VIJAYANAGARA IN FOREIGN EYES

A Study of Travel Literature and Ethnology

in the Renaissance (1420–1600)

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This dissertation attempts to understand the formation and transmission of images of non-European societies during the Renaissance from a case-study. An introductory chapter explains travel literature as a genre, and establishes its general importance for the early development of the human sciences in the European cultural tradition, in particular the empirical assumption that dominates the production of practically-oriented narratives based on the creative use of everyday language. The argument then goes on to focus on various descriptions of the South Indian kingdom of Vijayanagara written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by foreign observers. This body of literature is studied thoroughly and in chronological order, with reference to the education and interests of the travellers and to the quality of their Indian experiences. Thus the argument compares medieval with sixteenth-century travel narratives, and texts produced within a Muslim and a Latin Christian traditions. Finally, it attempts to evaluate the use travellers made of their rhetorical possibilities from a modern understanding of the complexity of the indigenous cultural tradition and political system. Continuous reference to the travel literature of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance connects this original case-study with the contemporary process of formation of ethnological languages in Europe. The conclusion argues for the understanding of travel literature as a possible form of cultural translation. It also defines the fundamental assumptions of Renaissance ethnology as the understanding of human diversity in natural and historical terms, albeit in the limited form of descriptions of social behaviour which avoided the open discussion of religious beliefs.
DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and not the outcome of work done in collaboration. It does not exceed 80,000 words in length, excluding footnotes, references and bibliography.
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In this piece of historical research I have attempted to uncover the different dimensions of a complex cultural process, the formation and transmission of images of foreign peoples in Renaissance Europe from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, broadly speaking. I have sought to relate a set of genres, travel literature, to the evolution of ethnological thought. Since the material is indeed vast, I have not attempted to analyze all the sources equally. Rather, by choosing one set of related texts, which I have tried then to interpret in the particular context of its production and circulation, my aim has been to elaborate a detailed case-study from which to suggest a wider narrative. Although this case-study focuses quite sharply on early European descriptions of the kingdom of Vijayanagara in South India, the validity of my generalizations is tested by a continuous reference to other texts which are peripheral to my analysis. Taken together, these references constitute the matrix for a more comprehensive cultural map which I have sought to define in an introductory chapter, dealing with travel literature as genre.

My intention is to offer two kinds of conclusions. First, at the end of the case-study focused on Vijayanagara I shall attempt to explain the relevance of travel literature for our understanding of the European
Renaissance. In this sense I expect my thesis to illuminate the new importance of some fundamental assumptions developed through the practice of describing a society placed almost entirely outside the European tradition, and more particularly to evaluate the quality of these descriptions, whose complexity far surpasses the self-interested imposition of European prejudices which has recently become known as "orientalism". Secondly, and throughout my historical narrative, I hope to have elaborated a model for interpreting cultural history which addresses some difficult problems about continuity and change in a tradition, and the relationship between subjective interpretation and human agency as a whole. In the following pages I shall explain with more detail these two claims.

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Although it is often recognised that the cultural changes of the Renaissance must have contributed to the rise of the empirical sciences in the following centuries, this link has scarcely ever been made clear, especially insofar as it concerns the human sciences. In part this is because significant genres, such as travel literature, have not been discussed in the context of an intellectual history which is too exclusively concerned with the more elite genres of the humanist and scholastic traditions. Thus some of the roots of early modern natural and human
history have been taken for granted. Another reason may also be that travel literature has not been sufficiently studied with this question in mind.

This does not mean that I have been unable to profit from previous studies. The tradition of travel collections inaugurated by Ramusio in the sixteenth century has been continuous in Europe since then, and there have been in the past two centuries scholarly editions of many travel narratives relevant to this study. In the English-speaking world, the various volumes published by the Hakluyt Society have been particularly invaluable. There has not been, however, any detailed and systematic attempt to assess the importance of this kind of literature in the development of the human sciences. In this cultural area a crucial development, both qualitative and quantitative, takes place since the late Middle Ages and in particular in the key moment of the great geographical discoveries of the Renaissance, with the subsequent expansion of cosmographical genres. Special studies of single narratives, such as those of Marco Polo or Columbus, however sensitive to special problems of interpretation, cannot be expected to have mapped satisfactorily a long-term process that, in several decades, led to the crucial discussion of the relationship between human behaviour and

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1 It has also been typical of the literature to assume that things start much later, and thus to neglect completely the Renaissance. Such is the case of Hazard 1935, who begins the analysis in the late seventeenth century, or more acutely in the work of Said 1978, whose references to the literature before the late eighteenth century fail to constitute a proper reconstruction of a European tradition of thought about the East.
human beliefs from the perspective of an empirical definition of diversity of laws and customs. Similarly, the cultural chapters often attached to general histories of the Expansion of Europe constitute little more than a starting point. Even though they may offer some insight, they can hardly deal with the complex interaction between this kind of literature and wider cultural processes. Equally limited are studies devoted to the geographical literature of a single country, such as France, Portugal, or Italy. Finally, some studies of travel literature have been undertaken from the perspective of literary criticism, which has made them particularly vulnerable to a tendency to simplify the historical context - social, political, or even cultural - for the sake of rhetorical analysis. I think that this study can contribute to a clarification of the more general questions, by introducing a full discussion of the theme from the perspective of a theoretically-sensitive and empirically-informed cultural history.

I am fully aware that any answer offered in this work can only be partial. Firstly, because genres beyond travel literature such as historiography or moral philosophy are

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3 See respectively Atkinson 1935, Silva Dias 1973 and Zoli 1982. Étiemble, in his recent work on the European interpretation of China, is right to emphasize the importance of a "pre-philosophical" thought in travel literature, which is at the root of Montesquieu's *Esprit des Lois*. However, the perspective is completely deformed because the author intends to explain "China as seen by Europe" while, in fact, he basically writes about "China as seen in the French cultural space" (Étiemble 1988, especially pp.213-27).

4 For instance Campbell 1988.
relevant to the development of the human sciences in early modern Europe.\(^5\) Secondly, because the number of sources available has meant that I have had to focus my analysis on a few texts. Therefore I have concentrated my attention on problems related to human, rather than natural, history. I have also omitted any significant consideration of material on the New World, relatively well covered by modern historiography,\(^6\) and have instead focused on descriptions relating to oriental peoples, and more precisely India.\(^7\) I have however included sources from the early fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth centuries, and from different European, and even Islamic, countries. This has allowed me to make the necessary comparisons in order to create a historical narrative capable of answering my questions - questions concerning the different dimensions involved in the creation of ethnological knowledge, and the historical sequence of a European cultural change.

Thus, since in choosing sources my criterion has been to be able to address such questions, this work is not intended to include a description of all the images of Asia produced in the sixteenth century, nor a list of all the

\(^5\) From this perspective I have also written a study of travel collections and humanist methods for travel in the Renaissance, but its extension has prevented me from including it within this thesis.


\(^7\) Hopefully, in the future I shall be able to compare this case-study based on Vijayanagara to parallel studies of various other colonial contexts, such as the Jesuits in Japan and China, the Spanish in Peru and Mexico, or Protestant New England.
works on India or China produced at the time - a task such as that accomplished by Donald F. Lach in his monumental *Asia in the making of Europe*, or, in a more limited way, by the works of Penrose and Bouchon. I am not writing a history of early modern ethnology either, the kind of work begun by Margaret Hodgen, Giuliano Gliozzi, or Anthony Pagden. In a general sense I have tried to understand the relationship between the two, travel accounts and ethnological thought.

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The writing of this thesis has been guided by two methodological convictions: that human history cannot be properly understood without reference to cultural aspects, and that much can be improved in the way such cultural aspects have been traditionally analyzed. This situation is the consequence of serious problems of definition - such as *what is culture?*, and it especially affects the way this "cultural dimension" can be related to a more general historical process.

Throughout my analysis of travel accounts I have attempted to define clearly and be faithful to three different dimensions of the process of knowledge: the tradition in which the authors of descriptions had been educated, including of course the rhetorical models and the

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8 Lach 1965-.

9 See respectively Penrose 1955 and Bouchon 1988b.

information that each of them could be expected to have available; the social strategies and political interests in which they participated, considering in particular the context of production of each text (beyond a mere sociological generalization, such as "Marco Polo was a merchant", or "Alessandro Valignano was a missionary"); finally, the experience of otherness in which the narrator may have been involved. Here I have tried to avoid the (now current) assumption that travellers only see those images they already carry, as a prejudice, from their own country.¹¹

From the combination of these perspectives two general ideas have emerged: that the history of culture can be treated as a history of language-games, and that travel literature is a possible form of cultural translation. These two ideas have several implications which I shall now explain.

Firstly, a "history of language-games" is an attempt to overcome the limitations of some traditional approaches to cultural history. I understand a "language-game" as a set of rules and assumptions, often unconscious to the

¹¹ Edward Said's influential book, Orientalism, has contributed to increased awareness of the political implications of much of what has been produced in the West as "empirical science on the Orient". However, Said clearly overemphasizes his case when he rules out one of the fundamental dimensions of the process of "knowing the other", and declares that 'The value, efficacy, strength, apparent veracity, of a written statement about the Orient therefore relies very little, and cannot instrumentally depend, on the Orient as such. On the contrary, the written statement is a presence to the reader by virtue of having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such real thing as "the Orient".' (Said 1978, p.21). If this were true, I do not think that some of the literature I have studied would have even been possible. A conclusion similar to mine was reached by Karen Kupperman 1980, concerning early English descriptions of the Algonquian Indians of Virginia and New England.
agents that use them, organized so as to meet the demands of a social context of communication. It encompasses therefore any cultural activity based on the interaction of subjective agents who create and exchange mental representations in order to meet various purposes. Needless to say, there are many different kinds of conventional signs which can be used in a language-game, not necessarily of a verbal kind, but also images and so on. Language-games are not static, because through use they are constantly adapted to new situations and transformed. The tradition of a language-game produced by a community constitutes a discourse.

I therefore believe that a "history of ideas" merely defined as such is too narrow as a means of assessing the full dimension of cultural developments. What makes sense of an agent's subjective experience is not just engagement with an intellectual doctrine, but also a set of purposes. Furthermore, such a thing as a belief should not be taken for granted - human agents have the capacity to entertain beliefs superficially, and to revise such beliefs in a context which creates new demands. Most cultural activities are developed through the unconscious use of common language. While sophisticated ideas and models are crucial in a cultural tradition, they rest on a wider ability to use a variety of language-games and thus to share in a cultural life.

One could of course argue that the formalized discourse of the elite is often more creative than the
popular use of a vernacular language, and that therefore Aquinas' concept of natural-law is more far-reaching than Marco Polo's book of travels. It is however the interaction between these two kinds of discourse that I wish to address as the main subject of a cultural history of early ethnology. In fact, the non-reflective use of everyday language can be creative because of the novelty of the context in which linguistic agency takes place. This is how the languages of Christianity and Civilization were appropriated by soldiers, merchants and missionaries in their descriptions of non-European peoples, up to the point where major intellectual assumptions concerning the understanding of human societies could be (and needed to be) challenged.

But if a history of ideas is inadequate, on the other hand a history of "mentalities", by trying to generalize collective "ways of thinking", and by confusing subjective interpretations with actual behaviour, is too often ill-defined. In the course of my research, for instance, to speak simply of a "medieval" and a "modern" mentalities would have been inappropriate. Equally wrong is the idea that there is an "oriental" way of thinking radically opposed to a "western" way. In fact, even the idea that there exist some "irrational" beliefs (such as the so-called confusion of fact and fiction some historians have

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12 This thought, which has guided for a long time my research, finds a complete confirmation in, for instance, G.E.R. Lloyd's recent book (Lloyd 1990).
identified in medieval literature on the East)\textsuperscript{13} cannot
be accepted without criticism: what is rational is what
makes sense within the context of a language-game -
rationality is in fact the human ability to learn and use
different language-games.

Secondly, my understanding of cultural history affects
three alternative assumptions about human subjectivity that
I would like to question. The first one is a form of crude
materialism, according to which people's subjective life -
a traveller's capacity to "see" - was somehow determined by
a kind of pre-defined power strategy, or, more simply, the
ideology of a social class to which an individual is
supposed to have belonged.\textsuperscript{14} The variety of
interpretations found in travel accounts makes this kind
of approach obviously simplistic.

The next assumption is a form of narrow rationalism,
according to which travellers simply saw "what was there
to be seen" - unless they were clouded by the prejudices
which more empirical or rational observers easily avoided.
In fact, different interpretations of the same "reality"
can all make sense - to the different travellers. There is
indeed no privileged position from which an interpretation

\textsuperscript{13} See for instance, typically, Hodgen 1964, p.28 and ff.

\textsuperscript{14} For instance, this is the fundamental flaw of a book such as Agnes
Heller's Renaissance Man (1967), otherwise very sophisticated: 'Wealth as a
goal, production for the sake of production, production as an \textit{endless process}
constantly dissolving and transforming things, and hence the dissolution of
all given, natural communities: \textit{all the imperatives with which the new
situation confronted men} led to the development of new types of men and
consequently of a new concept of man, different from both the ancient and the
medieval concept: \textit{that of man as dynamic}' (Heller 1978, p.8). It is of course
the inheritance of the attempt of Marxist dialectical materialism to explain
culture.

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of "what was there" may be considered unchallengeable, not even the modern historian's.

Finally, I would also like to question the idea that, because different interpretations of the same "realities" were possible, there is no way of talking about rationality. Each interpretation was incommensurable. In particular, travellers would not be able to interpret what an indigenous culture was about, because a traveller's perspective was relative to his own culture. A traveller from the late sixteenth century would equally misjudge a medieval account. Even the modern historian cannot expect to understand properly what a Renaissance traveller saw. I believe, however, that this "radical relativism" is incorrect. Of course, different travellers saw different things, and, of course, they relied on their own initial assumptions; but what is striking is how the process of learning languages (understood, in a broad sense, as language-games) allowed travellers to get involved with foreign cultures, or to interpret texts produced in a different context. This ability to learn languages, although (as far as I have observed) universal, was of course affected by the travellers' will to understand better, by the empirical means at their disposal, and by their diverse critical skills. The existence of different languages is obvious, but insofar as translation seems to have been a possibility, the problem of relativism is in
fact only a problem of degree. Thus the question needs to be phrased again as under what conditions did travel literature actually become a form of translation? This is what this study tries to answer.

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15 P.K. Feyerabend (1987, 265-72) argues for the idea of incommensurability. He thinks that it is possible to understand foreign concepts without translating them, by learning a culture from scratch, as a child does. He also thinks that a successful translation changes the translating language. Therefore the possibility of translation is not an argument against incommensurability. I would like to point out (since it is relevant to my interpretation of travel accounts) that learning a culture from scratch does not imply that a foreign culture is being understood, unless it is somewhat related to (i.e. translated into) an original culture. And to learn a different culture from scratch, if ever related to another (original) culture, is some kind of translation. Furthermore, the fact that a successful translation changes the translating language suggests that languages are not closed systems of meaning, thus the argument of incommensurability becomes irrelevant. The problem is understanding when and why do people engage in cultural dialogues. Finally, Feyerabend explains that the kind of incommensurability he understands is not merely to do with difference of meanings. It occurs only when the conditions of meaningfulness for the descriptive terms of one language (theory, point of view) do not permit the use of the descriptive terms of another language (theory, point of view). He likes to refer to historical examples (such as Aristotelian versus Newtonian science). This is also the kind of argument used by Jacques Gernet (1985) to argue that the Jesuits in China made a bad translation of Confucianism into Christianity. The problem here is, of course, whether there was any possible (more abstract) language from which the sharers of different cultures could understand the relative validity of their mutually-exclusive original languages. Or, to use Ian Hacking's concept of "style of reasoning" (1982), whether we should take "that which allows certain propositions to be identified as true-or-false" to be no more than a set of (revisable) assumptions which create a field for intellectual activities - in other words, a language-game. I think historical analysis shows that an ability to transcend particular language-games is possible and, in fact, one of the key elements of historical change. This is what translation actually consists of (rather than just equating one list of concepts onto another).
I am grateful to many people who have, in various ways, helped me during the years 1987-1991, when I have written this dissertation. In particular, I would like to mention those who have read part or the totality of the work here submitted as a PhD thesis and offered valuable suggestions. To begin with Dr Anthony Pagden, my supervisor, who has generously supported me throughout the research. Also my friendly readers, Wahid Behmardi, Gregory Blue, Anthony Butler, Dr Anthony Close, Jas Elsner, Teresa Garlake, Geoffrey Kantaris, Jamie Masters and Peter Ravenscroft. David Armitage and Melissa Calaresu were particularly helpful. Special mention should be made to Burton Stein. He generously allowed me to consult his work, relevant to my research, before publication.
TRAVEL WRITING AS A GENRE

'we maintain a trade, not for gold, silver or jewels; nor for silks; nor for spices; nor any other commodities of matter; but only for God's first creature, which was light: to have Light (I say) of the growth of all parts of the world.'

Travel literature is not an exclusively European creation, and yet its remarkable development since the Renaissance was crucial in the formation of a specifically western discourse on human societies. An understanding of this development requires an overview in which the basic traits that constituted this genre can be identified. I shall therefore attempt to define travel literature, by looking at its origins and general narrative qualities, and later I shall provide a typology of different kinds of travel account, in which the main analytic distinctions relevant to my research will be mentioned. It is hoped that the ideas suggested here will be clarified as I develop the argument with more narrowly-defined case-studies, so that in my conclusions the approach I have followed can be shown to offer a satisfactory hypotheses about the importance of travel literature in the European Renaissance.

The concept of literary genre refers to a set of assumptions and often invisible rules that shape the way a linguistic representation is formally organised to meet the demands of a social context of communication. A literary genre is therefore a form of "language-game", while any kind of cultural activity involves the learning and recreation of one such "language-games". The cultural


2 Literary critics are used to the concept of genre, since their work is a continuous re-interpretation of texts and, inevitably, a reflection on language. But of course cultural historians and anthropologists are bound to face these same questions. My concept of genre is meant to be helpful in the interpretation of texts and documents as sources of historical knowledge. But the concept of literary genre is related to a more general conception of linguistic acts, which has been influenced by the Philosophical Investigations
historian needs to reconstruct their assumptions and rules, thus encompassing the diversity of subjective experiences and their linguistic expressions without presupposing one single "truthful" way of interpreting the world, nor indulging in in a facile relativism in which different world-views are incommensurable. Without such awareness, the propositional contents of texts -including travel accounts- can be misleading.

As part of a literary genre, the idea of travel is from the beginning not only the direct description of a human experience of movement in space, but also a rhetorical device with a relatively independent life in the world of cultural discourses. Travelling Gods and heroes play a substantial role in the early mythologies and epic poems that have been transmitted to us from a variety of cultures, and important themes such as initiation or exile, in which human standards are defined in the face of the world and the unknown, find expression through the metaphor of travelling. Such is clearly the case in middle-eastern and Greek cultures, as expressed in the figures of Gilgamesh, Odysseus, Moses or Jason. Obviously these figures do not all express the same particular meanings, nor is it the case that they become a necessary model for a particular theme. Travel literature is not one but rather many genres, and has significance in a broader cultural context. Still, despite the fact that travel writing as a genre has undergone many changes, it seems also generally true that its cultural role includes, as a fundamental trait, the creation of a representation of the other in the

of Ludwig Wittgenstein (see Fowler 1982). Therefore genre also means language-game. The interpretation of propositions depends on the place they occupy in a 'linguistic context' (such as a text) which has some general traits (a plan, a form, an author, a reading). But what matters is not merely the definition of general rules and conventions. These are only interesting in that they tend to form a 'family' of similar texts (and readings of texts). Rather, the meaning of linguistic acts is given by the social interaction of those who share assumptions and use (or play with) certain conventions and rules - and this only happens in particular historical contexts. To summarize: understanding a proposition implies understanding a language, that is to say to know a technique (Wittgenstein, Ph.I. 199), and to 'follow a rule' is a practice (Ph.I. 202).
context of exchange and eventual confrontation between different human societies.³

The identity of an organized group is always defined in opposition to external elements—the world, mystery, the other—and in that sense travel writing has contributed decisively to the historical formation of social identities, expressed in categories of classification open to political interpretations. By the use of such categories men are opposed to Gods and monsters, nations—as defined by locality, language, customs and political institutions—are opposed to each other, and people are classified according to religious allegiances. This phenomenon we can call tribalism. How much distortion is introduced by such classifications, necessarily partial, depends on the case—quite often the member of a group discovers that he or she shares stronger interests with foreigners than with the original group—but in any case the classifications, despite their claim to essential identities and absolute definitions, are relative to the circumstances in which they are used, and their capacity to shape people's actions can be shown to have limitations. Tribal identities can be revised, and they require a continuous reappropriation of tradition (conservatism) which sometimes opens a possibility of transformation (reform) or even outright rejection (rebellion). The traveller is usually the protagonist of the twin process of establishing identities and dissolving them. On the periphery of a cultural system, the traveller and the mystic (who can be defined as the traveller of the subjective world) are in a privileged position to challenge its core. Because they face the monster of otherness, they also can denounce the original

³ For travel in antiquity see Casson 1974. There are many classical mythical and literary themes which explore the metaphorical possibilities of the idea of travel and the figure of the traveller. Travel created a rhetorical frame useful for both religious and epic narratives, leading to the basic structure of the ancient novel, and also proved to be excellent for satirical purposes (as Lucian and Apuleius well knew). In the field of history and ethnology Herodotus and Strabo wrote or compiled particularly rich and fairly systematic sources which ultimately relied on the idea of faithful travel accounts.
tribe as monstrous. 4

Or, because mythical travellers seek a treasure, either spiritual (immortality, knowledge) or material (gold, a promised land), they can also return home with opened eyes, to realise that their dreamt-of flower was in their back garden. The facility with which success in the world can become a symbol of spiritual progression is blatant in the recurrence of the idea of travel in the western European literary tradition. The Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh, the Greek story of the Argonauts, the Jewish myth of the promised land, the medieval chivalric romance of the Holy Grail, the oriental kingdom of the Prester John, the chronicles of the Crusades, the Spanish-American 'El Dorado', Voltaire's Candide, Novalis' Heinrich von Ofterdingen and even Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness reproduce a similar pattern, even if sometimes (especially in later writers) the message is turned upside-down.

Thus the traveller transcends the limits of a given identity, either to defend it against difference, to reject it as false, or to redefine it in the light of a deeper understanding. 5

Travelling is therefore a very powerful and ambiguous metaphor, but the cultural role of travel literature becomes much more specific as we attempt a historical

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4 There is now one comprehensive anthropology of travel - see Helms 1988. Helms emphasizes not only the relationship between travel and cultural frontiers of an invisible, "esoteric" kind, but also the fact that political-religious elites are often in a position to undertake or appropriate travel in order to enhance their position.

5 The awareness of the importance of travel for the establishment of identities produced a literature of advice or condemnation in moralistic works of antiquity and the middle ages. Moralistic works were related to education and, since the Fathers of the Church, to Christian education. There was never a single response to the theme, and it is clear that whether an author would emphasize the virtues of the pilgrim or condemn the relaxation of customs abroad depended on the social context in which the advice was being produced. The standard line in antiquity is to criticise the traveller as liar. Generally speaking, medieval moralists mistrusted travellers and curiosity in general, but it would be a big mistake to think this was the 'medieval mentality'. Franciscans and Dominicans, for instance, encouraged proper ways of travelling for merchants, knights and friars. Erasmus' condemnation of the corruption of pilgrimage opened the way for the influential figure of the gentleman as a traveller.
reconstruction of the texts in their contexts of production and readership. We can define the question further by asking: what are the conditions of appearance and development of the genre in different cultural traditions as related to a set of historical experiences? We soon realise that, insofar as representations of other human societies are involved, travel writing operates alongside related genres. In the European late-medieval and early modern cultural traditions, which are the main subject-matter of this study, travel literature has important links with political reports, geographical and cosmographical treatises, and histories. This is as true of travel within Europe as it is of travel outside Europe. More subtle, but also important, are links with the chivalric and picaresque romances, with utopian and anti-utopian literature, with moralistic reflections, and with rhetorical and dialectical models of education. And this shortlist is not exhaustive. We can imagine an arc ranging from fictional, purely literary travels to informative, common-sense descriptions of peoples and places. Each text needs to be located somewhere on this arc, and since texts are transmitted and transformed, each new mediation also requires a re-assessment of the particular kind of mixture of facts and fiction the language-game is at any given moment about. An approximate typology of different genres within travel literature can be elaborated on the grounds of three main variables: authorship, literary conventions and readership.

It would be a mistake to focus exclusively on authorship in an attempt to secure a source for the interpretation of the texts. Most texts have relatively well-known authors, but the travellers had to reelaborate their experience in order to fulfill specific demands. Thus Marco Polo, travelling at the end of the XIIIth century, seems to have been happy to ask for the help of a Chinese "astrologer" to find some stolen goods, but on the other
hand, after describing the virtuous self-restraint of some Indian Brahmans, who are said to be able to resist their sexual impulses in extreme conditions, suddenly adds that 'these are so cruel and so treacherous and so perfect idolaters that I tell you that it is devilry'. This sentence makes little sense in the context of the particular description, except to remind us that there is a decisive gap between Christians and idolaters that should not be forgotten. Perhaps it was an early interpolation by a pious copyist, or something Rustichello of Pisa felt the need to add, but in any case the text as a whole transmits the feeling that Marco Polo had to practice self-censorship in order to fulfill the expectations of an average European audience.

Thus we cannot know how things should be read just because we have an idea of who the author was. We need a more complex language-game theory for each text, which I shall define in every case as I come to study them. And we also need a relatively independent positivist reconstruction of the object the representations were supposed to describe. Only then shall we be able to make use of the distinction between facts and fiction and evaluate the role of subjectivity in historical developments.

These points can be illustrated with the example of the fourteenth century Travels of John Mandeville, a very popular and influential text which might also serve as one of the fundamental paradigms of European medieval travel.
literature. Mandeville's Travels are quite obviously an organized construction by a skilful author (who wrote in French but was soon translated into English and other languages). The traveller, an English knight from St. Albans, is mostly, if not entirely, fictional. As declared in the prologue, the book is devoted to describing the passage to the Holy Land, the most worthy of all lands, since the events of sacred history culminating in the Christian Incarnation took place there. There are references to the old and at the time very common theme of the need for the unification of the Christian lords, in order to conquer the Holy Land for the people of the Church against the common enemy. The value of the text is referred to its religious object: the persona Mandeville has often travelled in different parts of the world, and now offers advice to future travellers, telling them about possible routes and what lies in them. But the book, written by someone who probably never visited any of those places, and who obviously plagiarised other texts in order to write his own, does not merely offer practical information. Above all, it is devoted to recreating the mythology of the Holy Land, which is portrayed as the temporal and physical as well as spiritual centre of the world. He has recourse to Christian doctrine, scriptural historical references and other added material concerning miracles and similar expressions of divine providence. We may conclude this is a pious text, devised to instruct and entertain. If we prefer an ironical interpretation, then we can say that a cynical author may have approached the religious theme in order to mock and even relativise.

But the heavy presence of geographical and ethnological descriptions of lands and peoples makes the matter more complicated. These descriptions constitute the

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8 Mandeville's manuscripts differ widely. I have followed the modernised edition of the Egerton version by Moseley (1983), and have also consulted the edition of the original, together with the French continental text, by Letts (1953). Discussions of the Travels in Bennet 1954, Moseley 1974 and Zacher 1976. Also Campbell 1988.
second half of the text, without any apparent relationship to the former. Mandeville declares that he knows personally Turkey, Lesser and Greater Armenia, Tartary, Persia, Syria, Arabia, Upper and Lower Egypt, Lybia, Chaldea, a great part of Ethiopia, Amazonia, part of Lesser and Greater India, and 'many other isles that are about India, where dwell many divers kinds of folk of divers laws and shapes'. The traveller intends to speak more plainly about the things that are there 'according as they come to my mind, and specially for those who desire and intend to visit the the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy places that are thereabout'.

It is obvious that such a claim is absurd: it is completely unnecessary to know about all these places in order to go to the Holy Land. The imaginary traveller in fact encompasses the whole of the "known world", and the descriptions, drawing from all sorts of available texts (such as those one would find in the library of a clerical institution), have thus an encyclopedic character. The journey to Palestine therefore appears to offer justification for a description of the world, of the same kind as that written at the same time (around 1350) in Castilian, supposedly by a Franciscan friar, the Libro del conocimiento de todos los reinos...

The author of the Libro seems to have put together his material (either facts or legends) following a map as a guide, and his fictional traveller was only a rhetorical thread, certainly with less personality than Mandeville. Although the information contained in the Libro was superficial, the style inelegant and the itinerary absurd, the pedagogical intention and

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10 See Libro 1980 (Espada ed. 1877). There is an English translation: Markham ed. 1912. As Peter Russell has remarked, the attribution of a Franciscan authorship to this book dates from the early XVth century chronicle of the conquest of the Canary islands by Jean de Béthencourt, and has been repeated since without sufficient criticism. The attribution would make sense because Lullist missionaries had been involved in the early evangelization of the island, and the new conquerors wanted to use the book as a guide to western Africa.
universal ambition of the compiler are obvious.11

There is a passage - probably an interpolation - at the end of the English manuscripts of the Travels that suggests a desire to provide further authority for the text, probably because the sheer "personal experience" of the fictitious traveller is felt to be too weak. Thus the narrator declares that on his way home he showed the book to the pope in Rome, and that the Holy Father, assisted by a council of advisers who could draw on the knowledge of representatives of all the nations of the world, 'said to me that certainly everything was true that was in it [in Mandeville's book]. For he said he had a book in Latin that contained all these things and much more, after which book the Mappa Mundi has been made'.12 This would seem to endorse the theory that the religiosity of the text was mainly a device to make the book more acceptable.

This does not solve the problem yet. What was the intention of the author in writing about all those lands and peoples? Information is a possibility, but the uncritical use of different sources of very different quality creates a problem, especially since the writer was very skilful in blending the material in a coherent whole.

11 The fact that the Libro is almost a prose version of a map (it even includes colourful coats-of-arms to identify different kingdoms) is significant if we remember that the best late-medieval map of the known world, the Catalan Atlas of 1375 prepared by a Majorcan Jew called Abraham Cresques for the King Peter the IVth of Aragon, included pictures and explanations with ethnological information. Some of these seem to have derived from the books of friar Odoric of Pordenone and, most certainly, Marco Polo, which at the time were being translated into Catalan and Aragonese. The kings of Aragon Peter IV and John I, by the end of the fourteenth century, were also well-informed about the Prester John of the Indies, and ordered (or sponsored) such translations of Polo and Pordenone, as well as Hayton and Mandeville. The house of the crown of Aragon had an important tradition of imperialistic feudal expansion and crusading spirit in Spain and the Mediterranean. That such crusading ideals were an underlying motivation of such cosmographical assemblage is made clear by Nitti ed. 1980, in his 'introduction' to García Fernández de Heredia's Aragonese translation of Marco Polo (clearly from the same Catalan manuscript that served Cresques). Heredia was to engage against the Turks as Great Master of the Knights Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem, which his (and the various popes') efforts failed to reform. Jiménez de la Espada, 1877 editor of the Libro del Conoscimiento, observed that this book contained 'mistakes' similar to those in the Catalan Atlas and some other contemporary Italian maps.

The other option is to think that he was merely concerned with entertaining himself and the readers (or those who heard the Travels read aloud), to which we may add the possibility of some sort of ironic and relativistic intention that a few sophisticated critics have suggested\textsuperscript{13} - the theory of the idle cleric devoted to a masterly falsification. The case would not be without precedents in the middle ages. For instance, a similar theory could be held about Geoffrey of Monmouth, the author of the twelfth-century Historia Regum Britanniae, which the critics of his own age had already identified as historically inaccurate. But in that case there were also direct political inspirations to the writing of his book - mainly to justify the Norman conquest of England and to attract the favour of a few influential aristocrats. Is there anything similar we can say about the author of Mandeville's travels?

The problem of authorship is still very obscure, but on closer examination of the text the literary elaboration of the religiously-oriented passages is too impressive to have been devised merely as an excuse. Such detailed emphasis was not really necessary if all Mandeville wanted to do was to imitate the Venetian merchant Marco Polo. If we accept the possibility of a genuine interest in spreading a Christian interpretation of the world in a man who may as well have been a cleric, and if we resist the temptation to see the Travels as a mere conglomerate of common religious themes and medieval geographical encyclopaedism, then it becomes clear that the skilful summary of ethnographic information is indeed a true extension of the main religious purpose of the book. This purpose was to reinforce the traditional claim that the

\textsuperscript{13} This relativistic interpretation is a growing trend. See Moseley in Mandeville 1983 (Introduction) and Campbell 1988. Of course, the problem is to relate our readings (which, I agree, can be many) to the interpretations that could make sense in the fourteenth century, and, more specifically, in the particular cultural and social context in which the Travels were written and circulated.
Holy Land is the sacred centre of the world. The author, who was perhaps (like Ramon LLull, the thirteenth century author of the Llibre de Meravelles) a Franciscan educated in a kind of Augustinian theological framework, attempted to demonstrate that the diversities and marvels of the world all point towards God. The Holy Land, locus of the Incarnation, could again be presented as a privileged place of encounter emphasized by a general description of the world. By contrast, the only place the traveller cannot reach is the earthly paradise, which needs to be left to God's grace. In such description the integration of well-known facts and well-known myths in a moralistic framework was far more important than the accuracy of the particular information. And it is clear that the author used the evidence of foreign peoples (from friar Odoric of Pordenone, Vincent of Beauvais, Prince Hayton of Armenia, and many others) in order to stress the need for Christian reform, unification and zeal, rather than as a way of continuously denigrating the other. This is clear in his effort to stress correspondances, and find a dialogue, between Christianity and Islam.\(^{14}\) Mandeville's travels showed that the diversities of the world shared a common nature, which pointed towards a precisely-located divine center. They even suggested that different religions and sects tended towards the recognition of a universal morality, and therefore a Christian ruler could learn moral consistency from a Muslim one. The author went as far as to claim that God may as well love and be pleased with the manners of peoples who, despite lacking the articles of 'our faith', had a good intent and, by nature, 'a good faith'.\(^{15}\)

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^15^ Idem p. 180: 'And even if these people [the inhabitants of "Bragman"] do not have the articles of our faith, nevertheless I believe that because of their good faith that they have by nature, and their good intent, God love them well and is well pleased by their manner of life, as He was with Kob, who was a pagan...' Here the author of the Travels follows a medieval version of the account of Alexander's meeting with the Brahmins of India. The emphasis is however to an important degree original.
An imaginary traveller, supported if necessary by the authority of the Pope, could be a very effective narrative figure devised to make the whole message more attractive and coherent (better than an abstract traveller, or the name of the compiler of an encyclopedia). This also solves the riddle that a book written originally in French was attributed to an Englishman. A French or Anglo-Norman friar who wanted to remain anonymous (especially since many of his comments were critical and sympathetic to heterodox forms of Christianity) would rather refer authority to a non-existent knight than to someone known. A distant, even foreign persona could only strengthen the chances of passing undetected. What really mattered is that Mandeville impersonated an orthodox Christian who integrated the secular world with a vision of the path to the Godly one. This would thus fulfill the contemporary intellectual project (such as St. Bonaventura's) of the perfect unity of Christian knowledge.16

The book was widely circulated, and often accepted as a reliable description of the world. For many it also became a devotional text, and as such contributed to their spiritual education. In this, the rich illustrations that often accompanied the book served to captivate the imagination in order to direct the mind towards true

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16 On the Franciscan Augustinian and Neoplatonic synthesis of the thirteenth century see for instance Yates 1982, p.63, who follows Etienne Gilson. One of the reasons why I think the author may have been a Franciscan is that in the culminating experience of the Vale Perilosus, in which true Christians have to put their faith in God and reject covetousness in order to survive the crossing, the few travellers who take the risk are led by 'two Friars Minor of Lombardy' (Mandeville 1983, p. 173). One of these two is of course friar Odoric of Pordenone, who had dictated his account to a member of his order in 1331, about twenty-five years before Mandeville's Travels were composed. The whole passage is a subtle reworking of Pordenone's account, perhaps the single most important source to the Travels. Thus the original author is incorporated as a character of the fictional narrative! But I would not like to exclude the possibility that the author of the Travels were a Dominican. Aquinas' synthesis of natural and rational knowledge of the world, on the one hand, and Christian morality and faith, on the other, was an altogether similar enterprise.
Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{17}

It is now clear enough that the reconstruction of a particular language-game explains the apparent mixture of fact and fiction in an altogether coherently constructed work, without recourse to the idea of - in M. Hodgen's words - 'the mental torpor which is said to have cloaked the Western mind for so long during the middle ages, and which led in matters germane to social theory, anthropogeography, and ethnology to the acceptance of legend rather than unencumbered observation'.\textsuperscript{18} There is no need either to appeal to a radical relativism ("that was their mental world and we, being in ours, cannot judge it") in order to protect the medieval "mentality" from a western rationalist onslaught. The author of the Travels knew how to blend a diverse cultural material in a creative way so as to fulfil his particular aims. This is to act as rationally as we can.

Pilgrims to holy places -real or fictitious- thus provide the first type of traveller.\textsuperscript{19} Some of them employ an allegorical language in order to illustrate a mystical progression, while others are primarily concerned with providing practical information about routes and

\textsuperscript{17} The interplay of European prejudices and new observations in the case of late-medieval books and illustrations of Eastern marvels is studied in Wittkower 1957. This influential article, rather than providing a full account of the process of discourse-formation, highlights the need to develop the concept of genre so as to clarify the transformation of particular texts in their historical contexts. Wittkower focuses on Marco Polo and the pictorial tradition, Moseley 1974 does so for Mandeville.

\textsuperscript{18} Hodgen 1964, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{19} The main model for the literature of pilgrimage is provided by descriptions of places, buildings or other special objects that have a religious significance. In some cases the travel has for its objective meeting holy and wise men or religiously-defined communities, as well as visiting key places. The religious dimension of a space may be uncovered referring to myths, doctrines, miracles or ritual practices (festivals, sacrifices and other ceremonies). It would be a serious mistake to identify pilgrimage or religious travelling with Christianity. We find important traditions of travel to sacred places in India, China, Japan and in the Muslim world. We also have important descriptive accounts with possible mystical readings, such as the texts written by the Chinese Buddhist Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629), or the Japanese poet Matsuo Basho (1644-94). Such descriptions are also found in the Greek tradition. See the Description of Greece by Pausanias and De Dea Syria, attributed to Lucian.
dangerous/useful places, and a few widen the range of observations to almost everything that the particular individual who acts as a persona for the narrative has experienced. Still here there is a distinction to be made between those who invent things or take them from books and myths (such as John Mandeville), and others who - at least in part - describe a personal experience (for instance Ibn Battūta). In that sense, the distinction between persona and author is important, because the traveller is always a narrative construction, despite his eventual claims to being both an observer and the actual author who dictated or wrote the text. This is true for Ibn Battūta as well as for Mandeville, because independently of the fact that the former can be now defined as a historical individual, while the latter clearly was not, in all cases what appears in the text is necessarily an artificial and selective representation.

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land was important in Latin Christianity in the Middle Ages, but its influence loses ground as one approaches the late Middle Ages, and subjective travels with allegoric readings are restricted more and more to the literary genres defined as fictional from the outset. At the same time one finds the appearance of a secularised subject of knowledge impersonating an individual human being who can always have recourse to scepticism about all experiences, and therefore devotes his attention to the development of a critical common-sense knowledge. By "common-sense" I mean a language-game which sticks to the use of an inherited everyday language with little self-reflection, but with a

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20 On pilgrimage up to the twelfth century see Wilkinson ed. 1988, pp. 24-84. Perhaps the most important examples of such medieval figures of travel with allegorical readings are to be found in chivalric romances, and especially with the anonymous thirteenth century Quest of the Holy Grail, which was one of the clerical (Cistercian) elaborations of the themes of the cycle of King Arthur. The development of the theme throughout the centuries is traced in García Gual 1983.
direct concern for practicalities. This idea of a critical common-sense observer is central to my analysis. It is sufficient to stress here that this individualistic and partly self-conscious type of observer, often an adventurer who does not hesitate to make up a few exciting situations in order to increase his fame and assets, appears as central in the literature of the late fifteenth century in Europe (with such successful writers as Ludovico di Varthema), and evolves thereafter taking the role of the social critic (for instance Fernão Mendes Pinto, c.1510-1583) or the sceptic philosopher (such as François Bernier, 1620-1688). To a lesser extent, we find this figure coexisting with spiritual travellers in other cultural traditions, such as ancient Greece (e.g. Pausanias, 2nd century a.C.), medieval Jews and Muslims (e.g. Benjamin of Tudela, twelfth century; Ibn Battûta, 1304-1377) or Buddhist Chinese monks in India (e.g. Hiuenn Tsiang, 602-664).22

21 With common-sense knowledge I do not refer to a "cultural system" (Geertz 1983), nor to a "science of the concrete" (Lévi-Strauss 1962), nor of course to the spontaneous and universal recognition of something of the kind "this table is a table". Although all these approaches provide valuable hints, none of them is completely satisfactory. Thus Geertz wants common sense to be 'what is left over when all these more articulated sorts of symbol systems [science, art, ideology, law, religion, technology, mathematics...] have exhausted their tasks, what remains of reason when its more sophisticated achievements are all set aside' (p. 92). I think it is better to put it the other way round: common-sense is the basis on which more sophisticated cultural practices can be elaborated. But it does not disappear when these sophisticated practices take place, and it certainly does not constitute a separate system of symbols. Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, puts the stress on the inferior degree of abstraction of the particularised knowledge of the "primitive bricoleur", which looks like a misleading approach to me, since these peoples also use abstract concepts and linguistic rules. It would be more fair to talk about the different emphasis on systematicity and critical awareness required by the various traditional and modern language-games. Rather than just synthesising a primitive way of thinking, opposed to a civilized one, one should map the language-games and cultural spaces created by each tradition. Finally, to identify common sense with a kind of unhindered recognition of "what there is" is both crude and sterile, ignoring the problem of cultural differences and change.

22 Mendes Pinto, Bernier, Pausanias, Benjamin of Tudela, Ibn Battuta and Hiuenn Tsiang are not meant to constitute an exhaustive list of individualistic and partly self-conscious common-sense observers. My intention is to show that what has become the figure of a typically western subject is not an original historical creation of Europe, but in fact it appears elsewhere, even though in most other traditions its role is less central. The centrality of this subject in the Western tradition, and the fact that it eventually challenges any other possible centre of discourse, are interesting problems for cultural
The tension between a common-sense, historical observer and a subject devoted to witnessing mythologised areas of religious significance appears in the early forms of travel literature in various cultural traditions, and runs parallel to the fact that in any text the traveller is to a certain degree a literary construct. The quality of the religious experiences being described, and how they relate to the author of the text, constitute a different problem.

The emergence of the secularised observer devoted to the development of common-sense language descriptions is also related to two other types of travellers: the political ambassador and the merchant. As far as embassies are concerned, we have examples from ancient Greece (such as Megasthenes, representative of Seleucos Nicator in India between 302 and 288 b.c.), medieval Christianity (Ruy González de Clavijo, for instance, was sent by Henry III of Castile to Timūr in 1403) or Persia (‘Abd al-Razzāq was ordered to go to the Vijayanagara Empire by Shāh Rukh in 1442). These lists are not meant to be exhaustive, of course, and even Motecuzoma's envoys to Hernán Cortés can be said to have practiced some sort of exercise in "describing the other", to find out whether the Spaniards were to be classified as Gods or men. But the European historians, but they cannot be solved by appealing to an essential uniqueness (such as a Christian/bourgeois/eurocentric "Subject" running from Augustine to Marco Polo and, eventually, Richard Burton). Here again the most sensible approach is look at the development of concepts and figures in the context of language-games that transform inherited traditions in particular historical circumstances.

My understanding of the episode between Motecuzoma and Cortés is based on the latter's letters, the chronicle of Bernal Díaz and the reconstruction of indigenous sources, specially Sahagún's Florentine Codex (12 vol., Santa Fe, N.M. Monographs of the School of American Research, 1950-82). It has been argued that the distinction between God and Man did not operate in the same way in the Amerindian tradition than in the Christian one, in which limits are very strict. It has also been suggested that the Aztec was not an 'individual' in the same way a sixteenth century Castilian was, and that he communicated more with the world, while the conquistador communicated more with other men (Todorov 1982, pp 73-75). This appears to me like gratuitous and superficial relativism. Motecuzoma tried to come to terms with the newcomers, and he was not chained by his cultural tradition to respond in a particular way. There is evidence that different Indians took different attitudes. In that debate the distinction Men-Gods had a crucial classificatory role. Motecuzoma was
culture of the Renaissance developed a more formalised and self-conscious discourse with the aim of increasing the precision of the observations. This trend was especially emphasized as part of the political function of the aristocracy, first among the ambassadors of the Italian city-states, later and more generally as part of a humanist education of the young man in the feudal principalities elsewhere, and especially in the north of Europe. Outside Europe, because of its power and proximity, most attention was devoted to the Turks.

The missionary, devoted to spreading the word rather than to hearing a different one, originally made a poor observer, as we see in the case of the friar Ramon Llull (1232-1316), who preached in north Africa. For him Evangelisation was complementary to Crusade, and the observation of Islam was incompatible with the contemplation of the divine marvels of the world. But a few Franciscan missionaries had to operate as ambassadors to the Mongols as well, and to that extent they became common-sense critical observers. The missions they set in India and China also required to face practical problems and to pay attention to practical information. During the Atlantic expansion, in the Canary Islands and later Africa and America, the missionaries who wanted to defend Indian clearly frightened, while Cortés did not hesitate to manipulate indigenous perceptions as he saw fit. This was decisive. Furthermore, the American Indians were very divided, and once their institutional leadership failed to follow a clear direction, things became very difficult for them. The Spaniards were also divided, but they had more to win and less to lose by sticking together, and their system of aristocratic loyalties was militarily more efficient. While cultural traditions played a very important role in that conflict, it is not justified to talk about a particular 'concept' or 'way of relating to the world' that would make the Indians inevitably weak in front of the Spaniards. Similarly, mere technical superiority (such as fire arms) cannot explain the eventual success of the invaders, since they could still have been too outnumbered to win.

25 The most important envoys to the Mongols were John of Piano Carpini (1245-48) and William of Rubruck (1253-55), both of which left excellent accounts. In the next century Franciscan and Dominican missionaries to China and India followed their path and went further (see specially Odoric of Pordenone, John of Monte Corvino, Jordanus Catalani, and John of Marignolli).
Christians (or would-be-Christians) from enslavement developed ethnological arguments in order to justify their human status. Later on, the preoccupation to develop more sophisticated strategies of conversion in America and the East meant that the missionaries, especially the Jesuits, became systematic observers and thinkers devoted to the understanding of other cultures. The results were publicised in the form of letters and Histories as part of the propaganda of the Counter-Reformation.

But if ambassadors and missionaries provided occasions for the critical use of everyday language in order to suit particular purposes which demanded a new, usually more detailed organisation of the material, there can be no doubt that initially the most informative sources that expanded on common-sense information were written by merchants. The late-medieval merchants manual, of which the most famous is Francesco Pegolotti's Practica della Mercatura (c.1340), sometimes only contained the sort of information necessary for economic dealings, that is to say routes, markets, products and prices; but the genre immediately expanded to include ideal models of how the merchant should behave (as in the introduction to the Catalan manual of the late XIVth century), and information about the political conditions and customs of the different places (which is specially the case with the Portuguese descriptions of the Indian Ocean written by the

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27 I am especially thinking of José de Acosta, Alessandro Valignano, Matteo Ricci, Luis Fróis, Antonio Monserrate, Giovan Pietro Maffei, Jacomé Fenicio, Jerome Xavier and, in the next century, Roberto de Nobili, João Rodrigues, Athanasius Kircher, and finally Lafitau. But non-Jesuits also made important contributions (for instance the Augustinian Juan González de Mendoza, whose extremely influential description of China was repeatedly printed after 1585; the works by the Franciscans Toribio de Benavente and Bernardino de Sahagún, and by the Dominicans Bartolomé de Las Casas and Diego Durán, were fundamental in Spanish America).

28 See Pegolotti 1936 and Manual 1981 (the editor Gual Camarena suggests that the introductory material to the Catalan trader's manual could have been written by the thirteenth century canonist and General of the Dominican Order St. Ramón de Penyafort).
traders and crown officials Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa in the first two decades of the sixteenth century).29 Furthermore, it was an open genre, ranging from the strictly personal report based on diary-notes and memories to the encyclopedic attempts to map a whole route or area with the help of second-hand information. In some cases, especially where education and fortune allowed, merchants became political agents (for instance Marco Polo) or self-appointed social critics and philosophers (such was the case of the Florentine Filippo Sassetti, who sent letters from Portuguese India in the sixteenth century).30

This list of "genres within a genre" is not intended as an exhaustive one. Original ethnographical information and implicit ethnological reflections are scattered in histories, letters and administrative documents, many of which were written in Spanish America or Portuguese Asia in the context of complex experiences of cultural conflict and exchange. The importance of travel writing in the West has to be related to its flexibility, rather than to the existence of a highly conventionalised model. The continuous dialogue between cultural productions and new encounters encouraged the interbreeding of genres and increased their influence in the European tradition as a whole. Often the most interesting observers, and those who sold the most copies, cannot be easily classified as belonging to one type or another. The famous Fernão Mendes Pinto was at different times merchant, soldier, Jesuit, slave and novelist. He clearly invented many things, but at the same time was recording a very original and complex experience, so that the fictitious persona of the Peregrinação embodied many of the moral contradictions of the Portuguese Empire in the East. Thus the figure of the traveller provided a source of authority for a new genre.

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29 See Pires 1944 and Barbosa 1918.

30 See Polo 1938 and Sassetti 1970.
with many possible purposes — with hindsight we may define
it as an autobiographical novel in a realist setting.
Mendes Pinto's adoption of this form allowed multiple
readings of his work, which were available to generations
of Europeans (the Portuguese text, first published in 1614,
was translated into Castilian, French, German, Dutch and
English during the seventeenth century). Something
similar can be said of Marco Polo from the fourteenth
century onwards, and Ludovico Varthema from the sixteenth.

These texts integrated the non-Christian and
non-European into the mental worlds of many people from
different countries and social groups. On the other hand,
the different sorts of descriptions that contributed to the
formation of images of the other in the West were
reinterpreted further by theologians, moralists and
political thinkers. In that sense they substantially added
to classical and biblical scholarship in providing the
basis on which very important developments of the elite
culture occurred. Thus natural law theories stretching from
Vitoria to Suárez, Grotius and beyond had a source of their
elaboration in the problems posed by the political
assimilation of the American Indians. Knowledge of
naked "savages" and "civilized" Chinese inspired the
reflection of relativist moralists like Montaigne, La Mothe
Le Vayer and Voltaire, and reinforced the mythical trend
of the happy pre-civilized man, but also the comparison of
complex cultures. Utopian thought placed ideal
Christianized Platonic societies in newly-discovered lands,
and even some experiments were made by missionaries on the
Indians. The evidence of diversity stimulated syncretic

31 See Pinto 1614 and Catz 1978.
33 See O'Flaherty 1987.
34 There is an important possible correspondence between descriptions of
non-Europeans and models of better Europeans, between a new land and an ideal
land. Of course the key works are More's Christian humanist Utopia (1516) and,
later, the scientific dream of Francis Bacon, the New Atlantis (written in
attempts to stretch the religious foundation of morality to universal schemes that took account of historical cultures, so that the messianic ideals of people like Postel or La Peyrère went beyond the humanistic "neoplatonic" synthesis of biblical and classical sources, as in Giovanni Pico, towards the incorporation of peoples from the old and the new Indies. Some authors were not satisfied with including various historical examples in their general political treatises of advice to princes, but rather preferred to present a systematic survey of the geography, laws and customs of modern and ancient, Christian and non-Christian countries. Reflections on the diversity of customs and laws and their historical and geographical causes led to elaborate works on the development and suitability of political systems which relied on this growing body of systematic cosmographies, from Jean Bodin and Giovanni Botero to Montesquieu. And

1610). But we should not forget their satirical counterparts, modelled in the tradition of Lucian's True History: Bishop Hall's Mundus alter et idem (1605), Cyrano de Bergerac's L'autre monde (written around 1650) and Gulliver's Travels (1726), by Jonathan Swift.


36 This was the case with Gabriel Chappuys, who dedicated his L'estat, description et gouvernement des royaumes et republiques du monde, tant anciennes que modernes (Paris 1585) to prince Henry III of France. Although supporting catholicism and royal absolute sovereignty, Chappuys thought that useful wisdom could be learnt from Persia, Turkey, Athens, Genoa and Nuremberg as much as from France, Spain, England or ancient Rome. He concluded with a translation of More's Utopia, which he interpreted as an improved version of Plato's perfect Republic.

37 The systematisation of cosmographical information had a model in the Greek Geography of Strabo, and was re-enacted in the Renaissance (for instance, by Aeneas Sylvius), but the reflection on politics and laws based on this material was carried much further by people like the Venetian Francesco Sansovino (1561 and 1574), the French Jean Bodin (1560 and 1576), Louis Le Roy (1575), Gabriel Chappuys (1585) and La Popelinière (1582 and 1599), the Italian Giovanni Botero (1588 and 1591-1596), and thereafter several seventeenth and eighteenth century writers who either composed careful descriptions of kingdoms and nations (such as the Dutchman Johannes De Laet) or treatises on more general subjects - perhaps the most famous example is Montesquieu's Esprit des lois (1748). The tradition of "political cosmographies" was especially important as a departure from the kind of put-everything-together indiscriminate compilations prevalent at the time: for instance the cosmographies by the Germans Joannes Boemus (1520 and 1536) and Sebastian Münster (1544 and 1550), the French André Thevet (1575) and François Belleforest (1575), or the Spanish Jerónimo Román (1575 and 1595).
historians like the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta advanced increasingly sophisticated models of the stages of development from Barbarism to a full Civil Society that drew on the new information,\footnote{On the other hand Vico's \textit{New Science} (1725, 1730 and 1744) provided a rich model of universal institutional development which followed Classical and Hebrew sources with almost no regard for the new information of the East and the West Indies.} which also was used to argue for and against particular theories, as can be illustrated with the debate about the origin of the American Indians between, among others, the Dutch Hugo Grotius and Johannes De Laet.\footnote{On the importance of the debate about the origins of the American Indians see Gliozzi 1977 and Rubiés 1991.}

These are only the main threads of the influence of travel literature in the cultural developments of early modern European culture. Of course such developments also owed a lot to other sources of reflection, especially the rediscovery and reading of the classics and the practice of historiography and jurisprudence.\footnote{This is the context in which Renaissance critical scholarship and historical consciousness has been most thoroughly studied. See in particular Kelley 1970.} But neither of these discourses produced a new language of Civilization in isolation from contemporary descriptions of diversity of customs and laws, within but also outside Europe. Throughout the sixteenth century, empirical ethnography came to mediate between the languages of Christianity and Civilization in a novel way. Travel literature provided the European enlightenment with a rich body of literature on human societies which was essential to the new reflection and consensus on political and cultural themes – a connection made clear if we consider the importance that such literature had in the reading of people as Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, or even Kant.

