuguese, in such a way that his captains pay the cost of the whole without anything going out of the Treasury. PAES 616



IV.258
*Merchants from distant lands,
who import elephants and warhorses,
should be kept in imperial service at the capital.
Treat them with prestige
and provide them with towns and mansions.
Purchase their goods at a high price
and ensure that your enemies
are deprived of such resources.*

When we came to this country the king was in this new town, and there went to see him Chistovão Figueiredo with all of us Portuguese that came with him, and all very handsomely dressed after our manner, with much finery; the king **received him very well**, and was very complacent to him. The king was as much pleased with him **as if he had been one of his own people**, so much attention did he evince towards him; and also towards those amongst us who went with him he **showed much kindness**. We were so close to the king that he touched us all and could not have enough of looking at us.

here he [Krishna Raya] commanded us to be **lodged in some very good houses**; and Figueiredo was visited by many lords and captains, and other persons who came on behalf of the king. And the king sent him many sheep and fowls, and many vessels (calôees) full of butter and honey and many other things to eat...The king said many kind and pleasant things to him, and **asked him concerning the kind of state which the king of Portugal kept up**; and having been told about it all he seemed much pleased. PAES 101-2

Gaja Śāla

Vijayanagara | Hampi



IV.226

*Protect your stables at all times
and keep them well stocked with the best fodder.
Entrust the care of finely bred horses and elephants
only to skilled and loyal servants, never to your lords.*

This King has continually fifty thousand paid soldiers, amongst whom are **six thousand horsemen who belong to the palace guard**, to which six thousand belong the two hundred who are obliged to ride with him. He has also twenty thousand spearmen and shield-bearers, and three thousand men to look after the elephants in the stables; **he has sixteen hundred grooms who attend to the horses**, and has also **three hundred horse trainers** and two thousand artificers, namely blacksmiths, masons, and carpenters, and washermen who wash clothes. These are the people he has and pays every day; he gives them their allowance at the gate of the palace. To the six thousand horsemen the King gives horses free and gives provision for them every month, and **all these horses are marked with the King's mark; when they die they are obliged to take the piece of skin containing the mark to Madanarque, the chief master of the horse**, so that he may give them another, and these horses which he gives are mostly country-breds which the King buys, twelve or fifteen for a thousand pardaos. (Sewell 613-615)

Vijayanagara Theater State

the king had before him some twenty horses fully caparisoned and saddled, with embroideries of gold and precious stones, that showed off well the grandeur and state of their lord. Sewell 452





In their verandahs round the square are many captains and chief people who come there in order to see; and on the ground, near the platform of the house, are **eleven horses with handsome and well-arranged trappings**, and behind them are four beautiful elephants with many adornments. After the king has entered inside he comes out, and with him a Brahman who takes in his hand a basket full of white roses and approaches the king on the platform, and the king, **taking three handfuls of these roses, throws them to the horses**, and after...this he reaches towards the elephants and does the same to them. And when the king has finished this, the Brahman takes the basket and descends to the platform, and from thence puts those **roses and other flowers on the heads of all the horses**, and this done, returns to the king. When the king goes again to where the idol is... (Sewell 265-6).

Port City of Bhatkal

"very noble, beautiful and walled" (Rubies 2000: 148)

- between Goa and Cannanor
- developed sea ties while Vijayanagara controled hinterland
- cosmopolitan community
- Hindus, Muslims Jains, Persians and Arabs lived compatibly (Subrahmanyam 1990: 123)
- known as early as 848 CE
- captured by Ali Adil Shah in 1573
- Duarte Barbosa describes the large trade of the seaport of Bhatkal on its western coast, the exports from which consisted of iron, spices, drugs, and the imports of horses and pearls but as regards he last two items he says, "They now go to Goa, on account of the Portuguese." The governor of Bhatkal was a nephew of King Krishna Deva. "He lives in great state and calls himself king, but is in obedience to the king, his uncle."

Portuguese Policy

Christovão de Figueiredo replied that the whole business of the Portuguese was war.

“For, in order that the affairs of India should progress satisfactorily, as was convenient to the King of Portugal, Afonso Dalboquerque always laboured to make each one of these lords understand that **he desired to have peace and friendship and the trade in horses with him**, which was what they claimed; for, whereas he held the key of their position at Goa, **he desired by means of this artifice to sow dissensions among them.**” Commentaries III: 38

Albuquerque's Letters to King Manuel

“Goa in your power will make both the **kings of Narsinga and Deccan** pay tribute...because the king of Narsinga, in order **to secure Bhatkal, and his ports, and the supply of horse to his land**, will have to do whatever you request” 1 April 1512 (Rubies 2000: 191-2 Footnote 64)

“I have determined that the horses from Arabia and Persia should all be in your hand...first, in order to favour the port of Goa with the **high duties paid by the horses**...and also because the king of Narsinga and those of the Deccan will desire and strive for peace with you, seeing that it is in your power to give them victory over each other, because **without doubt whoever has the horses from Arabia and Persia will win**...and finally in order to ruin the port of Bhatkal.” 4 December 1513 (Rubies 2000: 191-2 Footnote 64)

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Aśvapati Narapati Gajapati



Map 1. Sixteenth-century India according to the *Rāyamācānu*.

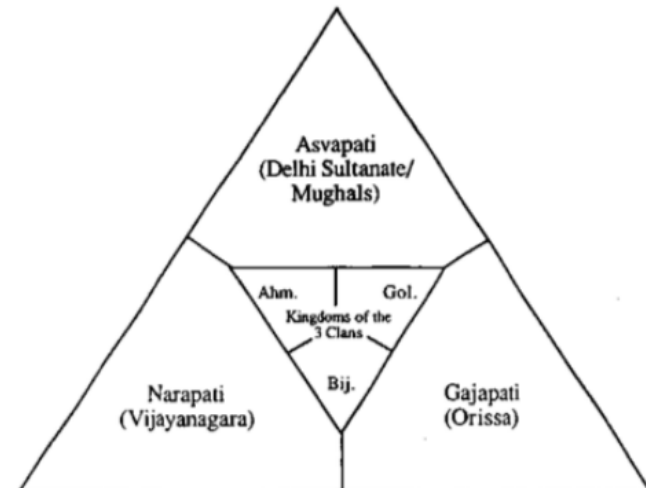


Fig. 5. Schematic representation of the *Rāyamācānu*'s political geography—the kingdoms of the Kings of the Three Lion-Thrones and of the Lords of the Three Clans.

Islamicate Architecture of Vijayanagara



Probing the Ocean

Areas of Future Research

Variety of historical sources

- including diplomatic communications
- foreign travelogues
- Indian literary sources

Composite picture of Indian Ocean maritime trade

- trade routes mediated by the Portuguese
- critical role in the dynamics of 16 century Deccani politics and society.

Fieldwork and Archives

- unexplored sites in Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra, etc.
- understudied texts in a variety of languages

What **insights** can we gain by listening to a **variety of voices** from the past?

And how did such **cosmopolitan exchanges** develop new ways of **thinking and seeing the world** at large?



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