This departure was not just based on organizing material in ways which might produce a more balanced map of the world, but more radically on abandoning moralistic purposes and challenging religious frameworks in the name of practical purposes.
However, a detailed study of the influences of travel literature on different aspects of European culture goes beyond the scope of this work. This, through a case-study, will be devoted to the understanding of the cognitive process of observation and classification of different human societies by the travellers on the spot. 41

Since the original process of describing "otherness" cannot be explained without referring to the traditions in which the authors of the texts now available to us were educated and for which they wrote, I want here to stress the importance of travel literature in the establishment and transformation of cultural identities. This meant that Europeans came to define themselves at the same time that they were defining others. It meant that they constructed increasingly sophisticated anthropological and historical theories by using comparative methods that in the first place required a critical reappropriation of common-sense language. In that process many possibilities were available, and each cultural act of knowledge was also a political act of interpretation. But in fact, we shall see when we come to look at particular texts that the process of political interpretation had started much earlier, from the very moment when a first traveller saw something and, by doing so, defined it. Nor of course were the original viewers responsible for what others in Europe would do with what they reported that they saw.

Western cultural originality was the result of a complex combination of multiple acts of interpretation generated by the interplay of material situations and subjective agencies operating within a tradition. I shall attempt to show that this is the best way of understanding the emergence in Europe of a complex cultural system which emphasized a high degree of self-conscious reflection on the use of language for particular purposes. This development occurred in the first place on the basis of the

41 To understand the context in which travel literature had this impact see for instance Lach 1977 pp. 286-323 and Wade 1971 pp.361-391.
flexible use of everyday language, but received the eventual support of institutions and articulated itself with the development of sophisticated elite theories. The existence of a critical attitude towards the traditional forms of discourse meant that while common-sense knowledge was given a central role and expanded in the cultural system, it was also subjected to a meta-linguistic discourse. This took the form of "methods" devised to guide the process of knowledge on a critical and productive basis, and gave rise to several academic disciplines engaged in a continually revisable process of abstraction and conceptual activity. Such abstractions (Nature, History, Man etc.) initially meant a departure from popular common-sense, but on the basis of the same concerns for practical aims and empirical knowledge that characterised "common-sense". This is why experience and even experiment became central concepts in the epistemological discourses. The importance of this double-sided movement can be seen in the prominent role acquired in the cultural system by a set of genres that have come to be known as empirical sciences.

Consequently, the full dimension of Renaissance ethnology (in its primary form of cosmographical literature) cannot be understood merely by studying the intellectual constructions of jurists and theologians concerned with defining the nature of man and of human political society. Writers increasingly appealed to the traveller's experience as a source of authority for the truthfulness of particular observations concerning human diversity. This traveller's experience was however complex, and its authority questionable. It is important to understand properly what was involved in the process of observing and describing a non-European society.

Among various possible case-studies I have chosen to concentrate on the South-Indian kingdom of Vijayanagara, because it was a novelty in the European experience and yet it could be framed in terms of a tradition that stretched
back to Greek accounts of barbarians and ancient Christian theology concerning gentiles. As opposed to the contemporary Spanish experience of the New World, the sixteenth century expansion of Europe in Asia was often kept in check and even rejected by the indigenous populations. Thus, the languages of Civility and of Christianity were from the very beginning under pressure to become more distinct. It was the tension between these two languages, under the shadow of the empirical authority of the traveller, that gave Renaissance ethnology its shape.
Alessandro Valignano (Chieti 1539 - Macao 1606), the Jesuit Visitor of the province of India between 1574 and 1606, wrote extensively about Asian lands and peoples in the different Summaria which he sent to the General of the Company in Rome. These three reports became the basis for a more ambitious historical narrative written in Castilian, the Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias Orientales the first part of which was sent to Europe in 1584. This text was influential among the Jesuit historians who provided Europe with full descriptions of the East in the late sixteenth century and contained chapters describing the qualities and customs of the oriental Indians, the Japanese and the inhabitants of the kingdom of China.¹ Valignano's writings were an important landmark of sixteenth century European discourse on the orient because they provided a sophisticated framework for the comparison of different peoples under the concept of a rational civilization, which was combined with racial and religious forms of classification. In this sense these writings they can be seen as a relatively original development that went beyond the impressive collection of travel narratives published by the Venetian Giovanni Ramusio in the middle of the century. On the other hand, it is significant that as late as 1574 the European observers, having had a long history of contact with the Indian subcontinent and its peoples, were yet unable to provide a unified image of India that made sense of its diversity. Valignano, aware of this problem, preferred to limit his observations to the south-western coast 'que va corriendo desde la ciudad de Dio hasta el cabo de Comorín'.²

This was, of course, the area under direct Portuguese

¹ See Valignano (Wicky ed.) 1944. For a general view Lach 1965, p. 257 ff.

² Valignano 1944, p 22.
political and religious influence. At the same time, a less intense contact with the Chinese or the Japanese offered to the better educated missionaries not only an apparently homogeneous image of a different people with particular customs, qualities and institutions (what we would now call a different "culture" or "civilisation"), but also higher hopes for evangelisation and even a feeling of non-European superiority associated with an ideal of human civil society.

Why were the Indians made to play such a marginal role in the first Renaissance interpretations of Asian peoples? The answer partly lies in the very frustration of the European Catholics in their attempt to evangelise the Hindus (Muslims were from the beginning regarded as a hopeless enemy). The more the missionaries tried and failed, the stronger became the temptation to place hopes in the next land. This process can already be observed in the letters of Francis Xavier himself, which were read by all his followers and inspired their first ideas on the Asians. 3 It is also true that the Jesuits developed a new conception of evangelisation based on the idea of a consciously-oriented cultural exchange, a conception which had not been available during the first half of the sixteenth century, when the first regular contacts with South India and the spice islands took place. 4 On the other hand, it was in the more distant China and Japan, rather than in India, where this new strategy was given most support, almost as if Valignano's own judgement about the inferior civilization of the brahmans directed well-trained missionaries like Matteo Ricci away from the Indian hinterland. Roberto de Nobili only started in the interior of South India in the seventeenth century, right after

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3 All the letters are collected, and translated into French, in Xavier (H.Didier ed.) 1987. The saint's career is studied in detail in Schurhammer 1977.

4 Background information for this "new concept of evangelisation" in Lach 1965, pp. 245-331 and Spence 1984.
Valignano's death.

This prejudice about the superstitious ignorance of the Indian gentiles was shared by the Portuguese ecclesiastical bodies established in the East, often reluctant to allow much initiative to missionaries from Italy or Spain, and indicates one other important reason why the westerners often failed to articulate their understanding of the customs and institutions of the peoples inhabiting India: they did not face a unified political system with which they could have economic, military and cultural dealings, but rather a collection of small and weakly vertebrated sultanates, principalities and semi-independent city-ports involved in oceanic trade. As Valignano recognised, it was difficult to speak about "India" in general, because 'tomando este nombre como se toma comúnmente en Europa, contiene la India en sí tanta y tan grande diversidad de provincias y reynos, que no se puede entender sino por quien anduvo por parte dellos'. The first serious contacts with Akbar's newly-constructed Moghul Empire did not come until the first Jesuit Mission led by father Rudolf Aquaviva was sent in 1579, of which the best account is Antonio Monserrate's Mongolicae Legationis Commentarius. Monserrate belonged to the group of well-trained and selected Jesuits that were led by Valignano in 1574 to infuse a new vigour and a new orientation to the missionary path opened by Francis Xavier, despite and beyond the previous efforts of other religious orders, especially the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

Thus a first phase in the production of travel

5 Valignano 1944, p. 22: 'Because taking this name as it is commonly done in Europe, India contains in it such a great diversity of provinces and kingdoms, that it is not possible to understand it except for those who have travelled part of them'.

6 Monserrate (Hosten ed.) 1914 and (Hoyland/Banerjee eds.) 1922.

7 Compared with Franciscans and Dominicans sent to the Castilian Western Indies, those in Portuguese India wrote remarkably little concerning indigenous customs and religion.
descriptions, written by laymen without access to the analytical tools concerning both Christianity and Civilization displayed later by Valignano, is fundamental in expressing attitudes previous to those found in the detailed works of erudite Jesuits later in the century, such as the Portuguese Frésis in Japan, the Catalan Monserrate in Moghul India, or the Italian Ricci in China.

The two most comprehensive of the early Portuguese accounts, the Suma Oriental by Tomé Pires and the Livro of Duarte Barbosa, took the form of itineraries that followed trade-routes along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. Such descriptions, written between 1512 and 1518, only circulated in manuscript form and were difficult to consult until they were assembled by Ramusio in his ambitious collection Delle navigationi et viaggi (1550-59). It has been argued that this was the result of the attempt by the crown of Portugal to prevent other "foreign" powers from having access to navigational and geographical information - although the success was only relative, since the book of Duarte Barbosa was available for translation into Castilian as early as 1524. Probably more important than any attempt to prevent valuable information from leaking into rival hands was the lack of a sufficient publishing infrastructure and book market in Portugal. It was not until the second half of the sixteenth century that other major narratives about India came to light, namely the

8 Ramusio (Milanesi ed.) 1978. Ramusio only published a fragment of Pires' work, and the less original, without even knowing the author's name.

9 For Barbosa's manuscript circulation and translation see Lach 1965, p.186. Lach repeatedly puts forward the traditional argument for a Portuguese 'control of information'. See Lach 1965, pp. 151-4. The view has received much criticism. It seems difficult to prove that there was a systematic attempt to prevent any information about the new lands to "leak" into the hands of foreign competitors, but there is little doubt that it was common in (at least) the sixteenth century Iberian Peninsula that governments organised their own sources of information on the colonies as a matter of state (for instance in 1575 the royal cosmographer Juan López de Velasco prepared a Universal Description of the West Indies for Philip II of Castile which was not meant to be published). It is also true that Portuguese writers found it difficult to publish in Portugal (such as in the case of F. Mendes Pinto), and many important chronicles were left in manuscript form (such as Correa's and Couto's), sometimes because influential people did not want certain details to be revealed.

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chronicles of the Portuguese expansion written by João de Barros, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda and Braz de Albuquerque. These chroniclers, in their efforts to summarize their information, tried to synthesize ethnographical observations in short descriptive chapters which thus made available to the European public evaluative generalizations on the oriental Indians. Some chroniclers like Castanheda could also claim a direct and long personal experience of the East. Generally speaking, however, because of the aims and conventions ruling them, which clearly belonged to the epic genre, such narratives could hardly give a central role to any first-hand descriptions.¹⁰

Thus the most complete pictures of India did not circulate extensively before 1550, and even then they did not have a unitary structure. The better-known areas were the Malabar coast and Gujarat, but the European writers responded to the political dispersion and instability of these areas by concentrating their attention on the activities of the Portuguese and the missionaries. Descriptions of more remote places such as Bengal depended on occasional expeditions.¹¹ The lack of recognisable unified political structures in the Indian sub-continent before the consolidation of the Moghuls in the north thus establishes the general context for the early experience of the Europeans in India. There is however an important exception to this, which is provided by the narratives dealing with the Empire of Vijayanagara. This Hindu kingdom occupied an area about the size of Britain in the tropical southern tip of the Indian peninsula. Both for the quality of the sources available and for the historical importance of the "object" of description it provides, Vijayanagara constitutes a good case-study for a central question: why did the Europeans in Asia see what they saw?


¹¹ For instance the 1521 expedition published in Voyage (Bouchon/Thomaz eds.) 1988.
After the end of the twelfth century some Muslim armies composed of Afghan and Turkish soldiers invaded India from the north-west. With the military superiority provided by central-Asian cavalry they succeeded in the majority of their campaigns, but unlike Mahmud of Ghazni, their earlier predecessor of the first decades of the eleventh century, instead of limiting themselves to regular plunder they settled in Delhi. From there, they soon pushed ahead further South towards the Deccan. This new Delhi Sultanate was never a very stable political entity, but it ensured a continuous presence of some Muslim overlords from abroad in northern India, and thus connected significant parts of the country with the rest of the then expanding Islamic world, which could thus be travelled from north Africa to China.12

The new Turkish rulers also invaded southern India as far as the Pandya kingdom of Madurai (1311) but could never secure a hold on it. The character of the land, a large plateau with a climate subject to the monsoons, separated from the commercial western coast by a chain of mountains, in great part covered by forests and hills inhabited by small independent tribes, and irregularly populated by several Hindu ethnic groups of Dravidian descent, did not invite a long settlement when easier conquests still had to be defended in the north, much closer to Persia. There were several rich cities and temples in the South, especially in the fertile river deltas of the East, but the peasant communities were very strongly organized and had to be commanded locally.13 The disseminated character of

12 Thapar 1966, pp 229-240.

13 The geographical and agricultural pattern is studied in Stein 1980, especially pp 30-62 and, concerning the Vijayanagara times, pp 366-488. Against the traditional idealization of the supralocal ethnic solidarity of medieval local communities, Stein makes it clear that the peasant villages of the Tamil country were under the leadership of an elite of peasant-warrior entrepreneurs, often Telegu foreigners from the north.
the indigenous political scene, with several thinly-
centralised little kingdoms ruled by groups of peasant-
warriors who derived political legitimacy from Hindu
brahmanic consent, also helps explain that the attempts to
found a Muslim dynasty failed to win a sufficient popular
endorsement.

Thus eventually, around 1336, two Indian brothers
named Harihara and Bukka who had been taken prisoners,
converted to Islam, and then were sent to restore the
authority of the Delhi Sultanate, were in fact able to
found a new royal city by the Tungabhadra river in Modern
Karnataka (near the village of Hampi). This new kingdom
expanded during the next two centuries, although not always
at steady pace, by winning over the allegiance of groups
of Kannada and Telegu speaking warrior groups, and
eventually conquering the Tamil south. The Vijayanagara
rulers thus transformed the world visited by Marco Polo and
Ibn Battūta into a more centralised and relatively stable
kingdom, incorporating the various Hindu local cults and
literary traditions and benefiting from the new wealth
created by the continuous processes of expanded land-
settlement and urbanization. The authority of this kingdom
was vaguely held together by the threat of the Muslim
invaders, who at the same time had successfully settled in
the Deccan and created (against the wishes of the Delhi
rulers) the Bahmani kingdom. But the remarkable success of
the rulers of Vijayanagara was the assertion of territorial
authority against both Hindu and Muslim rivals through
military means.¹⁴

The first dynasty of Vijayanagara, founded by the
Sangama brothers, gave way to a second dynasty in 1485,
named after Saluva Narashima. There was again much
instability at the end of the fifteenth century, resolved
by various dynastic crisis and a general process of

¹⁴ Stein 1980 and 1989. Sastri 1966 (pp 227-312) summarizes the political
history from the perspective of South-Indian nationalism, while Stein
emphasizes the internal economic processes (1980) and political tension
(1989).
centralisation and conquest which led to what was then, and is still now described, as the major moment of glory of Vijayanagara under the Tuluva ruler Krishna Deva Raya, of the third dynasty. This Indian king was known as one of the richest in the East. But while this last Hindu kingdom of India outlived the Bahmanis of the north, which disintegrated into five sultanates in the beginning of the sixteenth century, it did not stand the consequences of a spectacular military defeat against a Deccani alliance in 1565. The king (in fact an usurper of the powerful Aravidu family) was killed in battle, and the city shamefully abandoned and destroyed. This defeat, by leading to a new collection of Hindu regional lordships that were progressively plundered or conquered by expeditions from the north, finally revealed the internal weakness of the Vijayanagara overlordship, which was no longer an effective political force by the time Akbar's Moghul empire expanded in the north. In fact, those new regional lords who throughout the next century competed against the Aravidu royal dynasty (which moved East to Penugonda and finally Chandragari) from their various quasi-independent cities of Madurai, Tanjore, Gingee or Mysore, were often the old nayakas, or captains, originally sent by the Vijayanagara rulers as representatives of their authority in the East and South of the peninsula.  

The presence of political unity and centralized institutions played a crucial role in shaping the European interpretation of foreign societies in the Renaissance. Vijayanagara was a Hindu, therefore non-Muslim political society, which is important considering the European medieval tradition of confrontation with Islam, with its related tendency to "Christianize" Eastern rulers in terms

15 On Vijayanagara the fundamental work is now Stein 1989. See also however Sewell 1900, Sastrī/Venkataramanayya 1946, Sastrī 1966, Stein 1980, Fritz/Michell/Nagaraja Rao 1984 and Dallapiccola(ed.) 1985. For the surviving fourth dynasty Heras 1927 should be added to Sastrī 1966.
of the mythical figure of the Prester John. Moreover, the experience of Vijayanagara made its impact before the Europeans had any full access to Ming China or Japan. It is not comparable to the experience of the Aztec and Inca empires in America either, since these were almost immediately conquered and disorganized.

I shall therefore attempt to analyze comprehensively and chronologically all known foreign descriptions of the South Indian kingdom of Vijayanagara in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, up to the destruction of the capital city and the disintegration of its authority in the South (1420-1570). This will involve discussing what modern historians have to say about Vijayanagara, since this is the essential tool for a critical approach to this group of texts. Such a group, while providing a matrix from which to discover continuities and change, serves as model and example for the main themes, genres and interpretative problems which appear in the wider cultural process of the European interpretation of oriental peoples in Renaissance travel descriptions. My main purpose in the following pages is to reveal the different registers of the process of transforming an experience of otherness into a set of narratives, by looking at a particular case study.
Foreign authors and genres on Vijayanagara

The descriptions of Vijayanagara written by contemporary foreigners constitute a particularly valuable set of texts, because they allow the cultural historian to compare analogous material and to isolate important variables. This can be seen to operate in three ways. First, and chronologically, it is possible to compare fifteenth century descriptions with sixteenth century texts. Therefore, contrasting the account by the Venetian merchant Nicolò de Conti (which survived in two different reports, in 1437 and in 1441) with the two major Portuguese sources, by Domingo Paes (written in 1520-22) and Fernão Nuniz (written in 1530-1),¹ can shed light on the relevance of the cultural changes of the Renaissance in shaping the attitudes and descriptive skills of the observers. Observations by the Italian Ludovico di Varthema (first published in 1510) and the Portuguese Duarte Barbosa (written near 1518) increase the chance of following a continuous chronological sequence of written texts. This is further improved by the existence of a final description in the travel narrative of another Venetian merchant, Cesare Fedrici (published in 1587), which is based on what he saw in Vijayanagara in 1567, soon after the disastrous battle of Talikota. Second-hand references in sixteenth century Portuguese sources can be found in the Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires (written between 1512 and 1515), in the Coloquios dos simples, e drogas... published in Goa (1563) by the physician Garcia da Orta, and in the major chronicles by Barros (published from 1552 onwards), Correa (written all over the first half of the century), Castanheda (most of it published between 1551 and 1554) and Couto (written in the last decades of the century). From some of these sources, especially Barros, "Narsinga" became a standard theme in sixteenth century cosmographies,

¹ I have corrected 1535-7, the hypothesis of Robert Sewell (1900), because the earlier date is more consistent with the evidence.
notably so in Giovanni Botero's *Relationi Universali* (1591-6), but also in the expanded French translation of Münster's *Cosmographia* written by François de Belleforest (1575).

The analysis of the chronological sequence is best carried on the basis of the production of these texts, not their circulation in Europe. For instance, and quite remarkably, the manuscripts written by Paes, Nuniz, Correa and Couto, all of whom spent many years in Portuguese India and had a fairly detailed knowledge of the lands of Vijayanagara, remained unpublished in sixteenth century Portugal. As I said, Pires and Barbosa were not printed until Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1458-1557) produced his Italian collection in Venice. There are clear cases of direct indebtedness: Barros seems to have been sent the reports by Paes and Nuniz, and Castanheda drew on Barbosa, while the chroniclers usually followed each other. Nevertheless, it is above all the evolution of the experience of describing Vijayanagara that can be fruitfully followed.

A second advantage of this set of foreign descriptions is that we have non-European counterparts to them. The Persian ambassador 'Abd al-Razzāq wrote an account of his personal journey to Vijayanagara which took place in 1443, about two years after Nicolò Conti had explained what he saw in India to the secretary of the Pope Eugene IV, Poggio Bracciolini. Also educated in Persian culture was the late sixteenth century chronicler of the Deccani kingdom of Ahmadnagar, Firishtah, who wrote extensively about wars with Vijayanagara in a way that can be effectively compared with the Portuguese chronicles by Fernão Nuniz and Diego do Couto. Of all non-Europeans, Muslim travellers provide the sources better suited for a systematic comparison with western texts - here Marco Polo and Ibn Battūta can work as an orientative model. It is important to realise that, despite all the differences, Latin Christians and Muslims shared a similar Biblical and Hellenic background. A
slightly different perspective can be achieved by looking at what the Russian Orthodox Christian merchant Afanasi Nikitin wrote about the Deccani kingdoms of South India, where he travelled in 1469.

A third useful dimension of this group of texts is that they cover the two major narrative structures found in the kind of sources we are interested in: the sort of itinerary with lengthy descriptions devoted to geographic, economic, ethnological and political information, on the one hand, and the systematic historical reconstruction, on the other. A spatial dimension organises the first, a temporal one the second. We have excellent examples of each in Paes and Nuniz, respectively.

Of course, this distinction admits important degrees of variation within each one of the two kinds. The "itinerary-type" description can closely follow a personal journey (such as in the cases of Conti, Nikitin, Varthema, Fredrici and 'Abd al-Razzāq) or rather a more systematic geographical distribution (and this is the case for Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa). Cosmography was in fact a very flexible genre, a mixture of ancient Geography dwelling on the diversity of places, climates and peoples, medieval mirabilia reporting strange natural phenomena, and a trader's manual with economic and navigational information. All these could be combined with personal observations within the structure of a story about travels and adventures, or even offered as the illustrative and testing material for a political treatise. The problem encountered with historical narratives is of a different sort: the Portuguese chroniclers, despite the fact that they sometimes had a direct experience of India, often used second-hand information in the form of archival documents, letters, indigenous chronicles and oral or written reports. Moreover, most often they were more interested in portraying the deeds of the European conquerors than in the internal developments of the indigenous country. The weight of the conventions about what was to be considered a
noteworthy event, together with the system of patronage that turned historians into semi-professionals of political propaganda, tended to constrain dramatically the achievement of the self-declared aim of truthfulness, a problem of which they were remarkably conscious.\(^2\)

While some authors devoted themselves to one of these two basic structures, for instance Domingo Paes who wrote a pictorial, timeless description, more often they tended to combine one with the other. This is clearly the case with Fernão Nuniz, whose historical narrative is followed by a personal description. João de Barros, who never visited India, also liked to include chapters with background information before the main narrative of political events.\(^3\) But despite these inevitable overlappings, the authors were distinctively aware that there were two main types of narrative, the historical chronicle and the description of peoples, lands and its products. The authors made this distinction in the knowledge of the different traditions and conventions attached to each of them. The Portuguese chronicler of India Gaspar Correa, for instance, who had been secretary of Governor Albuquerque, explained why he did not dwell on geographical matters:

For my intention is to write nothing regarding these lands and their customs, as there are certain persons who have already done so, of whom one was Duarte Barbosa, nephew of the feitor Gil Fernandes Barbosa, who has composed a treatise, which I have seen, of all the lands, peoples, laws, customs and dealings from the Lequeos following the whole as far as the Cape of Good Hope.\(^4\)

Barbosa, who—from his preface—appears to have known very well what he wanted to write, had previously made the opposite statement:

\(^2\) See Rodrigues Lapa 1942, pp. v-xv. Also n.9 above.

\(^3\) For instance Barros D.III, L.IV Ch.iv (on Vijayanagara). More generally, see Boxer 1981, pp 105-9.

\(^4\) Quoted in the preface to Barbosa (Dames ed.) 1918.
In this attack [on Goa being taken by Albuquerque] many noteworthy events took place, which I do not here relate, in order to cut my story short, for it is not my intention to write a chronicle, but only a short summary of that which can in truth be ascertained regarding the chief places in India. 

In the European Renaissance, history and cosmography, which were both influenced by the humanist reappropriation of classical models such as Livy, Polybius, Ptolemy or Strabo, were the chief complementary genres that provided empirical material to illustrate and eventually change the theoretical framework of political thought (as the cases of Machiavelli's Discourses and Botero's Relationi Universali, at the two extremes of the sixteenth century, clearly show). Some of the more educated writers on the East, such as João de Barros and the Jesuit Monserrate, elaborated comprehensive plans in which they contemplated different works for the Historical and the Geographical matters. 

The value of the reports left by Paes and Nuniz is emphasized by the fact that they were writing from a first hand experience of the other culture and, nevertheless, they are fairly systematic in the use of their respective narrative structures. Paes' personal adventures do not affect the organization of his description in the same way as Conti's or Abd-al-Razzāq's do, but the text is still more lively and direct than those written by Barbosa or Pires. In a similar way, Nuniz is closer to Vijayanagara internal traditions than any of the other Portuguese

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5 Barbosa (Dames ed.) 1918, p.177 / (Reis Machado ed.) 1946, p.91: '...no que se passaram muitas e notáveis cousas, que aqui não digo por abreviar, porque não é minha tenção de fazer crónica, mas um breve sumário do que mais na verdade pude alcançar dos notáveis lugares da India'.

6 On Barros see Boxer 1981, p.130. On Monserrate see Monserrate (Hosten ed.) 1914, p.523. It is obvious from the few extant references to these works that, for instance, Barros' Geography was perceived to belong to the same genre that stretched from Strabo to Botero. Similarly ambitious projects were accomplished concerning Spanish American lands, remarkably so by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in his Historia general y natural de las Indias (1535, 1851-5), and Pedro Cieza de León in his Crónica del Perú (1553, 1979, 1985). In both these cases, the events of the conquest were set in a general geographical background which included all kinds of information, and ethnographic material had here a very prominent role.
chroniclers, and we have to wait for works written by Jesuits or by well-educated seventeenth century travellers (such as Monserrate and Bernier respectively, both writing on Mughal India) to find comparable insights into the self-understanding of Indian societies.

But of course, all these remarks about the value of the foreign descriptions of Vijayanagara depend ultimately on the existence of an "object of description" that created the conditions for the development of this sort of literature. It was the centrality of the capital city as a recognisable physical, economic and political unity that drew all these observers in parallel directions. And here we find serious problems. Because the Indian, Persian and European cultural discourses shared similar values about centrality and importance (referred for instance to kingship or richness), it is difficult to disentangle the subjective elements involved in recognising the city of Vijayanagara as important from the possibility of appealing to a universal rational awareness of what there is out there to be seen. Thus, for instance, in order to make sense of the appreciation by foreigners of the highly symbolic and ritual values of the annual Mahanavami festival of Vijayanagara one needs to postulate the existence of intersubjective elements - that is to say, a dialogue based on contrasting and negotiating the value of different traditions.

Another difficult problem is created by the fact that current historical interpretations of the Empire of Vijayanagara rely heavily on the very same sources we need to read critically in order to distinguish a historical reality from a western view of it. That is to say, we can say that Paes "shapes" what he sees according to what he wants to see, or what his cultural background allows him to see, only because we have a different idea of what there was there to be seen. But what happens when this latter interpretation of the modern historian has been constructed on the acceptance of what Paes says? We obviously must look
at alternative sources other than foreign descriptions of Vijayanagara, with the hope that they are rich enough to provide us with the distance we require from the European and Persian accounts.

An intricate dialogue between what we can reconstruct as our interpretation of Vijayanagara and what we think our travellers would tend to imply, forget or exaggerate is necessary here. Perhaps the key question that can help us most is whether the Portuguese interpreted Vijayanagara too much like their own Iberian "feudal" society. In the construction of this sort of image - the image of an economic and political system - the roles of kingship, trade, religious institutions and the military aristocracy seem to be most important. I shall also refer to the categories used to identify and evaluate different customs and beliefs, especially the constellation formed by religion, death, and women. These are less exclusive of a great political unity such as Vijayanagara, but still form the backbone of most ethnological descriptions applied to non-Europeans. Although each narrative will help me to emphasize different aspects of the process of formation of imagnes of otherness, these are the themes which provide the common thread for my analysis.
A medieval interpretation of South India: the merchant and the humanist

The concern for establishing the centre of the world in Christian language strongly influenced the geographical literature of the European middle ages. This was, to a great extent, the result of the fact that it was a clerical culture. The starting point for a medieval traveller was the figure of the pilgrim, as we found with the narrative of John Mandeville. However, the new genres of the expansion of Europe in the Renaissance tended to grow more like Marco Polo's book of Marvels than Mandeville's natural-Christian synthesis. After the fifteenth century the pilgrim lost ground steadily to more secularized travellers, to the practical reporter with specific aims to begin with, and to a first-person curious observer free from any obvious external sources of authority in the end. This transition did not come as a direct result of the discourse created by merchants living in the East like Marco Polo and Nicolò Conti, but rather through the legitimising power of a new kind of attitude among the elite.

Nicolò Conti did not write what he saw on his own initiative. He was instead compelled for special reasons to give an account of his travels to the secretary of the Pope, the humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459). Despite the unique quality of his mediator, he followed a medieval pattern, since in the previous two centuries it had been usual that travellers, like the Venetian Marco Polo, Prince Hayton from Armenia, friar Odoric of Pordenone, or the Moroccan Ibn Battūta, would dictate their notes and recollections, often to professional writers with a knowledge of literary conventions. This medieval pattern of mediation conditioned the narrative formation of the first European images of Vijayanagara precisely at the very moment of the cultural transformation brought by the humanists. Nicolò Conti's travel narrative touches on
similar themes to earlier late-medieval authors, and to a great extent reproduces a standard set of attitudes. On the other hand, it benefits from a particular tension—the mediation of one of the leading Italian humanists of the fifteenth century—which points towards an original situation that was to dominate the sixteenth century: namely, the dialogue between a massive experience of otherness in a context of discovery and colonisation with the critical concerns of European intellectuals educated in a thoroughly expanded and revised classical inheritance.

From the end of the thirteenth century the constant presence of a few Genoese and Venetian merchants attempting risky but highly profitable business in the East is attested in scattered documentary references. It was nevertheless exceptional when these travellers wrote and circulated a full account, as in the case of Marco Polo. Their presence was not the result of a trading network with political backing, but rather of the isolated efforts of a few families who knew that part of the business consisted in gaining a direct access that would not be easily attainable to other competitors. Information was valuable and often not publicised.

Conti was a Venetian (c.1385-1469) whose family had been long established in the East, and who began his career as a young agent in Egypt and Syria. Moved by economic interest he travelled in Asia for more than thirty-five years, in the course of which he married and had children. On his way back to Europe, and while in Mecca, Conti was forced to convert in order to save his life and that of his family. It was the current practice of adventurous Italian merchants to adapt to the local rules of dress and language in order to avoid conflicts with political authorities, but only in the extreme cases of intolerance, or when they decided to settle abroad, did they change religion and private customs as well. Relationships with Muslims were nevertheless always potentially difficult, because a tradition of religious opposition could easily interact
with territorial and economic rivalries to produce violent results. On his return Conti had patiently secured a safe-conduct from the Sultan of Egypt, notwithstanding which he had become a renegade (he claimed that the forced conversion in fact covered a robbery). He seems to have profited from his new condition for a few years however, since he was made 'trujaman' (interpreter) in Cairo. However, when four years later he came back to Italy in the company of Near Eastern representatives to the Council of Florence (1441), he went to the Pope, since it was his desire to be absolved and return to Venetian life (he was to settle down as procurator of the Church of San Francesco and as a magistrate and ambassador for his native city). Eugene IV, besides granting his demand, asked him to recount his travels to his own secretary, Poggio Bracciolini. Poggio was an educated man interested in expanding his knowledge of the world and its peoples.

From his text, written in Latin, we can reconstruct the dialogue that took place between an experienced merchant

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1 For Conti's life see: Lach 1965, pp. 59-60; Cochrane 1981, p. 324; Vives Gatell 1982 (repr. from 1938), pp. 62-66. Poggio and Tafur offer different accounts of Conti's life. I have complemented Poggio with Tafur, considering his account reliable on this point (as it has also been argued by Vives Gatell). When the two sources contradict it is necessary to use discretion in interpreting them, rather than automatically giving the primacy to one or the other. Thus, Poggio states that Conti travelled in India for twenty-five years, but according to the account of Pero Tafur, who suggests a date of departure before the time of the death of Timūr (1405), the travels lasted at least thirty-five years, since they met in Mount Sinai in 1437, and Conti would not reach Italy until 1441. Tafur's Conti, whose easy outward passage was facilitated by the stability brought by Timūr's power in central Asia, even states that 'cuarenta años a que bivo en la India con grant deseo de volver a mi tierra' (Tafur 1982, pp 96-7). Rather than just believing that Tafur is compelled to exaggerate under the spell of the mythical 'Mongol peace', supposedly renewed by Timūr to the benefit of western Christians, it is sensible to regard Poggio's isolated figure of twenty-five years as either a mistake or an interpolation or, more likely, as a statement referring to a particular period of Conti's travels spent in the Eastern parts of 'India'. The important fact here is not that Poggio is, generally speaking, a more critical (and thus more reliable) writer than Tafur, but rather that they both become more or less accurate according to their interests. It is easy to see that Poggio has little interest in Conti's life, and devotes most attention to obtaining a clear image of Indian society. Tafur, on the other hand, provides a context - a detailed narrative of Conti's life - in which his chronology makes sense.

of patrician origin trying to justify his religious behaviour, and a learned and inquiring humanist who had read all he could about the East and therefore directed his questions towards the instances left open by the western medieval Christian cultural tradition.

This exchange produced one of the most widely-read first-hand accounts of the East since Marco Polo, as Poggio included it as the fourth book of his De Varietate Fortunae (1443-1448), in which he also attempted an antiquarian's reconstruction of Rome from its ruins, and reflected upon the events surrounding the last pontificate. Such a miscellany did not belong to any specific genre, but rather expressed a variety of interests among which old and new could be distinguished and confronted. Only a vague idea about the diversity and changes of Fortune through time and place links together these different pieces.

This was not, however, the only medium through which Conti's travels were received into Europe. The Andalusian hidalgo Pero Tafur, also a traveller, claimed in his Andanças e Viajes to have met Conti at the monastery of Mount Sinai in 1437. While his account of Conti's experience has been described as being 'as brazen a piece of leg-pulling as can be imagined', Poggio's has been hailed as 'the most lucid account of Indian manners and customs to be prepared by a European since Megasthenes'. The denigration of Pero Tafur as unreliable is too simplistic - even at the factual level his report contains information (for instance, on the biography of Conti) which can be considered more complete than Poggio's. It was written in different conditions, and it belongs to a different genre. There is still, of course, a problem of

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3 Tafur 1982, p.95
4 Penrose 1955, p.23.
5 Lach 1965, I, p.61
6 This problem is discussed in Vives Gatell (1938)1982, pp.57-74.
truth and representation, which we shall tackle later. Leaving momentarily aside the question of whether Pero Tafur was lying or being lied to, it is in any case revealing that the secretary of the Pope provides the most secularised discourse.

Poggi's case reveals that by the middle of the fifteenth century the "new men" of the cultural arena, the humanists, tended to ignore the accounts of the end of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century, probably because they were classified as fictional literature (this was often the case with Marco Polo, Jordanus Catalani, John Mandeville - who in fact was plagiarising several authors, notably Odoric of Pordenone - and others of lesser importance). Poggio, like many of his fellow-humanists and aristocratic readers, was concerned with the geographical and ethnological image of the East one could find in Ptolemy and Strabo, then increasingly circulated, and - like his friend Toscanelli - used Conti consciously to correct that image. Thus we have to place Poggio's De Varietate Fortunae as the starting point of a tradition of cosmographical works produced around the Roman Curia in the fifteenth century. It was followed by the Cosmography of Aeneas Sylvius (1405-64), who in 1458 had become Pope Pius II, and later by the Commentariorum Urbanorum Octa et Triginta Libri of Raffaello Volterrano (1451-1537). These writers constructed a dialogue with the new information on the basis of the classical tradition rather than the medieval, because they were developing a negative attitude towards the recent past at the same time that they "rediscovered" the achievements of antiquity. It was therefore the medieval inheritance that was most often rejected as fabulous.

This encyclopedic exercise had a particular direction, since these humanists tried to evaluate the relevance of all the things that could be learnt about the diversities

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and changes of the world in the context of their present concerns for Christendom (especially its unification against internal dissent or Turkish attack, the defence of the leading role of the papacy, or the organisation of crusading enterprises). Their writings were however influential in other, often unexpected ways: thus Aeneas Sylvius's *Cosmography* was one of the few geographical works read and annotated by Columbus. More generally, they set the tone for a genre in which merchants and soldiers were asked to answer to the critical standards of humanists. In this sense, they are the precedents of later cosmographers and travel collectors, such as Barros in Portugal, Velasco and Román in Spain, Ramusio, Anania, Botero, and Possevino in Italy, or Postel, Thévet, Belleforest and Chappuys in France. 8

Of course, this new attitude which took the legacy of antiquity as the main framework for a critical geography was rooted in the cultural developments of the previous centuries, and corresponded to the social realities of a late-feudal western Europe. At the general level it was more of an expansion than a break with the medieval tradition, and yet the immediate fact is that there was an often conscious preference for certain texts rather than others, and above all a new way of appropriating those texts in the context of a re-interpretation of the world and the role of men in it. This was, in fact, the seed for a new model of organization of the cultural spaces in which encyclopedic accumulation in a theological framework gave way to a critical discrimination of sources of knowledge. Information of a geographical or historical kind was no longer simply perceived as further illustration of God's marvellous creation, nor merely accepted as traditional.

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8 These various sixteenth century cosmographers were all educated in a culture influenced by the humanities, and yet differed widely in the personal synthesis they developed. Clerics like the Augustinian Román or the Neapolitan Anania were regularly more conservative than politicians and administrators like Velasco or Chappuys, for instance, independently from the fact that they also had access to excellent empirical sources.
moral example. Eventually, by the end of the sixteenth century, the idea of a method regulated new disciplines in which empirical accounts tested generalities, and therefore improved the human enterprise of defining the natural and the rational in terms of logic, history, law, and morality.

Regarding the knowledge of India, the tendency to seek new sources of information was strengthened by the fact that for almost a century, between 1340 and 1440, the flow of first-hand accounts had been practically interrupted by the relative contraction of the expansive trends in Europe. The Travels of Mandeville, which circulated extensively from the second half of the fourteenth century, and the Catalan Atlas of 1375 together summarise the synthesis that was achieved by reelaborating material collected before the great plagues shook Europe. Afterwards, well-known medieval encyclopedism came to be despised by the learned men of letters who were opening their minds to a rediscovery of antiquity, after the hundred years of stagnation in the mainstream textual tradition. To a man like Poggio, Vincent of Beauvais probably did not look very exciting, although his Speculum Historiale included Friar John of Carpini's rich account of the Mongols. Similarly, William of Rubruck's travelogue on his mission to the Great Khan, although incorporated by Roger Bacon in his Opus Maius, suffered a relative neglect. Because of certain similarities it has been argued that Poggio took account of the testimonies of Marco Polo and Prince Hayton from Armenia, but this is dubious - similar observations may correspond to similar experiences. In any case, Poggio's otherwise intelligent text ignores most medieval sources, marvels and empirical first-hand observations alike. It is not simply that in a specific context his only purpose was to report on Conti's recollections. He actually thought that most of what was being said in his time about India was more fabulous than true (Mutata tum a veteribus

9 Sensburg 1906, pp. 26-7.
scriptoribus, tum communi fama de Indis feruntur, quorum certa cognitio ad nos perlata arguit quaedam ex eis, fabulis quam vero esse similiora). For that reason Conti's testimony was very valuable, especially because 'it seemed truthful' (and he had questioned the traveller closely).

We may conclude that of the best medieval descriptions often only the mythical was transmitted, and eventually the myth was rejected. Still, a few fundamental texts retained their value as key references. Thus when the Portuguese opened the Cape route, Marco Polo and Nicolò Conti quickly came to print. These were the texts most circulated among the Portuguese and the Castilians, especially in Lisbon and Seville, until they began to write their own accounts. They also became part of the fundamental corpus of old and new travel narratives compiled and printed by Ramusio in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The structure of Conti's account in two different parts follows the very same pattern of mediation I am trying to uncover: first he explains the journey, "mapping" his progress with occasional references to the particular customs and products of different places, and then he adds a more analytic description of the manner and customs of the Indians according to the special questions of Poggio. The description of the city of Bizengalia belongs to the first part, the narrative of the journey, but its meaning is better understood in the context of the general interpretation of India and its inhabitants that we find in the second section. It is in this second section that the perception, memory and language of the merchant traveller is being pushed to new areas by the action of the educated secretary. For instance, the introductory division of India into three parts ('one, extending from Persia to

10 Poggio 1964-9 II p. 628.

11 Lach 1965, 158-159 (that was the first printed collection of travel Literature. See Valentim Fernandes 1502).
the Indus; the second, comprising the district from the Indus to the Ganges; and the third, all that is beyond.')\textsuperscript{12} seems to satisfy the sense of order of the humanist in his effort to organize the information provided by the traveller. Duarte Barbosa, an early sixteenth century Portuguese, reported this to be a common division among the mouros, 'who have known it for longer than us'.\textsuperscript{13} On the other hand, it is in this instance that the alternative report of Pero Tafur is particularly vague and legendary. It is certainly through Conti and Poggio that the division was used to correct the fifteenth-century Geography of Ptolemy as it circulated in Europe.

Conti's account does not dwell on what he felt and did, but rather uses the idea of travel as a narrative structure for a geographical, economic and ethnological description. As in Arrian and Strabo, the two most complete sources about India, big rivers provide the basic principle of regional division, and cities the main focus of ethnographic attention, the boundaries of different countries and kingdoms being much less defined. Therefore the voyage is structured as a succession of cities. Going from one to the other may require crossing seas and deserts or following rivers, but the city is described as a settled human community evaluated according to its size (the bigger the better) and its products. The city is therefore fundamentally a social environment and a market. To this basic framework, local peculiarities concerning social practices (and, occasionally, institutional arrangements) may be added. Of all cities described by Conti, Bizengalia deserves the fullest description (if we exclude a digression on the social and sexual role of women in Calicut). This suggests a first important recurrent theme: the capacity to produce a complex urban life with its economic and political implications as the main measure of

\textsuperscript{12} Conti in Major 1857, p.21.

\textsuperscript{13} Barbosa 1944, p.188.
social and cultural achievement implicit in western narratives. Thus the language of civilization was constructed from a source independent of the Christian theological framework.

There were important foundations for this attitude in the tradition of classical and late medieval political thought, but the practical rationality of the merchant traveller also required particular attention to cities. The tension that allowed different interpretations of a civil society to take place has to be sought in the particular connotations of the concept of the city as it was used by different actors in different historical circumstances. The Greek polis that inspired Plato and Aristotle, the European late-medieval mediterranean city - such as Conti's Venice - or the South Indian capital that he eventually described to Poggio, all had distinctive features that only the contextual use of a continuous and changing conceptual tradition could express.

Conti was the traveller who found in Vijayanagara the fulfillment of this traditional assumption, and therefore introduced India into a European discourse on civilization that was outgrowing the language of religion and idolatry. This kind of discourse was already prominent in earlier travel literature. The connection between Marco Polo's Venice and his long description of the Chinese city of Kinsai (Hang-Chau) has long been noticed. Here the eulogistic language of the traveller does not so much refer to the marvelous other as to what he interpreted as a universal quality of human civilization. But unlike Conti more than a century later, Marco Polo did not find in South India any comparable city, and therefore, despite a few references to coastal city-ports, his important description of Maabar and Lar is organized according to vaguely defined provinces and kingdoms. No city was seen as the centre, and this detracted from the centrality of

14 Polo 1983, ch.155.
his description of India.

Conti's treatment of Vijayanagara not only re-enacts a traditional assumption, it also develops a traditional form, the type of city-description which repeatedly appears in travel narratives. This type, especially influential in the formalised 'genre' of late-medieval and Renaissance civic eulogies, has for instance been identified as a systematic pattern in the travels of Pero Tafur, relating both to northern Europe and the mediterranean.\(^{15}\) In Conti we may say that situation, size, and population function as a basic framework, while a few particulars on the king and on marriage and death customs identify the place further. So:

The great city of Bizengalia is situated near very steep mountains. The circumference of the city is sixty miles: its walls are carried up to the mountains and enclose the valleys at their foot, so that its extent is thereby increased. In this city there are estimated to be ninety thousand men fit to bear arms. The inhabitants of this region marry as many wives as they please, who are burnt with their dead husbands. Their king is more powerful than all other kings of India. He takes to himself twelve thousand wives, of whom four thousand follow him on foot wherever he may go, and are employed solely in the service of the kitchen. A like number, more handsomely equipped, ride on horseback. The remainder are carried by men in litters, of whom two thousand or three thousand are selected as his wives on condition that at his death they should voluntarily burn themselves with him, which is considered a great honour for them.\(^{16}\)

There are a few themes here which will reappear again in the Portuguese texts written more than sixty years later. Duarte Barbosa and Domingo Paes do not seem to have relied on Conti's narrative when they came to write their own, even though they may have read it, and despite the fact that cases of textual borrowing are not uncommon in travel writing even among authors of first-hand accounts. More commonly-used themes are the result of the interaction of similar cultural assumptions with similar experiences, and in the case of Vijayanagara the second of these two


\[16\] Conti in Major 1857, p.6.
components - the direct experience of the physical and social reality of the city - obviously plays a role of its own. As we have seen, Conti stresses the huge physical space enclosed by the walls, the remarkable quantity of people, measured in armed men available, the power of the king, his (also extraordinarily numerous) female household, and a few other key features concerning the role of women. In particular, he mentions the limitless polygamy and the practice of sati, which obviously raise some implicit moral questions. In short, Vijayanagara is characterized by continuously impressive numbers. It is important to note that the quality of such description is much affected by the intervention of Poggio, because he must have restrained the tendency to exaggerate which is common in popular narratives of the Middle Ages, such as in Marco Polo's book of 'marvels' or 'diversities', the 'description of the world' (perhaps for this reason known as Il Milione).

In the second part of the narrative we find further information specifically related to Vijayanagara, among the descriptions of religious festivals. This piece of information also corresponds to sixteenth century sources, which increases its interest for us. The description has to be understood in the context of Conti's account of Eastern religion. The Venetian identifies the diversity of religion in India, and refers explicitly to different gods represented by idols made of specific materials (of varying cost) and placed in richly painted temples.¹⁷

Of course the word 'idols' immediately classifies the Indians as heathens (pagans or gentiles). It is a classification that takes place from an explicitly Christian standpoint and uses the vocabulary developed by the Latin Christian tradition. Idols are false gods, nothing more than a piece of material that has been given a figurative form and worshipped, if not an expression of deviation actively inspired by the devil. Conti's

¹⁷ Conti in Major 1857, p.27.
treatment, nevertheless, is not condemnatory. Like many other travellers of unsophisticated education, he does not feel the need to dwell on the definition and implications of idolatry. He knows which are the words most appropriate to publicise what he saw in India and uses them. It is very difficult for the historian to evaluate the depth and truthfulness of subjective beliefs, except by looking at how they are tested by circumstances. In fact Conti, despite having travelled for many years in the East using Arabian or Persian dress and language as a means of socialization, and even marrying a probably indigenous woman who gave him several children, seems to have kept faithful to his original identity and beliefs as a Christian, while not particularly eager to spread them elsewhere.

The description of religion in late-medieval and early-modern travel accounts usually follows a dual pattern: first, social practices surrounding temples and idols are identified — Conti talks about prayer and sacrifice. Often popular festivals and death and marriage practices are also included. This could be called the exoteric description. In some cases, but less often, appear beliefs associated with those practices, either in the form of scattered references related to the description of behaviour, or as a continuous narrative in which cosmological and mythological stories are collected. Some of the most extraordinary practices lead the writers to occasional reflections on the psychological aspects of religious experience. The implicit evaluation ranges from respect for the ascetic virtue and wisdom of the holy man, with ambivalent attitudes towards the miraculous/magic use of power, to the condemnation of the cruelty and foolishness of the most bloody sacrifices. Although not present in Conti's narrative, it was a common motif from at least the Travels of Mandeville in the middle of the fourteenth century, and up to the late-sixteenth century Peregrinaçam of Fernão Mendes Pinto (c.1510-1583), that popular writers
would contrast oriental piety with Christian abuses and vices. Leaving aside an occasional Arab geographer such as Al-Birũnĩ in the eleventh century, we have to wait until the works of the seventeenth century French philosophe François Bernier (such as his famous Lettre à Monsieur Chapelain of 1667) to find a full and fairly relativist discussion of the meaning of all such practices by a direct observer. Nevertheless, analytic arguments about religion are important in earlier missionary letters and histories, which sometimes include doctrinal polemics, and even more superficial observers mainly dwelling on exoteric aspects of the oriental religions offer occasional comments on this matter.

In his account Conti follows this general pattern. Guided by Poggio's questions, he begins by comparing Indian practices with those of the ancient heathens, and even suggests some interpretations of the social consequences of the way priests can manipulate the religious feelings of the masses. This observation ultimately refers to the value of human life and God. Conti does not talk about the gods themselves, not even the Christian one, but rather concentrates on the powerful motif of self-immolation. It appears that there is an important element of "asking for favours" in the sacrifices, but at some stage the practice transcends that aim and becomes destructive of human life. The priests encourage the people to perform their religious duties, and that includes insisting on 'how acceptable it is to the gods that they should quit this life for their sake'. The more painful and public, the better is the sacrifice. Those men who yield their lives 'as a sacrifice

18 See Mandeville 1983 and Mendes Pinto 1614, for instance ch. 76. There is an early tradition of praise of the Brahmins of India at least since the time of the Alexander expeditions, which was transmitted from Greek sources into medieval romans. See C.Weinberger-Thomas, 'Les yeux fertiles de la mémoire. Exotisme indien et représentations occidentales' in Weinberger-Thomas ed. 1988.

to their idols' are 'regarded as saints'\textsuperscript{20} The introduction of the word 'idols' here, instead of 'God', signals the implicit criticism of this particular religious practice, a criticism that by analogy may eventually be extended to any sort of religious act with negative consequences for human life.

In this context, Conti introduces his description of the Vijayanagara festival:

In Bizengalia also, at a certain time of the year, their idol is carried through the city, placed between two chariots, in which are young women richly adorned, who sing hymns to the god, and accompanied by a great concourse of people. Many, carried away by the fervour of their faith, cast themselves on the ground before the wheels, in order that they may be crushed to death, a mode of death which they say is very acceptable to their god. Others, making an incision on their side, and inserting a rope thus through their body, hang themselves to the chariot by way of ornament, and thus suspended and half dead accompany their idol. This kind of sacrifice they consider the best and most acceptable of all\textsuperscript{21}

Without discussing the matter fully, the Venetian makes some important theoretical points simply by using descriptive language. 'They say' and 'they consider' work effectively as rhetorical devices to indicate a distance, the one that separates Christian and Western beliefs from Indian ones. The acceptance of diverse beliefs in diverse social contexts creates a ground for raising the problem of relativism. On the other hand, the acceptance of a form of free will in different people from different cultures also shapes the structure of western anthropology - there is an implicit idea of a universal human dignity through choice. So, women in India are expected to jump voluntarily into the fire with their deceased husbands, and this assumption has an important content despite the fact that, as the merchant explains, if they show too much timidity, priests, relatives and bystanders encourage them and, eventually, "push" them to fulfil their duty. By assuming

\textsuperscript{20} Conti in Major 1857, p.28.

\textsuperscript{21} Conti in Major 1857, pp 28-9.
diversity of beliefs and free will Conti does not suggest that the Indian religious practices are as good as the Latin Christian ones, but he does acknowledge the existence of different possible ways of believing and acting within a common structure of human agency, and, as in the case of idolatry, leaves up to the Christian authorities the task of defining a universal principle of evaluation of beliefs and morality which may constitute a defence of the superiority of the western tradition. Like Marco Polo and the Dominican Jordanus Catalani in the early fourteenth century, he assumes the rejection of sati and religious suicidal sacrifices as an instinctive reaction of an audience not used to them, but does not provide any argument to justify his rejection. In all these authors (we saw this with Marco Polo and the Chinese astrologers) condemnatory language often appears almost as an afterthought with little relationship with the description itself.

In fact Conti's description of Hindu religious sacrifices followed the pattern of previous European texts, for instance the description of South India given by friar Odoric of Pordenone in 1331. Thus:

... annually on the recurrence of the day when that idol was made, the folk of the country come and take it down, and put it on a fine chariot; and then the king and the queen and all the pilgrims, and the whole body of the people, join together and draw it forth from the Church [ecclesia] with loud singing of songs and all kinds of music; and many maidens [virgines] go before by two and two chanting in a marvellous manner. And many pilgrims who have come to this feast cast themselves under the chariot, so that its wheels may go over them them, saying that they desire to die for their God. And the car passes over them, and crushes and cuts them in sunder, and so they perish on the spot (...) and their bodies they burn, declaring that they are holy, having thus devoted themselves to death for their God.\(^{22}\)

Pordenone's description referred to areas which later became part of the Vijayanagara Empire, at his time however still non-existent. It belonged to a text that carried (in

\(^{22}\) Pordenone in Yule 1913, II, p.144. The Latin version is on pp 298-9.
particularly clear terms) an implicit condemnation on such practices. A virulent condemnation was, as one would expect, more likely among clerics than merchants. It was typical of the author of Mandeville's travels eagerly to copy Pordenone and then to add a comment in support of Christian reform which, in fact, relativised the former's tone of criticism:

...and they believe that the more pain they suffer here for the love of that idol, the more joy they will have in the other world and the nearer God they will be. And truly they suffer so much pain that hardly would any Christian suffer the half —nay, not a tenth— for love of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not unlike his predecessors, Conti is prepared to take many of the 'magic' effects of the Indian faith seriously (in such occasions Poggio takes some distance), and he explains how the saintly and wise brahmins study astronomy and predict the future, how he saw one of them who was three hundred years old, and how on one occasion the sailors of his ship negotiated with a demon so that he would send them a good wind. In this last event the Venetian presents himself as witness, and describes a ritual involving a few disgusting actions with obscure symbolic significance, and above all the scene of an Arab sailor being possessed by the so-called god or demon.

Analyzed with modern distinctions, Conti's vocabulary jumps ambiguously from religion ('god') to magic ('demon'), and from magic to anthropological science ('human insanity'). Obviously Conti's attitude towards magic (here understood as a practical way of exercising power over nature based on links with the symbolically apprehended "divine" realities) was common in fifteenth century Europe, not only among Christian believers in

25 Idem.
miracles, but also among humanist neoplatonist scientists. Conti's account of miraculous practices comes together with his description of the navigation technology in the Indian ocean.

Conti is one of the first travellers to be fairly precise about the regional differences between the Indian customs he describes, but at certain moments he speaks in general terms, and it is not clear whether he is still referring to Vijayanagara or rather to somewhere else in India. His rich account quickly touches on most of the themes about manners and customs that repeatedly recur in the sources, such as the burial practices, religious sacrifices, festivals, weddings and marriage conventions, or the wisdom and asceticism of brahmins and yogis. There are however a few aspects of the way he deals with these themes that are important in the light of future developments. I have already mentioned the sociological explanation of striking religious practices (such as the sati or the respect for certain animals) and the recognition of diversity of practices and customs within India, following regional, religious and even social differences. I should now add the not always derogatory comparison of Indian ways and perspectives with western ones.

The starting point for Conti's comparison of Europe and India is the elaboration of two different models for the Oriental world, one positive and one other negative. Thus in his division of India in three parts, he stresses that the latter, including the lands beyond the Ganges, 'excels the others in riches, politeness, and magnificence, and is equal to our own country in the style of life and in civilization' (vita et civili consuetudine nobis

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26 Popular attitudes to magic and science in early modern Europe have been studied in detail by, among others, Thomas 1971 and Caro Baroja 1978. The translation of these attitudes into popularising literature is best exemplified by works such as A.Torquemada's Jardín de Flores Curiosas (Salamanca, 1570), also translated as the Spanish Mandevile (London, 1600). The attitudes of the humanists are explored in A.Grafton, 'Humanism, Magic and Science' in Goodman/Mackay (eds.) 1990.
aequalis is the expression written by Poggio).\textsuperscript{27} From the description that follows it is apparent that the Venetian traveller uses a dualistic criterion to evaluate a culture in general terms, one which applies to style of life and forms of social organisation. What is rich, humane, civilised, refined and similar to Europe is opposed to what is poor, cruel, barbarous, coarse and different from Europe. Eating on the table belongs to the civilised group, eating on a carpet is more barbarous, and so on.

From another passage it is evident that when he refers to a highly idealised land beyond the Ganges, Conti, perhaps influenced by Marco Polo or Mandeville, but more probably by Arab merchants, is already thinking about Cathay:

\begin{quote}
Beyond this province of Macinus (Siam) is one which is superior to all others in the world, and is named Cathay. The lord of this country is called the Great Khan, which in the language of the inhabitants means Emperor. The principal city is Cambaleschia...[[follows a military description of the city]...the houses and palaces and other ornaments are similar to those in Italy: the men, gentle and discreet, wise, and more wealthy than any that have been before mentioned' (my it.)\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

At this point most medieval authors demonstrate an attitude surprisingly similar to the one developed by the Portuguese and the Jesuits when they encountered China (even before they concluded that China had to be identified with Marco Polo's Cathay).

As opposed to this image of civilisation that compares favourably with Italy, Conti's description of the cruelty and unlawful customs of the people from Taprobana (Sumatra) and Java - probably as a result of some bitter personal experience - provides the opposite model, the one related to barbarism and, ultimately, inhumanity.\textsuperscript{29} Again in the


\textsuperscript{28} Conti in Major 1857 p. 14-5.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. p. 15-6.
tradition of early fourteenth century travellers such as Polo, Catalani or Pordenone, people in Taprobana are cruel and warlike, and they trade in human heads and eat human flesh. Their customs are described as brutal (moribus asperi), which recalls, in the intellectual tradition to which Poggio and Conti belong, the extended practice of associating what is morally repugnant with what is naturally animal. Civilization is thus understood as the social control of animal passions through "cultural" means, such as laws and education in good customs; or, in other words, civilization (the quality of the civili consuetudine and the mores) is a process of refinement, and moral virtues are the inclinations to act which contribute to preserve a peaceful and harmonious social order. As a consequence, certain ways of acting are "less human": in Java homines inhumanissimi omnium, crudelissimique inhabitant.30 There are many particular instances that give origin to this judgement: killing men is very easy, the law encourages debtors to become assassins as a good way of escaping slavery, desires can be satisfied without social control (i.e. a man can take as many wives as he wishes), cock-fighting and betting on such cruel spectacle are popular amusements, and "unclean" animals -mice, dogs, cats- are commonly eaten. Either they have no law, or they have the "wrong" one, since its results are cruelty and other disgusting perversions (here again Conti does not mention the idea of natural law, he simply relies again on the educated instincts of his audience).

It is in relationship with the "civilized" model that we can make sense of Conti's remark that the Indians not only have their own subjective approach to the world, their own ideas and beliefs, but also an opinion about the Latin Christians.31 Conti reported that the natives of India


31 The adjective "Latin" is necessary because there were Christians living in scattered communities in different parts of Asia, quickly identified by Conti and other medieval travellers as heretic Nestorians or Jacobites; more
'call us Franks, and say that, while they call other nations blind, they themselves have two eyes and we have but one, because they consider that they excel all others in prudence' (Hi nos Francos apellant, aúntque, cum caeteras gentes coecas vocent, se duobus oculis, nos unico esse, superiores existimantes se esse prudentia). 32

This particular opinion was very widely reported in fourteenth and fifteenth European sources on Asia, to the point that it seems to suggest a case of massive unacknowledged textual borrowing. It is often applied to Cathay, which for Conti was the third, most civilised part of India. Thus, prince Hayton of Armenia,33 at the beginning of his Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient, a historical and geographical report on central Asia which was dictated at the orders of Pope Clement V to Nicole Faulcon of Toul (first in French and then translated into Latin, Poitiers 1307), has the following passage on the kingdom of Cathay:

Cestes gens, qui tant son simples en lur creance e ës choses espiriteus, sont plus sages et plus sotils que totes autres gens ës ouvres corporels. E dient les Catains que il sont ceus qui voient de II oils, e des Latins disent qu'il voient d'un oil, mäs les autres nacions dient que sont auvegles. E por ce puet on entendre que il tiennent les autres gens de gros entendement34

It was probably from Hayton's work that the author of the Travels of Mandeville took this passage on the

generally, the Greek, Armenian and Ethiopian Christians were usually distinguished from the Latin, "Roman" ones.

32 I translate from Poggio 1964-9 II, p.648. See also Conti in Major 1857, p.31.
33 On Hayton see introduction to Hayton 1906, pp. xxiii-cxlii.
34 Hayton 1906, I,1, p.121. This collection (Recueil des histoires des croisades, Documents Arméniens, II) also publishes the Latin version: 'Homines vero illius patrie [illarum partium] sunt sagacissimi et omni calliditate repleti et ideo in omni arte et scientia vilipendunt alias nationes: et dicunt, quod ipsi soli sunt qui duobus oculis resipient, Latini vero uno lumine tantum vident, sed omnes alias naciones asserunt esse cecas et per hoc certissime demonstrantur quod omnes alios reputant esse rudes'.(Hayton 1906, p.262).
Cathaians, which he then combined with material from Pordenone and his own additions:

Mais tant puisie bien dire, que ce sont lea plus subtilz gentz en toutes sciences dont il se mellent et en tout arteficerie qui soient au monde. Car de subtillite, de malice et de tous engins ilz passent tous ceula du monde, et ilz le scouent bien dire. Car ilz dient quil voient de II yex et les Crestiens ne voient que dun oeil, pour ce quilz sont les plus subtilz apres eulz; mais ilz dient que toutes les autres nacions ne voient goute et quil sont auveugles de science et douvrage.

One might be tempted to think that Poggio knew of either Hayton or Mandeville, and supplemented Conti with some information. In Mandeville he could have also found the description of the festival which he attributed to Bizengalia. There are however further reports of this same opinion, for instance in Iosafa Barbaro's relation of his embassy to Uzun Hasan, apparently written in 1487. Barbaro, an experienced traveller, had been sent by the Republic of Venice in 1471 to seek an alliance with the Turkmen rulers of Persia against the Ottomans. At one moment of his narrative the Persian king shows Barbaro some precious stones and asks him how valuable they are. The Venetian answers, with prudence, that he will not tell, but in any case they are worth more than any amount of gold, at least as much as a city. To which the king answers, with approval:

prancatani catani. Tre occhi ha il mondo, due ne hanno i Cataini, et uno i Franchi (...). Questa parola Cataini haveva udita per avanti da uno ambasciatore dello Imperator tartaro [the Timurid ruler Shâh Rukh?], il qual ritornava del Cataio del 1436. Il qual facendo la via della Tana [a commercial port in the black sea] io accetai in casa con tutti li suoi, sperando haver da lui qualche gioia. Et un giorno, ragionando del Cataio, me disse como quelli capi della porta di quel signore saperano, chi erano i Franchi. E dimandogli io se l'era possibile che havessemo cognition de i Franchi, disse, e come non la

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35 From the 1371 French version of the Travels, the oldest extant: Mandeville (M.Letts ed.) 1953, p.352. The English translation (Egerton version, between 1410 and 1420) reads: 'And therefore they say that they look with two eyes and Christian men with one; for they hold Christian men most subtle and wise after themselves. Folk of other nations, they say, are blind without eyes, as arent cunning and working...'
dobbiamo haver noi. Tu sai como hoi semo appreso à Capha 
[another Crimean port, was a colony of Genoese merchants],
et che al continuo praticiamo in quel luogo, et loro 
vengono in el nostro lordo. Et soggiunse, noi Cataini 
habbiamo due occhi, et voi Franchi uno; è voltandosi verso 
i tartari iguali erano li, soggiunse: e voi nessuno; 
sorriendo tuttavia. Et però meglio intesi il proverbio di 
questo signore quando usò quelle parole\(^{36}\)

Certainly Barbaro knew about Conti and Mandeville, 
since he mentioned their names in the first paragraphs of 
his Viaggi. He may therefore have invented the two scenes 
just to introduce (again) a borrowed idea. There are, 
however, two reasons against this hypothesis of consecutive 
borrowings. The first is that the source criticism does not 
support the idea. The narratives by Conti and Barbaro both 
have a structure which is independent of their possible 
models, Hayton and Mandeville. They convey original 
information, but they also fail to include things present 
in the earlier texts, and, what is more important, they 
often report similar things in very different ways. The 
distance which separates Conti from Pordenone and Hayton 
(and also from Marco Polo, another of Poggio's suggested 
sources) is much larger than the distance that separates 
Mandeville from his models, Pordenone and Hayton.\(^{37}\) A 
more detailed comparison of vocabulary does not encourage 
the idea of direct borrowing either. If Poggio, when using 
notes taken during his interviews with Conti for a Latin 
composition, had had recourse to the report of Hayton 
(probably the Latin version), he would not have spoken 
about Francos instead of Latini, caeteras gentes instead

\(^{36}\) Barbaro (A. Manuzio ed.) 1545, p.34. There is a XVIth c. English version by 
William Thomas: 'I had before hearde this worde Cataini of an ambassador of 
Tartarie in his retorne from Cataio the yere 1436, who, passing through Tana 
with all his trayne, was lodg6d in my house: I hoping to get some jewell of him. At which time, talking of Cataio, he tolde me howe the chief of that 
Princes corte knew well what the Franchi were. And upon my demaunding of him 
howe it was possible they should have knowledge of the Franchi, he asked me, 
why shulde they not knowe us? thow knowest, said he, howe neere we be unto 
Capha, and that we practice thither continually; liek as also they reasorte 
into or Lordo: addeng this further, we Cataiani have twoo eyes and yow Franchi 
one, whereas yow (torning him towards the Tartares that were with him) have 
ever a one, which he spake merrylie'. (Barbaro 1873, p. 57-8).

\(^{37}\) These borrowings have been well-traced. See for instance the introduction 
to Mandeville (Seymour ed.) 1967.
of alias nationes; he would not have felt the need to change the order of the sentence; and he would not have transformed the verbs dicunt and asserunt into apellant and vocent.\textsuperscript{38}

All this does not eliminate the possibility of an incidental plagiarism motivated by a particularly appealing passage (and there are reasons why the the passage on "the three eyes of the world" would be appealing). But then we must consider our second reason, namely, that it is highly plausible that this proverb was common in Asia after the thirteenth century, especially in the Arab-Persian culture of merchants and travellers. As Barbaro's anecdote suggests, such opinion may have spread as a result of the destruction brought about by the Tartar and Turkish invasions of the late middle ages, which left the far East and the far West as the most stable centres of civilization. Thus in the fourteenth century, while Ibn Battūta declared that 'The Chinese are of all peoples the most skilful in the arts and possessed of the greatest mastery of them',\textsuperscript{39} Ibn Khaldūn reported that 'We further hear now that the philosophical sciences are greatly cultivated in the land of Rome and along the adjacent northern shore of the Country of the European Christians'.\textsuperscript{40} And when in the fifteenth century the Persian from Khorasan 'Abd al-Razzāq tried to find words to describe the beauty and workmanship of a South Indian temple, he referred to the fact that it was all covered with paintings 'after the manner of the Franks and the people of Khata'.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Compare Latin Poggio (n.32 above) with Latin Hayton (n.34 above). Sensburg assumes that Poggio incorporated material from all authors he may have known, without understanding that Poggio may have not intended to do so. This is why his arguments tracing classical and medieval parallels in the fourth book of \textit{De Varietate Fortunae} are flawed. See especially Sensburg 1906, pp 23-9.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibn Battuta 1929, p.285.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibn Khaldūn 1967, p. 375.

\textsuperscript{41} 'Abd al-Razzāq in Major 1857, p.21.
In fact we should observe in the parallel passages that, while Hayton talks about Latins (himself being an oriental Christian concerned with finding help in the West in order to fight the Egyptian Saracens) and Mandeville refers to Christians in general (which fits the author's purpose of revising the moral coherence of the Latin Christians of his time), both Conti and Barbaro talk about Francs. This last was the name that would have been used by a medieval Muslim when referring indiscriminately to Latin Christians. It is clear that in the case of Barbaro this mediation is completely justified by his own narrative, where it is always a Persian (tartar or turkman) who tells the story. Conti, on the other hand, was probably often in contact with Muslim merchants, and had to dress like one of them (he had prospered under the protective shadow of Timur's court in the early fifteenth century, and as I said under the Mamelukes of Egypt thirty years later). In fact, since the time of Marco Polo and up to the arrival of the Portuguese, European (mainly Genoese and Venetian) merchants in India and China had themselves imitated the organisational patterns of Muslim communities, and often learnt about indigenous societies - both facts and legends - through their mediation. This common oral background helps to understand coincidences between Polo, Catalani, Pordenone and Conti, but also, of course, with Ibn Battuta. On the other hand, and in contrast, contact with Eastern Christians living under non-Christian rule, either Armenians, Jacobites or Nestorians, was never as fluid as theory demanded. They were often described as 'heretics' or even 'idolaters'.

Finally the proverb about the wisdom of the Chinese became common in sixteenth-century Europe. The Portuguese humanist chronicler João de Barros, who devoted the seventh chapter of the third of his Asian Décadas (1563) to the description of China, thus wrote:

E bem como os gregos, em respeito de si, tôdalas outras nações haviam por bárbaras, assi os Chins dizem que êles
Barros, one of the best informed early orientalists, but who never visited the East, is known to have consulted Chinese books (which he translated with the help of a Chinese slave) as well as Portuguese accounts and classical sources. His statement is remarkable because he has changed 'Francs' or 'Christians' to 'Europeans', and because he sets the Chinese next to the ancient Greeks and Romans as a model of civilization. On the other hand, he basically consolidated the association of the proverb with a positive appreciation of China as the most civilised kingdom of the world, an attitude which would persist in Europe throughout the following centuries.

We may therefore conclude that there is something more to close correspondences than mere textual borrowing. There was a genuine interest in the political and cultural achievements of the Chinese that made their proverb worth reporting. More generally speaking, it can be established that similar festivals sometimes produced similar descriptions, and popular stories could be reported independently several times.

A travel writer may have been stimulated to describe something by the reading of the same story in a previous author, but it is also likely that certain things (which we need to conceptualise as an objective historical reality) would have been considered interesting in all cases. And the fact that wife-burning, or the spectacle of

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43 On Barros and his sources of information see Lach 1965, p.190-1 and especially Boxer 1980.
44 One other remarkable example of an ethnographical curiosity being reported very often in the fifteenth and the sixteenth century, with clear cases of independent observation, is provided by the description of strange sexual customs in South-East Asia (especially in Pegu and Java). The situation is summarized in Lach 1965, n.298 p. 533.
people throwing themselves at the wheels of a chariot for the sake of a God, did not tend to pass unnoticed, immediately reveals the measure of a common framework of assumptions that was being challenged. The 'marvelous' was the strange, the different, what was recognised as worthy of being reported: something that did not leave the traveller indifferent. Although a ready-made image of legendary other-worldliness was easily available, a long experience abroad blurred the distinction between the common-sensical and the strange, and allowed the travelling subject, now in command of an expanded linguistic world, to challenge the terms of precedence on an initial us-other opposition. Thus, Conti's acquaintances in India made him realise that the Francs had a perhaps unjustified sense of superiority and, not unlike the more sophisticated Barros, his passage on "the three eyes of the world" is surrounded by the description of indigenous cultural achievements: calendar, coinage, military technology, paper and writing, languages, slavery (sic.) and justice. It is also followed by the sensational statement that among the Indians pestilence is unknown, 'neither are they exposed to those diseases which carry off the population in our own countries', with the consequence that 'the number of these people and nations exceeds belief'. Here, as in other instances, Conti exaggerates, but he was obviously referring to something he had experienced (he seems to have been particularly impressed by the huge armies, perhaps those of Vijayanagara). Freedom from disease, an idea already present in the Greek account of Megasthenes (the fullest among the ancients), must have had an important meaning in the plague-stricken Europe of the late middle ages.

None of these comparative aspects is developed in Conti's account with the systematic reflections one finds in late sixteenth century authors, such as Barros, some

45 Conti in Major 1857, p.32.
Jesuits or a few independent and educated observers (I take François Bernier in the seventeenth century as a paradigmatic example). As I have been able to demonstrate, what separated Barros from Conti and other medieval travellers was not so much an increased appreciation of different cultures, as the elaboration of an independent language of civilisation to describe them. The originality of late-Renaissance critical travellers is above all a matter of degree of elaboration of cultural references and theoretical concerns, a development usually associated with institutional efforts of organisation of information and ideological control, rather than the automatic effect of a new epoch-making modern "mentality" or way of thinking. What mattered was the attitude resulting from the combination of education and interests - or, in more general terms, tradition and desire; such attitude had to be further confronted with particular problems in specific contexts before its contribution to historical change could be made effective. This contribution, in fact, took the form of an alteration within a traditional 'genre'. This is the distance that separates Conti himself from Pordenone or Polo, despite the fact that in many particular instances their responses are so similar that one seems to copy another. Talking to Poggio, Conti revealed that he could become a more critical and keen observer than he would have probably remained if he had been left to talk to Pero Tafur, or to write on his own.

This point can be illustrated by looking in detail at the alternative report of Conti's narrative in Pero Tafur. What was striking to early commentators (i.e. Morel-Fatio and Desimoni)\(^46\) was the great difference between Tafur's text and that of Poggio. This disparity led to questioning the truthfulness of one of the witnesses, with the humanist usually being assumed to be the more reliable. I agree with

\(^{46}\) Morel-Fatio and Desimoni are discussed in Vives Gatell 1938.
Vives Gatell, who undertook a systematic comparison,\textsuperscript{47} that such great differences can be explained by considering the different conditions of the two writers and the circumstances of composition for each text. There are sufficient details shared by the two accounts, on the other hand, to make it difficult to believe that Tafur's encounter with Conti was a complete fabrication, as a sceptic reader may suspect. It is also unlikely that he copied from Poggio's account and other sources, because Tafur includes some original material on Conti's life which he could have hardly learnt elsewhere (if we are to accept, as all critics do, that his voyage took place between 1436 and 1439, and that the narrative was written in Córdoba about fifteen years later). Even if by some extraordinary chance Tafur had had access to an early manuscript of De Varietate Fortunae, he would not have reproduced it so erratically. These precisions are important so as to establish that we have a genuine case of two independent versions of the same travel-experience, one reported in 1437, the other in 1441, and both included in written texts composed (also independently) a few further years later. This serves to underline the importance of the process of mediation in the formation of travel narratives, and, consequently, the originality of Poggio's intervention in the context of a more widespread cultural attitude (which can be represented by the interests and assumptions of Tafur, a petty noble from Andalusia).\textsuperscript{48}

The contextual differences can be analysed as four pairs of oppositions:

\textsuperscript{47} Vives Gatell 1938, pp 62-74.

\textsuperscript{48} This encounter between two travellers, the crusader-pilgrim to the East and the merchant with tales from the Prester John, is in fact far from unique. Bertrandon de la Broquière, the author of Voyage d’Outremer (Schefer ed. 1892), had a remarkably similar experience with Peter of Naples, whom he met in Pera, merely three or four years earlier (1432-3). This not only happened very close in time, but in fact the kind of text, the kind of traveller and the kind of excursus are extraordinarily analogous, although I believe any direct relationship can be ruled out (in fact La Broquière was more of a spy than Tafur).
I. Pero Tafur met Conti by chance, and the information was transmitted to him orally and in a disorganized way. This he remembered and summarized a few years later. In his text the personal encounter is as important as the description of India, and certainly more vivid. In sharp contrast Poggio interviewed Conti several times, and with the intention of obtaining accurate information which he noted down immediately. He had little interest in the man himself.

II. Tafur probably did not know Italian (which must have been the language for both interviews) as well as Poggio.

III. Tafur displayed vague geographical ideas based on current medieval conceptions. His exchange with Conti does not seem to have altered them significantly. Poggio made a conscious effort to establish a true geographical image on the basis of the works attributed to Ptolemy, which he knew and corrected.

IV. Conti adapted to the audience he was addressing. He felt free to give advice, and probably also to exaggerate, when speaking with a foreign adventurous knight with whom he had made friends. He must have felt more intimidated by the secretary of the Pope, one of the most cultivated men he could think of and, at the time, in the service of the spiritual head of the Roman Church.

There is a structural analogy between the two texts. Both Tafur and Poggio divided the report in two parts, a narrative of Conti's travels and a description of India. It is however a superficial analogy, especially when it concerns the more cosmographical part. It is not only that Poggio and Tafur selected different observations, and expressed them in different ways. The two contexts of communication were radically different, and probably Conti's words and emphasis changed accordingly. Thus Tafur is full of personal details on Conti's life, but fails to record names of places carefully. He remembered all kinds of legends and striking wonders. He may also have
remembered marvellous things heard or read elsewhere, and added them while writing fifteen years later in Córdoba. Poggio either was not told as much, or tended to reject such information. Occasionally, he noted something fabulous with a hint of scepticism. If anything, what he had in mind were classical images such as those found in Pliny. It is particularly remarkable that Pero Tafur kept confusing the Nile with the Indus and that he referred very explicitly to the Prester John of the Indies, whom he located in India (and not in Abyssinia or somewhere near Cathay, which were the better substantiated versions of the medieval myth). He forgot or discarded any distinction between kingdoms and peoples in the East, a kind of information which is one of the main contributions of Poggio's version. Instead, he appeals to the typically medieval unified image of wonders and monsters which Conti certainly did not transmit to Poggio. It is this conception, rather than any one or other detail, which is significant of Pero Tafur's uncritical attitude. Beyond this, as to the source of exaggerations and confusions, we are left to wonder whether it was Conti who adapted to Tafur's preconceptions and ignorance, whether Tafur himself adapted to his Castilian audience, or whether maybe it was only Poggio's questions that clarified Conti's own confused memories.

But the fact that Tafur's text is a continuous and disorganized prose where legends and ethnological observations mix with each other does not detract from the validity of particular observations. A more detailed look reveals that the text consists of a series of independent themes which the author has not tried to select according to one particular standard of critical awareness, nor to reconcile in a consistent geographical picture. I shall distinguish twenty such independent themes as they appear in the text, and shall mention any possible parallels in Poggio's account (see table 1).
### TABLE 1: Pero Tafur's version of Conti's travels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pero Tafur</th>
<th>Poggio (parallels)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Prester John of the Indies. Conti introduces this figure at Tafur’s request. He is described as a great king obeyed by other minority kings and many gentile peoples. This image vaguely epitomizes well-known medieval sources, including the narratives of Marco Polo and Mandeville.</td>
<td>In contrast Poggio mentions separately a Nestorian king near Cathay, and the Ethiopian king. These two appear as reported by Eastern emissaries to the council of Florence, whom Poggio interviewed after talking to Conti. There exists an alternative report of this interview with the Ethiopian monks, which took place in the presence of a commission of Cardinals, by the antiquarian Flavio Biondo. A comparison shows that Poggio edited this information and eliminated any reference to whatever he considered excessively fabulous material, including the very name of the Prester John.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A lengthy description of a huge mythical mountain with a flourishing civilisation of Priest-Kings (the Prester John) which actually seems to combine the characteristics of Tibet and Ceylon and is offered almost as a utopian model.</td>
<td>Only details about fruits and cinnamon in Ceylon have a parallel in Poggio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. An isolated marvel about crabs that, in contact with the air, turn into stone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The description of a “gentile” religious ritual, a pilgrimage including suicidal sacrifices (jumping into a pool of mud) which is based on an indigenous myth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Another rite of self-sacrifice (cutting one’s head with huge scissors).</td>
<td>There is a parallel in Poggio.</td>
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7. A long account of an expedition sent by the servants of the Prester John in search of the origins of the Nile. This was a well-known theme, with classical undertones and a quasi-mystical interpretation, which appears for instance at the end of the Travels of Mandeville. Another version of the same story, very similar to that of Tafur, was told by Peter of Naples to Bertrand de la Broquière in late 1432, although La Broquière's Prester John was much more firmly located in Abyssinia. What in Tafur is no more than a suggested mystery Mandeville, and La Broquière, openly declared to be the earthly paradise. Here tradition actively encouraged the geographical confusion echoed by Tafur, since both the Nile and the Ganges (as well as the Tigris and Euphrates) were meant to have their source in the middle of this land, the highest on earth, and surrounded by an impenetrable wall. Thus Tafur, or perhaps Conti at his request, repeated the mythical Geography of tradition.

8. A report on Indian marriage customs, especially dowries and the sati (including two variants).

9. A report on valuable goods from India, with emphasis on medicinal herbs and precious stones.

The sati described by Poggio is different in the precise details, but very similar in essence.

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51 Mandeville 1983, pp 182-5.
52 Broquière 1892, pp 145-6.
53 It is very doubtful however that Conti or Tafur followed Mandeville directly, since the actual stories are completely different. The story ultimately derived from Genesis. This is why a few pages later Tafur mentions quite explicitly that the source of the Nile is the earthly paradise, as a piece of well-established mythical geography. It is however a river Nile that reaches as far as the tomb of St. Thomas (in "South India")!
54 The story about the failed attempt to find the source of the Nile appears to have an Egyptian local origin. It is already recorded in the Latin pilgrimage of Ludolphus of Suchen (1336-41), before Mandeville assembled his travels. See Ludolphus 1851, p.59. The thematic connection with the Prester John, Saint Thomas the apostle of the Indies and the location of earthly Paradise is likely to have been present among crusaders and pilgrims: see for instance Ibid. pp 62 and 64.
| 10. | A discussion on the best European markets for oriental products. Tafur shows a striking preference for Spain (i.e. the kingdom of Castile), his own country. |
| 11. | Asked about Indian humanoid monsters (the kind found in Isidore of Seville and medieval encyclopedias) Conti denies their existence, but insists on strange animals and gives some examples. **Poggio's account agrees even with some specific cases.** |
| 12. | A comment on the piety of the Christians of Prester John, despite the fact that they ignore Rome, again a theme close to the Mandeville tradition. **In his own report of the Christians of Ethiopia Poggio omitted detailed information about religious practices.** |
| 13. | Emphasis on the authority of the king (the Prester John) among his subjects. |
| 14. | A report on magical practices, with a story about prediction of weather in the Red Sea throughout demonic intercession. **There is a very similar parallel in Poggio, despite clear differences in detail.** |
| 15. | A description of big ships. **Parallel in Poggio.** |
| 17. | Emphasis on the size and importance of the Nile, which is made to run from India to Ethiopia (a common medieval idea, but a surprising mistake in someone who spoke to Conti). |
| 18. | A note on the interest of the Prester John in western Christianity and in the conquest of Jerusalem, perfectly coherent with the usual crusading meaning of the medieval myth (the Prester John was a promise of restoration of the original Christian paradise through the success of spiritual reform and war against the infidel). |
| 19. | A statement about the church and tomb of St. Thomas in India, including a legend about miraculous interventions (the legendary material has parallels in Marco Polo and other medieval reports, as well as in early-sixteenth century Portuguese descriptions of the tomb of St. Thomas in Mailapur, north of Coromandel coast, which suggests the existence of a common indigenous source). **Poggio only mentions the church with the remains of the apostle.** |
20- A comment on skin-colour, with the Indians darker than the Europeans, but not as much as the Ethiopians (Africans). Tafur seems to imply a geographical continuum, in the same way as Pliny, who commented on the same point.\textsuperscript{55}

From the comparison between Poggio and Tafur it is clear that the humanist composed a far more detailed and precise account. More importantly, he provided a narrative structure which was far more coherent than that of Tafur. But Poggio also omitted things, especially whatever seemed to confirm what he considered to be fables of an ignorant age. While Pero Tafur made use of various elements to give life to the Prester John, Poggio tried to bury this name. Tafur was an enthusiastic believer in Christian unity against Muslims, with interests ranging from the Spanish reconquista, in which he participated, to the crusading dreams in the East. His own writing may have been prompted by the fall of Constantinople, a city which he described in full decadence before its occupation by the Turks (he also claims to have been well received by the Emperor, a distant "relative" of his).

In contrast, Poggio had an intellectual dream. He wanted to restore ancient knowledge and improve it. Conti, whom he personally questioned, could be as good a source as any old text, if critically scrutinized. Poggio's attitude towards knowledge was not without reservations. The quality of his works which also makes his contribution to travel literature novel can be best summarized, in the words of F. Krantz, as a 'historical and analytical realism' in which original knowledge of ancient texts and scepticism about the direct utility of classical learning are combined in a wider attitude, defined by a 'reliance on the utility of contemporary experience', and, more generally, 'a tendency, even a drive, to view reality, past and present,

\textsuperscript{55} Pliny, Nat. Hist. (Rackman ed. 1949) VI, 22.
in terms of concrete particulars'. The result is a fundamental assumption: 'the secular relatedness and comparability, indeed, the interchangeability of [human] experience'.

We may thus say that, rather than Conti, it was Poggio who created Bizengalia for the west. He was to be followed by many others who risked their lives out in India and dealt with its particularities. Thus the Portuguese, who went to the East in search for 'Christians and spices', in Vasco de Gama's famous expression, quickly abandoned the idea of finding the Prester John and left it behind, securely located in a historical Abyssinia. Christians and spices they found, and also Muslims to wage war upon, but in the middle there was another king to negotiate with. Thus they re-created the empire of Vijayanagara.

56 Krantz 1987, pp 150 and 121-2. The 'secular', 'historical' and 'relativistic' aspects of Poggio's humanism have, I believe, been overstated in the most recent (and richest) analyses of his thought, for instance by R. Fubini (1982) and F. Krantz (1987). They extract almost a system of modern thought out of what merely was an implicit attitude of openness towards common opinion, and curiosity for contemporary events. This led Poggio, it is true, to challenge the abstract definitions of Fortune, Law and Virtue of authoritative philosophers and traditional moralists, but his was not really a systematic intellectual project. The overstatement can be illustrated by comparing F. Krantz's almost apologetic analysis of Poggio's Historiae Florentini Populi with E. Cochrane's more critical stance (Cochrane 1981). While Krantz isolates a few novel features that distinguish Poggio from Leonardo Bruni, his obvious model, Cochrane clearly identifies Poggio's general lack of originality, and points at things he may have been expected to know and criticise but, for his own reasons, left aside.
Vijayanagara from a Muslim tradition

The detailed analysis of the report of a Persian embassy to Vijayanagara, which took place a few years after Conti's visit, provides us with an opportunity to compare the extent to which differences in cultural background affected a traveller's ability to see and tell. While it is important to highlight some general differences between the Muslim and the Latin Christian medieval traditions, which is to say differences between conceptual assumptions and literary tools, it is also necessary to speak about an anthropological structure of cultural decodification (an ability to learn and use new "language-games"). And this needs to be understood in the general framework of a theory of culture and historical agency. Therefore, I shall stress the psychological structure which makes some kind of translation possible on the basis of an experience of otherness. This structure becomes apparent by looking at the importance of religious identities and at what threatens them when a cultural tradition is challenged by a process of change that casts doubt on the centrality of its supposed centre.

I shall therefore be treating travel writing as a form of cultural translation. There was of course the especial case of actual interpreters, who occasionally also wrote their own narratives - for instance Duarte Barbosa, or the anonymous lingua who composed a report on the 1521 Portuguese expedition to Bengal.¹ These were extreme cases of an individual acting as cultural bridge in a situation of initial and unprecedented exchange. However, interpreters were not the only "translators". Taking inter-cultural contacts as a whole, the possibility of dialogue and its implications for cultural identities was always a latent issue which affected, with different degrees of intensity, various kinds of travellers, European

¹ See Voyage 1988.
or not, ambassadors being the most obvious group.

The Persian 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn Ishāq al-Samargandi (Herat, 1413-1482) finished in 1470 a History devoted mainly to the reign of Shāh Rukh, the third son of Timūr and one of the successors of his unstable Empire. Shāh Rukh attempted to bring some peace and coherence to the Persian lands conquered with violence by his father, following the well-known Eastern historical pattern of a 'constructive' political phase between the invasion by a military nomadic tribe and the disintegration of the political system due to the weakening of the central institutions. In fact, the Mongols never succeeded in overcoming their factional disunity in fifteenth-century Persia. That role would be fulfilled by the Shi'is of the Safavid dynasty later on, while a branch of the descendants of Timūr went to India and there founded the Mogul dynasty. Nevertheless, Shāh Rukh tried to learn about his subjects and bring order among the military. Stabilising the exaction of revenues and ensuring the safety of traders was the best way of encouraging prosperity. Part of the political role of the centre, however, consisted also in accommodating the surviving original local elites and their culture, and protecting artists, jurists and chroniclers. In the context of that cultural renewal the two main inspirations were necessarily a glorification of the power of the king and his men and the defence of a Muslim religion that was common to many of the invaders and invaded alike. It was from this religious basis that law and morality were recovered and reinterpreted, and that other literary genres were developed within an accepted Islamic tradition. Culture was above all a commentary on tradition.

'Abd al-Razzāq was a judge involved in diplomacy, government and counseling who wrote poetry

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2 On Shāh Rukh see Roemer 1986, in CHI, vol. VIII ch. 3.

3 On the role of the judge in Islamic culture see Josef Van Ess 'Sunnites and Shiites: the state, law and religion' in H. Kung (ed.) 1986.
and some historical works. His father, who was from Samarqand, had already served Shāh Rukh as a Qādi (judge) and Imam (leader of the prayer), in the army and at court. After his death 'Abd al-Razzāq succeeded in attracting the attention of the king with literary works dedicated to him, beginning with a commentary on the work of another Qādi itself devoted to the clarification of some difficult grammatical points (1437). We have to think of such erudite works and public disputations as having a symbolic dimension with possible political readings. Personal talent, cultural orthodoxy and political faithfulness were three variables of a complex language-game. Thus 'Abd al-Razzāq succeeded in winning the approval of the assembly of court 'ulamā. From then onwards, and despite one crisis related to court rivalries that forced him to prove in a kind of public judgement that he was truly learned in the tradition (1439), he received the patronage of the king and was entrusted with several political missions, most importantly as an ambassador to Vijayanagara (1442-44) and Gilān (1447). Since he was an experienced ambassador and an intelligent man-of-letters, he was able to enter the service of several of Shāh Rukh's successors after his death in 1447, and he performed various activities (such as fixing taxes). Finally, in 1463 and while under Sultan Abu Sa'id, he retired as the Shaykh (master) of the Shāh Rukh's Khānqāh (monastery) in Herat. Thus after having served different (and often rival) lords in unstable circumstances, he was able to muster a consensus among them so that he could retire to an unworldly but revenue-supported religious life. It was then that he wrote his major historical works. 4

The extent of the historical works which were written or encouraged by them shows that the Timūrid dynasties, in

the same way as the Mongol Il-Khanid rulers earlier, were particularly self-conscious about a glorious family tradition in which military success and kingship were central themes. 'Abd al-Razzāq's chronicle, *Matla' al-sa'dain* (The dawn of the two auspicious planets), told in chronological order and in two parts the history of the Mogols from the birth of the Il-khan Abu Sa'id to the death of Sultan Abu Sa'id in his own days (1304-1470). It mainly focuses on the two great political figures of Timūr and Shāh Rukh, and to a great extent relies on previous works, especially the *Majma' al-Tawārikh* of Ḥāfiz-i Abrū. Thus 'Abd al-Razzāq was clearly writing within a tradition of chronicles sponsored by kings, in which each new author summarised the earlier records and added material relating to his own times. Ḥāfiz-i Abrū, at the orders of Shāh Rukh, edited the world history of Rashid-al Din and complemented the history of Timūr by Nizām-i Shami. His *Majma' al-Tawārikh* runs up to 1527. 'Abd al-Razzāq is consequently more original in the latest part of his chronicle, since it deals with episodes directly known by him which are not covered by previous authors.

This originality is particularly true of the embassy to Vijayanagara, an independent work written with different interests and constraints and later incorporated into the main narrative. One other chapter deals with an embassy to China, and although here Abd-al-Razzāq only summarised the report of a certain Khvāja Ghayyāth al-Din Naqqāsh to the court of Shāh Rukh, as transmitted by Ḥāfiz-i Abrū, this is again a piece of work in which conventions were less rigid and the subject-matter was approached with a great degree of directness and openness.\(^5\) This does not mean, however, that texts dealing with the embassies were poorly elaborated. On the contrary, what distinguishes 'Abd al-Razzāq as a historian, especially his more personal narratives, is a skill in combining a highly sophisticated rhetoric, in a

\(^5\) See F. Tauler 'Learned literature from its beginnings up to the end of the 18th century' p. 462 in Rypka 1968.
tradition of rich metaphorical imagery and conventional themes, with a strong expressive capacity. This means that, placed within his cultural context, he appears to be fairly accurate in the historical details and vivid and meaningful in the architecture of the whole work. The narrative of his embassy to China was to become famous in the Orient, being translated into Turkish (어서 al-Razzāq wrote in Persian) and even reaching publication in French in 1696. This French translation had been prepared by Antoine Galland (1646-1751), an early orientalist chiefly known for producing the first European version of the Arabian Nights, and who in fact translated an abridgement of the whole History of erno al-Razzāq. This was part of the intellectual effort that accompanied the French attempt (sponsored by Louis XIV and Colbert) to seize control of Persian trade from the second half of the seventeenth century.6

What erno al-Razzāq wrote about Vijayanagara is, in its generic assumptions and literary structure, more easily comparable to western descriptions of the South-Indian Empire than the important Deccani chronicle of Firishtah (also written in Persian) and other Indian sources. It can be argued that there is a general interpretative framework common to Persian and Western sources on Vijayanagara centered on city, kingship and ritual, the literary elaboration of which by diverse observers is dependent neither upon a mere intertextual borrowing, nor on a common cultural tradition which, for instance, the Bible or the Hellenistic background could provide. Rather, there is a singular and fairly independent process of decodification in each author that enables him to re-create, although in a limited form, an indigenous Hindu language-game. The

possibility of such decodification relies partly on the
observer's training in understanding a structurally
similar language-game in his own culture. However, the
major impulse for the act of decodification comes from the
original position the foreigner takes when he becomes
inevitably involved, albeit obliquely, in the indigenous
culture.

This argument is of course ultimately dependant on the
trust we place in available translations. The problems of
interpretation involved in translating from Persian to
English or French are more acute than when making
comparisons among Italian, French, Castilian, Portuguese
and even English texts. Not only were these European
languages originally closer, but, more importantly, the
European tradition was connected by the use of Latin and,
since the late middle ages, also by a continuous flow of
particular translations from works written in vernacular.
These translations, taken together, amount to an impressive
effort of cultural dialogue. The impact of travel
literature in Renaissance Europe is ultimately and for this
reason a global phenomenon, despite important variations
in the social and cultural contexts of appropriation and
interpretation of particular texts.

Coming back to 'Abd al-Razzâq's embassy to
Vijayanagara, in this case one has to be more careful. The
fundamental French translation by M. Quatremère published
with the original in Paris in 1843 is, despite its
qualities, far from being unbiased. Quatremère's most
obvious weakness is his resistance to the aesthetic

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7 This was the basis for the English version edited by R.H. Major in 1857. A
slightly different text, of which I shall also take account, was published by
H.M. Elliott and J. Dowson in 1872, but Quatremère seems to have worked with an
earlier copy (which he dates 1494, while Dowson only mentions a 1601 copy for
his revision) and, moreover, he did not introduce as many suppressions. In my
analysis of the embassy to Vijayanagara I have followed Quatremère, rather
than Major, as the original translator, and thus given the French in the
footnotes. I also compared differences in the version published by Elliott
1872. I have been able to check the accuracy of Quatremère's translation with
the kind help of Wahid Behmardi, from the faculty of Oriental studies in
Cambridge University. In my quotations (from Major 1857) I indicate changes
of meaning from the original between square brackets.
preference for ingenious metaphors and poetic expressions in the Persian literature of the fifteenth century, which he tried to eliminate so as to uncover a factual narrative. There was a narrow moralism underlying that criterion. He first relegated some particular descriptions to the footnotes, but later, 'après avoir fait cette version avec toute l'exactitude dont que je suis capable, j'ai reculé devant l'idée de mettre sous les yeux du public des images si bizarres'. We would be mistaken if we thought that the translator is sparing us some crude sexual expressions. What in fact he has decided to suppress are a few detailed verses describing a ship, precious stones, elephants, and the pleasure produced by chewing betel.

Those parts of the chronicle of Shāh Rukh which were thus translated took the form of a dry narrative dealing with seditions, aristocratic factions and court intrigues. The style is still emphatic, and the main themes (such as justice) recognisable, but by simplifying the literary qualities something important has been lost. Fortunately the narrative of the embassy to India did not suffer the same degree of "purification". Even after the translation it is possible to understand that the use of conventions of Persian literary style (allegories, exaggerations, emphatic and poetic descriptions, insertion of religious verses etc.) serves a purpose revealed by the structure of the entire narrative. This suggests that it is sometimes unfair to assume that Persian literature under the Timūrids is to be simply characterized by 'a decadent cult of an affected artificiality', as it is commonly done in histories of Persian culture.

I am therefore re-stating the need to treat a text as a whole in order to understand some general assumptions and contextual rules that affect the reading of particular

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8 Quatremère in 'Abd al-Razzāq 1843, p.513.

9 This conventional approach is exemplified in Browne 1920 and in Rypka 1968 (for instance, p.281).
instances. This is the same kind of reading which as early as 1926 Nikolai S. Trubetzkoi developed for the *Journey beyond the three seas* written by the Russian Afanasi Nikitin, a contemporary of Conti and 'Abd al-Razzāq who also described South Indian cities, rituals and kings.\(^{10}\) Trubetzkoi, instead of eliminating the apparently misplaced obscene and religious expressions written in non-Russian languages that from time to time interrupt the narrative, explained that they expressed the split identity of a Christian Orthodox merchant who, rather than following the well-mapped route to the holy land, found himself in Muslim and heathen lands. This explains the conscious imitation of the structures of a narrative of pilgrimage which his readers would have expected, and also their subversion when the centre was lost. Trading in India with a mixture of desperation and greed ('there is nothing there of interest for us; tax-free goods are reserved for the Muslims'), Nikitin, forced to disguise his religion and unable to perform his rituals, feared losing his soul ('therefore, oh my Russian Christian brothers, if anyone among you wants to go to the Indian country, leave your faith in Russia and invoke Muhammad').\(^{11}\)

This analysis raises a theme that is central to the cultural dynamism expressed by travel literature, and which must serve as basis for the comparison of oriental Muslim and a western Christian cultural backgrounds. The problem of a loss of identity related to a faith dependent on a religious tradition suddenly out of context is common to many travellers, and appears explicitly in many of the texts. The themes of Fortune and Providence in fact encompass both moral and physical dangers created by a situation of insecurity. The dangers of the journey - shipwrecks, thieves, illnesses, despotism - easily find a

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\(^{10}\) See Trubezkoi 1985.

\(^{11}\) I have made my own translation of Nikitin's words from the Spanish in Trubezkoi 1985. There is also an English translation in Major 1857, see p.11.
religious response: chance, given anthropomorphic figure and attributes, becomes Fortune, and may eventually be replaced by evil and divine powers. These latter moral powers particularly apply when the dangers of the traveller are those of the soul. Natural forces and their relative mastery by men of prudence are ultimately dependent upon the wider opposition of human frailty to God's infinite power and wisdom. Thus 'Abd al-Razzāq is glad to have abandoned a land of errors, 12 Nikitin states that the traveller finds many occasions to sin and few chances to keep his holy calendar of worship and abstinence, 13 and Conti requires papal absolution before he incorporates himself into the civil life of Venice. 14 But we can also observe slightly different responses to this challenge, options related to the way the contacts between worldly life and faith are experienced. Thus Nikitin's almost schizophrenic attitude is fairly different from the one expressed by Conti or 'Abd al-Razzāq. Conti was readier to separate private beliefs from public performance, so that the honest would not stand in the way of the useful; 'Abd al-Razzāq reflected upon his own weaknesses from a position of success he knew to be vulnerable, and developed a slightly ironic relationship with Providence and fate; but Nikitin accused Indian women of being all whores, and yet he provided, in a different language, detailed information about diverse prices and qualities of prostitutes.

It must be added that it would be wrong to think that all medieval travellers were bound to regard visiting foreign lands as merely a moral danger justified by economic and political necessities. In the Latin Christian tradition, as early as the thirteenth century we find

12 'Abd al-Razzāq in Major 1857, pp 43-4.
13 Nikitin in Major 1857, p.22.
14 Conti in Major 1857, p.3. In the west, the prominence of this providentialist scheme in expressing moral conflicts and solving the crisis of personal identities is also obvious throughout sixteenth century travel literature. See for instance the Peregrinação of Mendes Pinto (1614).
statements of the idea of improving oneself abroad. In the *Doctrina Pueril* (written around 1280), one of the earliest European books of primary and general education composed in Romance language rather than in Latin, the Majorcan Ramon Llull wrote that 'the wise merchant goes to different lands to earn money and brings goods to his own land so as to earn richnesses, but a wiser merchant you shall be, my son, if you go to different lands and choose the best customs you find'.\(^{15}\) This kind of statement worked under the assumption that "good customs" were a social enactment of a religious devotion and divine law. The problem was therefore about the wholesale definition of non-Christians as Jews, Muslims and Gentiles. Ramon Llull also told his son (as an ideal representative of all Christian children) that the gentiles were people 'without law nor knowledge of God', and that Muhammad was an impostor who distorted the Christian new law, but that his law was in fact so untenable that intelligent Muslims knew it to be false.\(^{16}\)

It was this kind of wholesale rejection of other religious traditions that Christian travellers, in their descriptions, implicitly deny. The gentiles do have laws, and this is what most descriptions are about, despite the usual rejection of many particular practices (especially what was seen as idolatry) and of any discourse of legitimation based on a rival God to one's own. Llull's appeal to the intelligence of wise Muslims was already a concession to natural reason and natural law. He believed in convincing them to convert through logic, aware that authoritative arguments were, against the Koran, a dead end. Paradoxically, the inspiration of his Christian apologetic Art can be traced back to the Aristotelian logic of al-Ghazzāli.

Therefore, in late-medieval Europe, in parallel with the introduction of Roman Law and the development of

\(^{15}\) Llull 1972, p.224 (§4. *De custumes*).

\(^{16}\) Ibid. pp 162-166.
constitutionalism and jurisprudence, the more information relating to different societies was reported, the more it became necessary to systematise it with the help of concepts such as natural and civil law (including customs), and the more it was necessary to make a particular faith very abstract or very privately self-disciplined. When in the early sixteenth century there was an enormous inflow of original travel descriptions, the intellectual response adopted by European scholars and philosophers was essentially based on this late-medieval strategy. The development of a new sphere of universal discourse about human systems of laws and customs beyond the narrow possibilities offered by the Christian tradition of revealed books required a new principle of legitimation and understanding, and this was the role fulfilled by the ideas of human history and human nature and, more specifically, by new interpretations of Aristotle's natural law. Thus a whole area of discourse grew between providentialism and moral particularism.

While in Llull the natural and rational law was still primarily conceived as the moral instinct of the pre-Mosaic patriarchs, superseded by the old and the new revealed laws, and as a form of natural theology that derived the idea of obedience to God (and to the earthly lord) from the understanding of the order of the universe, in Aquinas it had become the medium through which human law, both the general 'ius gentium' and the particular 'ius civile', could partake with divine law despite their being beyond the explicit contents of the Revelation. The moral challenge was the challenge of the rationality of diversity. The cultural challenge was the theological justification of the new spheres of discourse, created above all through the new Aristotelian models.\(^{17}\)

The marginal position left to faith in a particular revealed tradition was the tension felt, from their

\(^{17}\) Compare Llull 1972 pp 157-166 (De les tres Leys) with Aquinas 1959 pp 57-67 (S.Theol. 1a 2ae, Qus. 91, 93, 94, 95).
different backgrounds, by travellers such as Nikitin, Conti, 'Abd al-Razzāq and, later, those Jesuits who dressed like brahmins in order to convert Indians. At this point it is important to assess the relative originality of 'Abd al-Razzāq's cultural background as a Persian Muslim. Islam, like Christianity, derived from Judaism. It originally differed from Christianity in a very few crucial points, essentially in its understanding of the precise significance of Jesus and in its anti-trinitarian emphasis. This was in accordance with the acceptance of the Koran revealed to Muhammad. Historical developments brought further divergences between the two traditions. In its approach to human societies, Islam kept close to the Christian interpretation when criticizing Jews as unfaithful to God and his messengers, and when classifying pagans as lawless 'idolaters'. There was not, however, a parallel development between the two traditions in the idea of natural Law. While thirteenth century Latin Christian philosophy was being shaken by the reception of Aristotle and the separation of Faith and Reason proposed by Averroes, the work of the latter was falling on deaf ears in the Muslim lands. Muslim theology was traditionally more reluctant to accept the support of Greek philosophy than the Christians, who had been doing so since the early fathers. The Sunni schools of jurisprudence, in their effort to adapt the Koran to the diverse territories and peoples conquered by Muslims, tended to rely more directly on the Hadith and their own interpretative consensus than Latin jurists did on the Gospels and its exegesis. In sharp contrast, the city of men and the Christian city of God were separate. Through the medium of Roman Law, Latin Christianity had a universalistic secular model of civil law independent from the "religious" canon law, which was applied to the institutional Church. Local feudal traditions of privileges and constitutions were also operative on the principle of some juridical independence between Church and State.
Despite the fact that in the Muslim tradition there were fewer layers between Revelation and human law (and this is precisely what made the idea of natural law unnecessary), an important tradition of geographical works in Arabic and Persian was available to 'Abd al-Razzāq. For instance, Rashid al-Din's world history, composed in the early fourteenth century, and which went from Adam to 1304 (which is the beginning of 'Abd al-Razzāq's work), included chapters on the Jews, the Chinese, the Franks (i.e., the Latin Christians), the Indians and the Turks. Hāfiz-i Abrū, who followed his steps, also composed a work on Geography in 1414. And here, as in the Travels of Ibn Battūta or as in the reflections on historical change by Ibn Khaldūn, there was room for the development of descriptions of customs and laws. This went as far as the recognition that Hindu religious texts could be ultimately read as monotheistic, in opposition to the more popular 'idolatrour' practices and beliefs. This possibility is impressively attested in Al-Birūni's Kitab al-Hind, a systematic work on Indian thought, religion and society composed around 1030, in Arabic, by a Persian from Khwarizm who had to work (as a hostage-scholar) in the court of Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazna. This and other examples clearly show that the dismissal of foreign societies on the grounds of incompatible religious ideologies was not a serious impediment to the elaboration of a descriptive discourse on human laws and customs, whenever such a need was felt. The fact is that, while the main legalistic tradition continued to be linked to the Koran and rejected a philosophical theology, anything that was not felt to be anti-religious could develop independently in other fields, usually on the basis of ancient Greek (but also Persian) models and ideals. It was of course done in the name of

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19 On Al-Birūni see C. Sachau's preface in Al-Birūni 1888. From his preface it seems that he sympathised with the 'rationalist' Muta'zalite sect.
God's power. 20 It is a temptation to see such occasional critical scientists as isolated figures, especially those concerned with history and geography. But these individuals usually travelled widely, and the cultural interdependence of the Muslim lands (from Spain to India) ensured the transmission of most works at least at the level of the learned élite.

Thus the incorporation of several rationalistic sciences (whose models were based on the Greek inheritance) to a tradition centred on the transmission and interpretation of a religious revelation was a parallel development in the Muslim and the Christian medieval cultural spaces. The process affected political thought and juisprudence as well such disciplines as medicine, logic and mathematics. In this broad sense, the role played by Averroes from Cordoba - who, unlike Avicenna, commented on Aristotle 'without opposing him' - 21 was for instance similar to that of Thomas Aquinas. The major difference which remains significant is that Latin Christianity created more distance between revealed commandments and political practices, as a result of a more complex theology and of a wider variety of social and cultural milieus to which the moral system was adapted. This difference, which was reflected in the concept of law and in the relationships between the state and religion, needs to be understood as the justification of a space - a language-game, a genre -

20 See for instance Ibn Khaldûn 1967 (abridged from 1958), The Introduction, pp 29-31: 'History refers to events that are peculiar to a particular age or race. Discussion of the general conditions of regions, races, and periods constitutes the historian's foundation (...) there is need at this time that someone should systematically set down the situation of the world among all [Muslim] regions and races, as well as the customs and sectarian beliefs that have changed for their adherents (...). We seek God's help for the goal to which we aspire in this work. God gives guidance and help. He may be trusted' (square brackets mine). On the convenience and dangers of the different sciences see chapter 6, pp 333 ff. (see also n.81) In particular, referring to [Aristotelian] logic, 'One knows what harm it can do. Therefore, the student should beware of its pernicious aspects as much as he can. Whoever studies it should do so only after he is saturated with the religious law and has studied the interpretation of the Qu'ûrân and jurisprudence' (p.405). A similar attitude was expressed by Abelard in twelfth century Europe: 'I do not want Aristotle if it leads me astray from Christ'.

in the cultural discourse, rather than as merely an intellectual distinction,

It is in fact very significant that although in 1377 Ibn Khaldûn claimed a place for History among the universal and rational philosophical sciences, when it came to providing an analysis of 'the various sciences that exist in contemporary civilization', he failed to list it along with logic, physics, metaphysics, and mathematics. This is because in that last section of his introduction to a world-history the speculative, 'natural' sciences had been sharply opposed to the traditional and 'conventional' ones, all of which 'depend upon information based on the authority of the given religious law'.

Reasoning had therefore no place in these conventional sciences, except in order to relate matters of detail to the revealed principles. In Islam theological arguments were devised to fight heretics and infidels, not to uphold the faith in any fundamental way. In his historical reflections, and without making the question too explicit, Ibn Khaldûn, like Al-Birûni and others before, was defending the universality and rationality of a science which provided an explanation (and therefore a relativisation) for the changes that occurred in laws and customs for which the Koran and the Sunna were supposed to be, in his own words, the only valid foundations.

Leaving the question latent had its price. Different legal systems were not, in principle, comparable in equal terms. Platonic and Aristotelian ethics and politics were not really a proper subject of study. On the basis of the Koran's understanding of the "people of the book", Muslim rulers happily left their Jewish, Christian and even Zoroastrian subjects in error, having them pay special tributes and with autonomous laws. This separation—the dhimma system—basically meant that at the more sophisticated level of discourse, the level of a universal

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22 See Ibn Khaldûn 1967, p.5 (defence of history), pp 343-4 (the traditional sciences) and pp 371 ff. (the philosophical sciences).
account of human societies according to critical disciplines, there was no dialogue between Faith and Reason. In contrast, in the West it was the intensity of such dialogue that eventually led to the separation of Faith and Reason as two alternative ways to knowledge, difficult or impossible to reconcile. In the meantime, while in Al-Birūnī the main literary models of pagan customs which he used to interpret Indian practices derived from pre-Islamic Arabia and pre-Christian Greece, a Christian European could find that a Roman-inspired civil law was compatible with a divinely-ordained natural law, and, moreover, there was an open field for the 'ius gentium' which encompassed all rational peoples. This last idea became fundamental when the humanist critique, from Poggio Bracciolini in the first half of the fifteenth century to Jean Bodin in the second half of the sixteenth, revealed the historicity of the Roman model and thus the need for a new standard of naturalism in human diversity, a standard prepared to meet the demands of the diversity of ancient and modern systems of laws and customs alike.

This major difference between the cultural traditions in the West and Islam was more often potential than effective, since in many situations the western Christians did not feel the need to press on with their Faith-Reason dialogue. Again what mattered was the choice of strategy in particular contexts. Thus it has been observed that the Portuguese did not develop in India the same approach than the Castilians in America and the Philippines when dealing with local populations, because they wanted to exercise a monopoly on trade rather than to exploit the resources of the land through a control of the processes of production

23 See Al-Biruni 1888, ch.10.

24 On Poggio's "pre-Machiavellian" historical understanding of human law see Krantz's convincing argument (Krantz 1987, pp 143-149). For Jean Bodin see for instance the dedication to Jean Tessier in his Method for the easy comprehension of history (Bodin 1945, pp 1-8). See also Skinner 1978, II, 291-2.
and taxation. Although they entertained the idea of political conquest, they could not have defeated the local rulers and organized territorial Empires as the Spaniards did in Mexico and Peru. Thus, in J. Villier's words, 'even in those few places where the Portuguese had established their own institutions of municipal government and administration, the surrounding population remained largely unaffected by the Portuguese presence. Nowhere in the Estado da India did the Portuguese attempt to replace the indigenous laws by their own legal codes, as the Spanish did in the Philippines [and in America earlier] through the imposition of the encomienda system'.

The principle of jurisdictional division which they adopted was therefore similar to the medieval pattern of the reconquista in the Iberian peninsula, and not unlike the principle adopted by the Muslim invaders of India: in recognition of the religious origin of the ethical principles on which civil laws were based, 'the Portuguese always maintained separate jurisdictions for the adherents of non-Christian religions on whom they had sovereignty'. Thus the dhimma system

25 J. Villiers in Newitt (ed.) 1986, p.48

26 On the arrangements for the Muslim population in the conquering kingdoms of late-medieval Spain see Burns 1984, pp 52-59. In particular, 'Islamic dhimma models in Sicily and Spain's al-Andalus doubtless influenced the emerging counterparts, first in Norman Sicily and then in Christian Spain, interacting with European perceptions and experiences, and arriving not as alien but as reasonable expressions of domestic attitudes (...) Whether brutally borrowed, or insinuated by progressive meshing with native elements, the dhimma model did not merely arrive intact in the realms of Aragon. after the fashion of such cultural interchange it suffered massive restructuring, especially by the instrumentality of Roman Law with its passion for explication, articulation and universalizing. Roman Law traveled down Mediterranean Spain hand in hand with the Reconquest, culminating in a generalized surge during the thirteenth century (...) The European institution was less stable in character and tenure than Islam's model, and thus less a guarantee of basic tolerance; the Christian model rested not upon revelation but merely on a human situation that would assume new contexts and would continue to evolve in unforeseeable directions...'(pp 57-9). The connexion between patterns of conquest and conversion in late-medieval Spain and the Iberian expansion towards north Africa, which culminated in the colonial systems of Spanish America and Portuguese Asia, is argued in Fernández-Armesto 1987. On the contemporary Muslim attitudes towards Hindu subjects see Thapar 1966, chapter 133, esp. pp 289-292. Thapar argues, however, for a relatively high degree of legal integration in a not particularly defined system.

should not be regarded as an exclusively Muslim institution. What was exclusive of Islam was the fact that it rested on revelation. It was in fact common in Antiquity, in Byzantium and in Sassanid Persia, and it was also extensively adopted by the crusading kingdoms of medieval Spain on whose traditions the early colonial expansion of Europe rested. What was characteristic of Christian Europe was the adaptability of a system which was based on the community's rational manipulation of experience, as opposed to direct revelation. This could encourage legal change. But the Portuguese did not feel the need to depart significantly from the medieval model, and insisted on an ideology of crusade. This also explains their relative lack of interest in developing the idea of natural law in any way comparable to what Francisco de Vitoria and other Thomist scholars did in Spain in the first half of the sixteenth century, in relationship with the ideas of the status of the American Indians. Nor did the early missionaries in Portuguese India develop any ethnographical task comparable to what Motolinia, Sahagún, and Las Casas did in America. It was only the Jesuits who, with a more centralised organisation, in the second half of the sixteenth century seriously addressed the question of a cultural theory for Asian peoples, as they also were doing in America.

It must therefore be stressed that there was distance between the potential possibilities of a cultural tradition, diverse and contradictory, and the specific response of the individual traveller, with a limited

28 Silva Dias 1973, pp 175-182. His treatment of natural law theories and the Portuguese expansion is however simplistic, especially his evaluation of the medieval tradition and the way it affected the European experience in the Orient. It was not the lack of "gentile", non-biblical populations under "colonial" rule which determined the relative poverty of the Portuguese intellectual response, limited to a crusading justification of the Imperial action of the State; rather, it was the lack of an institutional project of social transformation combined with a serious acceptance of cultural debate as it existed for Spain on America. Moreover, the observation that Asian societies were politically and religiously organized is irrelevant to Silva's argument, since the same could be said about the Inca and Aztec empires, and in any case such realisation was an encouragement to the development of natural law theories, in contrast with what Silva Dias suggests.
education, when confronted with the foreign. A cultural tradition does not operate as a systematic block but, rather, as a labyrinth of partially defined spaces. The more immediate resources are everyday linguistic capacities which can be used for a wide variety of purposes in many combined ways. In this sense, eventual differences in attitude between medieval Muslim and European travellers to India have more to do with specifically defined language-games. And similarities are also related to the similar structure of their respective language-games. In the experience of the traveller who wanted to keep faithful to his own tradition, the religious tension felt by 'Abd al-Razzāq had the same root that one finds in Christian narratives, namely the realisation that other laws and customs were understandable (and it was useful to learn to play them) despite the fact one's own tradition had initially defined them as the derivation of a fundamental error. In other words, and despite all intellectual accomodations, the central faith in a tradition lost its centrality.

In conclusion, all fifteenth-century non-Indian visitors to Vijayanagara who bothered to leave a record were (even if unconsciously) committed to an enterprise of cultural translation, whatever their reasons and skills for it. They also shared a problem of redefining their own religious identity. Only the contextualised interpretation of each text in its totality reveals the qualities of the diverse responses, which is to say the meaning of the different ways the traditional (often thought of as absolute) was played against the new (with its demands of relativisation) in each of case.

'Abd al-Razzāq's account of his journey to Vijayanagara fulfills several related purposes at the same time: it is a self-conscious literary recreation of a personal historical experience written in order to give pleasure to his friends and to find credit among intelligent and important people. It therefore follows a
strategy of self-justification and self-advancement. It is also supposed to be informative to the Persian politician, and the truthfulness of the common-sense description is actually the main token for self-advancement. Such a message has nevertheless to be presented with elegance, and the author succeeds in adapting rhetorical conventions without distorting the information. The main descriptive material is placed in a more general framework of the journey to and from India by sea. The author elaborates these two passages poetically and with religious themes. The encounter with the dangers of the sea, in particular, offers room for free digressions, rich in imagery, on the cosmic order, human frailty and the relationship between Fortune and Faith. Within the description of India similar techniques are occasionally applied to specific details.

The author is aware of the demands of truthfulness in his description, and sets himself a method:

the narrative shall be given in its minutest details, and I shall insert in it all sorts of marvellous facts and wonderful matters worthy of notice. I shall set forth all the circumstances which have fallen under my notice in the space of three years; I shall recount, fully and in detail, all my adventures [my biography], and the dangers by which they have been rendered remarkable; and I shall also relate, in my usual manner, those events which affect the provinces of Khorassan...26

Adjectives such as 'marvellous' and 'wonderful' should not mislead us into thinking that 'Abd al-Razzāq is only interested in the monstrous and bizarre. He is mainly referring to what is different and worthy of notice, a similar attitude to the one we find in late-medieval European travellers such as Marco Polo or Conti. He takes for granted that such differences occur in the general,

26 Abd-er-Razzak [sic] in Major (ed.) 1857, p.1 / 'Abd al-Razzāq in Quatremère (ed.) 1843, p.426: 'Cette relation (...) sera écrite avec les plus grands détails, et j'y insererai toutes sortes de faits prodigieux, de particularités merveilleuses; j'exposerai ce qui s'est passé durant un laps de trois ans; je rappellerai tant en abrégé qu'avec étendue, les aventures [the biography], les péris qui les ont signalés, et je raconterai, d'après ma méthode ordinaire, les événements qui concernent le Khorassan...'. [Hereafter I refer to these two editions as Major 1857 and Quatremère 1843.]
possibly universal framework, of a cosmic order ruled by a divine will. Thus what he really wants to report is a collection of particularities structured around his own adventurous journey to India. He clearly integrates an empirical descriptive enterprise, based on implicit ideas of Nature (an ordered world) and History (a succession of events in an irreversible arrow of time), with a religious reflection related to his own particular experiences (of beauty and success, but also of tedium and dangers). Thus, on the one hand 'the measures adopted by men are all fallacious'.

Providence is a manifestation of the will of the creator, whose wisdom is reflected in all natural things, and faith consists in accepting, without losing heart, misfortunes that the limited understanding of men cannot make sense of. On the other hand, there is a connection (and a duality) between divine power and the personal observation of the world:

While the vision of those ships which float over the mountain-like waves of the sea, presented to my thought the traces of the Divine power, at the same time, in the converstaion of the companions of my voyage, I collected observations respecting remarkable names and facts worthy of note [marvellous signs].

'Abd al-Razzāq's empirical curiosity underpins, I believe, a hidden purpose. The description of Vijayanagara is ideologically biased towards an idea of kingship which presents 'Abd al-Razzāq's political message to his Persian contemporaries. But for that reason the author has had to recognise among the Indians the same political ideals he desires for his countrymen, and implicitly needs to defy a simplistic classification of peoples based on traditional religious definitions. The idea of unity is the driving


31 Ibid. p.45 / Ibid. p.468: 'Tantôt le spectacle de ces bâtiments qui voguent sur la mer, semblables à des collines, offrait à mes regards les caractères de la puissance divine; tantôt, dans la conversation de mes compagnons de voyage, je recueillais des noms remarquables, des faits [signs] merveilleux' (italics in the original represent a quotation from the Koran).
force in 'Abd al-Razzāq's ideology - so that the metaphysical unity of God is mirrored by the institutional unification of power relationships in human society. This is not, however, a mere repetition of a formula, but rather the re-appropriation of a traditional principle taking place both in religion and politics. The idea of justice, one of the main motifs of the chronicle as a whole, in the travelogue is grounded in a genuine decodification of otherness in the land of the pagans. On the other hand, this recreation of political ideals is placed in the context of an experience of personal frailty in the dangerous passages by sea, from Persia to the foreign land and back. This two-fold relativisation of the inherited ideological conventions allows the author to re-state his ideals more fully, beyond what is expected from him just because he writes within a tradition or because he has to be useful and pleasant to his patrons. Thus, the use of rhetoric is not completely alienating or sterile. It expresses a personal response to the unstable and dramatic circumstances of Persia in the Timūrid period, in the combined languages of poetry, theology, politics and common-sense description.

The central theme is reached progressively, through a sequence of dramatic contrasts. 'Abd al-Razzāq left for India in 1441, at the age of twenty-nine. He was accompanied by one of his brothers. The ambassador missed the Monzoon, because the authorities of Ormuz had delayed the departure. Finally on the ship, he immediately fell sick. He waited in Muscat, where he fell into depression. His poetry expresses his refusal to travel:

At the rememberance of my (lover) and of my country I weep so bitterly/ That I should deprive the whole world of the taste and habit of travelling/ I am a native of the country of the Arabs [the country of the beloved, i.e. Muhammad], and not of a strange region/ O mighty God, whom I invoke! vouchsafe to bring me back to the companionship...
Because of the excessive heat, 'Abd al-Razzāq and his companions fell ill, in an atmosphere that gave an idea of the fire of hell. The only solution was to commend themselves to the will of God. The 'cruel situation' lasted four months. His brother died. Finally, he set sail and, like Moses in his childhood, found life when everything seemed to point towards death.

The King and people gave him a poor impression of Calicut. There was a Muslim community in Calicut, but this was a land of infidels. The Muslims were dressed in magnificence, the Hindus were all naked, even the king. He could not conceive of finding a black woman attractive. Although 'Abd al-Razzāq liked the honesty of the inhabitants and the facilities of commerce—which were important requirements for a trading port in the collective exchange culture of the Indian Ocean—, he found the customs of the natives repugnant. 'Although they are all agreed upon the fundamental principles of polytheism and idolatry, each sect [qauum, group of people] has its peculiar customs.'

He distinguished the main peculiarities, namely the existence of several qauum (castes), the prohibition against killing cows, and, in the case of the group to which the King belonged, he remarked that laws of succession and inheritance went through female lineage and that many men shared the same woman in turn. He noticed similar 'strange' details to those recorded by the Europeans Varthema and Barbosa sixty and seventy years later, but it matters that in 'Abd al-Razzāq they are interpreted so as to emphasize the contrast with what will

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32 Ibid. p.8 / Ibid. p.432: '...Au souvenir de mon amante et de mon pays, je pleure avec tant d'amertume/ Que je ferai perdre au monde entier le goût et l'habitude des voyages/ Je suis natif du pays des Arabes [the country of the beloved, i.e. Muhammad], et non d'un contrée étrangère/ O Dieu puissant que j' invoque! daignez me ramener auprès des mes compagnons'.

33 Ibid. p.17 / Ibid. p.440: 'Quoique tous soient d'accord sur les principes du polythéisme et de l'idolatrie, chaque secte [qauum, group of people] a ses usages particuliers'.
come later, when the ambassador reaches Vijayanagara.

Thus, while in Calicut the presents brought from Persia were not properly appreciated, and the ambassador was neglected, in Vijayanagara he is well received and favoured by the king. Calicut was only a sea-port, Vijayanagara is an impressive kingdom with 'three hundred ports, each of which is equal to Calicut'. Although the Zamorin is formally independent from the king of Vijayanagara, 'he nevertheless pays him respect, and stands extremely in fear of him'. The prostitutes of the kingdom (no longer described as black) surpass all description, and its temples of idols, in their elaborated richness and beauty, have no equal in the universe. Furthermore, the king obtains power after violent succession (as in Timurid Iran), and not because he is the son of the last king’s sister, although this certainly makes him more powerful. Justice is not just a matter of fair trade and security, as in Calicut; it actually becomes a model of good government to be imitated by the 'fortunate Khakan' to which the report of the ambassador is being offered. In fact, if the embassy fails to bear more fruit it is because the author is betrayed by envious Muslim merchants from Ormuz. Corruption is really in the world from which he has come. Thus finally, in a typical move, the periphery has become the centre, and the targets of conversion have become teachers of justice.

This dramatic structure has a political aim, which is to justify ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s performance as an ambassador. His original destination was not Vijayanagara, but rather Calicut, where he was expected to impress the local ruler.

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34 Ibid. p. 19 / Ibid. p. 442.


36 The utopian transformation of the other is a frequent theme in the literary elaboration of travel narratives of different times and cultures, and finds most clear expression in fictional works. See for instance the analysis of the influential narrative of the voyage to Brazil of the French Protestant Jean de Léry in 1556–8, in Certeau 1988 ch. 5, in many ways comparable to ‘Abd al-Razzāq.
with the greatness of Shāh Rukh and win him over to the Muslim faith. The mission was in fact a response to a previous embassy from Calicut to Persia; the Zamorin of the city had heard of the fact that Shāh Rukh had protected the king of Bengal from the Sultan of Junapur, and may have desired a similar security against the rulers of the Bahmani kingdom or of any other Muslim Sultanate of the north. A Turkish dynasty created by Timūr, the Sayyid dynasty, albeit a weak one, was still ruling in Delhi, and generally speaking the various Muslim sultanates that ruled most of India in the fifteenth century were dependant upon a constant inflow of Turkish and Afghan 'foreign' soldiers who occupied important positions at court and in the army. Persian cultural models were also fundamental (with the notorious exception of Vijayanagara itself). 'Abd al-Razzāq's mission was therefore a test of the power of the descendants of Timūr to play a political role in India. This also had an economic side. Calicut and Ormuz were two of the most important trading links between India and Persia.

Indeed, 'Abd al-Razzāq failed to convert the Zamorin, but when Deva Raya II from Vijayanagara, on his own initiative, sent for him, the ambassador had a chance to make a bigger exploit by departing from his original instructions (this needed justification: in the narrative Shāh Rukh even appears in a prophetic dream to tell 'Abd al-Razzāq not to remain afflicted, just before the king of Vijayanagara sends for him). In the end, 'Abd al-Razzāq missed the opportunity to obtain clear results because his credentials as a legitimate ambassador were doubted. In his report, while conveying as much accurate practical information as he thought was useful, he tried to turn his failure into a relative success. The mere fact that he survived all dangers and returned after three years is, in his eyes, remarkable. The figure of justice recreated in the Hindu kingdom is not only the symbol of the importance of the place he has unexpectedly reached, but also the
model of behaviour of the Shâh who should punish envious courtesans (such as those who criticised the embassy) and reward good services (his, of course).

The fact that a single narrative combines informative and apologetic aims explains the emphasis with which the kingdom of Vijayanagara is decoded, rather than just invented, as a system of justice and power. The emphatic selection of information and its literary elaboration are perfectly compatible with a fundamental reliance on the language of a common-sense description of natural and social realities. This is already obvious as the ambassador approaches Vijayanagara by land; every particular location deserves a descriptive observation which carries its emphasis. Thus the temple (of idols) of Mangalor 'has no equal in the universe'.

The traveller encounters cities and towns 'each day', a mountain 'whose summit reached the skies', and at its foot a dark and impenetrable forest.

This is the way to Vijayanagara, but it could well serve to introduce any fictional tale of initiation and adventure. At the town of Belour the houses 'were like [heavenly] palaces', and its women 'reminded one of the beauty of the Houris'. And here again there is a temple (of idols) of ineffable beauty which 'Abd al-Razzâq tries nevertheless to describe.

To achieve his aim he relies on two main ideas: first, a continuous comparison with famous historical and mythical places known to his audience, usually to the advantage of Vijayanagara, stretching from his home-town of Herat to fabulous gardens of the earthly paradise. Secondly, a fundamental metaphor of Heaven and Earth with vague Neoplatonic undertones, by which the ground of a garden surrounding the temple, in the middle of the city, is 'paved with polished stones, joined together with so much

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37 Major 1857 p.20 / Quatremère 1843 p.442.
38 Ibid. p.20 / Ibid. p.443.
39 Idem / Idem.
delicacy and skill, that they seem to form but one single slab of stone, and look like a fragment of the sky which might be supposed to have been brought down to earth'.

'Abd al-Razzāq needs to remind his audience from time to time, if only briefly, that any devotional exercises performed there 'have nothing in them which can be agreeable to God', but insists on the fact that the magnificence of music and rituals has an aesthetic quality which is, all in all, essentially divine. The description of the temple thus dwells on the size and location of the building, number and value of figures and paintings, and so on, but avoids the interpretation of themes, necessarily dependant on idolatrous mythology. He thus insists on artistic skill and worldly richness as expressions of something ineffable. This is perfectly compatible with the creation of a model explaining the social and economic dimensions of the temple: 'All the inhabitants of the town have rents and pensions assigned to them on this temple. The most distant cities send here their alms. In the opinion of these men without religion, this place is the Kabah of the Guèbres [idolators].'

This pattern of interpretation is valid for the kingdom and city of Vijayanagara, in what amounts to another version of the praise of its greatness and magnificence by a foreign visitor:

He [the author of this work] saw a place extremely large and thickly peopled, and a king possessing greatness and sovereignty to the highest degree, whose dominion extends from the frontier of Serendib to the extremities of the country of Kalberghah. From the frontiers of Bengal to the environs of Belinar (Melibar), the distance is more than a thousand parasangs. The country is [the states are] for the most part well cultivated, very fertile [valued], and contains about three hundred harbours. One sees there more than a thousand elephants, in their size resembling mountains, and in their forms resembling devils. The

40 Ibid. p. 21 / Ibid. p.443.
41 Ibid. p.22 / Ibid. p.444.
42 Idem / Idem.
troops amount in number to eleven lak (1,100,000)\textsuperscript{43}

The insistence on giving particular measures and numbers only adds to the "fabulous" aura of the journey, and thus to the honour of the "humble" ambassador. The thematic observations - a big city in a big empire, a powerful king, a well cultivated and fertile land, a numerous army, awesome elephants - are however identical with those provided by Italian and Portuguese travellers. Of course, while the Europeans mention Paris or Milan as a comparable city, 'Abd al-Razzāq refers to Herat. And he immediately introduces a theme which will be meaningful to his audience at the Persian courts: an ideal model of a perfect political system in which a powerful king surrounded by wise men commands authority and brings prosperity. Again, we may be in the face of a fabulous moralistic story, a link the next passage explicitly suggests:

One might seek in vain throughout the whole of Hindoostan to find a more absolute rāj (king); for the monarchs of this country bear the title of rāj. Next fo him [for him] the Brahmins hold a rank superior to that of all other men. The book of Kalilah and Dimna, the most beautiful work existing in the Persian language, and which presents us with the stories of a rāj and a Brahmin, is probably [indeed] a production of the talent of the literati of this country.\textsuperscript{44}

The idea of the provenance of Kalilah and Dimna (a

\textsuperscript{43} Idem / Ibid p.445: 'Il [the author of this work] vit une place extrêmement vaste et peuplée, un roi qui possède au plus haut point la grandeur et la souveraineté, dont l'empire s'étend depuis la frontière de Serendib jusqu'à l'extrémité du pays de Kalberghah. Des frontières du Bengale jusqu'aux environs de Belinar (Melibar), la distance est de plus de mille parasanges. Le pays est [the states are], en grande partie, bien cultivé, bien fertile [valued], et renferme environ trois cents ports. On y voit plus de mille éléphants, qui, par leur taille, ressemblent a des montagnes, par leurs figures à des démons. Les troupes sont au nombre de onze lak (1,100,000)'.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. p.23 / Ibid. p.445: 'On chercherait en vain, dans tout l'Hindoustan, un rāj (roi) plus absolu; car les monarques de cette contré portent le titre de rāj. Les brahmes tiennent, après lui [for him], un rang supérieur à celui de tous les autres hommes. Le livre de Kalilah et Dimna, le plus belle ouvrage qui existe en langue persane, et qui nous offre les récits d'un rāj et d'un brahmane, est probablement [indeed] un produit de l'habilité des savants de ce pays'.

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famous collection of fables about animals which provided moral-political examples for court life) from Vijayanagara is not merely a way of expressing the importance of the kingdom in particular, but more significantly it legitimates very powerfully the idea that fifteenth century (Muslim) Persians could learn an explicitly political lesson from Vijayanagara.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, it is easy to see in the wise and virtuous brahmin a replica of the Persian judge or \textit{qadi}, who should be listened to and honoured by the king. This was, of course, a common claim, which idealistically implied that such a procedure could bring peace and end factional struggle among aristocratic groups. Both convention and intention combined in encouraging 'Abd al-Razzāq to overlook the real dynamics of power struggle in Vijayanagara, in which the military leaders, and also the brahmins, combined to make things difficult for the central authority.\textsuperscript{46}

But 'Abd al-Razzāq could draw on effective support for his ideas from the very symbolism of religious and civic ritual in Vijayanagara. Independent archaeological and art historical research in the ruins of the city has produced an hypothesis which interprets the distribution of the city buildings and their religious and social functions as having a symbolic significance strikingly similar to 'Abd al-Razzāq's literary interpretation.\textsuperscript{47} In the words of Fritz and Michell:

\begin{quote}
Vijayanagara was much more than a mere "setting" for courtly life (...) the layout of the city, together with its monumental architecture and sculpture, affirm a particular "argument" for royal power (...) The Vijayanagara kings appear to have been influenced by texts (shastras) that provided clearly articulated models for royal behaviour that would result in the maintenance of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} These stories were also, through the Persian and Arabic versions, very influential in the West since the Middle Ages. See Lach 1977, pp 105-7.

\textsuperscript{46} This is perhaps the central thesis of Burton Stein (his works, published in 1980 and 1989, constitute the most critical and complete modern interpretation of Vijayanagara available).

\textsuperscript{47} Fritz/Michell/Nagaraja Rao 1984.
moral values (dharma), and the increase of power and influence (artha).^{48}

Not only is the attention of the city and empire directed towards the ruler, but the power of the king—with that of [the God-hero] Rama at its core—diffuses outward creating form and ensuring order. Vijayanagara is a cosmic city where king and god meet, not only for the affirmation of royal power, but also for the protection and welfare of the Empire.^{49}

It seems thus that a system devised to impress a message of sacredness and power was read as such by most foreign travellers. Rather than imagining that Fritz and Michell, inspired by their own knowledge of foreign descriptions and of current anthropological theories relating to India, have "read" a fresh symbolic interpretation into the scattered ruins of a city, we may well think that there was at the time a complex set of language-games operating in the form of art, ritual, mythology and political life, and that 'Abd al-Razzāq, himself interested in a somehow similar language-game (his local Persian system of cultural and political life), decoded Vijayanagara to fit his own purposes, in the same way that Fritz and Michell, with less empirical evidence but with the help of critical scholarship, have recently done.

In many ways, as I shall argue later, European observers confronted Vijayanagara in a way similar to 'Abd al-Razzāq, not only in acknowledging the physical reality of 'a city' (which was, of course, the starting point, as we saw in Nicolò Conti), but also in translating an indigenous language-game into their own terms. Two main questions arise which I shall attempt to clarify. First, however similar Persian, Hindu and Christian symbolic systems of kingship and divine power may have been, there were important specific themes in each tradition of

^{48} Ibid. pp 146-7.
^{49} Ibid. p.151.
political (and thus religious) thought which remained different. This is clear if we consider the mythological representations, which were fundamental to each tradition. The figure of the Vijayanagara God-Hero Rama, an important model for the Hindu kings, does not seem to have been ever been "translated" into a Saint George or an Alexander by any of the foreign observers. Would that affect the implicit parallels drawn between Deva Raya II and Shāh Rukh in the 1440s, or between Krishna Deva Raya and Manuel I of Portugal in the early sixteenth century? The problem becomes more acute when we take account of the changes that took place between the time of Conti and ‘Abd al-Razzāq and the time of Paes and Nuniz.

Secondly, Fritz and Michell fail to work out the relationship between the functional and the symbolic aspects of the City they have reconstructed, a weakness which reflects a controversy among scholars between two different interpretations of the nature of the political system of Vijayanagara. Some authors have insisted on the "feudal" character of the state institutions, including a degree of administrative functions either centralized by the king, or distributed among local military chiefs (nayakas) and members of a religious caste with independent control of temple resources (brahmins). Others (who have inspired Fritz and Michell) have stressed the ritual and ceremonial roles of the king. This position is

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50 That it did not happen does not mean that it could not have happened - is it was the case with Buddha, who became "Christianized" in the medieval legend of Barlaam and Josaphat. See Lach 1977, pp 101-5.

51 See Fritz /Michel I/Nagaraja Rao 1984, p 146. The current stress on the ritual and symbolic roles of the king seems to have been inspired by the work of the anthropologist A.M.Hocart, in particular his interpretation of kingship (see Hocart 1970, repr. of 1936). Thus Stein 1980 p. 389 sees in the Mahanavami festival of Vijayanagara a confirmation of Hocart’s model of ritual kingship. There are reasons to suspect that Hocart has been misunderstood. His thesis can be summarized with the idea that kingship evolved from a ritual towards a political role, that ritual organization is older than government and provides the basis on which government is eventually organized. Hocart’s idea is not meant to differentiate "Oriental Kingship" from "Western Orientalism" because, if anything, Hocart stressed the universal validity of his thesis. In that sense, his implicit message is that "more ritual" and "less centralized and politically organized" equals "more primitive'. But I also want to argue that the whole idea is misleading, since it confuses a
summarised in the recent work of Burton Stein: 'The Vijayanagara era was one in which I see a new form of polity, but one with important links to earlier polities in being segmentary in character and one in which kings continued to be essentially ritual figures rather than, like contemporaries in western Europe, autocrats ruling bureaucratised, absolutist regimes'. 52

However, as the historical reconstruction of the political and social dynamism of the Vijayanagara Empire becomes more clear and detailed, thanks especially to the work of scholars like Burton Stein himself, it also becomes more apparent that such controversy is to a great extent purely semantic. Deciding whether kingly religious ritual was rather a claim to power than an effective exercise of it - whether political unity was culturally and economically sustained or only a fragile symbolic performance - becomes in the end a question of emphasis. There was a king in a capital, and there was a political tension surrounding the institution. What needs to be observed in detail is precisely this tension between what the Vijayanagara kings thought and wanted to do and what they could effectively perform in a context of political conflict.

Given this situation, the ritual and symbolic dimensions of kingship were not only an ideal construct, some sort of dream or piece of propaganda; above all, they

problem of emphasis (various degrees of centralization) with an analytic distinction (the "symbolic" and the "political"). Ritual and power always interact in human societies. It would be fair, on the other hand, to say, that European kingship tended to dissociate the secular and the religious aspects of power to a greater degree than most Eastern traditions of kingship did. This of course relates to what I said above about civil law and sacred law in the Latin Christian tradition.

The current tendency to distance "South Indian" kingship from "Western Orientalist" models can also be documented in Shulman 1985. He vaguely endorses Stein's idea of a segmentary state, but in fact his whole exercise consists of tracing ambiguity in literary representations of early medieval kingship in South India. The problem is that markedly literary -poetic and dramatic- sources should not be compared indiscriminately with different 'language-games', such as medieval Western political treatises, but, if anything, with similar European literary discourses.

52 Stein 1989, p.XII. See also Stein 1980, p.265, with a more detailed summary of the idea of a segmentary state.
constituted a language-game in which political struggles of a vaguely "feudal" character were fought - conflicts between centre and periphery opposing dynastic, ethnic and religious factions, struggles between the king, the lords and the brahmins for the shared control of resources and authority. Curiously enough, it is in such a way that foreign observers like 'Abd al-Razzāq, or later Paes and Nuniz, became interested: their own cultural assumptions were also part of language-games by which similar kinds of political struggles were being fought.

By getting involved in Vijayanagara and trying to further their personal ends, there also were revisited questions relevant to their original communities. And although I shall devote my analysis to literary recreations of Vijayanagara, the same holds true for visual representations: it is this homology of language-games about kingship what made it possible for an anonymous late-sixteenth century painter to make use of a tradition springing from an early woodcut of the king of Cochin, printed in 1508, to portray Queen Elizabeth of England ceremonially carried in a litter.53

It is this historical homology - between political contexts as much as between cultural language-games - which deserves to be explored. But here, too narrow definitions can prove to be misleading. For instance, there has been much reluctance to accept the adjective "feudal" to describe the society of medieval South India, and the concept has been seen as a form of Western ethnocentrism (which had its origin in the early Portuguese descriptions). Instead, as we saw, historians have adopted the idea of a "segmentary state" which gives full weight to the ritual and ceremonial dimensions of kingship. The need for a new concept adapted to non-European conditions is legitimate insofar as a very narrow model of "feudal

53 See Armitage 1990.
society" is being used. However, it becomes apparent to anyone familiar with the historical interpretation of medieval Europe that the understanding of feudalism (taking this now simply to be the descriptive term for the basic traits of a tradition of European economic, social and political systems in the middle ages) has, after much argument, adopted far more flexible definitions, often in the same direction towards which those historians who advocated the idea of an Indian "segmentary state" were pushing.

The crucial points are that early modern absolute monarchies can be regarded as a centralized form of feudalism, and that, in any case, feudal kingship and medieval empire involved an inner tension which had a symbolic dimension. European feudalism, with all its variations and changes, was based on a division of the local juridical space, controlled by aristocratic groups which developed especial political mechanisms to coordinate action for common goals and to distribute among themselves, through services and privileges, the revenues exacted from a fundamentally peasant economy. Princes played a substantial part in the working of such mechanisms. They were military leaders, guarantors of religion and law (and thus justice, peace and social order), protectors of sophisticated forms of culture, administrators of their own territorial dominions, and of a few especial taxes and monopolies which would help them to perform their public duties. They also incarnated a social 'ethos' of knowledge

54 There is the further problem, which I shall not discuss here, that the idea of a segmentary state was originally developed for an African context altogether different from India. It thus seems that there is not so much a universal analytical language for the history of non-European countries, as a widespread attempt to avoid European ethnocentrism.

and action with religious undertones.

In all this, Europe resembled many oriental societies, despite differences in geographical conditions and cultural traditions. Kings, not unlike merchant city-republics, fulfilled special tasks within the framework of a wider system, which was their starting-point, and by the sixteenth century the transformative power of either sovereign princes or autonomous commercial cities was such that they could not eliminate all other local jurisdictions and privileges, nor fundamentally alter the system of peasant production and revenues. An understanding of the power of the nobility, the cities with their privileged patricians, and the medieval Church, invalidates the idea that in western Europe, any more than in Persia or Vijayanagara, there were 'autocrats ruling bureaucatised, absolutist regimes'.

But it is not only that the crown's 'central' power was limited to a wider context of 'peripheral' aristocratic power. European kings could not have existed without their own systems of symbol and ceremony either, their language-games of 'justice', 'honour', 'dignity', 'virtue', 'fidelity', 'collective prosperity' and 'the common good'. Thus the traditional Hindu emphasis on ritual aspects should not be seen as more than this, an emphasis, to be understood in a particular context and tradition. It is, for instance, fair to say that in the Vijayanagara system the degree of centralisation through royal state administration and prebendal distribution of lands or revenues was weaker than in Europe at the same time (but closer, for instance, to Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), and that the strength of both chiefly authority and communal rights was more prominent where the king, despite his command of huge armies and symbolic ritual, had a more limited set of legal and fiscal functions and resources. In that sense the Hindu institutional world was more fragmented. But there is no specific characteristic that determines the definition of
two essentially different systems.

To use a relevant example, for all its court glorification the Portuguese house of Aviz (1385-1580) was a dynasty in continuous economic difficulties which, not unlike the Tuluva dynasty of Vijayanagara (1491-1540s), had to rely on the exploitation of its own familiar territorial dominions and a few commercial controls and monopolies in order to pay for costly military adventures. For all its apparent centralization, it could well be argued that only the secularisation of the lands of the military orders and the colonial expansion in Africa and Asia allowed the Portuguese crown to keep in check the nobility with a sufficient source of patronage.

Of course there were important contextual differences (Vijayanagara was never a maritime power with forts and fleets like Portugal, for example), but it is clear that the general question cannot be reduced to opposing a "western" (late-medieval European) against an "oriental" (medieval South Indian) state, nor can it be reduced to the opposition between a "western" and an "oriental" mentality. Alternative static systems of power and language did not exist. Only a reconstruction of changing particular historical contexts, both for the society a traveller came from and the one he visited, can produce useful comparable terms. These can be defined as different but open-ended language-games which, in fact, constitute a fundamental dimension of human historical agency. And then we can ask to what extent a foreigner came to learn and share an indigenous language-game, that is to say to what extent Nicolò Conti, Domingo Paes, or 'Abd al-Razzāq, found something similar to what they already knew, learnt about something alien, or merely invented it out of their own pre-conceived cultural ideals.

'Abd al-Razzāq's description of the city of Vijayanagara is very detailed. Although the city reconstructed by modern archaeologists was affected by important transformations in the sixteenth century which
seem to have meant an increase in its size and a significant addition of public works and independent city-temples (especially in the northern area, by the Tungabhadra river), the description of the Persian ambassador mentions many specific buildings in a core area or 'royal centre', as well as a general pattern of social and political life, which essentially remained continuous.\textsuperscript{56} Judging by the tone of the various foreign descriptions, checked by important archaeological findings, Vijayanagara seems to have been expanded and rebuilt without a fundamental change in its basic conception. It is however necessary to notice some differences in details.

'Abd al-Razzāq divides the city in a succession of seven citadels enclosed within each other, and gives equivalents from his native city of Herat in order to convey the distances between them. The first citadel is surrounded by a massive round wall constructed of stone and lime on the summit of a mountain. The gates (on the north) are solid and well guarded. The description, which again may have been found in any Persian fairy tale, conveys an impression of strength and order. It also has a clear centre, the seventh citadel, which 'occupies an area ten times larger than the market-place of the city of Herat. It is the palace which is used as the residence of the king'.\textsuperscript{57}

While the area between the first and the second wall is full of gardens and cultivated fields (an observation confirmed by modern archaeology), the space between the third and the seventh fortresses is identified as the urban centre, with many shops and a bazaar. This urban center culminates at the gate of the royal palace complex, where four bazaars ('long and broad' paved roads with numerous

\textsuperscript{56} Longhurst 1917 represents the traditional archaeological interpretation of the ruins of Vijayanagara, while Fritz/Michell/Nagaraja Rao 1984 develop a new, risky but thoughtful alternative. There is also a summary in Stein 1989, pp 31-9.

\textsuperscript{57} Abd-er-Razzak in Major 1857, p.24 / Quatremère 1843, p.446.
shops and 'a lofty arcade with a magnificent gallery' above each) converge from opposite directions. At this point one finds the main public buildings to which 'Abd al-Razzāq, omitting references to their possible religious character, devotes informed descriptions. Their exact correspondence with archaeological remains is arguable, and some other specific ideas - such as the outer walls being made of lime as well as stone - appear to be wrong. Furthermore, the image of seven concentric citadels seems to be an idealisation of the fact that the traveller crossed several guarded walls and enclosures as he advanced towards the central city-palace (the number seven is associated with perfection and paradise in traditional Islamic and Biblical literature). Still, although it is not my aim to provide a close scrutiny of possible correspondences between texts and physical remains, it is important to notice that the general pattern of the description may be recognised in the archaeological reconstructions.

'Abd al-Razzāq mentions several public buildings: first the king's palace, whose audience hall 'is elevated above all the rest'; next to it the divan-khāneh or council-house, 'which is extremely large and looks like a palace', and in front of which there is the dafter-khāneh or secretarial office, where the scribes sit. Opposite there is the Fil-khāneh, or elephant stables. Behind the king's palace are 'the house and hall allotted to the Daiang', the 'eunuch' who presides over the divan and administers justice (i.e. the prime minister, elsewhere translated as Danāik, probably meaning Dhannayaka, or commander of the army), and next to it the darrab-khāneh, the mint. Opposite the mint there is the house of the governor, with a strong guard of 12,000 soldiers, and behind it a long bazaar full of excellent prostitutes, by whose revenues the guard is daily paid.

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Each of these buildings has therefore a specific function, and the whole constitutes a system of justice and government. The description of the archives is accompanied by an explanation of the two kinds of writing practiced by the Indians, on coconut leaves and, of a more lasting quality, on painted stone. The mention of the mint is accompanied by a detailed description, with names and relative values, of the various kinds of coins: of gold mixed with alloy (there are three types), of silver, and of copper. 'Abd al-Razzāq also gives Persian equivalents and notices which currency is most useful for transactions. He insists that all the gold from the kingdom has to be brought annually to this mint, and that payments (for instance to soldiers) are made from this money, without making any assignment on the revenues of the provinces. This is a significant detail, since it expresses the political ideal (at least in 'Abd al-Razzāq's mind) to concentrate coinage as a royalty, as well as the desire to keep local land-revenues as an independent system without central interference.

The description of the elephant stables gives way to a long dissertation on elephant-breeding and hunting. This is no mere curiosity, there being far fewer elephants in Khorāsān than in India, but also part of the political system: elephants are a symbol of royal power (the biggest belong to the king, and are luxuriously fed), an important element in the army, and an expression of the superiority of man over the beast.

There is however no better expression of the general character of the system interpreted by 'Abd al-Razzāq than the description of the Daiang administering justice. He sits alone at the centre protected by armed guards. Anyone can go to him with his business and only needs to offer a small present, and the judgement is made 'according to the principles of justice adopted in this kingdom'. No appeal is possible. When the minister leaves, he is accompanied by pomp and ceremony (trumpets and parasols of different
colours), and 'on each side of him walk panegyrists who pronounce complimentary expressions in his honour'. He crosses the (again) seven guarded doors that lead him to the king, and 'at each door a parasol is unfolded'. Alone he reports to the king, 'and after a lapse of a few minutes retires'.

It is clear that 'Abd al-Razzāq, himself a judge and advisor of kings, has placed the ruler in the hands of his minister of justice. This follows one of the central preoccupations of much of Muslim medieval political thought, and certainly justice constitutes the main theme running throughout the whole of 'Abd al-Razzāq's own history of Timūrid Persia. In that work, justice is mainly understood as a regulated relationship between the public administration and the lords of the kingdom, with the king as supreme arbiter who has to find out the truth and punish (or promote) individuals accordingly. But while in his historical narrative the author stresses conflicts, to the point that the meaning of what is just changes according to each factional interest (especially when it comes to opposing the centralised fiscal polices of many 'vicious' prime ministers), in the description of Vijayanagara the ideal model is presented without the cumbersome narrative of human struggle to achieve order and peace.

'Abd al-Razzāq makes very explicit the link between the king's ability to pay a strong guard, and thus guarantee safety in the city, and the revenues that come from the highly organized and 'artistically dignified' prostitution of women:

The magnificence of the places of this kind, the beauty of the young girls collected therein, their allurements, and their coquetry, surpass all description. I will confine myself to some particulars. Behind the darab-khaneh is a sort of bazaar (...). On the two sides of the avenue formed by the chambers are represented figures of lions, panthers, tigers and other animals (...). Immediately after

60 Ibid. p. 25 / Ibid. p. 448.
mid-day prayer they place before the doors of the chambers, [which are usually very clean], thrones and chairs, on which the courtesans seat themselves. Each of these women is bedecked with pearls and gems of great value, and is dressed in costly raiment (...) each of them has by her two young slaves (...) in charge of attending to everything which can contribute to amusement. Any man may enter into this locality, and select any girl that pleases him, and take his pleasure with her (...) each of the seven fortresses alike contains a great number of places of prostitution, and their general proceeds amount to to twelve thousand fanom, which forms the pay allotted to the guards. 62

What is striking about this description is the way it portrays prostitution as part of a global institution in which sensual pleasure and artistic skill combine to create the image of the perfect political society. One of the consequences of having such system (which enables the king to have a well-paid guard) is that public officers can be made accountable for their responsibilities. Thus the ambassador goes on to tell that when one of Abd-al-Razzāq's companion had to deal with runaway slaves, the governor ordered that the guards should either find them or compensate for the loss, as with any other lost article. This public guarantee of social order and safety is seen as the mark of justice.

All this royal-administrative complex is at the centre of an urban core where order and justice produce prosperity: the bazaars are full of flower merchants who sell sweet-smelling and fresh-looking roses, to the point that 'these people could not live without roses, and they look upon them as quite necessary as food'. They sell of course all sorts of things, since 'each class of men belonging to each profession has shops contiguous the one to the other'. 63 However, the ambassador insists again on the richest, most aesthetic and symbolic objects: 'the jewellers sell publicly in the bazaar pearls, rubies, emeralds, and diamonds' (to which a whole page of poetic


63 Ibid. p.24 / Ibid. p.447.
exclamations follows, trying to describe the ineffable). A system of canals and running streams makes the place very agreeable.

Thus the prosperity of the city is ultimately a symbol for the prosperity of the whole country, and extends to the whole of society: 'The empire [is so flourishing] that it would be impossible to give any idea of it without entering into the most extensive details (...) All the inhabitants of this country, both those of exalted rank and of an inferior class, down to the artizans of the bazaar, wear pearls, or rings adorned with precious stones...' Through its aesthetic recreation, by the means of poetry, the description, while keeping faithful to many (but not all) empirical observations, conveys a quasi-religious feeling: Vijayanagara is an image of paradise. Through this process, however, 'Abd al-Razzāq has removed the grounds from which to judge the errors of the infidels by looking at their works.

In fact 'Abd al-Razzāq's exaltation of the aesthetic expressions of an ideal system of power effectively substitutes the religious mythology and political thought that underpinned the indigenous system. Not only does 'Abd al-Razzāq ignore any explicit reference to the Hindu literature dealing with dharma (moral order) and artha (material gain) which informed Vijayanagara political thought, but he also does not develop the mythological themes of the Ramayana on whose godly hero the kings mirrored their political action. He may have actually not known about these, despite the fact that he was a well-educated traveller and spent several months in the city. More strikingly, 'Abd al-Razzāq fails to include any temples or religious leaders in his tale about the city-centre in which the administration of the Empire was

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64 Idem / Idem. See the original in Persian printed by Quatremère for a full description.

conducted. He could not have missed them. In fact the Ramachandra temple in the middle of the city has been interpreted by modern archaeologists as the fundamental setting for the symbolic expression of the relationship between private and public spaces of kingship, and their eventual unification through the contact with the sacred in the mythical figure of Rama, the perfect dharmic - divinely lawful- king.66

It seems as if the Persian ambassador avoided any explicit religious imagery in order to hide the basic incongruity of his whole literary exercise, that is, his intention to mirror a heavenly, ideal, platonic society in empirically-experienced heathen lands. As a counterpart to this neglect of indigenous religion, he does not explain in detail that Deva Raya II had introduced Muslim cavalry men and archers in his army (an élite body for instance led by native khurasanis who had come to India after Timur's devastating expeditions),67 nor does he mention that the king had recently had a Mosque built in Vijayanagara, obviously with the intention of keeping Muslim servants faithful to him in his continuous wars against the Bahmani Muslim kingdom of the Deccan.68 The author's "platonic" idealism - a tendency to idealise foreign societies at the extreme of the known world, both in time and space, which was also fundamental in ancient Greek and medieval Christian ethnographic models - meant neglecting the fact that the Vijayanagara system was Hindu, committed to a heathen sacred law, and also that at the time it was experimenting with an important Muslim influence from the conquest-state of the north in order to compete with it in their notorious military struggle. Although the ambassador

67 Ferishtah in Sewell 1900 p.72.
68 Stein 1989, p.35, mentions the Mosque build by Deva Raya II in 1439. Ferishtah even includes the public acceptance of the Koran. See Sewell 1900, p.72.
mentioned this struggle, he did not dwell on it, and failed to express any sympathy for the Muslim enemies of his hosts. He also failed to mention the fact that some Vijayanagara Muslims may have helped him to get along in the city.

There are two passages in 'Abd al-Razzāq's account that further express the inner workings of the institution of kingship. While the narrative of a failed attempt to assassinate the king can act as model for a typical political crisis and its happy resolution, the description of the Mahanadi (i.e. Mahanavami) festival offers an elaborate image of orderly success.\(^{69}\) I shall begin with the attack on the king. This event, reported to have taken place when the ambassador was still in Calicut (November 1442-April 1443), is also mentioned in other sources, in particular the tradition collected by the Portuguese Nuniz in the 1530s. Exact identifications are however difficult. There has been some argument around the exact chronology of the reign of Deva Raya II (1424-46?) on whom the attempt had been made, and who maybe died a few months after the attack.\(^{70}\) In any case 'Abd al-Razzāq gives a personal description of the king, who had granted him an audience, and also provides the story about the conspiracy in which an envious brother who tried to replace the ruler performed a great massacre of lords and brahmins.

'Abd al-Razzāq tries to convey a general image of kingship, rather than the particular aspects of a particular reign. What is important in the personal description is the sense of magnificence associated with power: the king is richly dressed and imposing, thin, tall,

\(^{69}\) The manuscript edited by Elliott had Mahanawi, but there is no doubt that all these names refer to the same root.

\(^{70}\) Abd-er-Razzak in Major 1857, pp 33-5 / Quatremère 1843 pp 456-8. The same story, but referring to a son of Deva Raya II, is given by Nuniz (see Sewell 1900, who discusses the problem). The time of the death of Deva Raya II is to my knowledge still confused, since some inscriptions seem to make his reign overlap with some of his successors. The problem is acute because the following years of dynastic succession were riven by internal struggle and antagonistic claims to authority.
without beard, and of pleasant expression (he may have been fat and bearded and still would be portrayed in magnificence, of course). This dignity is then reflected in the ambassador, since he is treated with much favour and given generous maintenance. The key fact of the story is that an attack due to dynastic rivalry and court intrigue, a phenomenon which was a continuous source of instability in both Hindu and Muslim kingdoms of the age, eventually failed and led to terrible punishment. It is therefore clear that the story is relevant to the general political message directed at a Persian audience. Not surprisingly, 'Abd al-Razzāq gives an exaggerated and formalised account of the event, in which the king is saved by heavenly inspiration after almost everybody else has been butchered. The attempt takes place during the absence of his faithful "vizier", the Daiang, who was on a journey to the frontiers of Ceylon. It is likely that the story the Persian was told had already acquired a schematic form before he heard it.

The literary reconstruction of a system of symbolic power reaches a climax in the description of the Mahanavami festival, which the ambassador also claims to have witnessed. Again, there are some problems of historical identification, but these do not affect the understanding of the underlying meaning of the narrative. Thus, Robert Sewell argued that 'Abd al-Razzāq was describing a three-day festival, shorter than the proper Mahanavami ("nine days") festival which, moreover, should have taken place a month earlier than he says. Sewell suggested that 'Abd al-Razzāq actually described a New Year festival. The ambassador may have confused different events, but in any case he did not fail to stress any details which served to express the importance of the royal feast, prepared every year by the idolaters 'with view of displaying their pride, their power, their tyranny, and their glory'.

71 Sewell 1900, p.93.
72 Abd-er-Razzak in Major 1857, p.35 / Quatremère 1843, p.458.
The critical tone of language is here somewhat misleading, since the description is full of praise and culminates with a celebration of the greatness of the king, who then grants a new audience to 'Abd al-Razzāq. This is in fact portrayed as a diplomatic success.

The principal personages from all the parts of the empire, including 'learned brahmins' and 'military chiefs', present themselves in the palace with many elephants, richly adorned with drawings, magnificent castles and armour. 'Abd al-Razzāq devotes considerable space to these elephants, again because they symbolise the extent of royal power. Equally symbolic are the women. The king brings together both the best elephants and the prettiest women from the whole empire (he is said to have seven hundred wives and concubines, and each wife has a separate maintenance). The secular meaning of the feast is thus the concentration of wealth and power in the centre.

The festival takes place in one great space where many multi-storied pavilions are erected, and the highest (nine storeys) is, as one would expect, the king's. These pavilions are covered from top to bottom with figures in relief, which 'represent everything that the imagination can picture, men, wild beasts, birds, and animals of every kind, down to flies and gnats'. 73 'Abd al-Razzāq is always impressed by figurative art, somehow repressed in the Muslim tradition, and stops short of condemning it. He prefers to omit any religious reference and insists that 'everything was drawn with extraordinary skill and delicacy'. And in fact the main theme of the description is admiration for the skill with which all artistic performances are made: the pavilions can 'rapidly turn round and present a new face', women play music and dance 'with a grace calculated to seduce every sense and captivate every mind', storytellers sing and invent tales, jugglers 'execute some feats of skill which are quite

73 Ibid. p.36 / Ibid. p.459.
wonderful', and elephants are made to do all kinds of extraordinary things. During the three days the king rewards the various artists with gold and rich clothes, while all kinds of fireworks and games take place around him (to the point that the ambassador finds it impossible to describe everything in full detail).

In this setting the author presents the major audience granted to him by the king. This is in fact an important moment, because it is meant to explain 'Abd al-Razzāq's success before he begins the painful explanation of his fall from grace. In an earlier meeting the ambassador had offered his gifts (in particular his horses) and a letter (which must have been the same one originally intended for the Zamorin of Calicut!). The king had treated him kindly, and asked him questions about 'the fortunate Khakan' (Shāh Rukh). The ambassador had received regular presents in exchange (he was especially pleased with betel leaves, which he fully described as having aphrodisiac properties). All along it was clear that different cultures were not an obstacle for mutual understanding: thus the king had given 'Abd al-Razzāq gold in place of the invitation to share a royal meal he knew to be customary among Muslim monarchs, since in his own tradition he had to eat apart. The audience at the end of the festival is the culmination of this good relationship, and here again they all practice some kind of relativism based on a mutual understanding of power relationships and interests.

Thus the ambassador, who comments that 'in all the kingdoms of the world the art on inlaying precious stones is nowhere better understood than in this country',74 is told by one of the king's favourites that 'in your country they could not execute a work like that'. To this he replies that 'in my country they are able to produce workmanship of equal beauty, but it is not the custom', and the king is very pleased. In fact Deva Raya II, who had

learned about the lords, troops, horses and cities under
the authority of Shāh Rukh, had already expressed
'sentiments of great friendship' and finally promised an
embassy with elephants and eunuchs as a present. Gifts
were, of course, assigned relative values, and, together
with the terms of a letter and the quality of a messenger,
they expressed the explicit commitments of different agents
in a pact of friendship even beyond the validity of any
moral law defined according to a sacred system (since Islam
and Hinduism were in this respect incompatible).

This kind of understanding was a current practice
among ambassadors to foreign countries, and similar models
of decodification are found in other accounts of embassies. Far from being a language shared only by the
participants of one well defined cultural tradition,
Christian Europeans for example, it actually constituted
an open possibility of understanding beyond initial
assumptions, a valid mechanism in all encounters with
different human societies but also necessary within what
has been usually defined as a cultural tradition (since all
traditions are changing and diverse). For such a practice
to be successful, however, it was necessary that
conventions be constantly identified and constantly
created, and a precondition for this was a mutual desire
to reach an agreement. Thus mistakes could be made, but
they could also be corrected. Particular contexts were
bound to produce particular outcomes, and many variables
were important.

Some illustration might help here to place 'Abd
al-Razzāq's embassy in a wider context. Take for instance
the case of the mendicant missionaries who in the
mid-thirteenth century were sent by Pope Innocent IV or by
Louis IX of France to negotiate a peace with the Mongols,
and if possible a coalition against their common Saracen
enemies. This task was actually very difficult, because the
friars offered very little (very poor presents, to begin
with) and they demanded a lot (that the Mongol khan should
become Christian, for instance). They were misled by initial expectations of easy conversion prompted by the presence of Nestorian Christians (and of defeated Eastern Christian princes) at the Mongol court, which they had to make compatible with the horrific image with which the Tartars had been described in Europe at the time of their appearance. This image was not in itself an insuperable problem, because the idea of future conversion provided an ideological mechanism by which diplomatic ties could be justified. The mythical ten lost tribes of Israel from the medieval Bible who had escaped from behind the walls of Gog and Magog were rapidly exchanged for a historical identification based on the personal experience of Franciscan friars like John of Carpini and William of Rubruck, even though it was a qualified experience of otherness best described by the latter as 'entering some other world'.

The decisive aspect was, however, that the mendicant friars could not offer any guarantee of a unified Christian commitment to military assistance, and the fact that they were missionaries rather than true ambassadors reflected this weakness. On the other hand, and while it could make sense to suggest a tactical alliance, they did not find any enthusiasm among the Mongols for a Christian crusade against Islam. Although after many humiliations the friars achieved the chance to engage in direct dialogue, they had little to build upon. Thus they were caught in the misery of second-rate court factions and were lucky to come out alive, disgusted with what they portrayed (in the end without much to restrain them) as a barbarian society. It was not a lack of accurate observations or mental categories that led them to such conclusion, since they elaborated rich descriptions of Tartar customs, but rather their inability to play a more satisfactory language-game,

75 See Rubruck (Jackson ed.) 1990, pp 70-1.
that is, to engage in a more successful practice. 76

Of a very different kind was the huge embassy of Persian lords sent to Ming China in 1419 by Shāh Rukh and his quasi-independent allies, and also incorporated by 'Abd al-Razzāq in his historical narrative. Here rich presents were exchanged, and important trade links promised. The narrative describes the creation of a common ground of understanding and exchange, limited to certain specific areas of mutual interest, and without disrupting each other's identities, as expressed by ritual conventions. When tensions arise we witness a negotiation by which the boundaries of the exchange and its implications for each other's identities are defined - and here the agents display some flexibility in the use of conventions so as to separate "superficial" and "essential" meanings.

The author of the Persian report also decoded a system of power and justice expressed in ritual and in the organization of the kingdom, and found reason to admire the technical and artistic 'superior' skills of otherwise idolaters who also ruled over Chinese Muslims (these acted as interpreters) in an enormous and populous empire. We find again an exoteric description of religious practices without references to doctrine or to religious experience beyond the mere performance of formal prescriptions, but again also art and order in secular matters are praised (and we even catch a glimpse of neo-Confucian religiosity in the behaviour of the Emperor). As we saw above China was, in Muslim as in Western Christian sources, an idealised model of an organised human society which could be extensively related to empirical information. It was not just a mere imposition of a traditional prejudice, but rather the genuine recreation of a myth in a new empirical context in which the myth was again meaningful. 77

76 Ibid. (Jackson improves much on the 1900 edition of W.W. Rockhill). Also see Phillips 1988, pp 59-82.

77 The expedition to China is given in 'Abd al-Razzāq (Quatremère ed.) 1843, pp 387-426.
The dynamic aspect of this process of simultaneous cultural decodification and myth-creation is probably best expressed in the main narratives of the conquest of the Mexican Empire started by the Spanish in 1519 in the name of their prince Emperor Charles V. This is the case because the initial amount of shared experience from which to construct a mutual language was so little, and the whole conquest was a skillful and lucky improvisation. Both the leader Hernán Cortés in his letters, and the soldier Bernal Díaz in his chronicle, effectively transmit a process of learning about the other through the appropriation of language-games, and a learning without which the conquest could not have succeeded, because Hernán Cortés relied on the manipulation of a local political context and system of beliefs (and not merely military technology) in order to achieve his aims of domination and plunder.

Of course there were some misunderstandings and important areas of ignorance. In fact, the narratives convey the way the invaders created a simplified and "mythical" image of the indigenous religion at the same time that they learned how to relate to it. For them to offer the Indians a liberation from the tyranny of the Mexicans was part of a package which included substituting old gods which required human sacrifices with a new God that required none. But they had to learn about the desire of many communities to stop the Aztecs, and they also had to prove that their God gave them effective success, in order to sell their package. They worked on the basis of the providentialist assumption which they could easily share with the Indians, and thus moved from similarities to differences in order to have dealings (to their advantage) with peoples who had suddenly become part

78 The Christian eucharist is in this sense a non-sacrifice, because it is God himself who dies for the people. It is a divine sacrifice that makes other "human" sacrifices unnecessary.
of their world out of an unknown frontier of the past. 79

These three examples may well serve to illustrate the way a particular context articulated itself with any ambassador's ideological traditions to produce an interpretative emphasis in their descriptions. They also make explicit the existence of general mechanisms of cultural exchange. 'Abd al-Razzāq did not encounter excessive obstacles in ignoring, or at least pretending to ignore, a few things he was not supposed to like, nor in understanding many others that he was supposed to decipher to the advantage of his secular lord. Unfortunately, the experience was not very successful in the end. In the absence of the Daiang, his protector, who was waging war against the Bahmani king of Kulberga, several merchants from Ormuz, who benefited from selling horses in Vijayanagara and for some reason did not like the idea of an embassy of Deva Raya to Shāh Rukh, spread the rumour that 'Abd al-Razzāq was not a true ambassador of the Persian ruler, but only a merchant entrusted with a letter. They were supported by one of the king's counsellors, a Christian (or Jew, a zunnārdar) called Nimah-Pazir and emphatically described in the worse terms by 'Abd al-Razzāq. The king finally restrained himself from sending a full embassy, although he dispatched a cautious letter with two khurasanians of those settled in Vijayanagara (this also meant that 'Abd al-Razzāq had to be careful not to report anything that they could contradict, which may help to explain the ambassador's need to make use of his best literary skills to present his case in a favourable light).

Therefore 'Abd al-Razzāq had to return home with more or less empty hands. Even then he took back with him the image of kingship he had brought from Persia and found again in India. It did not matter if the king's servants

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79 I have followed the chronicle of Bernal Díaz (Díaz 1984) and the letters of Hernán Cortés (Cortés 1985). A fascinating reconstruction of the Spanish–Maya contacts is in Clendinnen 1987.
had been assassinated, since the 'sun' that gives light to 'numberless atoms' was still shining. Even at the worse time of his personal distress 'the king, on several occasions when he met me on his road, turned towards me with kindness and asked after my welfare. He is in truth a prince who possesses eminent qualities'.

'Abd al-Razzāq's narrative of his journey to Bidjanagar was an extended metaphor about the role of the king as a symbol of the unity of power in a lawful state, thus interpreting kingship as the principle that makes government effective and the army successful, independently from the particular fortune of individual servants. This view, shared with different degrees of emphasis by the political ideology of both Hindu and Muslim rulers, either in Persia or in India, clouded a fundamental weakness of the political systems in pre-industrial societies. This weakness was manifested in Vijayanagara by the political instability brought by dynastic struggles, of which the murderous attempt described by 'Abd al-Razzāq was only the beginning. The analysis of such disorders in terms of the vices of human agents moved by passion and doomed to failure did not do full justice to the underlying contradictions that a differently oriented empirical description may have revealed. 'Abd al-Razzāq does not mention any serious conflict between the centre, the capital city, and the periphery, the rural provinces controlled by local chiefs and brahmins. This conflict was revealed in the importance of those ethnic and familiar divisions and loyalties which manifested themselves through caste and sect identities. It probably also found expression in the fiscal and public expenditure of the kingdom. We thus lack the political history of everyday financial and social problems, beyond palace intrigues, foreign wars, and an abstract model of idealised administration.

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80 Abd-er-Razzak in Major 1857, p.41 / Quatremère 1843, p.465.
But maybe 'Abd al-Razzāq, obviously a firm believer in a hierarchical social order, could see no better answer to the problems of his native Persian lands of the north-east than to emphasize what was already an ideological tradition which, moreover, would please his patron, the 'fortunate khakan'. Later travellers to Vijayanagara, especially the Portuguese horse-traders, were more prepared to widen the analysis to include economic production, technology and trade as keys to the understanding of social success. But they were, of course, agents of a different world.
Ludovico di Varthema: the curious traveller at the time of Vasco de Gama and Columbus

Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna (d. before 1517), about whom very little is known apart from what tells us says in his own book – and that is not always reliable – is the second European traveller to have visited and described Vijayanagara.¹ By all appearances his journey, in the very first years of the sixteenth century, followed the same pattern as Conti's a century earlier: disguised as a Muslim merchant, and with a knowledge of Arabic, he followed the main trading routes that connected the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean. Thus from Egypt and Syria he travelled to Arabia (including Mecca), Persia, and the important commercial city-port of Cambay in Gujarat. Then he descended along the coast towards South India and its western ports, paid a visit to Vijayanagara, and afterwards he sailed (or so he claims) to the gulf of Bengal, the Malay peninsula and Indonesia.²

Varthema's description of Vijayanagara basically conforms to the image already present in a traveller like Conti, although it considerably expands it. His visit was in fact brief. Varthema is however interesting for other reasons. His travel narrative was written, in Italian, for a growing market of printed books, and on the adventurer's

¹ On Varthema see Lach 1965 pp 164-166, Varthema (Jones/Badger eds.) 1863, Varthema (Temple ed.) 1928, Penrose 1955 and Cochrane 1981 are more superficial. The date of death can be established through the 1517 Roman edition (see Jones in Varthema 1863, p.iv).

² The authenticity of the journey beyond Cape Comorin (and to Ormuz) is defended in Temple 1928 (who tries to prove the chronological feasibility of the voyage and explain away Varthema's abundant misstatements and the criticisms of Garcia da Orta). The best argument to sustain Varthema's truthfulness is the accuracy of the description of the nutmeg tree and the clove tree at the Moluccas. The argument is not altogether conclusive, since Varthema may have picked up this and other stories from his Persian companion and other traders he met, and in any case many aspects of his itinerary are suspiciously inconsistent. In general, even when his reports are basically accurate, Varthema tends to dramatise situations in a literary fashion, and invents funny dialogues in Arabic (in a way not dissimilar to the recreation of set speeches in humanistic historiography). Varthema is the most obvious precedent to Fernão Mendes Pinto, whose Peregrinação (1614) is obviously a literary recreation of a personal experience written as a novel.
He made use of the narrative techniques of popular "picaresque" story-telling, unchecked by any mediating figure such as the secretary of the Pope. In fact Varthema exemplifies an original development which was to be very important in the future of the genre during the following four centuries, namely the appearance of a new degree of self-consciousness of the European traveller, elaborated as a new literary persona with parallels not only in travel literature (from Pero Tafur in the middle of the fifteenth century to the Portuguese Mendes Pinto in the late sixteenth), but also in new forms of autobiography in the culture of the Renaissance. I shall therefore contrast this new figure with medieval precedents written in the vernacular like Ramon Llull, Marco Polo and Mandeville, and then discuss his contribution to the European interpretation of Vijayanagara.

Varthema belongs to the tradition of the 'curious traveller', the traveller who is not primarily a merchant, an ambassador, a spy, a conqueror, a mercenary, a pilgrim or a missionary, but rather an independent character self-defined by a desire to know other lands and peoples, and to report back on them to his own community of origin. The identity of the traveller is created in the narrative structure as the centre that organizes the world, because what he does and what happens to him provides the main argument, and what he sees or hears is in substance that which the reader learns. Because of the secular character of this self-centredness, this traveller is a figure

3 I do not know any earlier example of a travel narrative written and printed on the traveller's own initiative with the purpose of addressing an open market.

4 One famous example of autobiography in the Renaissance is Benvenuto Cellini's, the more remarkable because he was no more than an artisan (though a successful one). Popular autobiography in the sixteenth century also has supreme models in Spanish picaresque novels and dialogues, probably entirely fictional and perhaps written by Erasmian humanists - for instance the Lazarillo de Tormes and the Viaje de Turquia. There are late medieval precedents of fictional autobiography in the genre of satirical verse, for instance Jaume Roig's misogynist Spill (the mirror), written in Valencia in the XVth century, in which the protagonist travels painfully from woman to woman.
closer to the ancient Greek Herodotus than to Felix, the protagonist of Ramon Llull's medieval Llibre de meravelles. Herodotus the story-teller may be a liar, as Varthema himself was suspected of being, but his narrative can be challenged on the grounds of a purely human perspective.\textsuperscript{5}

There is nothing sacred in Varthema's itinerary either, no search for meaning or transcendence. The identity of the traveller is created in a literary form in the book itself, as the witness and occasional actor of the situations and events that are being described. This lack of external definition is stressed by the fact that Varthema himself is an obscure character, of no particular origin or occupation, a subject therefore impossible to classify by his social status or that of his family. As a traveller he assumes different identities as it suits different circumstances, changing dress, language, profession and even religion so as to become a soldier or a physician, a rich merchant or a humble pilgrim, a devout Christian or a Muslim holy man.\textsuperscript{6} There is no way to pin him down to any of these roles, since he presents himself as a clever spy (at one stage he is a Latin Christian disguised as a convert to Islam who makes friends with Oriental Christians) and at any moment he may turn out to be pretending further - even when he writes. His identity is therefore reduced to his authority as a writer, and the problem of truth is reduced to the question of the truthfulness of what he says.\textsuperscript{7} Varthema is primarily the author of a book and, secondarily, if we decide to believe him, the protagonist of a journey.

It is tempting to search for the origins of this kind

\textsuperscript{5} For Herodotus, see introduction in The Histories (A.R.Burn ed.), 1972.

\textsuperscript{6} For instance see Varthema (Badger ed.) 1863, pp 258-371.

\textsuperscript{7} It would be different if Varthema, like let us say 'Abd al-Razzåq, had a well-defined social position and a clear role as traveller. Then a whole constellation of cultural assumptions and rules of interpretation would attach themselves to the authority of the text. Then of course also the audience would be more defined.
of persona in the so-called 'twelfth-century Renaissance'. Self-awareness and an interest in human experience for which earlier centuries provide little examples have been traced in a variety of sources, theological and other.\(^8\) There is one exceptional traveller, Gerald of Wales (1145-1223), who expresses powerfully this twelfth-century feeling of self-importance (he even wrote a brief history of his own life).\(^9\) Gerald was an upper-class and well-educated cleric who wrote in Latin and made use of Christian and classical models, especially the New Testament, the late Latin fathers, Seneca, Cicero, and poets like Virgil, Ovid and Lucan. There is no obvious model for his ethnographic works, the Topographia Hiberniae, the Itinerarium Cambriae and the Descriptio Cambriae. He seems to have started with the idea that the wonders of the West (in Ireland) deserved as much attention as the traditional marvels of the East.\(^10\) Gerald expected literature to bring him the pleasure and the fame that the world of church politics, with all its human misery, denied him. He was critical and ironic.

Nonetheless, his attitudes were not part of a secularised approach to the world. Gerald went to Ireland as a Norman conqueror and travelled his native Wales as a preacher. In the first-person narrative of his Journey through Wales (1191) curiosity is motivated by an ideal of faithfulness to personal experience and respect for local historical truth. However, through various digressions, it always leads from the natural and the political to the miraculous and the moralistic. The author's self finds expression in the telling of stories and opinions rather than as the protagonist of a historical experience, and although far from the Augustinian subservience to God, it

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8 See Morris 1987.

9 On Gerald of Wales see the introduction by L. Thorpe in Journey through Wales (Gerald of Wales 1978).

10 See preface of Topographia Hiberniae (Gerald of Wales, 1982).
does not seek to establish a meaning outside the sacred. Furthermore, it may well be said that the individualistic aspects of the twelfth-century Renaissance were subsequently drowned by the contemporary and antagonistic tendencies towards 'law, authority, system and logic'.

This is why for the understanding of the opening of cultural spaces performed by travellers of the Renaissance proper it is more illuminating to compare Ludovico di Varthema with a late thirteenth-century pedagogical model, such as the one provided by the prolific Ramon LLull.

Two hundred years before Varthema became one of the best known travellers of Europe, LLull's fictional Felix had also been presented as an individual without a defined historical identity, 'a man' of no particular nationality or social origin. He was nevertheless a Christian, and a Christian who wanted to attain perfection, therefore his journey in the world was above all a journey through the marvels of the world. The world was being systematically uncovered as the ordered and harmonious - marvellous - creation of God.

Felix did not visit particular places with historical peoples, but rather had his adventures in an abstract wilderness inhabited by hermits, philosophers, abbots, knights and patricians, where Saracens, Jews and other infidels constituted the other that was to be converted through the means of infallible persuasive reasoning. Felix was conducted through the subjects of the Art so that he could see on every step of the ladder of creation the perfect qualities of God as revealed in the workings of all elements. By analogy from these divine-elemental workings, the virtues and vices in ethics and law could also be uncovered, and it was demonstrated to unbelievers that the divine workings were taking place through the specifically

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11 Morris 1987, p.166.

12 LLull 1979. On LLull there is now a very extensive bibliography. For an introduction to his ideas see for instance the article of E.Longpré in Dictionnaire de théologie catholique.
Christian symbols, the Trinity and the Incarnation. God was the ultimate aim of the search, because the world was ultimately what God had created, thus an expression of his will and power. The ideal attitude was contemplative, and human identity was defined by its place in the hierarchically organised tree of being.

This meant that man was a moral creature as the possible knower-of-God. Felix was therefore the young man seeking wisdom, the mystic, the hermit. This is why the ideal social state was the religious state. Even the secular aristocratic figure of the noble wanderer, the epic hero, was subjected to an allegorical reading through the institution of knighthood. The violent and greedy mercenary became a mirror of virtues in search of sanctity.¹³ In Llull all authority is external, coming from God and being transmitted by the Christian tradition. The written book, which aims to reproduce the world encyclopedically, is simply a means of transmission aimed at widening the circle of those who share in the contemplation of marvels and the identification of the qualities of the different levels of reality.

Llull's idealised knights and friars were in fact metaphorical extensions of the pilgrim, and sought to direct the aristocratic social strategies that had grown in feudal societies during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries towards a Christian ideal. There were other late-medieval travellers who found a new place in conventional discourse. Missionaries such as the friars Carpini, Rubruck, Pordenone and Catalani have already been mentioned, and what is significant is that their travel accounts do not portray a religious quest, but rather secular, mainly political concerns, assumed from an identity socially defined as religious. Theirs was a pragmatic position midway between the pilgrim and the

¹³ This is the meaning of Llull's Llibre de l'orde de cavalleria.
curious traveller.\footnote{14 On the medieval Mongol missions see for instance a useful summary in Phillips 1988. See also Yule (ed.) 1866 and Rubruck (Jackson ed.) 1990.}

An even more spectacular change in travel literature came from the new urban society and its trading activities. Marco Polo, its best medieval representative, had also broken with a purely sacred contemplation of the marvels of the world, but nevertheless he was still, essentially, a practical man, a merchant who had had the unusual opportunity of travelling far into the East and of entering the service of a foreign prince. What he had to tell about the East provided useful information as well as an entertaining story.\footnote{15 A point stressed by Olschki 1960. In this stimulating book Olschki, eager to provide a coherent interpretation of Marco Polo which emphasizes his qualities as an observer of men and institutions, perhaps overestimates the extent to which he had become something other than a merchant. See Polo (Moule-Pelliot eds.) 1938. See also Lach 1965, pp 34-8.}

There was now a danger that the completion of the picture of the human world by the incorporation of new details about peoples belonging to a non-biblical tradition would mean that the old schemes of classification had to be substantially changed. The mere problem of classification however was easy to solve, because the Christian tradition had some vaguely defined areas of secular discourse (especially in the vernacular languages) into which the new information could be incorporated without touching the rest. In the same way that Aristotle could be made compatible with Christian theology, ancient India and contemporary Cathay could be given a place in the geographic and ethnographic map of the known world. The idea is captured by Aquinas: Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit.\footnote{16 Aquinas (D'Entrèves ed.) 1959, p.xiii.} The rational understanding of the natural world could expand and even change and still culminate in faith in God.

The serious challenge came from the secularised view of the world. Increasing trust in the expanded areas of
discourse could lead to a more critical and carefree stand towards the traditional revealed and well-defined centre. Marco Polo did not compel his audience to see a natural world of different places and peoples instead of a well-defined creation of God, but he provided (in the same way that contemporary historians, doctors and astronomers who reported new observations did) the material that could be used by those who were making that step. The traveller's "marvels" of the world were still diversities, objects of contemplation, but the question was whether they expressed a meaning and an order, and, more specifically, evidence of God's creative power and loving will. A practical purpose in knowledge could usually be justified, because it had been declared compatible with a sacred conception since the early centuries of Christianity, and that declaration had been renewed by late medieval thinkers. More obviously dangerous was the possibility of collecting oddities with the sole purpose of the pleasure of the moment. If non-religious practices could be carried with both material success and subjective pleasure, there was little pressure to make the useful compatible with the honest, or to repress the human passions traditionally identified with sin.

Marco Polo, ignoring any religious framework other than the superficial fact that the Venetian merchants had carried embassies between Kubilai Khan and the Pope (which served them as both justification and safe-conduct), had simply tried to provide a lot of information, potentially of interest to more people than just the merchant wishing to do business in the Levant. Rustichello openly declares that it was as an exceptional reporter of 'novelties and marvels' that the Great Khan liked to employ Marco Polo in various travels.¹⁷ It may well be the Great Khan's interest - the interest of a pagan - that lies at the source of the major travel narrative of the European middle

¹⁷ Marco Polo 1938, ch.17.
ages. The introductory passage written by Rustichello to the merchant's book was actually identical to Rustichello's own introduction to an Arthurian Romance. In this introduction, a desire to know was the accepted motivation of the various listeners and readers of the travels, lords and bourgeois patricians alike, and no obvious explanation was given for why should people want to know. Miracles were reported among customs and other remarkable curiosities, but they performed no privileged role in the narrative. The text allowed the audience to move beyond the religious knowledge of the God-seeker, and also beyond the practical knowledge of the merchant or the politician, towards the dangerous area of the knowledge-for-itself and for-nothing-in-particular.

John Mandeville was the successor of Marco Polo in popularity and influence (both their travel accounts were originally composed in medieval French, and soon translated into other vernacular languages). He expressed a movement by which the new genre of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was finally appropriated by traditionalist agents. The anonymous author organized

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18 Ibid. ch 1.
19 Such as the miracle of the shoemaker of Baghdad (found only in manuscript Z), probably taken from the mythology of local Nestorian and Jacobite Christians living in a hostile environment; or the stories about the tomb of Saint Thomas in South India, of which there is little doubt that were also local. It is also with curiosity that Marco Polo goes about the discovery of Nestorian Christians in China (again a fragment only found in manuscript Z). Of course, the Polos enjoyed the fact that the Great Khan, partly for political reasons, tolerated different religions and refused to choose one and discriminate the others. In that context, the narrative makes clear that it was through its ability to give ("providentially" or "supernaturally") power to its followers that a religion was usually played against the others as "superior". As a divided minority with limited resources, the Oriental Christians could not expect to convert the Great Khan, but local miracles, and especially the ability to be useful to the ruler, helped them to keep their communities alive.
20 The author of Mandeville's Travels was traditionalist in the deep sense that he re-created the Christian theological framework with little regard for the internal coherence of his material - the same sense in which Renaissance cosmographers like Joannes Boemus or André Thévet were also traditionalist. This was compatible with being rhetorically audacious (for instance appealing to the experience of a traveller, real or imaginary, as a source of authority) and morally open-minded (retrieving a universal syncretic natural religion which was in fact a vision of reformed Christianity).
a complex inheritance of texts which had originated in different contexts and gave them a religious (albeit critical and reformist) interpretation. In Mandeville's Travels a mixture of historical fact and fabulous fiction, of practical information and moral teaching, is made to coexist with a providentialist interpretation of events and a religiously-oriented attitude towards the marvels of the world. His sources may be autonomous, but Mandeville's travels were still presented as an extended version of a guide for pilgrims to the holy land, thus it did not matter that most of the book was devoted to describing strange places and peoples. Ultimately, the journey was directed towards a sacred place, and the rest was probably meant to emphasize this. 21

Mandeville was therefore stepping back into a traditional sacred centre of the world. Paradoxically, he was also creating a fictional literary persona, a narrative centre, which would be exploited by the secularised writers of future centuries. This persona was in the first place useful for other imaginary travels, but it also became the vehicle for historical narratives to the point that the historical bore witness to the supernatural. In 1397 the Catalan nobleman Ramón de Perellós travelled to Ireland to visit the Purgatory of Saint Patrick. There he made sure that king John I of Aragon was not destined to hell, a fate for which he and others accused of his murder could have been made responsible. Perellós appended material from the Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii written by Hugh of Saltrey, an imaginary narrative of the visit of knight Owein to the Purgatory, to his own ethnographical observations of Ireland, whose authenticity few scholars today deny, blending the two around a particularised Christian first-person. 22

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21 On this interpretation of Mandeville see 'Travel writing as a genre' above. A useful summary of the manuscript tradition and source criticism can also be found in Mandeville (Seymour ed.) 1967, pp 272-8.

More decisively, the imaginary Mandeville was followed in the fifteenth century by ambassadors and humanists travelling either within Europe or further abroad: men like Ruy González de Clavijo, sent in 1403 by the king of Castile to the court of Timūr, the French herald Gilles le Bouvier, who in 1451 recorded what he could remember from his many travels for the pleasure and benefit of knowledge, or Pope Pius II, whose contemporary Commentarii were motivated by a desire to bring together the European Christians against the Turks. Although the author of the journal of Clavijo's embassy still wrote in the third person, out of social deference, and Pius II dictated his personal recollections in a third person reminiscent of Julius Caesar, the underlying principle that gave meaning and authority to these texts was a secular self-centred observer.

In this sense, it is not so much the presence of self in the first person what matters, because this could be an Augustinian, providentialist self — and the examples we have of thirteenth and fourteenth-century chronicles written by a first-person king, or by a first person witness of the deeds of kings and lords, obsessively insist on this divine connection. What we find in the fifteenth century is an increasing amount of narratives, often travel accounts, clearly written from an individual

23 For XVth century travellers see the introduction by Hale ed. in Beatis 1979. See also Clavijo 1984, Le Bouvier 1908, Pius II (e.g. Aeneas Sylvius) 1959.

24 The Augustinian self is best portrayed in the Confessions. A philosophical discussion including Plato, Augustine, Montaigne and Descartes in Taylor 1989. For medieval royal chronicle-biographies see Einhard on Charlemagne (IXth c.), Joinville on Saint Louis (XIIIth c.), Muntaner on the kings of Aragon (early XIVth century). There was from the beginning an obvious classical model in Suetonius, which the Middle Ages never lost (but in the Renaissance Plutarch would become better known). Alexander the Great was also a popular model throughout the Middle Ages. The other current of influence was hagiography. Muntaner is interesting because the scope of the work is determined by the recollections and experiences of the author, although the subject-matter is external to him, and the relationships between the chronicler and the royal house of Barcelona follow a feudal model with obvious religious (Augustinian and providentialist) undertones. A notable example of royal autobiography is the Book of the deeds of Jaume I of Aragon (XIIIth century), although the actual extent of royal intervention is a matter of dispute.
human perspective that attempts to make sense of experience without reference to the will and power of God. An important example is provided by the French Bertrandon de la Broquièrè, who in 1432 was sent by the Duke of Burgundy Philip le Bon to collect information about the Near East, and in particular about the Turks. Thus the pilgrim had been fully transformed into a spy, who took notes of what he saw with the view of supporting the organisation of another crusade. Such secularised travel accounts became especially important at the beginning of the sixteenth century, with remarkable texts like those written by the doctor from Nuremberg Hieronymus Münzer, who travelled in 1594-5 fleeing from the plague, or by the Italian ambassadors Francesco Vettori, sent to Emperor Maximilian I in 1507, and Francesco Guicciardini, who kept a journal of his mission to the king of Aragon Ferdinand II in 1511.

A special case is constituted by the early narratives of the great voyages of discovery. Despite the fact that both Columbus and Vasco de Gama come across as devout Christians with extravagant providentialist claims, their letters and journals, or those written by their companions, were also meant to construct a secular meaning from the perspective of personal observation. Mission and Crusade do not detract from exploitation of economic possibilities through the manipulation of geographical and political conditions. In fact, if the providentialist emphasis distorts the description it does so in order to justify and reinforce the validity of the economic prospects. So, one may well argue that Columbus made the naked Caribbean Indians more handsome and rational, and their land more marvellous, the more he needed to reassure himself and his

25 See Broquièrè 1892. The background of his mission, as that of Pero Tafur's wanderings or even of the cosmographical interests of Pius II, was an attempt from the crusading tradition of the Latin West to revive and confront the bleak possibility of the imminent fall of Constantinoble to the Ottoman Turks.

patrons that Marco Polo's Cathaians were not too far from the islands he had discovered.\(^{27}\)

Among all these, the case of Ludovico de Varthema is extreme, because neither his social origins nor his purpose are conventionally defined, and also because he directly addresses an unlimited market. Unlike his more immediate predecessors of the fifteenth century, merchants and diplomats like Caterino Zeno, Iosafa Barbaro and Ambrosio Contarini who had travelled in the Black Sea and Persia, Varthema was not constrained by the political and economic interests of the Venetian Republic.\(^{28}\) Like his contemporary Vettori, who may be described as a typically curious and hedonistic Renaissance traveller, Varthema felt free to invent entertaining (and often sexual) anecdotes.\(^{29}\) The danger of secularisation detected in Marco Polo is more advanced: his only reason to travel was a curiosity for knowledge, and all the authority of the text derives from an abstract will to travel in order to see and know. Polo and Conti are defined as merchant-patricians from Venice, Varthema is simply the man who went to see the East. Even among idle noblemen this was atypical. Thus the Andalusian hidalgo Pedro Tafur combined his desire to know famous and strange places by personal

\(^{27}\) See Columbus (C.Jane ed. 1988 and B.W.Ife ed. 1990) and Gama (Roteiro A.Velho 1945). Ife's interpretation of the narrative strategies of the Journal of Columbus (Columbus 1990, pp xix-xxiii) is particularly lucid.


\(^{29}\) These anecdotes are probably the least authentic part of Varthema's narrative, traceable to Boccacciosque novellas present in European picaresque and moralistic literature of the late middle ages and the Renaissance, but also to the sexual tales from the Arabian Nights current in the culture of sailors and merchants of the Indian Ocean. Although in general a reliable witness, Varthema would also enrich his own experience with fictional models of guaranteed literary success. It is in this regard remarkable the observation made by the English translator J.Winter Jones in 1863: '...the translator has endeavoured to preserve the quaint dry style of the author. This must excuse for retaining some expressions which are hardly suited to the refinement of the present day, and for not omitting some anecdotes which a writer in modern times would hardly venture to record. They, however, afford an additional voucher for the truth of the narrator: it is impossible to imagine them to be inventions, and they only make us feel the more assured that we are travelling with Varthema...' (Varthema 1863, p.II).
experience with an ideal of chivalric virtue that he wanted to associate with his social status as a member of the nobility. A later independent traveller of a similar kind, the knight from Cologne Arnold von Harff, still gave his extensive travels in the Mediterranean (1496-9) the conventional form of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Varthema expresses very clearly his motivations, and from his words it appears that he is extending to the activity of travel a primarily intellectual concern:

There have been many men who have devoted themselves to the investigation of the things of this world (...) others (...) to whom the earth has not sufficed (...) have begun to traverse the highest regions of Heaven with careful observations and watching (...) Wherefore I, feeling a very great desire for similar results [i.e. praise from others and satisfaction to himself], and leaving alone the heavens as a burden more suitable for the shoulders of Atlas and Hercules, determined to investigate some small portion of this our terrestrial globe; and not having any inclination (knowing myself of very slender understanding) to arrive at my desire by study of conjectures, I determined, personally, and with my own eyes, to endeavour to ascertain the situation of places, the qualities of peoples, the diversities of animals, the varieties of fruit-bearing and odoriferous trees of Egypt, Syria, Arabia Deserta and Felix, Persia, India, and Ethiopia, remembering well that the testimony of one eye witness is worth more than ten heard-says (my it.)

Varthema presents his motives with much irony. To mock pretentious theorists by appealing to the knowledge attained through practical experience was a recurrent theme

30 As expressed in the preface to his Andañas e viajes. Tafur believed that travel could make the knight effectively virtuous, both because in foreign lands he would have to prove himself worthy of his dignity (rather than just resting on the family tradition), and because he would learn political wisdom concerning different lands and peoples which could later benefit his country. In this sense Tafur, despite his "medieval" credulity and crusading ideals, clearly introduces major themes of the Renaissance understanding of nobility. See Tafur 1982, pp 1-2. The idea that the knight had to acquire wisdom by direct experience as a traveller is also present in the "realist" chivalric novel Tirant lo Blanc (Valencia 1490): 'Jo jamés haguera pogut creure experiencia tal si de mos ulls no ho hagués vist. Ara no tinc res per impossible que los hòmens no sapien fer. En especial tals sabers cauen en gentz qui van molt per lo món.'

31 Harff (Letts ed.) 1946. The part of the narrative dealing with India is probably apocryphal, and follows the model (and often the substance) of Mandeville.

32 From his preface in Varthema 1863, pp 1-2.
among all sorts of writers during the Renaissance. This also suggests that Varthema's dedicatory preface could be a rhetorical piece. Moreover, we cannot exclude an important dimension of fortune-seeking in his travelling to the East (in 1503) precisely at the same time when the Portuguese had reached the Indian Ocean (in 1498) and, as a result, the whole Venetian system of spice-trade in the Levant was being threatened. After his return from Malacca, Varthema was eager to sell information to the Portuguese in their struggle against the Muslim merchants and the indigenous rulers of Calicut. He was eventually knighted by the Viceroy Almeida for his services, and later, after he had returned to Europe, was confirmed in his new aristocratic status by king Manuel. 33 It is also probable that Varthema (partly for economic reasons) was interested in selling as many books as possible. Certainly his work is one of the most striking successes of travel literature in the early printing press, with at least five editions in Italian, one in Latin, three in German, and two in Castilian between only 1510 and 1523, and several more editions (including French, Dutch and English translations) later in the century. 34

Still, despite his hidden motivations, the original statement in the dedicatory preface indicates a genuine attitude confirmed by the rest of the narrative: Varthema is a very clear case of an independent and curious traveller seeking to transmit to his contemporaries a fresh and unmediated image of the world. He in fact offers himself as a model of audacity, survival and self-regulation in the dangerous world of natural and cultural differences. 35

33 Varthema's career with the Portuguese, explain in his own narrative, is somehow confirmed by Barros, who had read the Latin version of the Itinerary in the collection of Simon Grynaeus: Barros D.I, i.X, c.4.

34 See the preface by Winter-Jones the translator to Varthema 1863, pp i-xvi.

35 Thus he justified returning to Europe by explaining that he had had enough of being in a strange and changing environment; see Varthema 1863, pp 259-60.
The interesting issue is not however Varthema's possible originality. From the previous examples it is clear that his narrative appears in a moment of growth in both numbers and models of travel accounts. This growth affected travel within Europe as well as exploration outside. Varthema was not a humanist, and he was not particularly learned, but his preface shows awareness of an intellectual climate which owed a great deal to the humanists. They in fact provided some of the literary models and intellectual concerns that made travel narratives richer, and travel itself a fashionable activity.

It has been argued, and I believe with excessive emphasis, that one of the most famous early sixteenth century travel writers, Antonio Pigafetta of Vicenza, who in 1519 accompanied to Barcelona the apostolic legate Francesco Chieregato to the newly elected Emperor Charles V, had received a humanist education. With their permission he joined Magellan when he set sail for the first circumnavigation of the world, with no more obvious function than recording what he saw and heard. Despite some differences in their respective levels of education, Pigafetta and Varthema shared very similar motivations and narrative personae, they both wrote in vernacular for a wide audience, and they are both examples of the Renaissance cultural emphasis that allowed artists and

36 See introduction by Hale (ed.) in Beatis 1979. Also, more generally, see Penrose 1955.

37 On Pigafetta's account see Lach 1965, pp 173-6; Cochrane 1981, p.338 (who insists, wrongly I believe, on the idea that Pigafetta had a humanist education and followed humanist models in his "journal"). Old editions tend to follow Ramusio, who translated from a French manuscript, again published by J. Denuce in 1923. The best modern critical edition of the Ambrosian manuscript, discovered in 1800, is C. Manfron (1928). In English see Robertson 1906. The recent introduction by L. Cabrero to the Castilian translation (Madrid, 1985) is full of mistakes and ignorant remarks.

38 As expressed in the dedicatory letter to Filippo Villers de L'Isle Adam, Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes (Pigafetta himself was, or became, a Knight of Rhodes), he wanted 'to experience and to go and see those things by myself, so that I might be able to satisfy myself somewhat, and so that I might be able to gain more renown...' (Robertson 1906, I p.23).
adventurers, and no longer only kings, knights and saints, to appear as a proper subject for biography and, more significantly, for autobiography.39

The contribution of writers like Varthema, as opposed to most travellers that stayed within the boundaries of Europe, consists in the radical degree into which they portrayed themselves as de-contextualised individuals. This was helped by the fact that they moved outside the frontiers of Christian society proper, but there was more to it. While a medieval traveller like Ibn Battūta reproduced himself as member of a religious (Muslim) institution even in India and China, or while the Spanish and the Portuguese in America and Asia also carried with them, albeit in the difficult beginnings only symbolically, the institutional reproduction of their original society (their town, their king, their priests and crosses), Varthema moves around with his single identity as an observer. There is good reason to believe that he actually tried to hide the extent to which he stepped away from his conventional Christian identity, when he requested a privilege to print his narrative from the Chamberlain of the Pope, Rafael the bishop of Portueri, or when he dedicated the work to the duchess of Tagliacozzo and countess of Albi, Agnesina Feltria Colonna. His position seems to have been similar to that of Nicolò Conti.

Thus the physician García de Orta, who had settled in Goa and published his learned botanical treatise Coloquios dos simples, e drogas he cousas medicinais da India... in 1563, could find no better way of casting doubt on

39 Vasari wrote lives of artists and Cellini was himself an artisan (see n.136 above). Many Spanish soldiers wrote about their exploits in the New World (such as Bernal Díaz del Castillo and Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca) or in Europe (for instance Alonso de Contreras). The recollections of merchant-adventurers could become the central thread of a narrative, such as in the case of Fernão Mendes Pinto, Cesare Fredrici, Francesco Carletti, Jacques de Couttre or Peter Mundy, all of whom went to India. What mattered was not simply that these authors were first-hand witnesses of interesting information, but also that they were themselves, in various ways, interesting focus of literary attention and self-discovery. It would take a more specific analysis to determine the extent to which they portrayed themselves as types rather than individuals.
Varthema's accuracy — in determining the geographical origin of benjuy (stoxax) — than by recalling what kind of traveller he was:

As for Ludovico Vartomano, I have spoken here and in Portugal with men who knew him in India, and said that he went about in the dress of a moor, and that he returned to us and did penance for his sins. They told me that he never went beyond Calicut and Cochin...40

To summarise, two variables are important. On the one hand, an individual point of view expressed in a first-person narrative, which can be the narrative source of an empirical description (but also of many other things), and, on the other hand, a de-contextualisation in respect of those ideological institutions that determine social condition and purpose. This de-contextualisation, in its more radical expression, means that the first person of the narrative becomes a centre. This second variable effectively implies that the empirical emphasis of a description, which originally was a pragmatic possibility that coexisted with an allegiance to a traditional sacred centre, can now be justified as an entirely independent secular discourse. However, there is no direct link between the presence of an independent first-person traveller and the quality of empirical descriptions in a particular text. Varthema's account of Vijayanagara makes this clear.

His account of India is part of his general progression towards the East, and although it can be doubted whether he really went as far as Pegu, Malacca, Java and the Moluccas (which is what he claims), there is no doubt that he reached Vijayanagara from Cannanor, probably by the end of 1504.41 He was travelling disguised as a Muslim in the company of a Persian merchant,

40 Garcia da Orta is here quoted by Temple (ed.) in Varthema 1928, p.xx.

41 Temple in Varthema 1928 offers a likely reconstruction of the chronology of Varthema's itinerary in his introductory discourse (although his conclusions should be regarded as provisional, since many inconsistencies remain).
and stayed a few days in the city of Bisinegar in the kingdom of Narsinga before proceeding towards Calicut. It is doubtful that Varthema had read anything about the place before.\textsuperscript{42}

As with previous travellers, it is the power of the king and the magnificence of the city that focus of his description.

The said city of Bisinegar belongs to the king of Narsinga, and is very large and strongly walled. It is situated on the side of a mountain, and is seven miles in circumference. It has a triple circle of walls. It is a place of great merchandise, is extremely fertile, and is endowed with all possible kinds of delicacies. It occupies the most beautiful site, and possesses the best air that were ever seen; with certain beautiful places for hunting and the same for fowling, so that it appears to me to be a second paradise. The king of this city is a pagan, with all his kingdom, that is to say, idolaters. He is a very powerful king, and keeps up constantly 40,000 horsemen...\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{It appears to me a second paradise...} It is surprising how immediately Varthema has decided to use the same metaphor as 'Abd al-Razzāq (albeit the Italian does not need to count as many as seven city walls). Again, its meaning is political. The power of the king, expressed in the richness, size and walls of the city, is portrayed as being based on a military capacity. There is then a reference to the key role of horses and elephants in the armies, which also brings to mind the importance of horse-trade and its political implications (especially for the sea-ports of the Malabar coast, where the Europeans were beginning to be involved at the time). Varthema quickly grasped the the possibility of gaining political and

\textsuperscript{42} Conti’s account, which circulated extensively in Latin and Italian manuscripts, did not necessarily reach Varthema, despite the existence of some early editions (in 1485 and 1492 in Latin, and in 1502 V. Fernandes published a Portuguese translation which accompanied one of the earliest printed versions of Marco Polo). In fact Varthema may have read some manuscript Italian reports of the first two Portuguese expeditions before he left (probably in late 1502), of the kind published in the \textit{Paesi...} in 1507. It is mainly through the interest of Venetian and Florentine merchants that news of the Portuguese advances spread from Lisbon to Italy, and Varthema seems to have been aware of this climate.

\textsuperscript{43} Varthema 1863, pp 125-6.
economic benefits from the situation:

And you must know that a horse is worth at least 300, 400, and 500 pardais, and some are purchased for 800 pardais, because horses are not produced there, neither are many mares found there, because those kings who hold the seaports do not allow them to be brought there.44

Like 'Abd al Razzāq, the author dwells a lot on the discretion, strength and intelligence of the elephant. This example may be used to examine the different conditions that combined to bring a specific subject into the narrative. One may argue that the Italian traveller was expressing a sense of wonder before an animal that challenged the conventional experience of the natural world in Europe. There was a strong tradition of description of elephants in western sources about India, from Arrian and Pliny to Nicolò Conti, and medieval imagery showed a predilection for abnormal and fantastic creatures, as the existence of so many bestiaries proves.

The bestiaries are therefore an expression of the same cultural attitude to which the tradition of the "marvels of the East" belongs, an attempt to place in a distant but real place whatever was radically different, either in the sense of a desired Eden of plentiful riches where Europe would find freedom from the bonds of everyday life and death, or in the sense of an inverted world of moral perversion and monstrosity that had to be rejected. Many commentators freely adapted the description of animals in order to elaborate allegories with moralistic purposes. Themes and images had been transmitted from antiquity to the middle ages, so that even the popular roman d'Alexandre, which had become an epic of feudal chivalry based on a famous mythical figure from the past, included a description of the wonderful elephant as soon as Alexander confronted the Indian king Porus across the Indus. The transmission of themes also included influential

44 Ibid. p.126.
borrowings from the Arab and Byzantine cultures, and versions of the *Kalila and Dimna*, the political fable with animals as type protagonists (and originally transmitted from India to Persia) circulated in vernacular in thirteenth century Europe.\(^4\) The Renaissance rediscovery of the East usually meant a naturalistic recreation of the very same themes, so that the Rhinoceros and the Elephant filled European tapestries and engravings in the sixteenth century.\(^5\) Varthema had therefore been trained to search for and report strange animals such as elephants.

A parallel argument, substantiated by the fragment quoted above, is that Varthema emphasizes the importance of horses as a result of his own interest as a Christian and European who comes from the western sea-ports where such trade is conducted. His experience with Arab and Persian traders, his vague knowledge of the intentions of the Portuguese, and his experience of the role of foreigners in Vijayanagara could explain Varthema's interest in horses. Yet, beyond the recreation of a traditional theme ("The elephant is the monstrous animal - and I truly see it!") and the expression of a self-interested perspective based on a personal experience ("Horses fetch a good price here!") there is a further reason why Varthema talks about elephants and horses. These two animals are both in symbolic and in technical terms essential elements of the institution of kingship in Vijayanagara, and they belong to his general interpretation of the kingdom.

The two key features that organize the whole description are precisely the city and the king. The prosperity of the first is the counterpart of the power of the second. The city is well located in a fertile, healthy and beautiful place. It is large, strongly defended and rich in merchandise. This description is not far from the

\(^4\) Lach (1977) pp 85-116 is, as usual, extremely useful.

\(^5\) On this subject see the thorough work of Lach 1970.
ideal of a European city at the time. Is it then the case that Varthema simply sees in Vijayanagara the same sort of thing he would like to see in Venice or Bologna? Do all European travellers share a common ideal of a large prosperous city and, in their attempt to recognise a well-ordered civil community, try to find it in Damascus or Vijayanagara? Or is it rather that because non-European cities can successfully be described as fulfilling the western model of a political society, they become in effect the message that the traveller spontaneously transmits to his contemporaries?

The ideal city depends on external human factors: a true government and, ultimately, a true religion. In our western sources on Vijayanagara, as in 'Abd al-Razzāq before, we have a good king, but with false gods. There is no open discussion of this duality, but the description constitutes by itself an implicit acknowledgment of one of the deepest questions of early modern political thought in the West. Both the success and the falsity of the system of government are expressed in inequivocal terms:

This king of Narsinga47 is the richest king I have ever heard spoken of. This city is situated like Milan, but not in a plain. The residence of the king is here, and his realms are placed as it might be the realm of Naples and also Venice; so that he has the sea on both sides. His brahmins, that is his priests, say that he possesses a revenue of 12,000 pardais per day. He is constantly at war with several Moorish and Pagan kings. His faith is idolatrous, and they worship the devil, as do those of Calicut. When the proper time comes we will state in what manner they worship him. They live like pagans...48

Varthema goes on with a description of dress, distinguishing between men of condition (who wear a short shirt and a turban 'in the moorish fashion') and common people (these go quite naked, with the exception of a piece

47 Early European descriptions often used the word Narsinga to refer to the kingdom, and restricted the word Bissnagar to the city. This is because at the time of their arrival the-rulers of Vijayanagara had the name of Narashima, one of the incarnations of the god Vishnu.

48 Varthema 1863, p.129.
of cloth about their middle). Women are not described as proper inhabitants, but rather belong to the realm of religion and customs of the men. As opposed to common men, the king deserves a special description as the culmination of human society proper. It becomes obvious not only that his more sophisticated dress expresses a higher status, but also that his horse has a symbolic value on top of its practical purpose:

> The king wears a cap of gold brocade two spans long, and when he goes to war he wears a quilted dress of cotton, and over it he puts another garment full of golden piastres, and having all around it jewels of various kinds. His horse is worth more than some of our cities, on account of the ornaments which it wears. When he rides for his pleasure he is always accompanied by three or four kings, and many other lords, and five or six thousand horses. Therefore he may be considered a very powerful lord (it. mine)\(^{49}\)

To summarise, the central idea is the concentration of power in the institution of kingship. This power depends on high revenues and military capacity, of which the prosperity of the city and the huge armies with elephants and horses are the main expression. The rest of the observations and references ultimately refer to these premises. Thus, Varthema describes the monetary system, of interest not only because it expresses the economic order of which the king is ruler and guarantee, but also because it relates directly to the trading activities that concern foreigners such as the Portuguese. (The basic structure of the monetary system is similar to the one described by 'Abd al-Razzāq sixty years earlier, but the numerical correspondences seem to have changed, as one would have expected).\(^{50}\) Of importance for foreign merchants is also the safety of the roads, and the tolerance of different creeds. The king is able to guarantee all of these in the interest of the system (and because that system needs the

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\(^{49}\) Ibid. pp 129-30.

\(^{50}\) Ibid. pp 130-1, n.1 (Badger).
foreign traders). The aim of political power is the peace that brings prosperity, and because the king of Narsinga offers that, he is a good king despite the fact that the human community he governs is idolatrous and worships the devil. 'In this kingdom you can go everywhere in safety'. Furthermore, 'This king is a very great friend of the Christians, especially of the king of Portugal, because he does not know much of any other Christians. When the Portuguese arrive in his territories they do them great honour'. Varthema sees the political influence of the king of Narsinga extending everywhere in south India, so that he is in constant war with the Muslim ruler of Bijapur, several cities of the Malabar coast are subject to him, and his presence is recorded in Coromandel, Ceylon, and even Tarnassari in the gulf of Bengal. Varthema perceives both the symbolic expression of a system of power and its practical effectiveness, with the consequences it carries for the Europeans. He thus describes, interprets and evaluates a whole social system in a single narrative movement. For all his initial indefiniteness, it is quite obvious that Varthema organises the literary recreation of his experience of Vijayanagara from the perspective of a self-appointed spy for European merchants and conquerors.

The problem is whether Varthema is right in thinking that the king is so powerful. I have already explained that modern scholars defending the idea of a 'segmentary state'

51 Ibid. pp 130-1.

52 It is doubtful that Varthema knew what he was writing about when he mentioned Tarnassari in this context. The whole travel towards the Malay peninsula and the Indonesian islands looks as if it had been made up on the basis of hearsay. Thus Tarnassari cannot in my opinion be identified with Tenasserim in Siam, as the English editors of Varthema, Badger (1863) and Temple (1928), have repeatedly done, not only because Varthema seems to locate the place in the Indian peninsula, between Coromandel and Bengal, but also because the description is difficult to match with current knowledge. It includes elements that might rather correspond with Masulipatam and the kingdom of Orissa (i.e. Hindu religious beliefs and customs, including sati; a language similar to Malayalam; the statement that the king has wars against Vijayanagara and Bengal etc). On the other hand, he mentions details, such as junks that trade with Malacca, which seem more accurate for the intended area. In fact, the narrative is not fully consistent with any particular place.
insist that the symbolism surrounding the South-Indian king expressed a coherence and centrality that was more ritual than administrative. From this perspective, Varthema's emphasis on the power of the king may have been the result of a confusion of two different kinds of centralization. While 'Abd al-Razzāq constructed his whole account as a utopian projection, Varthema intended to provide the Portuguese with a reliable assessment of the power of the king. His failure to understand the segmentary character of kingship would therefore appear to be more serious. Such an interpretation is however overly simplistic.

The effective power of the Indian ruler was indeed limited, and subject to continuous negotiation and threats. In the context of such a tension between the ritual and the political functions of the king, an emphasis on sacredness may have served to legitimize further claims to resources and authority. To be fair Varthema, and in contrast with 'Abd al-Razzāq, shows some awareness of this problem. To begin with, in the traveller's account the presence of the political power of the kings of Vijayanagara, which is based on his military capabilities, has its limitations. So, important cities of the Malabar coast such as Calicut are independent (because, as Duarte Barbosa and the historian Barros would later observe, the western chain of mountains running along the coast prevented the Vijayanagara armies from finding an easy access to the oceanic trading centers).\textsuperscript{53} This is probably why the king welcomes so many foreign traders into his city. On the other coast the power of the king is felt to be distant. This is unfortunate for the indigenous Christians, because they are being driven away or killed by the Muslims (this

\textsuperscript{53} See Barros D.I, l.IV, c. 7: 'E segundo estes povos entre si são belicosos e de pouca fé, já tôdo esta grande região fora subditas ao mais poderoso, se a naturaleza não atalhara à cobiça dos homens com grandes e notáveis rios, montes, lagos, matas e desertos...'; Barbosa 1946 pp 100-1: 'Desta serra por diante, para trás, é a terra muito chã e igual, e desta outra banda é tão áspera a subida, que parece ir-se ao céu, e, tão fragosa, que não podem as gentes passar senão por alguns lugares e portos, e, por esta razão, estão os reis do Malabar tão isentos que, se não fora o empedimento desta serra, el-rei de Narsinga os tivera já tomados...'}
was in fact a reaction to earlier Portuguese attacks on Muslims). Varthema learns that they do so 'secretly, in order that it may not come to the ears of the king of Narsinga, who is a great friend of the Christians, and especially of the Portuguese'. The power of the king is therefore feared, but it can be evaded. The same tension was, of course, present in practically all European principalities at the time.

The most penetrating description was, therefore, the one that measured the degree to which the theoretical power of the king and its effective use differed. The fact that Varthema does not compare the different instruments of political centralization in Europe and Vijayanagara in any detail is a clear limitation, but Varthema's representation (and he had been in Vijayanagara for only a few days) was a good starting-point, insofar as the interest of the Portuguese merchants and conquerors was concerned. In the terms of the aims that informed this particular part of Varthema's narrative, the weakness lies elsewhere. His optimistic claim about the friendship of the ruler of Vijayanagara with the Portuguese conveys the illusions and hopes of the Viceroy Almeida and his successors, rather than any coherent articulation of interests and compatible beliefs.

European travellers may have been deceived by appearances, but that was not as a result of any cultural shock, since they interpreted signs in the same way as the indigenous population was intended to do. There existed a symbolic system of power and of this they clearly became aware. They may have failed to measure the extent to which the institutions of government were not centralized, but

54 Varthema 1863, p. 131. See also p.134: 'I have not written about the manner of living, the customs and faith, the administration of justice, dress and country of Chiavul and Dabul, of Bathacala, nor of the king of Onor, nor of Mangolor, nor of Canonor, nor, indeed, of the king of Cucin, nor of the king of Caicolone, nor of that of Colon, neither have I spoken of the king of Narsinga. Now I will speak of the king here in Calicut, because he is the most important king of all those before mentioned, and is called Samory, which in the pagan language [Malayalam] means God on earth' (the two observations I have underlined are clearly mistaken).
here the narrative conventions to which they were accustomed made them converge with the ritual emphasis of the indigenous language-game, rather than attempt to analyse the different assumptions underlying it. Lamenting the financial difficulties of the monarchy, or the quasi-independent power of great noblemen and other privileged institutions, was not a common theme of geographical literature.\textsuperscript{55} Indeed Varthema described the rulers of Vijayanagara in a way similar to that employed by European medieval and Renaissance chroniclers and historians, all of which tended to overemphasize the power of princes in the late-feudal world.\textsuperscript{56}

Varthema does not dwell on customs and religion, but this is because he confines his account of these things for the whole of South India to his description of Calicut, since he claims that in most other cases 'they live after the manner of those of Calicut'.\textsuperscript{57} This narrative strategy, shared by Duarte Barbosa, shows at the same time the degree of trans-cultural similarity that he was prepared to acknowledge and the degree of local difference he was prepared to sacrifice. Why Varthema and Barbosa chose Calicut is easy to understand: this was the city where Vasco De Gama had originally landed, and in the years during the first Portuguese expeditions it was considered the most important economic and political centre on the Malabar coast. The Portuguese, in fact, first organised their trading system in India as a war against Calicut and in rivalry with Muslim merchants. Varthema's description of Calicut is indeed a model for a full (if rather

\textsuperscript{55} This kind of concern was, instead, expressed in other linguistic contexts, such as parliamentary discussions.

\textsuperscript{56} For instance Muntaner in his Catalan Crònica (finished in 1328), relating to the the kings of Aragon, and Guicciardini in his Italian Storia d'Italia (finished in 1540). For all his lucidity, Guicciardini shares with other Renaissance historians an emphasis on the actions of princes which can be misleading for the purposes of a more general historical reconstruction.

\textsuperscript{57} Varthema 1863, p.124. The statement is repeated with more emphasis in p.134, but the idea that the king of Calicut is more powerful than any other, including the king of Vijayanagara, is certainly wrong.
unsystematic) treatment of ethnological information inserted into a wider narrative based on the adventurous progression of the traveller through different places. I shall develop the analysis of this ethnological discourse in a later section.

For the time being, however, it is important to keep in mind that Varthema also described other peoples, particularly Jews and Muslims, and Damascus impressed him no less than Vijayanagara. There was therefore nothing especially "alien" about the South-Indians, except that they were perceived both as very important (because of the possibilities of trade, plunder and evangelisation that they offered) and not very well known.58 The fact that they were pagans or heathens - i.e. idolaters - did not create any apparent problem of understanding, and the only thing that is remarkable in the early texts is an almost complete lack of interest in the beliefs and faith of those peoples whose material resources, military power, dress and ritual customs attracted such attention. The earliest descriptions, still under the influence of the myth of the Prester John, tend to make them as Christian as possible. And even later, no knowledge of the religious and philosophical foundations of manners and customs was thought to be essential for their practical understanding.

The first Europeans do not seem to have needed racial explanations to understand and evaluate the new people they encountered. Marco Polo noted the fact that in South India people were black as just another curiosity, and emphasized the idea that they appreciate being black, and that they portray their devils as white.59 The accounts of Persian and Deccani Muslims and the one written by the Russian Nikitin are much quicker to express racial prejudice than those written by the Italians and Portuguese who visited

58 At the time of writing his book, Varthema was aware that the maritime route to India had just been discovered by the Portuguese, and few people could afford the risk of travelling by land as he had done.

59 Polo 1938, p.400 (ch. 176).
the Empire. But that does not mean that European racism did not exist. Varthema's sexual anecdotes, for instance, invented or not, often have a racist component, as when the Queen of Rhada in Arabia, driven by desire for his white body, laments that she and all her family are black. Both racial and religious classifications appear central to many other texts written at the time and referring to peoples from Africa or Asia. What characterizes these classifications is their superficiality — until the writings of Jesuits like Valignano there is scant evidence for sophisticated racial arguments — and the fact that they do not appear continuously, but only in particular texts. They do not constitute a necessary way of thinking for the whole of the late-medieval European cultural tradition, nor are they exclusive to it either (a great deal of it was in fact inherited from the Arabs). Dismissive racial or religious classifications are most often found in descriptions and histories written by people with a need to justify a political attitude such as mistrust or violence, or to explain a political event, such as the defeat of an army (and, in the case of the Jesuit Valignano, the failure of a mission). These were not the only possible classifications, of course, but when later the understanding of non-Europeans became a theoretically more complex entreprise, both religion and race (and also climate) provided some of the grounds on which comparative theories were built. Although in several particular cases these classifications may have been inherited, for the Europeans as a whole they constituted only an option among many cultural (linguistic) possibilities, an option whose adoption and development was mainly a political, ethical choice.

Varthema's identity as an independent observer and adventurer was not accompanied by any sophisticated

60 Valignano's racism, and its dependance on feelings about the success of the missionary effort (which he conceived, with many Jesuits, as a sort of spiritual war) are expressed in Valignano (Wicki ed.) 1944.
intellectual concerns on his part. As a consequence, his otherwise original narrative did not produce reflections substantially different from those of Marco Polo or Nicolò Conti. The increase in the number of travel narratives brought about by the Portuguese arrival in the East did however create a pressure to write informative and precise descriptions. In Portuguese India as in Spanish America, 'pen, ink and paper' was an essential element of the overseas administrative machine.61 The complexity of the Portuguese institutional presence also demanded further definition of the religious and racial modes of classification on which systematic policies had to be organized and legitimized. In the Latin Crusades of the previous four centuries the Europeans had had to learn painfully that the distinction between Christians and non-Christians was not sufficient for political purposes - it was they who had first sacked Constantinople, and then failed to unite to defend it against the Turks.62 Thus, before embarking on the analysis of the more detailed ethnological and historical models used to describe the society of South India, it may be useful to look at the implications of the overall Portuguese official approach to Vijayanagara.

61 I borrow the expression from Elliott (L.Bethell ed.) 1987, p.63.

The Portuguese and Vijayanagara: politics, religion and classification

The kingdom of Vijayanagara was the largest political unit the Portuguese found in South India, and one of its central features was its non-Muslim character. This is important because the Portuguese, in common with other medieval Mediterranean nations, had a long tradition of contacts with Muslims. Moreover the ideology of crusade, common to all Western Christianity, was further developed in the Iberian peninsula in relationship with the process of 'reconquista'. The Portuguese expansion along the western coast of Africa in the fifteenth century has often been interpreted as some sort of extension of reconquista values and aims (and something similar has been said about the Castilians in America). There are however significant differences to consider, especially the fact that in this second phase of "feudal" expansion trading activities were much more significant than territorial conquests. The early colonial expansion was not really a continuation of a single process of reconquista. Nevertheless, it is still true that some ideological attitudes persisted, and that the Portuguese and other Europeans who reached the Indian Ocean were used to classifying and conceptualising Muslims with a higher degree of ethical precision than peoples belonging to a non-biblical tradition.

Vasco da Gama's initial reaction to India was to identify the Hindus with Christians which he had been led (somehow too emphatically) to expect, and to recognise in the Muslim communities involved in oceanic trade the natural enemies the Portuguese could and should legitimately fight. Meeting a couple of Tunisian moors who spoke to them in Castilian five minutes after landing in 1

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Calicut certainly helped to dispel the initial feeling of disorientation. Praying in a "Church", surrounded by images of "saints", must also have been reassuring - despite the fact that it was a very peculiar church, the saints had many arms and long teeth, and the priests (in fact brahmans) put some white clay in their heads. It is likely that the Tunisians were responsible for telling the members of the first Portuguese expedition that all non-Muslim rulers were Christians, probably because they perceived that was what the newcomers wanted to hear - they had been told 'vimos buscar cristãos e especiaria'.

It was soon established that there were fewer Christians than expected, despite the important communities of St. Thomas, and distinctions were also made between Arabs, Rumis (Turks) and local Muslims. However, the main ideological pattern for the colonial enterprise would not change substantially in the following decades. The first set of categories applied to these newly-contacted peoples, therefore, followed an apparently religious principle of classification: the Portuguese wanted to find Christians, knew how to deal with Jews and mouros, and finally grouped all the rest together as gentios or 'idolaters'.

The fact that they had to deal with 'gentiles' as important political powers with whom they wanted to negotiate changed European attitudes towards them. The practical problems involved in dealing successfully with the king of Vijayanagara or with the Ming emperors of China were of a different kind to those raised by the Aztecs in Mexico or even the Zamorin of Calicut, who were felt to be more accessible, not to mention the Indians of the Caribbean islands or the populations of the western coast of Africa. The five-hundred men who accompanied Cortés would not have succeeded in taking over Vijayanagara, and

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2 Gama 1945, pp 36-7, 40-1, 81 ff.

3 The roots of the Christian idea of idolatry are of course in the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. This concept defined the identity of Judaism and Christianity vis-a-vis other traditions in the ancient world.
the fleet of ships that bombarded Calicut in 1502 could only operate along the coastal areas. Each case presented its own peculiar possibilities, but one may generalise by saying that Europeans measured their interests against the military strength of the different peoples they encountered, and evolved alternative attitudes according to the result. Thus, the same general concept of 'gentiles' acquired different contents and connotations depending upon the particular relationship the Europeans expected to have with peoples concerned. As a general rule, the weaker the Europeans felt, the more they tried to understand with precision, so that in their accounts those societies perceived to be more powerful easily became the more sophisticated and, at the same time, the more respected.

This is reflected in the space devoted to each 'province' or 'kingdom' in the first systematic general accounts of the East, by Tomé Pires and Duarte Barbosa. The latter, for instance, deals with each coastal city or little state in a few paragraphs, paying some more attention to key entrepots or commercial areas such as Ormuz, Gujarat and Malacca; but then the narrative expands dramatically when he talks about Vijayanagara and the Malabar coast. Attention to Calicut and the south-west coast of India makes a lot of sense, because that was the area where the Portuguese first landed, settled and evolved complicated economic, political and cultural relationships. It was also the area where Duarte Barbosa spent most of his time in India. The interest in Vijayanagara, on the other hand, has to be related to the potential importance that the kingdom appeared to have (especially through its impressive capital city), because the Portuguese presence in it was, and always would be, limited to the few people the king wished to welcome.⁴

⁴ See the space devoted to Vijayanagara in Barbosa 1945, pp 94-114 and Pires 1944, pp 63-5. The history of Portuguese contacts with Vijayanagara has been summarised by Lopes 1897, Sewell 1900, Heras 1925 and Shastry 1981. The main original references were found in the chronicles of Barros, Castanheda, Correa and Couto, the letters relating to Albuquerque (including the
In fact the first references to Vijayanagara recorded by the Portuguese seem to have derived from hearsay. The newcomers formed their first impressions through local intermediaries, and these impressions were strikingly similar to their own later descriptions. The author of the anonymous narrative of the first expedition of Pedro Alvares Cabral, which left Lisbon in 1500, wrote extensively about the people of Calicut and its king, who was clearly an idolater 'although others have believed that they are Christians'. The author had a few ideas about another king who lived beyond the mountains:

in the mountains of this kingdom [the land of Calicut] there is a very great and powerful king who is called Naramega [Narashima], and they are idolaters. The king has two or three hundred wives. The day he dies they burn him and all of his wives with him. And this custom prevails for nearly all the others who are married when they die (...). 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 beings...

The author briefly remarked on some of the themes common to all foreign descriptions of Vijayanagara: the power of the king, his idolatry, the custom of sati, the significance of elephants and horses. The relation of priest Joseph, a Christian from Cranganor in Malabar who returned to Europe with Cabral's fleet, insists on similar (if more obviously militaristic) points:

Towards the mountains and about three hundred miles distant from the sea is to be found a very powerful king, who is named king Narsingh, and he has a great city with three circuits of walls. This king, as priest Joseph told, he has seen with his own eyes. When he goes with an army against his enemies, he takes with him eight hundred elephants, four thousand horses, and innumerable foot...
soldiers, and he says that his camp from north to south is thirty miles long, and from west to east, of equal breadth. Consequently it may be supposed that his kingdom is very extensive (...) is three thousand miles around. Its faith is idolatrous.  

Joseph had already described sati, which explains its omission here. There is little doubt that he and the anonymous writer stressed the same idea of kingly power (they may have actually met, thus Joseph might have been the informant of Cabral's companion). Both of these descriptions found their way into the first collection of travel literature published in Venice, the Paesi novamente ritrovati... of 1507. They serve to establish an important point, namely that the Portuguese first learned about Vijayanagara and identified its prominent features from Indian mediators with whom they shared the same basic descriptive priorities.

Cabral's expedition also took some Franciscan friars to India, and one of them, Luis do Salvador, is known to have visited Vijayangara (probably as a missionary) in 1504 if not earlier. The next two Portuguese expeditions to the Malabar coast, in their dealings with the chiefs of Baticalá (Bhatkal) and Cannanor, realised that the king of Vijayanagara exercised a vague overlordship over some of these petty coastal kingdoms, which they were trying to turn against the Muslim merchants to their own benefit (the Portuguese could not compete economically because they had little to offer in exchange for Indian pepper and other products, therefore they had to rely on aggressive policies in order to secure a trade monopoly). As a result in 1505 the new viceroy, Francisco de Almeida, was dispatched with instructions from king Manuel to establish links with Vijayanagara. Pero Fernandes Tinoco had also been sent from Portugal as the future feitor of Vijayanagara, with the idea of trading in precious stones. As soon as Almeida arrived he was told that an embassy from Vira Narashima was

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7 Ibid. p.113.
waiting for him in Cannanor.

The ruler of Vijayanagara, who at the time had trouble establishing his authority as a king (he was in fact a recent usurper) must have realised that the aggressive foreigners were able to exercise a new power in the sea, and his embassy was facilitated by the visit of Friar Luis, who acted as ambassador and was accompanied by his nephew Pero Leitam. According to the chronicler Castanheda, Vira Narashima offered friendship to the Portuguese king, including the right and facilities to build fortresses on the coast, although he excepted Bhatkal, which had already been rented out to one of his vassals.\(^8\) It seems that the king of Vijayanagara envisaged a cooperation in which he was the land power while the newcomers controlled the sea, thus strengthening both partners against rival powers. This idea was also favoured by some factions within petty kingdoms such as Cannanor, who therefore took an anti-Muslim stance seemingly compatible with the Portuguese strategy.\(^9\) In his embassy Vira Narashima did not fail to send presents, and offered his sister in marriage to a Portuguese prince.

Although Almeida received the ambassadors from Vijayanagara with pomp, he decided not to do anything for the time being, to the frustration of Tinoco, who sent letters complaining about this delay to King Manuel. Tinoco was excited by the descriptions of Friar Luis, full of 'great and miraculous things' which they associated with prospects of conversion, and had determined to write everything he saw and heard in Vijayanagara in a special book for the king. But his letters also reveal divisions among the Portuguese about the priorities to be followed in approaching local powers, divisions soon related to the

\(^8\) Castanheda 1924, II; p. 240-1. See also Shastry 1981, pp 86-7 and Bouchon 1988 (a), pp 77-8.

\(^9\) Bouchon 1988 (a), p.81.
factional distribution of personal loyalties and benefits. Almeida did not make anything of his initial good prospects, perhaps because he was not sure whether or not Vira Narashima had consolidated his own power. It was not until 1508 that Almeida sent Tinoco and Friar Luis to Vijayanagara. Rather than regular trade and the right to send missionaries, Almeida insisted on the furthering of military plans, in particular the right to make a Portuguese fortress in the trading centre of Bhatkal (the single important petty coastal kingdom whose ruler was directly related to the king of Vijayanagara). Vira Narashima's answer was now vague and non-committal. This embassy set a future pattern, which was to link an agreement of friendship with such high demands that it took several decades of fruitless delay and negotiations before anything was established.

It can be argued that the European visitors quickly grasped the strategic importance of the kingdom, especially with regard to the lucrative horse-trade. Varthema, if not Luis do Salvador, must have already informed Almeida that the powerful king needed to import horses from Persia and Arabia for his army, and thus whoever controlled that trade could demand high prices and negotiate the supply. The Portuguese governors and viceroys, on the other hand, soon played with the idea of finding in what they called the kingdom of Narsinga an ally against the the Zamorin of Calicut (his neighbour in the Malabar coast, who had sided with local Muslim merchants rather than with the Portuguese), and, eventually, against the Muslim rulers of Bijapur in Deccan.

The new Governor Affonso d'Albuquerque is commonly considered to be the main strategist of the Portuguese Empire in the East at the time of its rapid (if somehow precarious) military expansion. His carefully balanced attitude towards indigenous powers clearly shows that there

10 For Tinoco's letters, dated 21/11/1505 and 15/1/15[06] respectively see CA II pp 341-4 and III pp 170-7.
existed no absolute ethical principle derived from religious classification when it came to defending the economic and military interests of the Portuguese system in India. And when, in February 1510, the new governor sent the Franciscan friar as his first emissary to the city of Bismaga (Vijayanagara) he intended him to act as a spy as well as a diplomat. The instructions Albuquerque gave him clearly express how he sought to present his position (keeping in mind that he had not yet taken Goa). Luis do Salvador was required to offer the new king Krishna Deva Raya the assistance of the armies of Portugal, and should emphasize the power of his lord, king Manuel. Then he was to declare that the king of Portugal wanted to make friends and trade with all gentile rulers, and fight against their common enemies, the Moors. He suggested a combined attack against the Zamorin of Calicut (although he was Hindu) and then he promised to help Vijayanagara by taking Goa and by selling him the horses, whose source he controlled in Ormuz. Finally, he asked for the right to build fortresses and feitorias all along the coast, including Bhatkal. 11

Albuquerque could relate trade interests and military strategy in a single negotiation. He could at the same time find a fleeting sympathy for the 'idolaters' — insofar as the Muslims, hopeless for conversion, were their common enemies. The truth is that no important missionary effort was ever made in the interior of Vijayanagara, despite the fact that the literature of the Franciscan order later portrayed Luis do Salvador as a missionary martyr who impressed the king of Vijayanagara with his miracles and perseverance. 12 Generally speaking the gentios had always

11 These instructions are reproduced in Braz 1922-3, II, 17; vol I pp 322-4. Soon after Albuquerque sent another ambassador, Gaspar Chanoca, who was (as usual) well received, but failed to obtain Bhaktal or a commitment for concerted action against Bijapur. After the death of Friar Luis, Gaspar Chanoca was sent again. His role is mentioned by Barros D.II, l.V, c.4 and by Castanheda, l.III, c.12.

12 The hagiography of friar Luis, from a 1772 Notícia do que obravão os frades de S. Francisco... is printed in Silva Rego 1947-, V, pp 398-400. There exist details about his missions in India also in the Portuguese chronicles.
been seen as the privileged field for evangelisation, and it was only gradually that the church institutions discovered that they had enough trouble with keeping the indigenous and Portuguese Christian populations clean from the "contaminating influences" of idolaters they were supposed to convert.13

Albuquerque proceeded to conquer Goa, at the suggestion, indeed, of Timoja, an Indian privateer, nominally vassal of the king of Vijayanagara.14 Although Goa had in the past been disputed between Vijayanagara and Bijapur, Albuquerque took it from the Muslim ruler only to create a Portuguese horse-monopoly there, even against the "friendly" ports of Bhatkal and Cannanor.15 Thus, despite

of Castanheda and Correa, in the Commentarios of Braz de Albuquerque, and in the letters of his father, including Tinoco's (see n.10 above). Castanheda wanted him to have been sent primarily as a missionary trying to convert the king, but it is clear that he had been sent with instructions before Gaspar Chanoca, the other ambassador, who only joined him after the conquest of Goa. He may have been accompanied by an interpreter called Lourenço Prego (CA II, p.74).

13 Albuquerque's sympathy for the gentios over the mouros is stated by Braz 1922-3, IV, 28, vol. II p.317: "...a determinação de Albuquerque era entretelo [the Adil Shāh of Bijapur], até ver se o rey de Narsinga queria tomar conclusão no que lhe tinha mandado dizer, porque lhe vinha melhor sua amizade por ser gentio, se com boa determinação quizesse antender na conquista do reyno de Decam, que a do Hidalcão por ser mouro, com o qual não podia ter nunca verdadeira amizade, por amor dos turcos..." For more general attitudes towards the Hindus see Silva Rego 1949; Lach 1965, I, pp 229-245; Pearson 1987, pp 116-130.

14 For the role of Timoja see Shastry 1981, pp 92-121. A similar role was played by the "king" of Gersoppa, nominally also a vassal of the king of Vijayanagara.

15 Albuquerque argues for the advantages of holding Goa and this horse-monopoly in his letters to king Manuel, especially 1 April 1512, 4 December 1513, and 1 January 1514. He is very explicit: 'Goa em vosso poder há-de fazer pagar tributo a el-rei de Narsinga e a el-rei de Daguém (...) porque el-rei de Narsinga, por segurar Batecâla e seus portos e os tratos dos cavalos que vão a sua terra, há-de fazer o que vós quiserdes' (Letter 1/4/1512, Albuquerque 1957, pp 57-8) '...tendo tomado por determinação ser vosso serviço os cavalos de Arábia e da Persia estarem todos em vossa mão (...) primeiro, por favorecer o porto de Goa, e pelos grandes dereitos que pagam os cavalos (...) a outra, por el-rei de Narsinga e os de reino de Daguém desejarem e procurarem a paz e reconhecerem estar em vossa mão sua vitória, porque sem contradição vencerá um ao outro aquele que houver os cavalos da Arábia e da Persia, de que são mui necessitados, e dão muito por eles (...) a outra, por desfazer o porto de Batecâla...' (Letter 4/12/1513, CA I, p. 199 ff). The ambassadors of Vijayanagara of course complained, and in November 1514 demanded that the horses could go to their ports, but to no avail: 'a isso lhe respondy, que m espantava muito del rey de Narsinga comer a remda de sua terra, e nam querer que vosalteza comese os dereitos dos seus (...) que se
the declaration of such a positive attitude towards the non-Muslim would-be Christians, Albuquerque was eventually prepared to let his new friends down.

When Friar Luis reported that the king of Vijayanagara delayed giving an answer because he did not desire to give away Bhatkal, nor to break his friendship with Bijapur for the sake of the Portuguese, Albuquerque opened negotiations with the Adil Shāh, hoping that he would force Krishna Deva Raya to agree to his conditions if only to keep the supply of horses. He may have felt justified because Friar Luis had warned him against trusting men like Timoja, who had apparently written to Krishna Deva Raya offering Goa to Vijayanagara before the Portuguese had consolidated their position there. In any case, it is clear that Albuquerque consciously played with the need for horses of both Vijayanagara and Bijapur turning one against the other. No wonder that, in the meanwhile, Father Luis do Salvador was killed in mysterious circumstances, apparently by a rumi (Turk) on behalf of the Sultan of Bijapur. This did not stop the negotiations. Between 1511 and 1514

cavallos queria, que mandase por eles ao porto de Goa, que sempre lhos dariam amtes que aos mouros' (Letter 27/11/1514, CA I, p.341). In such conditions of monopoly the price of horses was of course exorbitant, and the treatise against the Adil Shāh failed one other time.

16 Braz 1922-3, III, 8, vol II pp 32-3. The passage where he reports Friar Luis's letter to Albuquerque is very important, but presents problems of interpretation. The English translation of the Commentarios given by W.Gray Birch (London 1880, vol. III p.37), based on a 1774 Portuguese edition, does not make sense of the ambiguous passage of the 1576 editio princeps. Lopes 1897 believed that Krishna Deva Raya delayed the agreement with the Portuguese because he thought they were negotiating with the Adil Shāh, but I have interpreted that he himself had reached an momentary peace with the Adil Shāh, which he did not wish to jeopardize, and was waiting to see who ended up with controlling Goa. This would fit with Barros D.II, 1.V, c.3, who reports on his answer to the embassy by Gaspar Chanoca a few months earlier, and with Castanheda II, 12, who explains that the king of Vijayanagara was not really very pleased with the Portuguese taking Goa, because he feared losing the supply of horses that the mouros had never denied him. This suggests that the fluctuating opposition between Hindus and Muslims did not really interfere with trading conditions until the arrival of the Portuguese. Correa II, 4 and 22 also suggests that the important issue with the Portuguese was all about the monopoly of horses, independently from the fact that there were land-based wars between Vijayanagara and the Deccan - an altogether different kind of conflict.

17 See above n.15.
Albuquerque and Krishna Deva Raya exchanged several further embassies, often at the Indian's initiative, but it was obvious that they all were keeping contacts with their "common enemies" in order to strengthen their respective positions in negotiation. Whenever Albuquerque detected that the king of Vijayanagara was serious, he raised the stakes of his demands, and finally met with further ambiguity and delays. 18

The Portuguese were rivals of the mouros in their attempt to secure good trading conditions from the local powers, but for the same reason they were prepared to negotiate with Muslims and betray Hindus when it was in their best interest. Albuquerque had to write to the king explaining that it was not possible to defeat the mouros by trading with local Christians and gentios alone, because their best cities were filled with Muslim merchants who were richer and, therefore, too powerful to be just ignored. 19 But the Portuguese were not alone in playing this sort of game, and as far as war and trade were concerned there was more cultural understanding than cultural shock between the Asians and the Western newcomers. Romila Thapar has summarised the situation in XVth century India, 'A Hindu ruler saw nothing unusual in allying with and obtaining aid from a Muslim ruler in order to fight another Hindu ruler, and the same held true for other Hindu dynasties'. 20 Despite the fact that the defence of Hindu identity was part of the political mythology of Vijayanagara, its rulers were actually successful insofar as, acting as one power among many, they welcomed methods and allies from the Deccani Sultanates. On the other hand, they were eventually destroyed when Rama

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18 According to the information contained in Albuquerque's letters and Commentarios, this stalemate happened at least three times: in 1510-11, in late 1513/early 1514, and in late 1514. See also Lopes ed. 1897.


20 Thapar 1966, p.281.
Raya, failing to maintain this flexible attitude, actually forced the Muslim neighbours to unite against a common enemy (which happened to be the only surviving important Hindu kingdom in the peninsula). This led to a disastrous defeat in 1565.21

In this context, the Portuguese may have been original in claiming a lordship over the sea, but not in trying to use military power to improve trading opportunities. The lack of success of any long-lasting alliance against Bijapur was due to the fact that, quite often, either the Portuguese or the Hindus preferred to agree with the Sultanate when circumstances dictated. The idea of a Christian alliance with Vijayanagara (not unlike the idea of a Christian-Mongol alliance against the Saracens in the XIIIth century, or a European-Persian alliance against the Ottoman Turks between the XVth and the XVIIth centuries) was always available, but it only occasionally took a practical form. Embassies were exchanged on several occasions after 1505, especially when Albuquerque was in command between 1509 and 1515, but no formal agreement was reached until many years later, in 1547, perhaps because the Portuguese could not really secure a monopoly of Persian and Arabian horses in Goa, and this fundamental weakness made their political demands (such as a fort in Bhatkal, on which Almeida and Albuquerque repeatedly insisted) excessive.

The lack of articulation of the alliance between the Portuguese and Vijayanagara was due to the fact that systematic opposition to the mouros did not benefit either party. Although in 1548 the prime minister and virtual usurper Rama Raya and viceroy João de Castro tried to implement their agreement against the king of Bijapur, it can be said that an intermittent presence of Portuguese feitores specialised in horse trading, and vague rumours that circulated in Europe (for instance in 1511) about the

21 A traditional account in N.Sastri 1955. Rama Raya's policies, which led to the defeat at Talikota, are newly assessed in Stein 1989, pp 113-21.
conversion to Christianity of the ruler of a fabulously rich kingdom of Bisnagar, constitute a more faithful summary of the results of the diplomatic exchange between the Portuguese and Vijayanagara than the very terms of the circumstantial treaty signed in 1547.\footnote{The contents of the 1547 treatise are published in Lopes ed. 1897. Soon after destroying Dabul the viceroy João de Castro sent Tristão de Paiva, a "casado" from Goa, to negotiate its implementation. He seems to have been initially successful, to judge by his two letters sent from Bisnagá in February 1548, and published with the Coleção de San Lourenço (D.U.P. vol VIII, pp 432-8).

\footnote{I am sending a messanger to Narsinga, and also some horses to the king of Narsinga to represent him the deed of Goa (...) and to see whether with this deed of Goa we can take away from him the credit they give to the Turks and the fear they have for them, and make him see that we are as good fighting in the land as we are in the sea, and thus I shall see whether I can make him move his armies against the Turks of Daquém \textit{and wish for our true friendship} (my it.) Letter from 22/12/1510, Albuquerque 1957, p.10.}}

One can illustrate the political character of the attitude of the Portuguese leaders by referring to the letters sent by Albuquerque to King Manuel. In December 1510, soon after taking Goa, he insisted upon the desirability of winning the king of Narsinga as an ally against the mouros. His plans were to ask for a site on which to build a fortress and to organise combined military operations against the Muslims of the Deccan and the Malabar coast. In exchange, he offered Krishna Deva Raya exclusive access to the Arabian and Persian horses imported by sea. Thus:

\begin{quote}
mando a Narsinga um mensageiro, e mando alguns cavalos a el-rei de Narsinga e representar-lhe o feito de Goa (...) e ver se com este feito de Goa lhe podemos tirar o crédito que tem nos Turcos e medo que lhe hão, e haverem que somos homens que faremos tão bons feitos na terra como no mar, e assim ver se o posso fazer abalar seus arraias contra os Turcos de Daquém [meaning the Muslim rulers of the Deccani kingdom, in particular Bijapur], e quererem nossa amizade verdadeira (My it.)\footnote{I am sending a messanger to Narsinga, and also some horses to the king of Narsinga to represent him the deed of Goa (...) and to see whether with this deed of Goa we can take away from him the credit they give to the Turks and the fear they have for them, and make him see that we are as good fighting in the land as we are in the sea, and thus I shall see whether I can make him move his armies against the Turks of Daquém \textit{and wish for our true friendship} (my it.) Letter from 22/12/1510, Albuquerque 1957, p.10.}
\end{quote}

The value of such a true friendship is better understood by looking at a subsequent passage in the same letter, where Albuquerque explains the strategic value of Goa:
em mui pouco tempo poderiam as vossas gentes entrar o reino de Daquém e de Narsinga, porque a força dos Turcos só por si não é muito grande, se os gentios não fossem seus súbditos e não andassem na guerra com eles; e os gentios são homens cheios de novidades, e se acharem capitão português que dé escala franca e soldo, são logo cem mil páes com eles, e tomam a renda da terra em pagamento de seus soldos; e os Turcos são deviós entre si; toda sua forga é páes gentios (my it.) 24

The observation that the 'gentios' love novelties is a derogatory one because it implies political (and moral) weakness, and was commonly used in this sense by Renaissance historians such as the Florentine Guicciardini. 25

Albuquerque realised that the Muslim military aristocracy depended on the cooperation of the Hindu population to remain in power, and hoped to devise a scheme by which the Portuguese, if they could win a few battles against divided enemies, would be able to substitute them as rulers of the country. The prospect proved to be beyond their powers (the main point of Albuquerque's letters was in fact to justify a militaristic approach in the Orient and to ask for more armed men from Portugal). Even the more limited idea of controlling the oceanic trade and establishing a monopoly of the spice-market eventually failed. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there was a manipulative attitude towards Oriental peoples that went beyond the self-professed belief in abstract, moral, religiously-based principles. Albuquerque in South India, like Hernán Cortés in Mexico, shows that the agents of

24 'In a very short time your men could enter into the kingdom of Daquem and of Narsinga, because the strength of the Turks is not by itself very big, were it not that the gentiles are their subjects and go to war with them; and the gentiles are people full of novelties, and if they found a Portuguese captain who gave them free scale and pay, there would then be one-hundred thousand footmen with him, and they take the rent from the land for pay; and the Turks are divided among themselves, and all their strength consists of gentile footmen' (my it.) Ibid. p.11.

25 For instance, in his History of Italy, on the Neapolitans: 'such is the nature of the people, who are inclined to hope more than they ought to, and tolerate less than is necessary, and to be always dissatisfied with the present state of affairs. Especially is this true of the inhabitants of the kingdom of Naples, who among all the peoples of Italy are most noted for their instability and thirst for innovations' (Guicciardini 1984, p.90). Also in his Ricordi, about the popolo in general (Guicciardini 1977, n° 140, p.153).
Christian kings justified actions on the grounds of 'machiavellian' ideas even though European jurists and theologians had not yet confronted them as principles of political thought, and tried to deny their implications.  

Furthermore, this 'political' way of interpreting non-Christians and non-Europeans in fact unified them with the rest of humanity, insofar as a classification according to religion was replaced by a manipulative anthropological conception. This anthropology was implicit in the use of political narratives—especially historiography—which had been inherited from the classical and medieval traditions, and therefore the extension of this language to new peoples made them appear as the same kind of men.

Albuquerque understood the convenience of making agreements with indigenous powers, but insisted that no trust should be placed in them: 'porque a amizade que assentardes com qualquer rei ou senhor da India, se a não segurardes, tende, Senhor, por certo que volvendo-lhe as costas, os tendes logo por inimigos'. Friendship ultimately depended on power, in particular the ability to appear militarily strong (and, to achieve this, in the long term it was necessary actually to be militarily strong). These are again the same sort of ideas we find expressed in contemporary political thinking.

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26 I am merely referring to some of the famous ideas expressed in The Prince, such as that 'all armed prophets have succeeded, and those disarmed have sunk', or the idea that the honest is better defined after the useful. I am also referring to a general attitude towards political situations based on the assumption that certain things can be predicted because the nature of men is somehow understandable (for instance, by looking at history and at personal experience, and deriving from these observations general laws). I do not of course intend to say that Albuquerque had worked out any of the subtle aspects of Machiavelli's ideas.

27 'Because the friendship you may establish with any Indian king or lord, my Lord, unless there are safeguards, you can be sure that as soon as you turn your back you will have them for enemies' Letter from 1/4/1512, Albuquerque 1957. p.30.

28 The idea appears in Machiavelli's The Prince and in many other contemporary texts, sometimes outside Italy (for instance Spain— but of course the practice of princes such as Alfonso V, king of Aragon and Naples, or his nephew Ferdinand II of Aragon, the Catholic king, was often inspiration
Portugal should trust good soldiers and good fortresses rather than good words, and this conception explicitly included the ruler of Vijayanagara:

E el rei de Narsinga não tem ele amizade e paz convosco? e ajuda o Sabaio [the Muslim captain who governed Goa for the sultan of Bijapur] contra nós secretamente; e dentro em Besnigar não matou um rumi frei Luis? e não fez nisso nenhuma cousa; e na primeira vez que nos os Mouros entraram Goa, aí matámos um seu capitão e pesou-lhe mui bem como a tomada de Goa, e há mui grande medo de Vossa Alteza.29

Fear backed by occasional display of violence was to achieve the political aims which friendship alone could not: 'Quem derribou a soberbia do reino de Daquém, e Narsinga ter-nos tão grande temor, senão terdes-lhe tomado Goa, que está metido entre eles?'30 This political conception was not exclusive to a single Governor such as Albuquerque. Portuguese of more humble origins, for instance the anonymous interpreter and ambassador who wrote the illuminating Lembrança d algumas cousas que se passaram quando António de Brito e Diogo Pereira foram a Bengala (1521), often display a similar political rationality in which the non-European other is integrated. The point is not merely that the religious classification was replaced by a more general political conception of a manipulative character, but, more precisely, that the complicated relationships of interest and power which were established with diverse peoples were articulated at the cultural level by a sophisticated game of shifting identities. The more obvious ideological divisions were therefore no more than

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29 'And the king of Narsinga, does not he have friendship and peace with you? and he secretly helps the Sabaio against us; and inside Besnigar, did not a rumi kill friar Luis? and he did not do anything about it; and the first time that we took Goa from the Moors, we killed one of his captains, and he felt very bad about the taking of Goa, and has much fear of your majesty' Albuquerque 1957 p.29.

30 'What pulled down the arrogance of the kingdom of Daquem, and made Narsinga be so much afraid of us, but the fact that we took Goa, which is placed right between them?' Ibid p. 61.
the starting point for a continuous exercise of conceptual subversion and recreation.

What strikes the reader of documents such as the *Lembrança*... is not the clever apology for Portuguese piracy, nor the obvious self-advancement of the author, but more interestingly the creative elaboration of new language-games in accordance with situations of conflict and dialogue with local powers. This implies that a basis was being defined for the mutual understanding of peoples with different cultural backgrounds and, moreover, that such basis was not stable, nor did it depend on the attitude of a single subject. In fact, individual identities, European or otherwise, were ultimately absorbed by the language games they tried to learn, shape and control. In this sense the disquieting individual who changed dress and religion, like one Cristovão Jusarte in Bengal, was not doing anything substantially different from the members of the rival embassy who preferred to present themselves as faithful servants voicing the truthful friendship offered to the Sultan by their lord the Christian king of Portugal.31

Two problems concerning the arrival of the Portuguese in Asia which were suggested at the beginning of this case-study needed to be tackled with further precision. To what extent was the recognition of the non-Muslim character of the Empire of Vijayanagara influential in shaping attitudes towards it? For what reason was the political unity of a foreign society considered important by the European travellers? I have attempted to clarify these questions by looking at the approach of the leaders of the Portuguese expansion towards Vijayanagara. On the basis of the letters of Viceroy Albuquerque it has been made clear that the religious principle of classification of foreign societies was dependant on a political rationality which was shared by indigenous and invading powers alike. This

political rationality operated on the basis of measuring one's power against the enemy's in an attempt to further profitable activities, either trade (regulated by local customs and laws, and exceptionally by international treaties) or tribute and plunder, linked to the claims of political dominion.

A further question remains. How does this "practical rationality" in which men, because of their nature, can be made friends but not trusted, relate to the image of the Orient transmitted to the West in descriptive narratives? This I shall next try to answer by examining the ethnological models relating to south Indian societies (including Vijayanagara) developed by men such as the escrivão de feitor of Cannanor Duarte Barbosa, a contemporary of Vira Narashima and Krishna Deva Raya and also one of the first Portuguese to speak Malayalam, the language of the Malabar coast.32

32 At least since the time of Ramusio there has been a strong tendency to confuse two individuals called Duarte Barbosa. One of them was the son of Diogo Barbosa, a servant of Alvaro Bragança who participated in the third Indian expedition led by João de Nova in 1501. He was the captain of a ship sent by his master, left a feitor in Cannanor, and then returned to Portugal (Barros, D.I. l.V, c.10). He later followed Alvaro Bragança to Castile, settled in Seville (where he was made Alcaide of the castle) and welcomed Magellan at his home. Magellan married his daughter. This faction of dissatisfied Portuguese who had tried to benefit from the oriental trade organised the first expedition round the world for Charles I of Castile, the rival of their natural lord. Duarte Barbosa, Diogo's son, accompanied Magellan in 1519, and died in Cebu a few days after him, in 1521 (Barros, D.III, l.V, c.8-10. The most complete report of the expedition is Pigafetta's). The second Duarte Barbosa was the nephew of Gonçalo Gil Barbosa, a member of the Cabral expedition sent in 1500 who became the first feitor of Cochin (Barros D.I, l.V, c.8). In 1502 Gonçalo Gil was transferred to Cannanor, where he organised the feitoria until 1505, when he left for Portugal at the command of a ship. In Cannanor he was accompanied by Duarte, escrivão de feitoria, who learnt Malayalam and became an important interpreter (Bouchon 1988 (a), p.62). Despite one or two trips to Portugal, Duarte Barbosa remained attached to Cannanor, and occasionally to Cochin and Calicut, but found it difficult to get a promotion in the feitorias, perhaps because he did not earn the trust of Albuquerque. He thus in 1513 wrote to the king against the Governor's militaristic policies. His name is often mentioned by Correa and by Albuquerque, with whom (despite initial misgivings) he collaborated between 1514 and 1517. This man, considered by both Correa and Barros as a specialist in Malabar language and customs, is of course the author of the Livro, finished between 1516 and 1518. It is not possible to identify him with Magellan's brother-in-law because in 1520 and 1527 he was signing documents in Cannanor (published in CA, in Silva Rego 1947- and in Bouchon 1988(a). He is mentioned by Barros still as escrivão at Cannanor in 1529. A somewhat misleading guide to Barbosa's biography by M.L.Dames is in Barbosa 1918-21, and the most updated references are in Bouchon 1988(a). G.Schurhammer in 1960 noticed a third Duarte Barbosa who was a pilot (Bouchon 1988(a), p.73 n.79).
Figure 1: Early sixteenth century view of Cannanor, lithograph by J. Pedroso Gomes da Silva from a drawing made by Gaspar Correa for his *Lendas da India* (LimaFelner ed. 1858-64). Correa, who spent most of his life in Portuguese India, is considered a particularly valuable chronicler for his attention to detail.

Na costa do mar passando esta cidade de Balaerpartão, contra o sul, está uma mui grande cidade que chaman Cananor, de muitos mouros e gentios. São mercadores, têm muitas naus grandes e pequenas, tratam em toda sorte de mercadorias para o grande reino de Cambai, Ormuz, Charamandel, Dabul, Chaul, Banda, Goa, Ceilão, e para as ilhas de Maldiva. Nesta cidade tem ei-rei, nosso senhor, uma fortaleza e feitoria de trato, com muita paz amor e segurança, derredor da qual fortaleza está uma vila de cristãos da terra, casados, com mulheres e filhos, que depois dela feita se converteram à nossa sata Fé e convertem cada dia. (Duarte Barbosa, *Livro em que dá relação de que viu e ouviu no Oriente*, 1516). It seems that Cannanor was not always such a peaceful place, however - see Bouchon 1988, pp 80-97 and 166-171.
The practice of ethnography: Indian customs and castes

The Portuguese presence in Asia after 1498 entailed an important leap both in the amount of information regarding oriental societies which was available, and in the variety of generic forms it took. South India, and in particular the Malabar coast, was to become one of the better mapped areas of the Renaissance world.¹ Much more clearly than in the relatively hazy reports of Marco Polo, who fully described the same areas, it is in the narratives of Varthema, Barbosa, Pires, Paes and Nuniz that one finds the obvious precedents of such "modern" ethnographical treatises as the *Character, manners and customs of the people of India and of their institutions religious and civil* (1806), written in French by the Abbé Dubois, who in 1793 fled the French Revolution and sought material and spiritual refuge in exotic missions.² Major Wilks, acting president of Mysore, wrote in 1807 advising the use of the manuscript as a manual for the servants of the English Company:

> Every Englishman residing in India is interested in the knowledge of those peculiarities in the Indian castes which may enable him to conduct with the natives the ordinary intercourse of civility and business without offending their prejudices.³

The Portuguese Pires, Barbosa, Paes and Nuniz would have agreed wholeheartedly, and this sets them apart as an altogether new category of "colonial ethnographers". They were in fact those who introduced to Europe an

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¹ This however was only true within a manuscript tradition that did not always come to print (Nuniz and Paes remained unpublished), or appeared relatively late (it was not until forty years after they were written that Ramusio published extracts from Barbosa and Pires). But despite its limited political importance, Calicut still figured in late Renaissance cosmographies of the kind of Giovanni Botero's, together with China, Persia, Turkey, or the Great Mogor of India.

² Dubois 1879.

³ Ibid. p.viii.
understanding of India as a caste society. I shall here try to uncover the cultural basis on which their ethnographical practice rested.

While Marco Polo and Varthema may have been motivated by the desire to "sell" information, to the Great Khan or to Venetian and Portuguese merchants, they were also engaged in selling a romance: Marco Polo sold marvels, and Varthema the idea of the self as traveller and adventurer. We know little of Pires, an apothecary in the service of the crown who was now supervising the spice-trade in the feitoria of Malacca, and head of the first Portuguese embassy sent to China - from where he was never allowed to return. We know equally little about Barbosa, escrivão de feitoria of Cannanor and occasional interpreter for Albuquerque, or Paes, horse-trader in the company of Cristovão de Figueiredo, an important casado from Goa, or Nuniz, another horse-trader and probably, earlier, escrivão de fazenda. This is however enough to identify the authors of these empirical descriptions as members of a fairly homogenous social group of settled merchants and crown officials in Portuguese India.

These men were nominally agents to the crusading and

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4 On Tomé Pires see Pires (A.Cortesão ed.) 1944. In Malacca Pires was escrivão and contador de feitoria, and vedor das drogarias. On Duarte Barbosa see my discussion above. On Paes and Nuniz see Sewell 1900. Nothing certain is known of Domingos Paes or Fernão Nuniz outside their involvement with trading expeditions to Vijayanagara, but Nuniz may also be identified with the Escrivão de fazenda who, according to the chronicler Castanheda, was asked by the influential vedor de fazenda Afonso Mexía to read the document by which an alternative succession to the Governorship of Portuguese India was opened in 1526 in Cochin, so that it fell on Lopo Vaz de Sampaio instead of Pero de Mascarenhas, the captain of Malacca. See Castanheda 1.VII, chs. 11 and 12 (1933, pp.24-26). Neither Barros (D. IV, l.I, ch.1) nor Correa (1862, l.III. vol. III pp 97-104) mention this Fernão Nuniz, whose role must have been relatively unimportant. It was probably the same Fernão Nunes who was escrivão de feitor of Calicut in 1512, who in 1533 was provedor-mor dos defuntos in Cochin, and who in 1538 was in a list to make a loan to the king of Portugal (Schurhammer 1977 p.669). In 1541 he signed a document in Goa by which the vedor de fazenda and provisional governor of the city, F.Rodrigues de Castello Branco, appropriated the rents from the Hindu temples (Silva Rego 1949, II, pp 293-303). In 1547 he was a casado and purchased the position of almoxarife of the city. He was alive in 1565 (Schurhammer 1977 p.669).

5 It can also be observed that a few names—a few families—appear repeatedly in the contemporary documents and chronicles relating to Portuguese India, suggesting a substantial degree of social homogeneity.
missionary ideals of the crown, but actually tended to develop their own contacts and interests locally, to the point of rejecting the more militaristic aspects of the Portuguese policy in the East, of the kind developed by Albuquerque. 6 There was of course a high degree of factionalism, related to the distribution of lucrative jobs, which may have motivated support or opposition to a particular Governor or Viceroy. 7 However, it is possible here to identify, in more general terms, the early forms of institutional support and political motivation that stimulated the creation of such ethnographical models. Culturally, they rested on common-sense descriptions which used everyday language and developed its narrative possibilities independently of traditional literary and classificatory models. It was the engagement with the local languages and language-games - Barbosa learnt Malayalam and Nuniz probably Kannada - and not with Ptolemy, whom Pires openly declared to be irrelevant to his purposes, that led the creation of this colonial ethnography.

In the medieval traditions, Latin or Eastern, human culture (art, science and law) was defined primarily in relationship to religion. However, Barbosa, Pires, Paes and Nuniz developed an ethnographical practice in which the behaviour of the people (their customs) was described with more detail than their doctrines or beliefs. They followed in the steps of Marco Polo, Conti and Varthema, but more systematically because they wrote to meet the aims of a system of European institutions implanted in foreign lands. Thus in their descriptions of lands and peoples culture came to be judged, effectively, as civilized behaviour, and ranked hierarchically according to political and economic success. Law was not presented as a system, but rather as

6 Thus Barbosa openly wrote against this policy to king Don Manuel in January 1513. See CA III, pp 49-50. Pires, on the other hand, seems to support a more aggressive approach, but the situation in Malacca was more precarious. See Pires 1944, pp 323-4.

7 Thus, Pires seems to have achieved direct favour from Albuquerque, which may help explain his different stance.
a political guarantee to safety, peace and fair dealing. History was not dismissed as a source of definition and understanding, but was usually developed into an altogether different genre. As "geographers" these merchants were interested in particular conditions, and therefore they provided quantitative information. The curious traveller, Varthema for instance, felt free to exaggerate to an extent that contrasts with the detailed moderation of Tomé Pires, for instance. Pires may never have been in Vijayanagara, but his description is perhaps the most "watered-down" version of the rhetorical common-place about the greatness of the city:

The kingdom of Narsinga [Narsimgu] is large and very important. [Follows a description of its limits]. In older times the kingdom of Narsinga was much greater than it is now (...) the king is a heathen [gemtio] of Kanara, and on the other hand he is a kling [guelim]; 9 in his court the language is mixed, but his natural speech is Kanarese [Kannada]. The king is a warrior and he often goes to field with more than forty thousand mounted men and a large number on foot. He must have five hundred elephants, two hundred of which are for war. 9 He is always at war, sometimes with the Deccan, sometimes with Orissa, and sometimes inside his own country. He has great captains and many mercenaries. When he rests it in in Vijayanagara [Biznagar], a city of twenty thousand inhabitants,10 which lies between two mountain ranges. The houses there are not usually very much ornamented. The king’s houses or palaces are large and well built, and the king has a good following of noblemen and horsemen. He has great lords with him and he is held in great respect. There are a thousand girl entertainers in his court, and four or five thousand men of the same profession. These are Klings and not Kanarese... 11

8 This means that ethnically and linguistically he is both Kannada and Telegu. The other major Dravidian group of the Empire was the Tamil.

9 According to the Paris ms., with which Ramusio here agrees. As observed by the editor of Pires 1944, A.Cortesão, the Lisbon ms. has 300.000 mounted men and 800 elephants - much more enthusiastic. All the copies of Pires' account now available are imperfect.

10 The Lisbon manuscript here says 50.000. On the other hand, 20.000 vizinhos may be best translated as 20.000 households (like Ramusio, who translated 20.000 fuochi).

11 Pires 1944, pp 64-5. I do not give the manuscript version (ibid. p. 351) because the Portuguese is difficult to read, but I have included within square brackets the key words. The 1944 edition by A. Cortesão includes both the Portuguese version (based on the Paris ms.) and an English translation which notes the variants.
One important aspect of these Portuguese descriptions is that they can refer with relative familiarity to local concepts of ethnic and social classification. Thus Pires here distinguished the kanarese from the klings – the Kannada from the Telegu. Barbosa also explains that in Malabar they all speak Malama, Malayalam, and that the language of the chatis from Coromandel -Tamil- differs from Malayalam 'as it is with the Castilians and Portuguese'.12 In their description of castes in Malabar, both Pires and Barbosa clearly distinguish the Brahmans and the Nayars, the religious and military dominant groups. Although the classification and treatment of other groups becomes less homogeneous, the attempt to be precise cannot be doubted – not when Barbosa distinguishes as many as eighteen castes, 'dezoito leis de gentios naturales'.13

The word most used by Barbosa to distinguish these social groups is "law". The implicit meaning of this concept is in Barbosa's report the formal recognition of a social regulation which thus defined a limited group, rather than the looser idea of accepted and characteristic behaviour, for which he uses "custom" or "use", or, at the other extreme, the written constitution of a kingdom and the particular commands and regulations issued by a

12 Barbosa 1946, p.120 and p.158 / Barbosa 1918, p.73.

13 Barbosa 1946, p.120. This Portuguese edition amalgamates the Portuguese manuscript –an irregular copy- with Ramusio, without taking account of a copy of the Spanish translation of 1524 (Barcelona manuscript). This translation was made by the Portuguese Diego Ribeiro, royal cosmographer of Charles I of Castile, and the Genoese ambassador Martin Centurion, and was the version Ramusio translated into Italian (it was also from the Spanish that Ramusio translated Varthema back into Italian!). It was probably meant to be used in the junta of Badajoz-Elvas, in which the emperor Charles I of Castile and the king of Portugal tried to settle their colonial dispute concerning the discovery and possession of the Moluccas. This version also may have helped Diego Ribeiro when he composed the second Borgia map in 1529. The best modern edition is in English (Dames ed. 1918), since it indicates all these sources. The faithfulness of Barbosa's analysis of caste is defended by Dames ed. 1918, II, pp 70-1. Dames seeks to provide modern identifications and proves the extraordinary reliability of Barbosa.

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temporal sovereign power. This use of the concept of "law" was in fact analogous to the distinction between different religious communities in the biblical tradition, Jews, Christians and Muslims. The *gentios*, however, have "different laws within a common law", for instance in Narsinga 'há tres leis de gentios, que cada uma delas tem muita diferença de lei sobre si, e outro-sim os costumes eles são mui desviados uns dos outros'. They however are exclusive and transmit from generation to generation — in particular the eighteen "laws" of Malabar:

e cada uma é sobre si, sem se poderem tocar nem misturar em casamento; e, agora estas dezoito leis dos gentios naturais do Malabar, que vos já disse, há outras de gentes estrangeiras mercadores e tratantes da terra...

Which is the same observed by Pires:

In Malabar a son cannot be more important than his father (...) and a Nayar is always a Nayar, and in all crafts, and among jesters, singers and sorcerers, the son has to follow his father's profession.

Pires and Barbosa then emphasize rules of untouchability and hierarchy, marriage, professional activities and special prohibitions (such as those concerning food). What is striking about this observation, and more generally about this group of sources, is the extent to which one finds parallels in the descriptions.

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14 Occasionally, Barbosa uses the word sorte or casta. See Barbosa 1946, pp 63 and 140. Pires, on the other hand, has no specific concept for "caste"—nor even lei—, and uses sometimes "people" or "nation". His account is however much more original when he describes areas further East, such as Java or the spice islands, since he spent most of his time in Malacca, and eventually China.

15 Barbosa 1946, p.107 / Barbosa (Dames ed.) 1918, I, p.212: 'there are three classes of Heathen, each one of which has a very distinct rule of its own, and also their customs differ much one from the other'.

16 Barbosa 1946, p.157. / Barbosa 1918, II, p.70: '...each one separate and unable to touch others or marry with them; and besides these eighteen castes of the Heathen who are natives of Malabar (...) there are others of outlandish folk, traders and merchants in the land...'

17 Pires 1944, p.72.
This can of course be explained because of the social homogeneity of authorship that I have observed. However, it is also necessary to take account of the fact that these writers were engaged in an original process of decodification of indigenous rules. They had the advantage of a long and direct experience, but clearly they also benefited from a serious attempt to "map" difference in order to guide the behaviour of the Portuguese newcomers.

With the exception of the main towns such as Goa and the missions, the Portuguese could not really try to change the indigenous ways of living, but sought instead to reach a series of agreements with local powers that would give them the dominant role. It was only on the sea that the Portuguese could consider themselves in full command. The image we have of early sixteenth century Cannanor, for instance, drawn by the chronicler Gaspar Correa, is that of an indigenous town by the beach, under the palm-trees, to which a foreign fortress has been superimposed, with its little port, walls, tower, hospital, Churches, feitoria and Christian town.\textsuperscript{18} Correa's perspective emphasized these Portuguese constructions, as his voluminous \textit{Lendas da India} emphasized the deeds and misdeeds of his fellow countrymen. But the background of a different cultural reality is something which imposes a presence even if only by extending its boundaries outside the picture. It cannot be simply written out of the imagination, and therefore must be mapped.

It is from this perspective - living in the "Portuguese quarter" of a petty indigenous kingdom shared by various socio-cultural communities - that Barbosa, for many years escrivão de feitor at Cannanor, approached his subject matter. The statement of his aims and method in his preface (which only appears in Ramusio's Italian edition), may be valid for the whole group of sources:

\textsuperscript{18} See figure 1. On Cannanor in the early sixteenth century see Bouchon 1988 (a).
Avendo io Odoardo Barbosa, gentiluomo della molto nobile città di Lisbona, navigato gran parte della gioventú mia nell'India (...) e andato anche fra terra in molti e vari paesi vicini a quella, e in questo tempo veduto e inteso varie e diverse cose, conoscendole maravigliose e stupende, che mai per li nostri antichi sono stato vedute né intese, per beneficio universale ho voluto scriverle, si come di giorno in giorno già le veddi e intesi, sforzandomi de dichiarare in questo mio libro li luoghi e li confini di tutti quei regni dov'io son stato personalmente o da altri degni di fede ne intesi, e qual sia regno e paese di Mori o qual di Gentili e lor costumi, non lasciando i traffichi e le mercanzie che si trovano in quelli, e dove nascono le cose, dove si conducono...19

This text is extremely revealing because it contains briefly most of the key elements necessary for an understanding of the genre: its derivation from a personal experience of travel, the fact that it deals with what is different (varie e diverse cose (...) maravigliose e stupende) as defined by tradition (li nostri antichi). But it also provides, schematically, the main categories which define the subject matter of the text; that is, towns and kingdoms, their religion and customs, and the traffic of merchandise. It even defines the identity of the author - a citizen of Lisbon - and its audience - universal. Furthermore, it goes on to express a concern for empirical reliability, based on a clear distinction between what has been seen by the author and hear-say:

Imperocché, oltre a quelle cose che ho vedute, io mi sono sempre dilettato di dimandare a Mori, a cristiani, a Gentili, dell'usanzè e costumi di paesi de'quali essi erano pratici, le quali informazioni nondimeno ho voluto

19 Ramusio 1978, II, p.543. There is no good reason to suspect that Ramusio (or anyone else) would have interpolated this preface, dated 1516, although it is clear that both his version and the other manuscripts contain later additions. The author himself may have revised the manuscript. / Barbosa 1918, I, p.1: 'I Duarte Barbosa, a gentleman of the right noble city of Lisbon, having sailed for a great part of my youth over the seas of India (...) and having travelled by land as well through many and divers regions lying in the neighbourhood thereof, and having seen and heard at that time many things which I esteemed marvellous and astonishing inasmuch as they had never been seen or heard by our forefathers, have resolved to write them down for the profit of all men, even as I saw them or understood them day by day, endeavouring to set forth in this my book the towns and the bounds of all those kingdoms where I have either been myself or as to which I have learnt from trustworthy persons, stating which are the kingdoms of the Moors and which of the Heathen, and the customs thereof. Nor have I omitted the trade of those countries and the kinds of merchandise found therein, and the places where they are produced, and whither they are carried'.

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Of course different authors pursued this same programme with their particular emphasis. So, while Pires seemed to restrain his admiration for the greatness of Vijayanagar by noting that the houses are not very ornamented, and by giving numerical assessments of the size of population and armies which are not wildly above the average, Barbosa seems to have insisted on the fact that the inhabitants are, in most respects, "almost like us" - rich, tawny, prosperous and well organized, rather than naked, black and poor. For instance, 'os próprios naturais da terra são gentios (...) são homens baços quase brancos (...) são homens de boas estaturas quase das nossas fisionomias'. Later, 'O rei e gentes da terra casam quase à nossa maneira, e têm lei de casamento...'

This last observation is meant to contrast with what Barbosa said about the people of Calicut, who have no 'lei de casamento'. Although he also described many substantial differences between 'us' and 'them', these were not used to create a dramatic distance, and the most obvious condemnations of vain and cruel customs appear to be additions by Ramusio.

More generally, Barbosa's underlying message was that

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20 Ibid. / Ibid. p.2: 'Inasmuch as, besides those things which I have myself seen, I have ever taken pleasure in enquiring from Moors, Christians and Heathen regarding the manners and customs of those countries of which they had knowledge, and their statements I have none the less painfully compared one with another to the end that I might have a more certain knowledge of the truth thereof, which has ever been my chief desire as it should be of all who write on such matters'.

21 See Barbosa 1946, p.103 and p.104. / Barbosa 1918, I, p.205: 'The natives of this land are Heathen (...) they are tawny men, nearly white (...) the men are of good height with [physiognomies] like our own'. Ibid. p.208: 'The king and the country-people marry almost in our way, and have a marriage-law...'

22 Barbosa 1946, p.121. / Barbosa 1918, II pp 9-10. On the other hand, Barbosa carefully describes rules, however bewildering to a European, which tell who can sleep with whom, who cares for children, and who inherits and succeeds. In that sense there is a "law".

23 Barbosa 1918, pp 219-20 (especially p. 219 Dames ed. n.1).
Vijayanagara was a great place for business. Thus:

[the king] é mui grande e mais rico de mercadoria que se acha no mundo, e tem mui grandes cidades, onde vivem muitos mercadores mouros e gentios de muito dinheiro e grosso trato, principalmente de pedraia [precious stones], que neste reino é mui estimada...²⁴

He probably reached this conclusion from "informed and critical" hear-say. It was, in fact, not simply his own. More fundamental than the personal rhetorical emphasis by individual writers is the general agreement between descriptions. The question is now the extent to which parallels found between these various descriptions of Malabar and Vijayanagara are based on general categories of classification, or rather on particular observations which happen to coincide.

Although Ptolemy and Strabo were well known in early sixteenth century Europe, there is no evidence that writers like Barbosa and Pires drew from them any formalised models of ethnographic description comparable to the historiographical models that Barros, Castanheda and Correa had - in particular, the annalistic, yearly sequence of Livy, and also the tradition of medieval epic poems and chronicles. It was only later in the century that methods for travellers proliferated. It seems, therefore, that they wrote on the basis of a very broad and vague consensus about the proper subject of Geography. As we saw in Barbosa's preface, he wanted to talk about the boundaries and inhabited centres of each kingdom, to distinguish the religion and customs of the inhabitants, and to discuss in detail the merchandise for each place. There is little doubt that this is precisely what he and others actually do.

However, by compiling a comparative table of the

²⁴ Barbosa 1946, p.114. / Barbosa 1918, pp 226-7: 'this [king] is the greatest and richest found in this world [...] And [...] possesses great cities wherein dwell many merchants, both Moors and Heathen, and there is great traffic chiefly in precious stones, which are held in great esteem in that kingdom...' I have corrected this translation.
various descriptions of Malabar written by Varthema, Pires and Barbosa, it is possible to be even more precise (see Table 2). It would seem that the interplay of these broadly shared aims with the particular realities of historical Malabar led to further parallels, affecting sub-categories such as the kinds of customs described or, more generally, the kinds of emphasis and simplifications employed. These parallels spring from the use of a shared everyday language, with its full range of European connotations, in its attempt to decode Malabar according to certain aims - such parallels spring from a complex process, rather than just from an immediate set of "prejudices" or an immediate "empirical observation".
## TABLE 2: Customs of Malabar and Calicut

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<td>Size and limits of Malabar (1)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Traders and navigation (13). Bankers and money-lenders (19).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IV Cities</strong></td>
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<td>Picturesque description of the city (1), starting point of narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>V Rulers and Government</strong></td>
<td>Separate Kingdoms (18). Kings and lords also discussed in chapters on Brahmans (6) and listed aside (15). See XII.</td>
<td>Very thorough account of Calicut kingship. Legendary origins (2), death and succession ceremonies (8), oaths and obligations, and prime minister (9), role of &quot;prince&quot; (10), writing officials (11), women servants (12), special attentions (14), betel and food (15), Travel (16). Emphasis on ceremonial customs.</td>
<td>King (2), his religion (2) and eating habits (3). Death and succession ceremonies (7) (23). Palace (14) (22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VII Law and religious classification</strong></td>
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<td>Generalizes about people, language and social customs (5). See XII.</td>
<td>Language and caste system (3). Physical description and dress (4), ceremonial customs of kings (5).</td>
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<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>X Marriage and Sexual customs</td>
<td>Discusses rules of succession and sexuality among Brahmans (6) and Nayars (10).</td>
<td>Kings (6) and Nayars (20) marriage and matrilineal succession. Detailed account, with emphasis on the sexual freedom of women. Maidenhood ceremonies (7) (20).</td>
<td>Merchants exchange women, and among &quot;the others&quot; (Nayars) women sleep with whom they please (8).</td>
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<td>Brahmans (6), Nayars (10) and more than ten other groups (11). Detailed, but simpler than Barbosa. Discusses power and inequality (9) (21).</td>
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<td>Brahmins (4). Nayars and four other sorts of people (distinguishes six castes in total) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII Wonders</td>
<td>Charmed snakes (12).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Snakes (21).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note to TABLE 2:
Numbers between brackets indicate the place that each item of description occupies in the sequence of each narrative. It must be observed that while both Pires and Barbosa claim to describe the land of Malabar in general, Barbosa in fact focuses on the kingdom of Calicut, but leaves the description of the city as a separate section. Varthema's description of customs in Calicut is meant to be applicable to other kingdoms in South India. Both Barbosa and Varthema have therefore further sections dealing with other cities and kingdoms of Malabar. It must also be borne in mind that some of the descriptions are lengthier than others, and in that sense the numbers between brackets are not equivalent. Barbosa's description is fuller than any of the other two, and that by Pires is the shortest. Since he lived in Malacca, his account is, as I said, more detailed when dealing with Indonesia, the Moluccas and China.
The table again reveals the different emphasis of each author. Varthema is the more superficial but nevertheless remarkably in line with writers committed to preparing reliable geographical guides. Pires is more precise on the economic and political situation, and Barbosa particularly informative about sociocultural aspects. The latter's approach to Vijayanagara follows the same general pattern of description (see Table 3), although with a far less detailed account of the lower castes, and perhaps more emphasis on the relatedness of city setting and size, the king's military power and ability to keep justice, and the good prospects for trade, especially in horses and precious stones. He fully describes sati and maidenhood ceremonies, distinctly from the peculiarities of Malabar, and clearly keeps his account of the role of women separate from the matrilineal patterns of Calicut. The clarity with which distinctive patterns of behaviour are identified matches, therefore, the clarity with which they are narrated, not simply as being different from Europe, but also as having a cultural consistency of their own:

As mulheres naires de sua linhagem são mui isentas e fazem de si o que querem com bramanes e naires, porém não dormem com homem mais baixo que sua casta sob pena de morte (...)
Quanto mais amigos tem quanto mais honra, e cada um está com ela dia certo, dê o meio dia até outro meio dia, e, assim vão passando sua vida temperadamente, sem os ninguém ouvir, nem haver entre eles competimentos, e o que a quere deixar, deixa e toma outra, e ela também, se lhe algum aborrece, diz-lhe que se vá, ele o faz ou a roga. Os filhos que nelas hão ficam às costas da mãe que têm os criar, porque não os dão por filhos de nenhum(...) são seus heredeiros, seus sobrinos e das mães (...) Esta lei (...) a fizeram os reis naires por não terem coisa que os obrigasse a não fazerem o que pertencesse a seu serviço (...) Estas [mulheres naires] não fazem nenhum ofício senão fazer de comer para si, e ganhar de comer por seus corpos, porque além de que cada uma tem três e quatro amigos, que lhes dão de comer, não se negam a nenhum bramane ou naire que lhe dá dinheiro. São mulheres mui limpias, tratam-se muito bem, hão por grande honra e galantaria, e prezam-se muito de se saber comprazer aos homens, e têm por fé que toda mulher que morre virgem é danada.25

25 Barbosa 1946, pp 140, 141, 147. / Barbosa 1918, II, pp 40, 42-45, 54: 'The Nayre women of good birth are very independent, and dispose of themselves as they please with Bramanes, and Nayres, but they do not sleep with men of caste
What is important about this description is that a society which breaks almost every important European convention about family life is not portrayed as "savage" and "natural", nor monstrous, nor legendary, nor utopian, but simply as empirical, traditional and civil. What Barbosa has portrayed is not an image of "otherness", but rather a complex set of social rules which happen to be different. In fact, whenever he finds analogies with his European background he exploits them, so that Brahmans and Nayars are openly shown to be analogous to European priests and noblemen, the religious and military dominant classes of a three-ordered society. This scheme, on the other hand, does not prevent him from explaining the peculiar strength of the division that separates the lower castes, not only from the two above them, but also between themselves.

Analysis of religion is more of a problem. But here too Barbosa seeks for analogies, and, like Pires, sees a trinity in the beliefs of the brahmans - probably on the basis of the major triad of Brahma, Siva and Vishnu. Despite his accurate description of behaviour, he is ill-prepared to find any system of meaning in the indigenous literature, of whose existence he was well aware, and unable to find any recognition of 'our Lord Jesus Christ', lower than their own under pain of death (...) the more lovers she has the greater is her honour. Each one of them passes a day with her from midday on one day, till midday on the next day and so they continue living quietly without any disturbance nor quarrels among them. If any of them wishes to leave her, he leaves her, and takes another, and she also if she is weary of a man, she tells him to go, and he does so, or makes terms with her. Any children they may have stay with the mother who has to bring them up, for they hold them not to be the children of any man (...) their heirs are their nephews, sons of their sisters [emended] (...) which rule (...) the Kings of the Nayres instituted (...) in order that the Nayres should not be held back from their service by the burden and labour of rearing children (...) These women do not work except to prepare their own food, and to earn their living with their bodies, for in addition to the three or four lovers, whom every woman has, they never refuse themselves to any Bramene or Nayre who gives them money. These women are very clean, and fare very well, and they consider it a matter of great honour and gallantry and pride themselves greatly thereon, to be able to give pleasure to men, and it is article of faith with them that every woman who dies a virgin is damned'.

26 He calls it Bermabesma Mageuru. See Barbosa 1946, p.138. This idea went back to the early Portuguese confusion about Hindu religion, and is found very commonly. For instance Nuniz, when discussing the bramines of Bysnaga, mentions the Hindu Trinity, Tricembeca. See Lopes 1897, p.75.
he concludes in disappointment that 'they believe and respect many truths, yet do not tell them truly'. 27 Similarly, he finds devotion in the Christians of Malabar, but also much ignorance ('these lack both doctrine and baptism') and does not trust the "Armenian" priests who follow the Chaldean (Syriac) rite. Perhaps, he writes, they do not 'recite the whole office, as do our friars'. 28 The escrivão de feitoria of Cannanor was obviously better prepared to observe customs systematically than to enter into a systematic dialogue about beliefs. He did not of course have a humanist education, but more importantly, he did not have a proper cultural space in which to discuss religion since this belonged to the authorities of the Church.

This is why in 1603 Agostinho de Azevedo, an Augustinian friar who had spent nineteen years in Portuguese India, was the first man to write a geographical report of the kind of Barbosa's which included not only a description of places, commodities and social customs, but also a full discussion of the beliefs and doctrines that underpinned indigenous behavior. 29 Writing about the literary and historical traditions of some Indian peoples from the monastery of Nossa Senhora da Graça in Lisbon, the Portuguese Azevedo was able to draw on a classical background that contained the practical totality of Greek sources on India, as well as the travel accounts published by Ramusio. His report was brief and confused, but more widely focused and sometimes more penetrating than those by Alessandro Valignano — in particular concerning international trade, Hindu religion and two special first-

27 Barbosa 1918, II p.37.
28 Barbosa 1946, pp 172-3. / Barbosa 1918, p.100-1.
29 This interesting manuscript has been published, albeit anonymously. See 'Estado da India' (1960). The author was identified by G.Schurhammer S.J. in his biography of Francis Xavier (Schurhammer 1977 pp 614-20). From internal evidence it can be established that the author knew well Ormuz and Ceylon, and had also been to Cambay and probably Goa.
hand reports on Ormuz and Ceylon, which were then used by the chronicler Couto. Azevedo was also able to criticize previous historians, such as Barros, because they confused the Indian pantheon with the Trinity. He was, however, constantly dismissive of Indian "superstition", which he claims he had personally investigated through various conversations and by an examination of their books. He also remarked quite emphatically on the social "hypocrisy" of the brahmins. As it happened with many contemporary Jesuits, Azevedo's humanist education had been contained almost in its entirety within the boundaries of Counter-Reformation orthodoxy.

The Portuguese ethnographers transformed the isolated observations of Marco Polo and Nicolò Conti into a systematic, even quantitative "map" of kingdoms, customs and castes. Known in Europe through Ramusio's collection, they set standards for a Renaissance ethnology based on naturalistic and historical assumptions, within the framework of a secularised, rather than a metaphysical, idea of order. The contribution of modern ethnology was not to be so much the observation of behaviour, nor the classification of beliefs, but more ambitiously, the attempt to relate systematically beliefs to behaviour. The fundamental requisite for this development was a new form of cultural analysis, in which religion was examined critically and in detail beyond the boundaries of its dogmatic and doctrinal definitions. In Renaissance Europe, where the medieval definition of qualities and boundaries was felt to be inadequate and not really absolute, culture was increasingly seen as human consensus, and it has been suggested that the new emphasis on faith, both Catholic and Protestant, was an attempt to come to terms with the

30 On these borrowings see Schurhammer 1977, pp 616-20. Azevedo mentions Couto several times, but with a suspicious attitude which makes it likely that he forwarded his material reluctantly, probably through Fr. Adeotato da Trindade, who lived in the same convent and was Couto's brother-in-law (Boxer in Correia-Affonso ed. 1981, p.191). In the end Couto did not acknowledge Azevedo's role. See Couto Dec.V, l.VIII, c.14.
anxiety caused by this unreliability of culture. While in Europe attempts were made to avoid the consequences of questioning the centrality of Revelation through various Neoplatonist and syncretic systems, from Pico to Postel and Bodin, in the field of the ethnological genres it was paradoxically Catholic missionaries like the Franciscan Sahagún, and especially Jesuits such as Valignano, Acosta and Kircher, who opened the path of cultural analysis of religion, leading to the symbolic anthropology of Lafitau.

The way in which these missionary writers protected their own tradition from sceptical enquiry was of course by refusing to apply to their own version of Christianity the same standards of analysis that they applied to foreign beliefs. This is very clearly the case in Valignano's informed treatment of Japanese Buddhism. While in his opinion the vaguely theistic and trinitarian religion of the Brahmins was corrupted by irrational superstition and deserved contempt, and the Confucian morality of Chinese mandarins could be reduced to an original "natural law" of a civilised but proud people which only needed the crowning effects of Christian Revelation and Grace, the Buddhism of the Japanese was most puzzling and frustrating, a mixture of Machiavellian cynical prudence and Lutheran moral irresponsibility. The intelligent Japanese represented a subtle inversion of all universal and rational values in a most perverse combination: 'ver que en todo van al revés de Europa, y que con esto concertassen sus ceremonias y costumbres tan políticas y puestas en razón para quien bien las entiende, es cosa que puede causar no pequeña

31 See Bouwsma 1990, p.177.
32 I am referring here to the Bodin of the Heptaplómeron (1580s).
33 On Lafitau see Pagden 1986, pp 198-209.
34 See Valignano 1944, pp 154-163.
They were the other par excellence, 'porque en muchas [cosas tocantes a religión] se conforman con lo que nosotros dezimos y hazemos, aunque va tanta diferencia dellos a nosotros, como de la mentira a la verdad, y de las tinieblas a la luz'. Of course, Christianity would have never withstood the kind of rhetorical deconstruction used by the Jesuit visitor in his attempt to ridicule Japanese religion and moral values.

Alessandro Valignano had tried to contain the evidence for religious diversity within a flexible discourse justified by strategies of conversion. This led him to a purely political analysis of the possibilities of comparison of beliefs, to the extent that Christianity itself was not to be presented as it was, divided and varied, but rather as a uniform and rational system. Uniformity was a criterion for truth. Hindu religion was neglected because there was not a powerful Indian state, nor an admirable Indian civilization for European standards. The next generation of Jesuit missionaries however realised that it was necessary to penetrate further into the mind of their possible converts. Thus Jacomé Fenicio (Capua c.1558 - Cohin 1632) composed the first detailed compendium of Hindu mythology, based to a great extent on translations of Malayalam poetry. Fenicio understood Hindu beliefs as a mere collection of irrational fables comparable to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, but the unpublished manuscript of his *Livro da seita dos Indios*

35 Ibid. p.141: 'to see that in all things they do the opposite from us in Europe, and yet have arranged their ceremonies and customs so much politically and according to reason (for those who properly understand them), that is something that cannot fail to cause great admiration'.

36 Ibid. p.162: 'because in many things [regarding religion] they agree with what we say and do, but there is as much difference between them and us as there is between falsehood and truth, and between darkness and light'.


38 Valignano worked in India after the fall of the city of Vijayanagara.
orientais became an informative source for seventeenth century writers, like the Portuguese Faria y Souza or the Dutch Baldaeus.\textsuperscript{39}

The most remarkable case of active engagement with the Hindu tradition fully belongs to the seventeenth century, with the Jesuit Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656).\textsuperscript{40} His adventurous experience in the Tamil country, which had been until recently under the direct authority of Vijayanagara, was remarkably late and isolated compared with the attempts of other Jesuits in Japan and China, and yet very radical within the tradition of missionary work in India. By trying to make his message socially acceptable to the brahmanic culture, he actually forced Christians to recognise a distinction between civil customs and religious beliefs, while also engaging in a deep theological debate with the indigenous traditions. It was him who, for the first time, translated Hindu Dharma, with its various meanings, into European ideas of virtue and social custom, including ius gentium and recta ratio.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus Nobili's approach was not only a matter of dressing as an Indian holy man in order to facilitate conversions, but also of understanding a gentile civil tradition as valid in its own terms, insofar as it could be made compatible with Christian and Natural Law. To sum up, he brought together the separate discourses of Aquinas and Barbosa, and because many contemporary missionaries and churchmen (in particular the Portuguese in India) reacted against his unconventional methods, he forced his Roman superiors to take account of the need for a more

\textsuperscript{39} See Fenicio 1933. J. Charpentier's introduction is useful, but now outdated. The author of the manuscript was originally identified by G. Schurhammer.

\textsuperscript{40} For Nobili Cronin 1959 is a delightful, if somewhat fanciful, biography.

\textsuperscript{41} Arokiasamy 1986, especially pp 21-2, 115-6, 294.
sophisticated theological reflection.\textsuperscript{42} Nobili's effort took place only when it was clear that the Portuguese were being seriously challenged by the Dutch, which supports the view that this original attempt was the result of military inferiority rather than a collective Catholic commitment to peaceful methods of conversion.\textsuperscript{43} While the Portuguese were still powerful Alessandro Valignano did not believe in Indian culture as a civilisation, as opposed to that of the Chinese, while Azevedo, who knew a little more about Hinduism, let the devil explain away gentile customs and values which were different from those of Europe. Francesc Ros, the Jesuit Archbishop of Cranganor who had learnt Syriac in order to understand the tradition of the Malabar Christians under his charge, was the man of authority more willing to lend support to that young Italian aristocrat who believed that Indian customs and beliefs were not to be rejected outright. In this way, the missionary effort generated an original approach to theology, though always under the suspicious scrutiny of more orthodox eyes.

Religious dissension in Europe and the inheritance of classical humanism contributed however to another, more broadly sceptical tradition of analysis of religion,

\textsuperscript{42} The Irish Bishop Peter Lombard, who in 1622 was examining the orthodoxy of Nobili's methods with a direct (and what proved to be decisive) commission from the Pope, ended up developing a remarkable argument: the fact that some Indians give a religious meaning to their social customs through mythical accounts only expresses their ignorance of their own tradition; Sanskrit texts alone [now known to the missionaries] establish that some customs, such as caste divisions, have a social function which is non-religious, and thus compatible with conversion to Christianity. Therefore, in order to pave the way for policies of adaptation which required a cultural dialogue, the Christian theologian imposed Thomist distinctions upon the indigenous cultural system. The document is translated in Cronin 1959, p.228. It is important that both Nobili's approach and the controversy it created were parallel to contemporary developments in China.

\textsuperscript{43} While Nobili's work took place much after Francisco de Vitoria, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Matteo Ricci and José de Acosta, it was unique for the degree in which it accepted a gentile religious tradition as an autonomous and effective rival with which a deep philosophical dialogue had to be established. American religions had soon been deprived from any political structure, while Chinese Confucianism could be more easily defined as a civil system of morality which only waited to be crowned with Christianity. Hindu Dharma, with its various meanings, often had an obvious religious significance which could not be missed, nor suppressed.
represented for instance by Montaigne and Bayle. 44 This relativist tradition created a pressure on conservative definitions of religion without which neither the theories of Jesuits like Lafitau would have been necessary, nor the eighteenth century Enlightenment possible. 45

44 Of course, scepticism was not the same as atheism, although it implied a separation, or tension, between what was understood as faith and reason.

45 The declared purpose of Lafitau was to refute a purely rationalist and historical understanding of human laws, beliefs and customs (Pagden 1986, p.200). Similarly, in the seventeenth century Catholic fathers such as Gassendi and Mersenne had tried to reconcile Religion and Science with a compromise between Christian fideism and a historical and naturalistic understanding of the world. See Popkin 1979, pp 129-150.
TABLE 3: Customs of Vijayanagara

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<td>Animals (3).</td>
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Figure 2: Sāsivikallu Ganēsa statue from Hampi (Vijayanagara). Photograph Rubiés 1989.

Neste templo Darcha [a city on the road from Bhaktal] estáaa huu ydollo de figura de huu homem quanto ao corpo, e o rosto tem d'alifante com sua tromba e dentes, e com tres braços de cada banda, e seis mãos, dos quoaes braços dizem que tem jaa menos quatro, e que tanto que cahirem todos que ha de ser o mundo destroydo, e asy tem por fee que hade ser, e o tem por suas profesyas. A este ydollo dão de comer cada dia, que dizem que come; e quoamdo elle come baylao lhe molheres diante, las quoaes são do dito pagode... (Paes 1897, pp 84-5. Also Sewell 1900, p.241).
Figure 3: Pampāpati (Virūpāksha, i.e. Shiva) temple at Hampi, as seen from the South, with the Tungabhadra river behind. Photograph Rubiés 1989.

Fora dos muros da cidade da banda do norte tem tres pagodes muy fremosos (...) o outro se chama Aoperadianar, e ho a que elles tem mais veneração e grande romagem (...) Tem húu romeyra sobre esta primera porta, e tem húu corucheo muy alto, todo de hordenanças d'homenes e de molheres e montaryas e outras estoryas muytas, e asy com o corucheo se vay apanhamdo pera cima, asym se vão as ymagenes diminuyndo; passamo esta primeyra porta temdes loguo húu terreytro grande, e outra porta do theo r d'esta prymeyra, se náo que en tudo mays pequena; e passamdo esta segumda porta estaa húu terreytro grande todo derredor das varandas sobre seus piãres de pedra, e no meyo d'este terreytro esta a casa do paguode. (Paes 1897, pp 98-9. Also Sewell 1900, pp 260-1).
Figure 4: Stone reliefs from the Southern side of the Hazara Rama (Ramachandra) temple at Vijayanagara, believed to have been the "state chapel" within the royal palace. Photograph Rubiés 1989.

entramos em hũum pateo (...) muito bem argamassado (...) eataa hũa casa sobre muytos pilares feyta, as quoaes são de maçanarya, e asy todo o travejamento (...) asy todos os pilares com toda a outro obra he dourada tam bem que parece ser forrada de oura. Luogo a entrada d'esta casa, na nave do meyo, eataa, sobre quatro pilares, hũa charolla armada de muytas ymagenes de molheres baylhadeiras, afora outras ymagenes por que nas que estão metidas pella maçanaira, tudo ysto tambem dourado, e algũua cor de llacre nos emveses das folhas que da maçanarya saya; sabereis que d'esta casa não se servem, por quoanto he do seu ydollo e o pagode; no cabo d'esta eataa hũa porta pequena fechada onde o ydollo eataa, e quoamdo lhe querem fazer algũua festa trazem no a hũa cadeira d'ouro, e põem no debaixo d'aquella charola, que pera yssso foy feyta, e entāo vem od bramines seus a fazer ally suas cerymonias, e vem as balhadeiras a balhar... (Paes 1897, pp 119-20, Also Sewell 1900, pp 286-7. From a visit to the royal palace).
Figure 5: Throne platform in the royal enclosure of Vijayanagara, from the South-West. Photograph Rubiés 1989.

e a bamda esquerda do norte d'este terreyro estaa hũa casa grande terrea, e asy são todas; esta casa estaa sobre hũus piareys feytos d' alyfantes e d'outras figuraz, e toda aberta pella frontarya, e sobem a ella por huas escadas de pedra, tem derredor de sy hũu corredor maya abayxo d'ella de muy boas lageas lageado (...) e esta casa de chama da vytoria, por que foy feta quoamdo veyo da guerra d'Orya... (Paes 1897, p.101. Also Sewell 1900, p.263).
The social and political order: Vijayanagara decoded

About the year 1534 someone in Goa collected some descriptions of Vijayanagara and sent them to Portugal, probably to the official chronicler of the Portuguese Indies, and humanist-educated, João de Barros:

... conveyo me pois que hera necessario fazer o que me manda vossa merce, buscar homens que forao a Bissnaga, porque sey que náo vay lay nenhú queue náo traga sua mão de papel escripta das cosas da laa; asy que ouve este summaryo de húu Domingos Paes que ca amda, o quocal foy a Bissnaga em tempo d'elrey Crisnarao [Krishna Deiva Raya] coando la foy Cristóvão de Figueiredo. E por que hú homem náo pode dizer tudo, ouve outro de Fernão Nuniz que laa esteve tres anos com cavallos de que foy mal paguo; e porque húu falla em algúus cousas que náo falla o outro, mando ambos (...) porque d'ambos tomara vossa merce ho que lhe cumprir...

The anonymous sender was not wrong in thinking that the two long and detailed reports complemented each other. The narrative of Paes was closer to a personal experience, as had been the case with 'Abd al-Razzāq, than to a geographical description of the kind attempted by Barbosa. He approached Vijayanagara with the eye of an external observer who does not think any detail is irrelevant, and therefore uses a very "physical" narrative thread. Leaving 'India' (i.e. Portuguese India) from the coastal city of Bhatkal, the expedition followed the route of the pack-oxen loaded with merchandise, and crossed the mountains towards an alien countrysidé that combined urban settlement and wilderness. Paes' general frame of description is clearly geopolitical and economic, with a sophisticated understanding of the interactions between physical

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1 Lopes 1897, p.80. / Sewell 1900, p.235: '...it seemed necessary to do what your honour desired of me, namely, to search for men who had formerly been in Bissnaga; for I know that no one goes there without bringing away his quire of paper written about its affairs. Thus I obtained this summary from one Domingos Paes, who goes there, and who was at Bissnaga in the time of Crisnarão when Cristóvão de Figueiredo was there. I obtained another from Fernão Nuniz, who was there three years trading in horses (which did not prove remunerative). Since one man cannot tell everything -one relating some things which another does not- I send both the summaries (...) I desire to do this because your honour can gather what is useful to you from both...'
conditions and human activity. He takes us along the road towards the king and his city, stopping only, like his Persian predecessor, to describe an extraordinary temple. With original precision, almost everything he thinks noteworthy is either quantified or compared to the world known to the Portuguese, and thus translated into measurable standards.

The Portuguese expedition first went to meet the king in the new city of Nāgālapur (near modern Hospett), built in honour of Krishna Deva Raya's beloved wife, and here Paes describes the brahmans, the king, his daily routine, his favourite minister and his household, including eunuchs and wives. Then the brief embassy takes place. When Paes finally proceeds towards the capital city, we are led through several circles of walls, 'e d'auy atee os paços d'elrey tudo são ruas e casarias muy freamosas, e casas de capitães e d'outras homenes ricos e honrrados, e vereis casarias com muytas ymagenes e louçaynhas que são bem para ver'. We thus walk with him in the streets of an extraordinary city - not a fabulous city taken from a book of chivalry, which is what the Castilian soldier Bernal Díaz saw in Tenochtitlan during the conquest of Mexico, scarcely a year earlier, but something much closer to a European city of his own time. Paes' eye is caught by

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2 This is the identification suggested by Sewell 1900 but it presents some problems, since Paes (1897, p.93) said that the new city was 'one league' (Hüa legoa) from Vijayanagara - and 13 km., the distance from Hoapett to Hampi, is perhaps excessive. From his other various estimations, it seems that Paes' leagues are between 2 and 5 kms long.

3 Lopes 1897, p.94 / Sewell 1900, p.254: 'and from here to the king's palace is all streets and rows of houses, very beautiful, and houses of captains and other rich and honourable men; you will see rows of houses with many figures and decorations pleasant to look at'.

4 See Díaz 1984, I pp 310-1. 'y desde que vimos tantas ciudades y villas pobladas en el agua, y en tierra firme otras grandes poblaciones, y aquella calzada tan derecha por nivel como iba a México, nos quedamos admirados, y decíamos que parecia a las cosas y encantamiento que cuentan en el libro de Amadís (...) y no es de maravillar que yo aqui lo escriba desta manera, porque hay que ponderar mucho en ello, que no sé cómo lo cuente, ver cosas nunca vistas y aun soñadas, como vimos'. Compare with Sewell 1900, where a huge lingam is not as tall as 'the needle of St. Peter's at Rome' (p.241), the wall of the palace of the king encloses 'a greater space than all the castle of Lisbon' (p.254), and the temples in streets belong to institutions 'like the
many details, his prose is prolix and often repetitious. We are shown the landscape and buildings surrounding the city, and its economic life; the city itself, with its tanks, temples, streets and market; an important religious festival; an impressive military parade; Finally, thanks to a special permission secured by Figueiredo directly from the king, we enter into Krishna Deva Raya's private palace. Paes does not fail to climb a hill and contemplate the city below him. He compares it with Rome, which he had seen.5

With Paes a modern traveller can also follow the ruins of the site of Hampi temple by temple and road by road, up to very same hill where the strange landscape unfolds in all directions.6 Paes does however not go very deep inside. He saw the palace, but not the women's quarters. He gave something to a Brahman so as to be allowed into the shrine of the Virupāksha (Shiva) temple by the river, which he mysteriously called Aōperiadanar, but all he could see was a series of idols, 'ho principall ydollo he hūa pedra redomda sem nenhūa fegura, tem nelle gramde devação'.7 And he steps out again, having made no attempt to interpret the shape and meaning of a lingam.

Nuniz, who is perhaps of all writers the one with the best knowledge of the local language (he spent three years in Vijayanagara, and must therefore have learnt at least Kannada)8 chose instead to write a chronicle. At the end of this chronicle he comments on the place and the people, but does so from the perspective of someone who tries to uncover a political system centred on kingship. The kings provided the thread of the historical narrative, and it was

confraternities you know of in our parts' (p.256).

5 Ibid. p.256. 'What I saw from thence [a hill) seemed to me as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight...'

6 See figures 2, 3 and 4.

7 Ibid. p.100 / Ibid. p.261: 'the principal idol is a round stone without any shape; they have great devotion for it'.

8 Rather than Telegu, since Kannada was spoken in the area South of Goa.
only as a digression from it, because of the political role of Lords and Brahmans, that religion and customs were brought in, with some contempt, at the end. In Paes the king played also, of course, a central role - but only as part of the landscape. He was the perfect ruler of a system that stretched from the wild forests and cultivated areas of the Empire to the public spectacle of the city, but he was also a rather fat and cheerful man who 'tem no rosto synaes de bexigas'. The perspective (a human king) was unconventional, but the implicit message (a central king) right. Paes was therefore able to decode some of the language of the indigenous culture without entering into it.

Nuniz knew of the Ramayana ('dizem que em outro tempo esta terra toda foy de bogios, e que neste tempo fallavão elles, tem livros cheos d'estorias suas de gramdes cavallaryas...' and dismissed it as a ridiculous fantasy, 'bestidões de suas ydolatrias, que não està em rezão d'omenes terem taes opinios'. He wrote history and, from indigenous sources, interpreted a political system remarkably similar to that of European feudalism. Paes probably never heard as much about Hindu traditions and mythology, but by describing the streets and the festivals in full detail he transmitted a vision of justice, abundance, pleasure and piety. It was not the heavenly paradise of 'Abd al-Razzq, but perhaps a version of the dharma, artha, kama and moksha - the "four ends of man" of traditional Hindu literature - that the Ramayana, in its mythological language of virtuous kingship, was also about.11

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9 Ibid. p.89 / Ibid. pp 246-7: 'has on his face signs of small-pox'.

10 Ibid. p.75 / Ibid. p.390: 'and they say that in former times this land belonged to the monkeys, and that in those days they could speak. They have books full of fine stories of chivalry (...) foolish tales about their idols such as it is out of reason for men to believe'.

11 The general framework of indigenous thought is best expressed in terms of this theory of the "four ends of man". See Embree 1988, pp 209-341. This book has proved extremely valuable. I have treated "the fourth end", moksha (spiritual liberation), in its more popular aspects, such as the radical pietism of Bhakti sectarian cults. The more philosophical and mystical aspects
Although Paes' narrative is too detailed for me to discuss fully here, there are a few points where a comparison with indigenous sources and archaeological reconstruction is particularly useful. But one needs to assess this material carefully. To begin with, it is important to remember that it is not possible to read directly, from the Hindu classical tradition, the values that actually informed the life of the Vijayanagara empire. More than twenty centuries separated the beginnings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata from Krishna Deva Raya, and throughout this period the Sanskrit brahmanic tradition had been repeatedly interpreted and modified to suit local contexts. Vijayanagara, where Sanskrit had been partly supplanted by vernacular languages, had a classical and mythological tradition in the same way that Europe had a classical and mythological tradition in Latin and Greek - a source of inspiration, and a language with which to deal with the tension between ideals and particular situations. There was, nevertheless, one fundamental difference. In Christian Europe the religious and the secular had been divided, so that the biblical and the classical traditions were difficult to combine. The separation of religious and secular discourses - openly opposed as faith and reason - was accentuated in the Renaissance, with the combined impact of humanism and the various reformations. This affected the image of kingship very directly, for even though Rama could have been compared with sacred kings of the ancient Near East such as David or even Alexander, he was neither Christ nor Charlemagne, still less was he a

are less directly relevant to the cultural tradition that underpinned the social life of Vijayanagara, in the sense that such mystical languages were highly elitist. This raises a question of definition. While everyday piety, ritual and devotion, as expressed in the Bhakti literature and in the mythology of the Puranas, was obviously very important in South India at the time of the Vijayanagara Empire, it also seems that the brahmanic literature of the period often encompassed devotion under the concept of dharma, or moral (cosmic as well as personal) order. This emphasis on dharma is apparent in the Ramayana, the epic poem which seems to have inspired much of Vijayanagara art and kingship. It may be concluded that moksha, in fact a later addition to brahmanism under the influence of spiritual heterodoxies such as Buddhism, overlapped and accentuated some of the ideals expressed in dharma.
national sovereign acting with the grace of God - because Vijayanagara, the city of victory, was (in terms of Augustine's distinction) both city of God(s) and city of men. One could not add supernatural grace to kingship. Simply by becoming part of a sacred landscape kingship was sacred.\textsuperscript{12} In more historical terms, Krishna Deva Raya was neither Pope nor Emperor, but rather a combination of the two.\textsuperscript{13} And thus if we take the European tradition as a term of reference the Ramayana did not operate at the level of Homer's Odyssey, which is the usual comparison, but in many respects should be seen as something closer to some books of the Bible - a moral and political model, expressed in a mythological language, within a fundamental religious framework.\textsuperscript{14}

Both Vijayanagara art and dynastic tradition show a significant eclecticism, with Shiva and Vishnu equally honoured in special temples, and in diverse manifestations. South Indian culture had also incorporated local cults to the "mother goddess" of blood and power and to various male warrior-gods into its brahmanic tradition, with important figures such as Durga, the slayer of the demon.\textsuperscript{15} Islam and Jainism were also, at least, tolerated. What one needs

\textsuperscript{12} In many ways the practice of medieval Christianity in the West was tied with the Augustinian duality. So, if is true that 'the identification of the Church with the whole of organized society is the fundamental feature which distinguishes the [European] Middle Ages...', on the other hand 'the medieval Church was (...) less than a state because the forces of coercion were ultimately not within its control (...) it had to be the state or none at all. As soon as there were other states similarly equipped to rule, the church was on its way to becoming a voluntary association for religious purposes'. See Southern 1970, pp 16 and 21. This, which was true of politics, was also to become true of culture. For political thought see Gierke 1900, pp 9-21.

\textsuperscript{13} An ancient roman emperor, such as Augustus, is of course another matter - I am here referring to the Christian emperors of the West.

\textsuperscript{14} Of course, the important differences remain, since the Hindu epics were not meant to sustain the doctrinal orthodoxy of a historical revelation. But the point is that the Iliad and the Odyssey did not have in Latin Christianity the sacred role they may have had in ancient Greece - and, in that sense, any later re-appropriation of the works of Homer was something radically different from the Greek experience before Christianity.

\textsuperscript{15} The interplay of these local goddesses and warriors and the brahmanic tradition is discussed in Bayly 1989, pp 27-44.
to conceptualise is, therefore, the cultural system that held together these different elements. This can be approached by asking which was the emphasis given in Vijayanagara to the traditions of art, religion and political thought inherited from traditional Hinduism.

Some kind of political originality has been recently argued for Vijayanagara, in the form of a "centralised prebendalism" superimposed upon traditional South Indian kingship mainly as a response to the need to militarise created by the competition of Muslim states in the north. But more generally, Vijayanagara "high" culture seems to have been fundamentally conservative and accumulative, with emphasis on the elaborate ornamentation and eclectic patronage of traditional deities, including the logical concessions to the new strength of Bhakti devotional cults, rather than any new abstract principle or theme originating from the centre. The incorporation of new deities was usually the corollary to the incorporation of new lands - but most often what was brought to the capital was a new image of an old god.

Our most informative Vijayanagara sources, the Amuktamālyada and the Rāyavācakam, both composed in Telegu vernacular, deal with political success in terms which try to combine practical advice with dharma, on the basis of the image of the perfect king, that is to say, a manifestation of the divine Vishnu on earth. Thus, for instance, 'If, when a king is bestowing equal attention to the Vargas, Dharma (Religion), Artha (Wealth), and Kama

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16 Stein 1989, 140-6.

17 Thus R. Thapar relativises the idea of a "Hindu" revival: Thapar 1966, pp 333-5. Paradoxically, B. Stein prefers to see more originality in areas outside politics, which is, however, the one where some (of his own) claims can be substantiated. See Stein 1989, p.xii.

18 When in 1513 Krisna Deva Raya successfully attacked the Gajapati ruler of Orissa, he took the image of Krishna in the Udayagiri fortress to his "city of victory". See Longhurst 1917, p.20.

19 I have worked from the partial translations in Rangasvami Saravasti 1926, and Sastri and Venkataramanayya 1946.
(Love), by chance he shows more attention to Dharma, it would be like allowing the surplus water intended to irrigate other fields overflow and fertilize corn-fields. It would only conduce to enjoy [sic] of the sovereign'.

Or again, 'if your majesty walks (in the path of) dharma, it is bound to rain thrice a month; the land yields plenty'. The Āmuktaṁālyadā was attributed to Krishna Deva Raya, while the Rāyavācakam is believed to have been written at the end of the sixteenth century, although set in his time. However, from their contents one could argue that both works have a common root in brahmanic culture and the concerns of the king's court.

The structure of the Āmuktaṁālyadā may serve to expose the techniques through which the brahmanic literature of Vijayanagara sought to relate the local to the cosmic in a traditional framework, and by doing so to serve immediate political purposes.

The more general frame of the poem is the exhortation of Vishnu to the king, to whom he appears in a dream, to compose a poem in Telegu - the language most widely understood at court - dealing with the marriage of the god and the goddess. On hearing this the court poets react with enthusiastic praise of the king, tracing back his genealogy to the moon. What is remarkable about this context, beyond the more obvious self-justification and propaganda, is the fact that the gods are not just the cosmic principles of Hindu mythology which make kingship sacred, but also, and at the same time, deities related to particular localities.

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20 Rangasvami Sarasvati 1926, p.76. The translator, by rendering Dharma as "Religion", or Artha as "Wealth", is actually only giving an approximate equivalent, which can never do full justice to the complexity of each of these concepts, especially when one considers them in their dynamic relationships. Thus in certain contexts Dharma should be translated as "Virtue", or "Law". This dynamism is best expressed in dramatic literature, such as the plays of Kālidāsa.

21 Sastri and Venkataramanayya 1946, III, p.141.

22 The courts of the nayakas at the end of the sixteenth century (where the Rāyavācakam was probably written) modelled their symbols of authority on the earlier success of Vijayanagara.
Thus this general framework connects the Telegu king with the Chola area of the Tamil South. This pattern is repeated again in the main theme of the poem, which is about a maiden-Saint (Āmuktamālayadā), foster-daughter of Vishnuchitta of Srivillipittur, a saintly sage devoted to the worship of Vishnu in the far South. Now an interpolation in this main theme is another "parallel" story, told by Vishnu to the goddess Lakshmi, about the life of Yāmunāchārya, a ruler of part of the Chola country and a brahman. His life reproduces an archetypical pattern, the renunciation of power and a return to dharma after a period of "loss" in the pleasures of kama. At his departure, however, he gives political advice to his successor - and it is here that the author introduces the maxims which were meant to inform the actions of Krishna Deva Raya. Moreover, the author has also introduced an intentional shift into the traditional story, by marrying the brahmanic ruler to a sister of the Pandya king, who was of the Kshatriya (warrior) class, and thus, by their special rules of succession (similar to those of the Nayars in Malabar), making the son of Yāmuna the brahman also the successor to the Pandya kingdom.

Thus this complex architecture, very much like a temple of Vijayanagara, allowed the author to introduce special emphasis into traditional material. The story builds on a tradition of Vishnu worship, but at the same time brings together different South Indian "local deities", and even claims to kingship, through the cumulative technique of telling a story within the story. The God appears often as a character, commanding the writing of the poem or even telling a story himself. But in fact the theme that holds together these diverse stories is ultimately based on classical Sanskrit drama and poetry: saints ("ascetic sages" and "saintly maidens") interrelate with kings following a cosmic-godly pattern, in a social search for a balance between kama (love) and dharma (moral order), the condition for artha (prosperity). In the end
kingship strengthens its sacred claims by establishing a pattern of renunciation. The poem is thus about the necessary relationship between royal power and brahmanic tradition, which reinforces their political dominance by connecting the local-historical to the cosmic-divine.  

One of the fundamental differences between the Hindu and the Christian traditions, as they met in Vijayanagara in the early sixteenth century, is the fact that Hinduism did not seek theological coherence as much as a flexible language of sacredness, while Christianity tended to reduce the scope of that language for the sake of doctrinal coherence. In other words, similar components - such as a sense of moral law inspired in the divine, a devotion based on faith, or and an idea of spiritual perfection attained through asceticism - developed in Europe through a more narrowly defined cultural framework, involving a universal Church, a unique Revelation, the ultimate separation of Faith and Reason. This actually implied different conceptions of kingship. At a superficial level, the Indian as well as the European believed in a centre, both political and ideal. Kingship was seen as a guarantee of order, and therefore the king was portrayed as a symbol of the prosperous social community, generally speaking the empire but, more emphatically, the city. This is clearly the meeting point between Nuniz and his sources: the history of Vijayanagara is a history of its kings, and the greatness of the kingdom has much to do with the virtue and success of their rulers.

However, in Vijayanagara the king was also a sacred figure who dramatised the search for a balance between virtue and pleasure - dharma and kama. Because of his

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23 This reconstruction is necessarily tentative, based on the summary in Rangasvami Saravasti 1926, pp. 61-4. Also Krishnaswami Ayyangar 1919, pp 132-3. More generally, I have received much insight from the plays of Kālidāsa. See Kālidāsa (Stoler Miller ed.) 1984.

24 One should for instance compare dharma, which is at the same time supernatural, cosmic and social, with the European idea of law, in which the divine, the natural and the human are continuously distinguished and defined in relationship with each other.
sacredness the king not only held supreme power but, through the mediation of the brahmans, whose temples he had to endow, he also held supreme renunciation. The sacred landscape of India was very rich, and there was no god nor shrine that needed to be excluded, because the role of the king as a centre was merely dramatic and political. He enacted a cosmic pattern for the community, but he did not define the religious as such. History was in that sense cyclical.

Christianity had followed a different course. Medieval pilgrims ultimately sought, in the Holy land, the centre of the world. The story of Christ was a major historical event that defined past and future for eternity. Of course much of Christian piety and symbolism was universal and mystical, like much of Hinduism, but Christian theological discourse occupied a radically different space. I argued earlier that Mandeville sought to include a map of the known world in his pilgrimage towards a reformed Christianity. By the time Paes and Nuniz went to Vijayanagara, Prester John had become a purely historical Abyssinian ruler, and the oriental Christians had been described according to the castes and customs of the Malabar coast. The next stage in this process was the discovery of heresy, various attempts to enforce papal authority, doctrine and rite, and finally disappointment. Therefore, although European travellers liked Vijayanagara because they found in it a centre, it was also, necessarily, a secular centre, outside any sacred landscape. Only a syncretic and mystical approach, inspired perhaps by Neoplatonism, could now bring back the language of sacrality to those areas that fell outside the orthodox path, restricted, for instance to the tomb of Saint Thomas the apostle, in the Eastern coast of the Vijayanagara Empire, and soon after to the new sacred landscape of the missionary martyrs. The alternative to which the Jesuits committed themselves - conversion through cultural dialogue - had to rely on the acknowledgement of a centralized
system of power defined in secular terms. Not surprisingly, it was also as part of a political purpose - to establish kingship over all religious traditions - that rulers such as Akbar listened to the Jesuits later in the century. Christians were welcome to sit in a room already crowded with Muslims, Hindus, Jains and Jews, and expound their doctrines, so that the king might judge them.

The predilection for centrality, the king as centre, is very obvious in Nuniz, but receives a special emphasis in the narrative of Paes. There are implicit ideals of, for instance, justice, wealth and power in the idea of centre, ideals which somehow tend to exclude the local and the contingent. The description of the king's power, even though it may be presented in secular and historical terms, creates a periphery in the discourse. To a remarkable extent, Paes succeeds in bringing this periphery into the centre by making all the details of the journey relevant to the final discovery. Although Nuniz provides a more systematic interpretation of the kingdom's political system, with a special discussion of the revenues and the power of the military chiefs, it is Paes who gets closer to decoding the sacred nature of kingship. This cosmic dimension is however only hinted at, because his perspective is popular, that of an uninitiate. He observes a Hindu festival in much the same way as many Catholics may participate in a procession without really knowing very much about the theological discourses which underpin it. But of course, Paes only observes, without full participation, because he does not want to contaminate his own identity with idolatry.

From the beginning, Paes explains that the ritual character of such festivals, and the reverence with which they are pursued, is like in Europe:

Deveis de saber que entre estes gentios ha dias que celebrão suas festas, como nos, e tem seus dias de jejú, e não comem todo o dia cousa nenhua, e comem a meya
The most important festival, which starts on the 12th of September and lasts nine days, takes place at the royal palace in the capital city, and brings together all the important people of the kingdom: the king himself comes from his new city, so do all the single women ('mulheres solteiras do reyno'), and all the captains, kings and great lords who are not engaged in war or in the defence of remote frontiers. The festival is therefore a "meeting at the centre".

Paes then describes in full detail the inner courts of the palace, where the festival takes place. These huge courts are surrounded by walls and well guarded. The inner area is a space of display surrounded by low verandhas, occupied by the lords and chiefs of the kingdom. The dancing girls ('mulheres solteyras') stand in two circles by the gates, adorned with many jewels. There are also eleven lofty wooden scaffoldings, specially made for the occasion, adorned with colourful cotton cloths, and three double-storeyed stone platforms, also hung with embroidered cloths. Here the king, his guests (including the Portuguese) and his household (favourites and eunuchs) may watch the spectacle. The principal platform stands on pillars 'feytos d'aliphantes e d'outras figuras', and is called (like the city) 'casa (...) da vitorya', after the successful war against Orissa. A special gate connects this platform to the private palace of the king, where his twelve-thousand women servants live.

This is so far a picture of artha (power and abundance), and as Nuniz acknowledged in his own

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25 Lopes 1897, p.100 / Sewell 1900, p.202: 'You should know that among these heathen there are days when they celebrate their feasts as with us; and they have their days of fasting, when all day they eat nothing, and eat only at midnight'.

26 Ibid. p.104.

27 Ibid. p.101. See figure 5.
description of the festival, also of kama: 'asy que nestes nove dias são obrigados a buscar a elrey cousas de prazer'. The arrangement soon acquires, however, a religious dimension in which the king is the connecting figure, while the "house of victory" that separates the public and the private palaces is the connecting space.

Thus, in the "house of victory" the king has a rich throne, with a golden "idol", adorned with precious stones and flowers, and also a little shrine made of cloth, which also belongs to the "idol". During the festival the king sits on some cushions in front of this idol.

Paes was able to follow closely the rituals, and described them in great detail. According to his observations, every morning the king performed some ceremonies and prayers inside the shrine of the idol, and then, with the help of several brahmans, he threw white roses and perfume to a specified number of horses (eleven) and elephants (four), beautifully adorned, who stood in the courtyard while the women danced. The ritual involved several entrances and exits, in which the king, clearly acting on behalf of the "idol", and under the close supervision of brahmans, alternatively became private and public, giver and receiver, actor and spectator. At some point the curtains of the shrine were opened and the king, sitting inside, contemplated the sacrifice of twenty-four buffaloes and one-hundred and fifty sheep. Before retiring to his private quarters, the king received the ritual salutation and occasional gifts of his favourites, lords and chiefs.

A different set of ceremonies, mainly involving wrestling and dancing, took place in the afternoons.

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28 Ibid. p.67. / Ibid. p.378 'in this way during these nine days they are compelled to search for all things which will give pleasure to the king'.

29 My interpretation of Paes' account follows here the suggestions put forward in Fritz, Michell and Nagaraja Rao 1984.

again a third set at night, by the light of lamps and torches, with other plays and stage-battles, and also fireworks. The main emphasis of the description is on a procession of triumphal carts, horses, elephants and women. Paes is particularly interested in the ritual significance of horses, and in the extraordinary value of what the maidens of the queens carry on them and display. At the close of each day, and before anyone eats anything, the king again performs the rituals involving the idol, similar to those of the morning, and witnesses the sacrifice of cattle, whose number is increased in the very last day.\textsuperscript{31}

The presence of the idol unequivocally brings a dimension of sacrality (\textit{dharma}) into the festival, but Paes is again unable to provide any identification of a distinctive mythological background - nothing that may allow us to identify the 'idol' with perhaps Rama.\textsuperscript{32} On the other hand, the social and political implications of the ritual arrangements interest him a lot - and, in that sense, \textit{dharma} (which is also a social code) is present in the narrative. This reflects the area in which an analogy with a Portuguese popular festival or a royal celebration would have been most immediate, and, from time to time, Paes does refer to the festival of 'corpo de Deos' in Lisbon.\textsuperscript{33} Thus, the festival is not merely a display of wealth and art, but also of order and hierarchy, and Paes is eager to identify the special rights and preeminences of every group.

For instance, the prime minister \textit{Salvatinica} (Sálua

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. pp 105-110./ Ibid. 268-75.

\textsuperscript{32} The temple of Rama within the royal enclosure was in all probability in the area where the festival took place. It is believed to have been built by Krishna Deva Raya (perhaps in 1513, i.e. a few years before Paes went) and has been defined as 'the nucleus of the royal centre' (Fritz-Michell-Nagaraja Rao 1984, p.149). The walls of this temple depict episodes from the epic which involve celebrations of kingship with armies, dancing women and entertainers, i.e. about the same that Paes was shown. Rama would be an appropriate deity to preside on the festival because it was both "private" of the king and "public" in its militaristic aspects. As Paes declares later, this same 'idol' was placed in the royal tent in front of which the military parade took place.

\textsuperscript{33} Lopes 1897 p.107 and 113.
Timma), who made Krishna Deva Raya king, organizes everything, and his is the first triumphal car.\footnote{Ibid. pp 105 and 107, but in p.91 Paes called him Temersea, i.e. Timma Raya / Ibid. pp 268 and 272.} After the king sits, only the important kings 'of his race' who have given him their daughters in marriage can also sit, and stay near him. A special exception is made for wrestlers and dancing-women, who can eat betel and sit when they please.\footnote{Ibid. pp 105-6. / Ibid. p.269.} Paes expresses his surprise that such women (whom he has earlier established are much honoured prostitutes attached to temples and living in the best streets) are allowed to become so rich.\footnote{Ibid. pp 106-7. Also p.85. / Ibid. p.270. Also pp 241-2.} It is only after the king is sitting in comfort, both he and the idol fanned with coloured horsetails by the brahmans who stand nearby, that the captains and principal men ('capitãees' and 'gente honrrada') are allowed to enter in, in turn, and to position themselves in the verandhas, followed by the captains of the king's guard, first those who carry shield and sword, an then the archers.\footnote{Ibid. p.106. / Ibid. p. 270.} In summary, 'os oficiaes da casa amrão certamndo toda a gente, e cada hâa põem em seu lugar, e estão repartidos pellas portas pera que não entrem se não os que elles mandarem'.\footnote{Ibid. p.105. / Ibid. p.268: 'The officers of the household go about organising the people, and keeping all in their places. They are distributed among the doors so that nobody may come in apart from those whom they want to' [corrected].} A similar sense of order is observed in the procession of women and eunuchs which comes from the private section of the palace - some of these women are hardly able to move because of the sheer quantity of gold and jewels that they wear.\footnote{Ibid. pp 108-109. / Ibid. pp 273-4. See also Nuniz in Ibid. p.67. / Ibid. p. 378.} But there can be little doubt that Paes was even more impressed by the display of power and magnificence
involved in an army parade that he witnessed after the festival had finished,

que volve não sey dizer (...) e por ver e dar synal de tudo o que vya, andava com a cabeça tão amede de húa bandá e da outra que quase esteve para cair do cavallo abaixo com a syso perdido (...) que verdadeiramente tão fora de mym estava, que me parecia ser visão o que vya, e que passava aquillo em sonho.40

This dream-like experience was not so much a necessary outcome of an expedition into "otherness", which never shook the deep conventional beliefs of the Christian trader, as the result of a desperate attempt to see everything and record every detail. The shouting and shield-beating of the colourful crowd eventually overstretched his ability to hear and count.

We do not have any indigenous descriptions of this annual festival which may enable us criticise the Portuguese accounts.41 However, fifteen years later Nuniz provides a description which is remarkably similar, although it differs in some details from that of Paes.42 Nuniz is sometimes more precise (for instance, the "nine [not eleven] lofty wooden scaffoldings" are in fact "castles" made by the principal captains of the kingdom), and sometimes he gives different numbers (thus, in the sacrifice, 'matão e sacrifício, o primeiro dia nove bufaros

40 Ibid. pp 113-4. / Ibid. p.278-9: 'I have no words to express what I saw (...) [in order to see all and tell about it,] I went along with my head so often turned from one side to the other that I was almost falling from my horse with my senses lost (...) I was so carried out with myself that it seemed as if what I saw was a vision, and that I was in a dream' [corrected].

41 There is however a description of the coronation of Krishna Deva Raya in the Rājavācakam, from a later tradition (late sixteenth, or early seventeenth century). Here the king appears as a quasi-mythical model of wisdom and virtue, mainly in traditional brahmanic terms. This account of Krishna's coronation ceremony possibly distorts the actual events by simplifying the line of royal succession towards a more "lawful" model, and consequently presents the coronation as in full accordance with traditional ritual. This ritual involves reciting sacred texts such as the Ramayana, and specified baths, gifts, music, dress and meals. The king has little initiative, and it is the lords, brahmans and court officials who invest him with sacrality. See Sastri and Venkataramanayya 1946, pp 94-6.

42 Lopes 1897, pp 66-68. / Sewell 1900, pp 376-379.
machos, e nove carneyros, e nove bodes, e d'ahy por diante matão cada dia ao galarym sempre dobrado'). But the general pattern of the ritual is clearly identical. One could argue that Nuniz summarized more, but was probably in a position to distinguish and calculate better. Where the two accounts really differ is in emphasis, because, almost like a premonition of later trends, Nuniz hints at a novel combination of wild ethnocentrism and secular cynicism. Thus, the nine days of the festival may be celebrated 'a honrrra dos nove meses que nossa senhora trouxe seu filho no ventre'. Despite his access to indigenous traditions, Nuniz ultimately interprets all religious practices either as a corrupted Christianity or, more often, as purely political rituals: '... se não fazem senão porque neste tempo vem estes capitães pagar as remdas a elrey'.

Confined within a more directly descriptive language, Paes never offers an explanation that reduces the effect of the picture as a complex totality. He nevertheless gives a very brief explanation of the inner workings of a system that will allow a ruler to maintain an army of one million fighting men, including 35,000 armoured horsemen, so that 'he o mais temido rey que nestas partes se sabe'.

Developing patterns of thought very common in sixteenth century Europe, he thinks that the economic prosperity brought by the many merchants prevents the kingdom from becoming empty of people, because it creates a balance between soldiers and men employed in other activities. He

43 Ibid. p.66. / Ibid. p.377: 'the first day they kill nine male buffaloes and nine sheep and nine goats, and thenceforward they kill each day more, always doubling the number'.

44 Ibid. p.66. / Ibid. p.376: 'in honour of the nine months during which Our Lady bore her Son in the womb'.

45 Ibid. / Ibid: 'it is only done because at this time the captains come to pay their rents to the king'.

46 Ibid. p.114. / Ibid. p.280: 'he is the most feared king of any in these parts'.
also observes with admiration the technical skill of the Muslim mercenaries, and then comments on the religious caste, the Brahmans, who are 'like friars with us' and are seen everywhere in the kingdom. They follow special food prohibitions, are of a lighter complexion than the majority and have beautiful but modest wives. They are, as holy men, held in honour by the king. Although Paes had explained earlier that, besides these lettered men who look after the temples, other brahmans work as royal governors of towns and cities, and still others are merchants or landowners, he also remarks that 'they have little stomach for the use of arms' - and are, in this sense, not very useful to the king.\footnote{Ibid. pp 87-8 and 114. / Ibid. pp 245-6 and 280.}

The problem is, therefore, the collection of sufficient revenues to pay for the army. As Paes goes on to explain, the king's captains are in fact like noblemen, who hold towns and territories. These are obliged to maintain a substantial number of troops ready for battle, according to their revenues, and in addition they have to offer annual payments to the king. The troops are chosen and paid so as to give "the best" possible troops. The king has also a number of troops which he pays directly from the revenues of the capital city, and in particular many horses and elephants. His captains, and some other petty kings who are also his vassals, send him presents on his birth-day, and when he has children. In fact, the annual offering of revenues is very much part of the ritual, and it takes place during the New Year festival, soon after the other festival is finished. In order to preserve this wealth the kings also to have a well supplied treasure in which they can bring in more than they take out.\footnote{Ibid. 115-6. / Ibid. pp 280-2.}

The pattern of Paes' description can be recognised in any modern attempt to understand the political system of Vijayanagara, but clearly here this "system" is portrayed
at its best. The chronicle written by Nuniz during the time of a weaker king, Achyuta Raya, offers a glimpse of what happened when the supreme ruler was not in full command. However, Nuniz's understanding of political change still leaves us in a simplified political world, in which everything depends on the personality of the ruler; that is, unless we are able to uncover the inner tensions of a system that necessarily, if only by analogy with other aristocratic, "feudal" systems, must have suffered divisions and factions. I am talking not only about rivalry between chiefs, or between chiefs and brahmans, but also between the king and his almost independent captains, who (from Paes' description) were in a position to tax lands and raise armies before they had to submit to royal authority. Burton Stein has convincingly shown some of these tensions in operation.49 But we do not, in fact, need to wait for modern scholarship to find them. Fernão Nuniz, in his chronicle of the kings of Vijayanagara, not only portrayed the rulers with their human weakness: he also thought that the social fabric, with its greedy brahmans and overtaxed peasants, was faulty. By restoring time to a description of otherness, he went beyond the system of social customs of Barbosa and the colourful human geography of Paes, and identified the movements of political improvement and corruption in their historical particularity.

49 This is perhaps the main theme of Stein 1989.
Figure 6: India, including Besinagar, second map prepared by Jacopo Gastaldi for the first volume of Ramusio's Navigazioni e viaggi (1550).

Alli studiosi de geografia: Nelle presente tre tavole sono descritte le marine secondo le carte da navicar de'Portoghesi, e fra terra, secondo gli scriptori che si contengono in questo primo volume, acciòché i lettori si servino di quelle per una breve informazione di quanto in esso leggeranno, veggiendo situati fiumi, monti, città, province e capi principali de l' Africa, Arabia, India e isole Moluche (...) crediamo che una parte della geografia moderna sera talmente illustrata, che poco necessario sera l' affaticarsi sopra le tavole de Ptolomeo. (Ramusio).
The historical dimension: from native traditions to European orientalism

The Portuguese and Spanish chronicles of the sixteenth century constitute a special group among the important genres of Renaissance historiography. They drew on a tradition of medieval chronicles, books of "deeds" of kings and princes written by secular authors, but providentialist and moralistic. In Portugal as in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula, these chronicles evolved from feudal epic towards a prose narrative centred on royal dynasties and a vaguely defined "nation".\(^1\) By extending these narratives to overseas conquests, the chroniclers of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries could perpetuate social ideals and rhetorical techniques that belonged more properly to the chivalric romance than to the realities of contemporary Europe. In their accounts of the conquests of Mexico or India, they wrote tales of honour and crusade in praise of particular princes and lords.

Some of them, however, were also aware of humanist models - Livy, in particular, had a considerable impact - and constantly struggled with an ideal of historical truth rooted, to a great extent, in an idea of personal experience, either direct or secondary. Thus, while authors like Barros and Castanheda, or Gómar in Spanish America, had a remarkable command of style and overall plan, the more "popular" Gaspar Correa or Bernal Díaz often display an extreme emphasis on observed detail.\(^2\)

What made the chronicles of conquest original was, in the first place, the fact that the figure of the king necessarily diminished. In this sense they accelerated a process which had been only incipient in European historiography. Conquerors and Governors, and the "nation"

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\(^1\) See Rubiés 1989. For a more general background Hay 1977.

\(^2\) On Portuguese historiography see Bell 1924a and 1924b; Boxer 1981; Harrison 1961; Rodrigues Lapa 1942.
in general (Castilians, Portuguese), became protagonists. It was their collective deeds or interactions that, in the end, justified and organized the historical narrative. Moreover, by placing these adventurers in specific alien contexts the chroniclers were in a position to respond to the need for a geographical and ethnographical background peopled with something more than stereotypes and symbols. Indians and Moors - and more particularly, their kings and their lords - became historical agents next to the Castilians and the Portuguese. As such, they were able to make (at least implicitly) historical choices. Not only did they interact with the Europeans; they also had concerns of their own. Thus Barros wrote about the wars of Krishna Deva Raya in his third decade, and Couto included an important summary of Vijayanagara history in the sixth decade, a work that was meant as a continuation of Barros' text.

The next (and more remarkable) step was to write a chronicle exclusively focused on the history of an indigenous society, without any reference to the providential Christian background that ultimately underpinned all European chronicles. This is what Nuniz had already done by the time Barros and Couto wrote their sections of Vijayanagara - in fact, Barros merely summarized a section of his work. Unlike some of the historians of the American Indies who wrote about indigenous traditions (for instance the Inca Garcilaso), Nuniz was not of a mixed ancestry, nor was he a missionary concerned with the salvation of human souls. He wrote exclusively as an external observer. His account of Vijayanagara is best compared to what contemporary European historians wrote about the Turks: a non-Christian society sufficiently independent, perhaps even threatening, that an attempt to understand it in the terms of origins and development could be justified - as, that is, a secular, historical tradition. Such an exercise required the learning of languages and, ultimately, the translation of
indigenous sources. Although Paes, who had antiquarian interests, could compare the peoples of Vijayanagara with the ancient Romans, although Nuniz found nothing about them in the Bible or even in the histories of Alexander. Stretching the account back to the thirteenth century, and carrying it forward to his own times, he wrote about what he observed, what he was told and, crucially, what he had read. Couto, also, wrote 'segundo suas escrituras'.

The mythical foundation of Vijayanagara between 1220 and 1260 (that is, a century earlier than modern historians accept) is well recorded as part of an indigenous tradition. Remarkably similar accounts to those recorded, independently, by Nuniz and Couto, have since come to light as part of the modern historiographical project. Here again, interest in an indigenous tradition was something early European travellers could understand as being analogous to what was common in their own societies.

The first central theme of these stories is that a holy man - a wise and ascetic brahman (Vydyāranya), sometimes explicitly associated with the worship of Virūpāksha by the Tungabhadra river - chose one of two famous brothers, Harirara and Bukka, to build a city on that spot, guaranteeing sacredness and, consequently, promising worldly success. Couto's account resembles a classical explanation of the origins of a civil society, in that this "holy man" is above all a lawgiver. In this

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3 Lopes 1897, pp 92-3. / Sewell 1900 p.252: '...there are other shoes that have nothing but soles, but on top are some straps which help to keep them on the feet. They are made like those which of old the Romans were wont to wear, as you will find on figures in some papers or antiquities which come from Italy'.

4 Couto Década VI. c.5: 'Do fundamento deste Reino Canará, e origem de seus reis com todos os que até hoje reinaram: e donde nasce o chamarem a este Reino de Bismagá, e de Narsinga'. Couto is known for having appropriated the work of people like Agostinho de Azevedo, who translated indigenous sources, as his own.


account the first king was merely a local shepherd who brought him milk, and the foundational emphasis is on the establishment of imperial overlordship over local chiefs and tribes. The successful fight against the Muslims of Delhi, which is the second central theme of the indigenous tradition, and the foundation, as a memorial, of the 'City of Victory' (Visajá Nager) are portrayed as later developments.⁷

Nuniz, on the contrary, follows more closely the historical sequence of events: the king of Bsnaga - that is, the Hindu king Anegundy in the region of Canarā (modern Karnataka) - lost his city, Nagundy, to the Sultan of Delhi - but he and his people sacrificed all their families before giving themselves up. The Sultan's governor was however unable to subdue the people, and finally the Sultan proclaimed an old minister of the kingdom as king. The foundation of a new city 'that would never be captured by his enemies' at the other side of the river followed as a consequence of a prodigious hunting scene, which the holy "hermit" interpreted for the king, "Deva Raya" (Deoráo). Thus the city received the name of the hermit, Vydiajuna, but in Nuniz's words 'in the course of time this name has become corrupted, and and it is now called Bsnaga'⁸. Nuniz also explains that the temple in which all kings have to worship before they are crowned, and to which they offer many prayers and annual feasts, was then built in honour of this hermit. (This can only be the temple of Virupāksha by the river). It in fact provides a key to the sacred continuity of the city.

There can be little doubt of the identity of Nuniz's "Vydiajuna" with the Hindu Vydyāranya. The Shivaite character of this connection can also be reconstructed through the Virupāksha temple. On the other hand, the etymology of Vijayanagara provided by Couto - "city of

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⁷ Couto D.VI c.5.

⁸ Sewell 1900, pp 291-300.
victory" - is more widely accepted by modern historians. Thus, although neither of them matches perfectly any well established model, the fundamental fact is that they both reflect very closely a native self-understanding, of a historical-legendary character. They both include a "dharmic" element crucial to indigenous identity, defined in opposition to political desintegration and to Muslim domination, and expressed in terms of a sacred landscape and origins.

It is not that Nuniz and Couto accepted the indigenous account uncritically. Not unlike Nuniz, Couto thinks that these 'oriental gentiles' are full of silly tales, 'mil patranhas para virem dar um honroso principio a seus Reis'. His own history of Vijayanagara is, on the other hand, very imperfect: in his attempt to clarify the matter, Couto amalgamated indigenous traditions and various European references. He thus invented a false coherence and perpetrated a number of serious confusions (for instance, that he fifteenth century Castilian ambassador to Timūr, Ruy González de Clavijo, in his references to a Christian king of India, was actually talking about the king of Vijayanagara and "his" vassals the Christians of St. Thomas!). Couto, who was the keeper of records at Goa at the time of Philip II, displayed a remarkably imperfect knowledge of the history of Vijayanagara even during the first half of the sixteenth century, and after the Portuguese arrival in India. Although he was well read in Portuguese and classical historiography, and his work is generally considered to be both full and lively, he failed

9 Couto D.VI. c.5: 'one thousand inventions so as to provide their kings with an honourable origin'.

10 See Clavijo 1984, pp 197-8. The author of the account of Clavijo's embassy merely reported a battle between Timūr and a (north Indian) king. He described this Indian king a Christian probably because the Central Asian Mongols (from whom the story must have come) were likely to have classified the Hindus along with the Christians as "idolaters". Timūr attacked India in 1398, and Couto mentions the date of 1394. In fact, it may well be that the so-called Indian king was even a Muslim overlord – Mahmud Shāh of Delhi (who was only a puppet of Malla Khan).
to match Barros (who at least followed Nuniz) and Castanheda (who copied things from Barbosa). What matters here however is the attempt to take seriously the original records of the inhabitants of Vijayanagara as a source for historical reconstruction.

Working with similar principles, but with the advantage of someone who had spent a considerable period of time living as one more foreigner in Vijayanagara, Nuniz produced a long and balanced chronicle of the kingdom - without doubt, the single most useful work for modern historians, from Sewell (1900) to Stein (1989). It is nonetheless (and as one would expect) very partial, organized along a succession of vaguely characterized kings whose exact names and dates may be easily contested. These problems have, of course, a lot to do with the quality of the sources to which he had access. Consequently, the chronicle becomes fuller and more critical as it approaches the historian's own times, and it is both personal and perceptive by the time it reaches an analysis of the organization of the kingdom at the time of Achyuta Raya, in the 1530s.

Two fundamental qualities emerge from this process: First, the sense of order, in almost purely secular terms, that the writer imposes on its material. Secondly, the internal dialectic of two fundamental models of kingship, "good" and "bad", which develops throughout the narrative. These two qualities are in fact interconnected, so that Nuniz actually fashions his indigenous material into a form of Renaissance historiography, not so much inspired by classical models - references to the European tradition are remarkably absent - as in terms of the practical politics that led to the theoretical formulations of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. It is only in this restricted sense that Nuniz can be compared to his Italian contemporaries; formally, his work is closer to the medieval chronicle than to Livy.

What connects Vijayanagara to the European tradition
is not just that history builds a political identity around a dynasty of kings, but more ambitiously, that it has an exemplary role: it is a source of advice for the practical politician. Both the political maxims of Krishna Deva Raya in the Āmuktamālyadā and the account of his success as the head of a conquest state in the Rāyavācakam are in the last analysis an advice book and a "mirror for princes". In that sense, Christian and Hindu - and Muslim - genres shared a lot in common. But as I said, this enterprise was also associated with an attempt to link the authority of the mythical and universal to the allegiances of the local. Nuniz had to omit this. As a foreigner, he could not write from a local sectarian perspective, and had no duty to praise any particular king; as an orthodox Christian, he had access to few mechanisms which might have allowed him to take the religious dimension of the indigenous tradition seriously, even though he commented the many things which the gentiles did to win "paradise" from their "God"; moreover, he was writing in a context in which Christian providentialism and morality had little opportunity to frame the discourse.

Because of all these reasons, what Nuniz produced was a secularised system of practical politics. He had no need to oppose Aristotle and Tacitus, or Fortune and Prudence, to Christian piety and Providence. He had no need to develop an amalgamation of practical advice and revealed law into a system of natural morality based on historical consensus. Quite simply, he had no context available to him except this "natural" one. He wrote about tyranny and kingship at the minimal meeting point of all medieval traditions, the practical concerns of the human community where the different laws of Christians, Jews, Muslims and even Gentiles necessarily talked to each other.

Thus Nuniz's chronicle thoroughly questions the assumption that had governed earlier European descriptions of Vijayanagara: that the king of such vast state and wealthy city was simply very powerful. More critical than
Paes, he portrays a dynamic system in which qualities counter-balance defects, and the greatness of Vijayanagara is in fact shadowed by instability. The virtuous king, Krishna Deva Raya, is succeeded by a cowardly tyrant, his brother Achyuta, who is detested by everyone. Often the king is only a puppet of a powerful lord, and the faithful minister is actually involved in political intrigue. The power of the king is, in fact, counter-balanced by the power of great chiefs, whose names are thus listed as worthy of notice, and the armies are raised to the detriment of the peasant population. Trade is not conducted with such justice than one can escape having to bribe the king and his officials.\textsuperscript{11}

It is not that Nuniz portrays a black image of Vijayanagara: on the contrary, his rhetorical sophistication allows him to contrast things he admires with other things he detests, although not as systematically as Suetonius contrasted the virtues and vices of Augustus and Tiberius, or Guicciardini those of Pope Alexander VI. Thus he recognizes that thieves are thoroughly persecuted, and that as a consequence the city is safe.\textsuperscript{12} The brahman priests are first described as 'despicable men' (homenes muito despreziveis), but later, and more generally, their caste are portrayed as 'homenes limpos, dados a mercadaryas, muy agudos, e de vivo engenho, grandes contadores, homenes secos, e bem despostos, pouco soficientes pera nenhûu trabalho'.\textsuperscript{13} His personal experience, no longer the glimpses of the occasional visitor who is entertained as ambassador, but now the bitterness bred of three years trying unsuccessfully to get rich by selling horses, leads

\textsuperscript{11} Lopes 1897, p.68. / Sewell 1900, p.380.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. pp 68-9. / Ibid. pp 80-1.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. p.75. / Ibid. pp 379-80 and 390: 'honest men, given to merchandise, very acute and of much talent, very good at accounts, lean men and well-formed, but little fit for hard work'.
towards an image in which the pretensions of ideal kingship, although not completely obliterated, are nevertheless reduced to human proportions.

One example may suffice to show the dramatic rather than the stereotyped character of this chronicle. Contrary to the more idealised version of the Rāyavācakam, which portrays Krishna Deva Raya as the happy successor of "his father" Vira Narashima, Nuniz explains that Busbalrao (Vira Narashima) was one of the five sons of Narsenaque (Narasa Nayaka), himself the second in a succession of successful usurpers to the throne. Krishna was a second son to Narsenaque and thus brother of this Busbalrao, but the latter king wanted him to be blinded so as to secure the succession of his own eight-year son. It was only the trickery of the minister, Salivatina (Saluva Timma), that saved Krishna. At this crucial point a special relationship is established between the king and his minister. Seeing the threat, Krishna's first reaction had been to renounce any claims to power, 'that his desire was to pass this world as a jogui'. Paradoxically, this helped convince the "wise minister" that he should be king. Afterwards, their exemplary partnership made Krishna Deva Raya the most successful of all kings of Vijayanagara. He thus became patron of arts and builder of cities and water-tanks, but above all conqueror of his neighbours, both Hindus (the Gajapati ruler) and Muslims (the Deccani Sultans, in particular the Adil Shah of Bijapur). Not unlike the Rāyavācakam, Nuniz offers here a detailed account of political strategy and military campaigns, in which the king proves himself to be courageous, prudent, pious and magnanimous.

But then the pattern of renunciation recurs again: Krishna, wanting to rest and secure his succession, decides to abdicate and make his six-year old son king. Saluva

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14 Sewell 1900, p.315.
15 Ibid. pp 315-58.
Timma will lose his job as prime minister and become Krishna's counsellor. Fatally, during the festival the boy dies. Krishna suspects that he has been poisoned by the son of Saluva Timma, whom he had also made a great lord. Bringing together the old minister and his family - indeed, a powerful court faction - Krishna delivers to his hitherto faithful servant one of the few speeches of the chronicle:

I held thee always as my great friend, and now for these forty years thou hast been governor in this kingdom, which thou gavest me; yet I am under no obligation to thee for that, because in doing so thou didst act in a way contrary to thy duty. Thou wert bound, since the King my brother commanded so, to put out mine eyes; yet thou didst not carry out his will nor obey him, but instead thou didst cheat him and the eyes of a goat were put out, wherefore, since thou didst not fulfil his command, thou wert a traitor, and thy sons with thee for whom I have done so much. Now I have learnt that my son died of poison given to him by thee and thy sons, and for that ye are all here made prisoners.¹⁶

Thus questioning the core of the concept of duty, the relationship between the king and his counsellor ends in a tale of treachery, disappointment, rebellion and punishment. Not long after, Krishna Deva Raya also sickens and dies 'with pains in the groin, of which die all the kings of Bisnaga'.¹⁷ With him dies sacred authority too. His successor, Achyuta, who since his brother's accession to power had been kept confined in the fortress of Chamdegary (Chandragari), 'gave himself over to vice and tyranny'. He is 'a man of very little honesty (...) he has never done anything except those things that are desired by his two brothers-in-law, who are men very evilly disposed and great Jews'.¹⁸

Here suddenly a European language of contempt creeps in, but surely Nuniz was also expressing an indigenous feeling - 'the captains are much discontented (...) he had

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¹⁶ Ibid. pp 359-60.
¹⁷ Ibid. p.362.
¹⁸ Ibid. p.367.
destroyed the principal people of his kingdom and killed their sons and taken their goods (...) he is a man that they hold to be of little force of character".  

It is not that the modern historian must accept Nuniz's interpretation uncritically. Burton Stein, for instance, argues that Achyuta Deva Raya survived the early threats of an usurper, Rama Raja, 'by his courage and impressive allies of his own'.  

But he depended on the support of brahman military commanders - an inheritance from Krishna's attempt to balance local chiefly powers - and, as Nuniz said, on the powerful Salakarajus, his brothers-in-law. In this sense, the inability of the ruler to contain the growth of factionalism, a key problem of all aristocratic systems, necessarily casts a doubt on Achyuta's political success. Nuniz may have been only expressing sympathy for lords who belonged to an opposing faction, but his negative judgement was not entirely without historical justification. In fact, eventually Achyuta Deva Raya could not prevent Rama Raja from establishing a regency over his nephew and successor Sadasiva. With the military power under their command, Rama Raja and his two brothers were destined to become new usurpers to the throne, and many years later - three decades after Nuniz wrote his chronicle - actually led the huge armies of the last Hindu empire to the disastrous battle of Talikota (1565), which they had certainly provoked, and which marked the end of the "City of Victory".

Simple as his scheme of virtue and vice may be, Nuniz's achievement as a historian needs to be measured against the standards of the historical models he had inherited. Not only did he undertake to write about a non-

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19 Ibid. pp 367 and 369. In fact, Achuta Raya does not even sit on the throne of gold and precious stones at the Mahanavami festival, 'for they say that whoever sits on it must be a very truthful man, one who speaks the whole truth, and this King never does so' (p.377). That is, Nuniz picks up that this king, out of immorality, has lost the sacred character accorded to him in the indigenous tradition.  

20 Stein 1989, p.68. Burton Stein (pp 113-7) provides a detailed background to this dynastic struggle which goes a long way to correcting Nuniz.
European kingdom with languages and gods very different from the known traditions, he also developed the medieval chronicle so as to generate a dramatic tension in place of the usual dynastic or nationalistic propaganda. More surprisingly, he did so with little reference to ancient classical models. Only personal engagement with the local tradition could have helped him here. Most other historians of Portuguese Asia or Spanish America were committed to writing about indigenous peoples only with reference to a European military, or spiritual, conquest. This was the case even with writers who developed a sympathetic understanding of indigenous historical traditions, authors such as the Spanish Pedro Cieza de León on Perú.21 We probably need to wait for the doctor-philosopher and libertin François Bernier, author of the Histoire de la dernière révolution des états du Grand Mogol (Paris 1670), before we find a European history dealing exclusively with non-European affairs that surpasses the early and almost unnoticed achievement of Nuniz the horse-trader.

We are now in a position to provide a more satisfactory answer to one of our original questions: did Nuniz project a European "feudal" understanding of society and politics onto his experience of Vijayanagara? His chronicle is as much an original combination of indigenous sources and Portuguese attitudes, as his political interpretation is an attempt to "translate" Vijayanagara patterns into more general models, analogous to European ones. One may argue that, even within the narrow framework of court politics, he fails to acknowledge properly some of the important historical movements emphasized recently by Burton Stein, such as the long rise to power of Aravidu Bukka and his son Rama Raja. It must be borne in mind

21 See Cieza 1553, 1979 and 1985. The second part of Cieza's chronicle dealt with pre-hispanic history, but the general plan was based on the Spanish conquest. On the other hand, the chronicle by Juan de Betanzos on the Incas (Betanzos 1987) is a very special case, almost exclusively based on an indigenous tradition. Both were written around 1550. The Mexican chronicle written by the Dominican missionary Diego Durán (c.1580) was also remarkable.
however that Nuniz's experience of Vijayanagara was ultimately limited. It is not just that the terms of his language may have been simplistic when dealing with foreign social and cultural realities: his experience was also limited in time and space. Furthermore, the very native sources at his disposal were likely to omit many of the things identified by the modern historian. As I argued above, Barbosa, Paes and Nuniz are occasionally better guides than some of these sources. It is only when we keep all these considerations in mind that Nuniz's account can be fairly criticised from the position of modern reconstruction offered by Burton Stein.

Stein has defined the fundamental problem in one sentence: 'the Vijayanagara kingdom, at the moment when its central authority was greatest, was a weakly-centralised polity'. 22 This weakness was due to the fact that the kings owed their power over local communities and temples to a caste of military overlords, the Nayakas, who ultimately manipulated and contested the central institution of authority. The pattern of all crisis of succession is strikingly similar: the same prime ministers and generals who lead the royal armies to restore authority, build up family factions and replace existing kings. The centralised prebendalism of a conquest state directed against an interior, as much as an exterior, enemy, led to the creation of powerful provincial generals in control of substantial resources and armies.

There is little of this that the language used by Nuniz fails to capture. Although he emphasizes the luxury of the King's private life in the "female" side of the palace, and his display of military power and authority whenever he goes out, 23 he also explains the delicate balance of power between him and his captains. The royal ministers are few in number: a regedor do reyno (prime

22 Ibid. p.121.
minister, probably also general of the royal army), a
tisoureyro (treasurer) with the escrivaes de fazemda
(scribes of the exchequer), a thisoureyro moor (chief
treasurer), a porteiro moor (head porter, i.e. commander
of the palace guards), and two special officers in charge
of key goods: jewels, and horses.24

We are here forced to translate Portuguese terms into
indigenous realities, making suppositions such as that
these escrivãos de fazemda were in charge of keeping a
record of the revenues from the king's own lands and
customs. And it is worth recalling that Nuniz may himself
have been the escrivão de fazemda for the Portuguese king
in India.25 Despite this linguistic distortion it is very
clear that the administration thus described, with a very
limited amount of paperwork and no sense of a secular
constitution, is in fact in the hands of a powerful
aristocracy: the king 'não tem veador de fazemda, nem
outros oficiaes, nem de sua casa, somente os capitães de
sur reyno'.26 Thus, for instance, 'Salvanayque [Chellappa
Saluva Nayaka], regedor que agora he (...) e senhor de
Charamãodel [Coromandel], e de Nagapatão [Negapatam], e
Tamgor [Tanjore], e Bomgarim, e Dapatao, e do Truguel, e
de Caullim, e todas estas são cidades, e as tudas terras
são muyto gramdes, e partem com Ceilão'.27 Thus the
current prime minister is also lord of a substantial
portion of the Tamil country.

In this context, the king's method of dealing with
rebellious lords is not so much by the development of an
independent central administration, as by the reliance on

25 Here I follow Sewell's suggestion (Ibid.)
26 Ibid. p.72. / Ibid: 'The king has no controller of the revenues nor other
officers, nor officers of his house, but only the captains of his kingdom'.
27 Ibid. / Ibid: 'Salvanayque, the present minister (...) is lord of
Charamãodel and of Nagapatão, and Tamgor, and Bomgarin, and Dapatao, and
Truguel, and Caullim, and all these are cities; their territories are all very
large, and they border on Ceylon'.

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ultimate military superiority. This entails, of course, that if the king ceases to be the most powerful general, then the most powerful general will become king. In fact, the same minister [Saluva Nayaka] who had always supported Krishna Deva Raya, and guaranteed the enthronement of Achyuta against the pretender Rama Raja in 1529, rebelled soon after in 1531, leading a coalition of many other Tamil chiefs.28

Nuniz dwells in detail, and with the precision of someone used to keeping numerical records, on the nature of this "nobility":

[os capitães] são como remdeiros que tem todas as terras d'este rey, e alem de terem toda esta gente [600.000 foot-soldiers and 24.000 horsemen] paga a sua costa. Lhe pagam cada ano sessenta leques [6.000.000] de remda foruros pera el-rey, e as terras dizem que remderão cento e vinte leques [12.000.000], dos quaes pagão estes sessenta a elrey, e os mais lhe ficão pera soldos das gentes e gastos dos alyfantes com que são obrigados a servir, pela quocal rezão o povo meudo padece myuda fatiga, por elles nas terras que tem serem tão tiranos...29

Despite his claims to revenues from the whole land, and a lucrative monopoly on the importation of horses, the king has little direct political contact with his subjects,

28 See Stein 1981. pp 48-51. I believe Sewell was wrong in dating Nuniz's chronicle as late as 1536-7. This narrative actually stops at the beginning of Achyuta's reign, when Saluva Nayaka was still his minister. It should therefore be dated 1530-1, just before the rebellion of Saluva Nayaka. Nuniz actually reflects the climate of dissatisfaction that would have preceded it. Sewell probably confused Ismail Adil Shah's attack on Vijayanagara in 1530, when he took Raichur back, with a later confrontation, when Achyuta actually entered into an alliance with one of the candidates to succession to the Deccani Sultanate (Ismail had died in 1534). Sewell was misled by apparent coincidences between Nuniz and the Persian chronicle of the Deccani historian Firishtah, who wrote a century later. Firishtah is extremely unreliable, even though his account may have a factual basis, because from his Deccani perspective Vijayanagara represented only "the other", whose role is to fall victim to the success of Muslim Sultans. In this sense Firishtah was more "orientalist" than Nuniz, who had no vested interest of the kind.

29 Lopes 1897, p.64. / Sewell 1900, pp 373-4: 'These nobles are like renters who hold all the land from the King, and besides keeping all these people [600.000 foot-soldiers and 24.000 horsemen] they have to pay their cost; they also pay to him every year sixty lakhs [6.000.000] of rents as royal dues. The lands, they say, yield a hundred and twenty lakhs [12.000.000] of which they must pay sixty to the king, and the rest they retain for the pay of the soldiers and the expenses of the elephants which they are obliged to maintain. For this reason the common people suffer much hardship, those who hold the land being so tyrannical...'
except through his lords. Peasants are portrayed as having to pay as much as nine-tenths of their produce to them.\(^{30}\) The king, on the other hand, must spend more than half his revenues to keep his own soldiers, horses and elephants. He also keeps more than four-thousand women, who perform all kinds of activities within the palace, and as many as two thousand artisans paid by the day.\(^ {31}\) Nuniz explains that he needs to keep a close watch on his lords, who therefore 'amôo sempre na corte' and 'não são nunca aposentados por cidades nem villas, por que as tem nellas postos outros de sua mão'. Those lords who do not keep the appropriate number of soldiers 'são por ysso muy castigados, e suas fazemdas tomadas'.\(^ {32}\)

These noblemen - about two-hundred, says Nuniz - imitate on a smaller scale the life-style of the king: 'se servem d'amdores e palamques', and 'quoamdo morre huã capitão queymão se então suas molheres quantas tem'.\(^ {33}\) They all have secretaries who connect them permanently to the court, and who naturally act as spies: 'de maneira que não se pasa cousa que elles loguo não saibão'.\(^ {34}\) Nuniz emphasizes that these captains, all 'gentios' (Hindus), are compelled to pay a fixed amount and to maintain a number of forces 'segundo as terras e remdas que tem'.\(^ {35}\) He even provides a list of some eleven important captains, which includes details of the territories they hold, and the

\(^{30}\) Ibid. p.68. / Ibid. p.379.

\(^{31}\) Ibid. pp 69-70. / Ibid. pp 381-382.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. p.64. / Ibid. p.374: 'must always attend court (...) are never suffered to settle themselves in cities or towns because they would there be beyond reach of his hand (...) are severely punished and their states confiscated'.

\(^{33}\) Ibid. p.74 and 77. / Ibid. pp 389 and 392: '[the captains of this kingdom] make use of litters and palanquins (...) when a captain dies, however many wives he has they all burn themselves'.

\(^{34}\) Ibid. p.65. / Ibid. p.374: 'and they manage so that nothing takes place of which they do not soon know'.

\(^{35}\) Ibid. p.74. / Ibid. p.389: 'according to their lands and revenues that they have'.
amounts of men and pardaos that they supply each year.  
There can be little doubt that Nuniz's understanding of European institutions did not prevent him in any fundamental way from conceptualising the specific nature of political life in Vijayanagara. Rather, the analogous character of many institutions such as kingship, or even of ideological schemes such as the three-ordered division of society, actually helped him to introduce distinctions into the description of Indian peoples. Thus, bramines were like European friars and priests, while nayaques were compared to noblemen.

This homology would have been disastrous if it had been used to hide differences. However, it could, and actually was often used, to provide a basis on which to build distinctive descriptions. In the analysis of political institutions, Nuniz was able to show that Vijayanagara kings were remarkably successful in maintaining criminal justice, but he did not transmit any sense of a political constitution comparable to those of contemporary European principalities. The Indian king could thus nominally give and take lordships as he willed, without committing himself to any written law that was more than a mere historical record: 'não passa cartas nem alvaras das merces que faz'. When analysing society, Nuniz again drew important parallels. Supporting brahmins with economic benefits, for instance, was translated as 'giving charity' in a way reminiscent to the endowment of monasteries in Europe. But the long account of brahman marriage and funeral practices at the end of the manuscript could leave the reader in no doubt that there were substantial differences between them and their Christian counterparts.

36 Ibid. pp 72-4. / Ibid. pp. 384-389. According to Paes (Sewell 1900 pp 282-3), one pardao had the value of 360 Portuguese reis. It was a small gold coin from Vijayanagara kingdom, but with prestige all over the Indian peninsula.
37 Ibid. p.65. / p.375: 'no written orders are ever issued, for the favours he bestows or the commands he gives'.
38 Ibid. p.68. / Ibid. p.379.
It is in this careful observation of customary behaviour that travellers contributed most creatively to an ethnological discourse.

Does all this mean that there was no hint of "orientalism"? I have mentioned earlier the considerable limitation posed by the lack of cultural space that may have enabled travellers to approach religion from a comparative perspective. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the kind I have been analysing are far from being mere "orientalist" constructions. In fact, it is possible to trace the later emergence of orientalism as Vijayanagara was progressively incorporated into more central areas of the European system of cultural discourses. If we take "orientalism" to mean an attitude by which the other (and, only circumstantially, the oriental other) is defined more in terms of one's own system of power and identity than in terms of a genuine exchange, then it appears that, in the case of the Renaissance re-invention of the theme, "orientalism" increased with distance, both physical and mental. That is to say that rather than in the first-hand report of Nuniz the merchant, it is in the summary of his account in the history of the humanist Barros, who was committed to an apology of the Portuguese Empire, that orientalism took shape. And more clearly still, it was in the universal system of political cosmography of the counter-reformation scholar, Giovanni Botero, who summarized Barros and various travellers, that Vijayanagara became a stereotyped model of oriental tyranny. Symptomatically, all this occurred as the kingdom itself fragmented, and only a shadow remained of the now-mythical glory of the City of Victory.

João de Barros (1496-1570) published the third decade of Asia in 1563.39 He had devoted two of its chapters to

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39 See Boxer 1981.
explaining certain events relating to Vijayanagara. 40 It was part of his plan to offer an indigenous background to the narrative of the Portuguese expansion, but it also seems that this interest was generally limited to the relevance such a background might have for the understanding and proper representation of Portuguese affairs. Barros thus justified including a section on the king of Narsinga because his wars with the Adil Shah of Bijapur favoured the Portuguese expansion in the 'terras firmes' (hinterland) surrounding Goa. This king was also, traditionally, an ally of the Portuguese. But Barros emphatically chose to describe the power of such a king in terms of military ability, because it was only his power that interested him. He probably had the narratives of Paes and Nuniz in front of him, and decided to disregard the kind of picture supplied by the former:

E posto que, dando nós notícia de como se serve e dos aparatos de sua casa, dávamos à mostra em que se podia julgar sua riqueza e poder, por serem cousas de príncipes deliciosos e soberbos, que querem com ouro, prata e muita polícia fazer suas casas templos de adoração, e no serviço de suas pessoas à maneira de idolatria, com que querem ser servidos dos seus povos, leixaremos tôdas estas superstiqües... 41

This Barros rejected the extraordinary display of the festival, so carefully described by the Portuguese horse-traders, precisely because it succeeded in suggesting the sacredness of kingship in an idolatrous context - and certainly Barros would not like his own lords to mirror themselves in bad examples. Thus he turned to his feudal epic ideal: 'porque en nenhüa cousa com razão se pode

41 Ibid. p.190: 'Now, if we gave notice of the way in which he [the king] is served, and of the apparel of his household, this would be something with which to judge his wealth and power; but these are things which belong to refined and haughty princes, who with gold, silver and much political skill want to turn their houses into temples of worship, and service to their persons into a kind of idolatry, and by these means they want to be served by their peoples. Therefore, we shall leave aside all these superstitions...'
Barros turned to Nuniz, and then summarized, with elegant and measured style, his account of the prebendal system that allowed the king to concentrate revenues and raise huge armies. This served as a good basis for a more detailed account of the expedition against the fortress of Raichur, in which Barros could describe not only the indigenous military campaign and diplomatic exchange, but also the decisive intervention of Cristovão de Figueiredo and his Portuguese men as the providential allies of the gentile king. This section of Nuniz's chronicle was the only one in which the Portuguese became protagonists (much as Xenophon's Greek mercenaries were the heroes of his account of Persian wars).

Barros' incipient orientalism was only the starting point for future authors. Although in the beginning of the sixteenth century Turkey attracted most attention, and after the 1580s it was the Great Moghul of India, Japan and, above all, China which became famous through the histories produced by Augustinian and Jesuit missionaries, the kingdom of Vijayanagara (as well as Calicut) kept maintaining a modest, yet remarkable, presence. For instance François de Belleforest, in his French translation of Münster's influential cosmography (La cosmographie universelle de tout le monde, Paris 1575), included a description of the Royaume de Narsinga as part of his improvements on the original. However, Belleforest lacked the geographical or historical perspective to summarize the original sources he found in Ramusio's collection without making serious mistakes and distorting the original emphasis. He thus used Barbosa's full account and

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42 Idem: 'because the power and being of a prince cannot be reasonably noticed better in anything other than the order and apparel appertaining to the military practice'.

43 He attributed this account to indigenous officers of the exchequer: 'segundo o que temos sabido dos oficiais de fazenda daquele príncipe...'(Ibid).
Varthema's sketch in order to create an image of Vijayanagara, and yet he did not use information from these travellers to criticise the Greek sources, like Ramusio wanted, but rather tried to combine these new descriptions with some dubious identifications from Ptolemy's geography. Furthermore, he expanded the original accounts with unnecessary verbosity, while at the same time failing to realise that the oriental kingdom had been destroyed ten years before he published his universal cosmography. It was not simply that Belleforest could hardly have had access to something like Cesare Fedrici's account of the fall of Vijayanagara, only published in 1587, but more importantly he suffered from the theological tendency to create a cosmographical encyclopedia which would be a definite account of God's created world—and therefore, the historical dimension did not play a coherent role.

Giovanni Botero (1544-1617), a failed Jesuit but successful counsellor of Cardinal Federico Borromeo, also included Vijayanagara in one of the most important cosmographies of the Renaissance. In the various volumes of his Relationi Universali (Rome, 1591-) he brought together an immense mass of geographical and anthropological information, which he tried to organise so that it might serve to test his own political and economic theories, as explained in Delle cause della grandezza e magnificenza della città (Rome, 1588) and Della ragion di stato (Rome, 1589). The second and most popular part of his Relationi (1592), dealing with the political organization of the most important nations of the known world, included Botero's fullest account of Narsinga. It was based on

46 There was also one section devoted to Narsinga in the first part, which was more like a world Geography. See Botero 1617, P.I, l.II, pp 112-3; P.II, l.II, pp 64-7.
the historians Barros and Osorio, but also on the various accounts published in Ramusio's travel collection (which included Conti, Varthema, Barbosa, Pires and in later editions Fedrici). Unfortunately, the fact that Botero wrote his summary with a wider perspective than Barros did not prevent him from trying to extract some political lessons which had little to do with the conditions in which the original descriptions had been written. He looked for a comparative framework where particulars could be assembled and understood according to more general conditions. Asia was, in his opinion, a land where specific climatic conditions encouraged great Empires, and also the origin of all ancient sciences, sacred events and valuable spices; while Europe found the source of its superior strength in its diversity and divisions, which were explained by a combination of natural causes (the geographical setting) and human qualities (the characters and skills of its different peoples). 47

Botero's interpretation of Vijayanagara became the best known in seventeenth-century Europe: thus, the second part of the Relationi was translated independently as a short historical description of the most famous kingdoms of the world. In England, for instance, Robert Johnson's The travellers breviat (London, 1601), first printed anonymously and with Botero's material arranged in a new order, was repeatedly revised and republished (1608, 1616, 1630).

The result of several overlays of epitomizers was to produce a text that responded more to the interpretative needs of European writers than to the original experiences of those who went, saw and heard. But in fact, Botero did not make any direct effort to change the story, nor did he try to depart consciously from the empirical model of knowledge sustained by the figure of the traveller. He even compared Conti with Varthema and complained about their

47 Botero 1617, P.I 1.I pp 1-2; P.I 1.II p.102; P.II p.45.
inconsistencies in measuring the size of the city of Bisnagar. Some of his blunders result from a misguided attempt to make things clear: 'In Narsinga are two imperial cities; Narsinga and Bisnagar: by reason whereof he is termed sometime king of Narsinga, sometime King of Bisnagar'. There is also a concern with finding models useful in the context of the political thought of the West, which could feed on the interpretative emphasis of the original Portuguese descriptions. Vijayanagara is a land prodigiously abundant 'with all good things'. This soon reaches fantastic proportions, reminiscent of ancient and medieval accounts of the marvels of India. 'The waters (...) doe woonderfully coole, moisten, and inrich this land, causing the graine and cattell to prosper above imagination'.

Thus, while some details are close to the original descriptions - the diversity of provinces and languages within the kingdom, the fact that it depends on horses imported from the Indian Ocean, or the relationship established with the Portuguese on the coast - the central concern of the text, namely, the power of the king to raise huge armies and to present himself as a very rich and powerful lord, is rationalized in a way that completely misses the internal mechanisms by which power and revenues were distributed in the South Indian empire. The author tries to explain the military power by appealing to an image of oriental despotism which, in fact, enhances the power of the king at the expense of the common people. Thus, we are told that 'He is absolute lord of the bodies and goods of his subiects, which he shareth to himselfe and his captaines, leaving the people nothing but their hands and labour (...) all these barbarous princes maintaine not peace and iustice, as arches whereupon to lay the

48 Ibid. P.I 1.II p.113.
49 Botero 1601, p.140.
50 Ibid. p.139.
groundworke of their estates, but armes, conquest and the 
nurserie of continuall soldierie'. Botero had been 
clearly impressed by Barros' account of Vijayanagara 
military might, but before reproducing the expedition to 
Raciel (Raichur) he introduced some negative reflections. 
A quick comparison with a Christian prince, the king of 
France, allowed Botero to show that if this king were 
absolute, as 'potentates of the East' are, and therefore 
richer, he would be able to raise huge armies. However, 
since wealth is better distributed in Europe, thanks to the 
variety of rights and laws that limit the power of the 
king, 'the peazants live wel here, in comparison of the 
villagois of India, Polonia and Lithuania'. Oriental 
despotism is therefore seen to be founded upon an excessive 
concentration of authority and revenues.

In this way Botero tests and develops his political 
philosophy, an exercise through which the people of 
Vijayanagara, first stripped of their gods by Nuniz, and 
then of the beauty of their landscape, city and festivals 
by Barros, become mere despots defined, now in purely 
secular terms, against us: they are just what we don't want 
to be.

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Thanks to one of the three maps prepared by the 
cartographer Jacopo Gastaldi to accompany the first volume 
of Ramusio's travel collection, by 1550 Besinagar had been 
firmly set in the midst of the new European "map of the 
world". Throughout one century of intensive dialogue with 
the Geography of Ptolemy, travel accounts had thus provided 
the information that enabled Renaissance Europe to 
supersede the ancients. Afterwards, occasional

51 Ibid. p.140.
52 Ibid. p.141.
53 See figure 6.
observations about Vijayanagara appeared in the historical, cosmographical or moralistic literature of the second half of the sixteenth century. Paulo Giovio in 1550 knew of the wealth and horses of the king of Narsingam. Le Roy in 1575 thought that Narsingue supported his case about the concurrence of armed strength and excellence in learning, while one of Montaigne's later additions to his essays (after 1588) confirmed his view that the taste for good and evil depends on human opinion with a reference to the custom of Narsinga, according to which servants burnt themselves on the pyre of their dead master.54 Through Barros and Botero, the battle of Raichur between Krishna Deva Raya and the Adil Shah of Bijapur became part of the historiography of the Portuguese conquest of India, and was mentioned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Osorio, Faria y Souza, and Lafitau.55

All these references were in a sense anachronistic: only a static image of Vijayanagara effectively reached Europe. Few of these writers seem to have reflected on the disastrous end of the city that sustained the myth of Vijayanagara, even though its portrayal figured prominently in the narrative of the travels of a Venetian merchant, Cesare Fedrici, published in 1587, and then incorporated into the collections of Hakluyt (1599) and a later edition of Ramusio (1606). Fedrici stayed in Vijayanagara in 1567, two years after the battle of Talikota, which he recounted, and he concluded that it was no longer a good place to conduct business. The new king, not recognized by the lords, had recently cheated the traders that brought him horses, and had also moved the capital to another town. The old capital was still safe and the palace still impressive, but wilderness was gradually overcoming the city, while the roads were full of thieves and very dangerous:

54 Lach 1977, pp 227, 311 and 296.
55 Sewell 1900, pp 144-5.
I rested in Bezenger seven moneths, although in one moneth I might have discharged all my businesse, for it was necessary to rest there until the wayes were cleere of theeves, which at the timw ranged up and downe. And in the time I rested there, I saw many strange and bestly deeds done by the Gentiles.\textsuperscript{56}

The century and a half that separated Fedrici from his earlier compatriot, Nicolò Conti, is expressed through a considerable change in style. Fedrici was more aware of himself as an interesting subject than Conti would have dared to be, and the petty difficulties of the petty traveller had now become possible as a literary theme. This was the inheritance left by travellers like Varthema. Moreover, even though by Renaissance standards Fedrici's material is not particularly well organized, there now existed a context, institutional and mental, which allowed him to be much more precise than Conti had been. This framework was made possible by the Portuguese colonial system, and by the consolidation of travel writing as a European genre. But the most striking difference that singles out Fedrici's description of Vijayanagara is a change of tone. In the dilapidated order of a decaying city gentile rulers were all seen as tyrants, and strange customs, of which Fedrici seems only to notice sati and similar burial practices, had become filthy and repugnant - in fact, anti-natural:

\begin{quote}
there are a number of beastly qualities among them, of which I have no desire to write. I was desirous to know the cause why these women would so wilfully burne themselves against nature and law, and it was told mee that this law was of an ancient time, to make provision against the slaughters which women made of their husbands...\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

The last glimpse caught by a European of a Hindu empire emphasized the loss of all that earlier foreign visitors had admired:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{56} Hakluyt 1907, III, pp 213-4.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. pp 215-6.
\end{flushright}
there are many kings, and great division in that kingdoms, and the city of Bezeneger is not altogether destroyed, yet the houses stand still, but empty, and there is dwelling in them nothing, as is reported, but Tygers and other wilde beastes.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. p.216.
Conclusion

Modern historians of the kingdom of Vijayanagara have all been aware that the foreign descriptions are crucial for the understanding of its history. This attitude was best expressed by Robert Sewell in 1900, when he first published in English, and with a full historical introduction, the Portuguese chronicles of Paes and Nuniz, which had remained almost completely unknown until 1897, when David Lopes edited them in their original language. As Sewell wrote,

These documents possess peculiar and unique value; that of Paes because it gives us a vivid and graphic account of his personal experiences at the great Hindu capital at the period of its highest grandeur and magnificence—"things which I saw and came to know" he tells us— and that of Nuniz because it contains the traditional history of the country gathered first-hand on the spot, and a narrative of local and current events of the highest importance, known to him either because he himself was present or because he received the information from those who were so (...) Senhor Lopes (...) writes in his introduction: "Nothing that we know of in any language can compare with them, whether for their historical importance or for the description given of the country, and especially of the capital, its products, customs, and the like..."1

The chronicles of Paes and Nuniz are only the apex of what one may call 'Vijayanagara as seen by outsiders'. Historians of Medieval South India in our century have made an effort to lay more stress on indigenous texts, inscriptions and archaeological evidence in order to complement these reports. At the time when they undertook their task these were the sources on which any major empirical addition had to be made, and with few exceptions they had not been thoroughly studied, nor even properly collected. Moreover, reliance on foreign interpretations also implied a reliance on the pre-conceptions of intrusive powers which were seen to have brought eventual imperial

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1 Sewell 1900 vii-viii.
domination. This is why the most updated and innovative of recent interpretations of Vijayanagara, the work of Burton Stein, is ready to fend off the ghost of orientalism:

These Portuguese merchant adventurers [Paes and Nuniz] knew no Indian languages well enough to correct their visual impressions through understandings obtained from verbal or written views of Indians. Vijayanagara kings of the sixteenth century were presented as oriental despots whose authority consisted partly of sacred power founded upon, or regenerated by, royal sacrifices and partly on feudal relations between them and great territorial lords ('captains'). Finally, to these was added the orientalist notion of the fabulous riches of Asia which was supported by the splendours of the city itself, its vastness, its monumentality, and the wealth of its citizens.²

This view is certainly unfair. As we have seen, Paes and Nuniz do not insist at all on the ideas of "oriental despotism", "fabulous riches" or "feudal relationships" in their descriptions of Vijayanagara. These concepts are later European cultural elaborations, all too often assumed as obvious by modern scholars without further explanation. Although it may be possible to construct an orientalist interpretation of Vijayanagara using the descriptions of Paes and Nuniz, as in fact Botero did, there is no underlying assumption of an essentially different Orient in these writers which would necessarily lead to such interpretation. Paes and Nuniz do not seem particularly ill-informed when it comes to Indian views either. The whole of Nuniz's chronicle was most probably based on local oral or written traditions which can be traced back to Kannada and Telugu texts. In fact, what is surprising is the extent to which it is precisely in the quality of their personal observations, rather than in their transmission of local traditions, that the accounts of Paes and Nuniz have been consistently confirmed by recent revisionist archaeological findings and anti-orientalist research into

² Stein 1989, p.3.
the political history of the kingdom.

It is in the field of archaeology that the most serious effort has been made to develop an interpretative framework wholly independent from foreign descriptions. In the words of Fritz and Michell:

By far the most popular historical sources for Vijayanagara are the widely quoted accounts of the foreign visitors (...) Abd-ar-Razzaq, Domingo Paes, and Fernao Nuniz were at the capital during the spectacular mahanavami festival, and noted with awe the display of royal magnificence. They also attempted to describe the layout of the city and some of its principal monuments. Unfortunately, we encounter considerable difficulties in matching these contemporary urban "portraits" with the material record of the site. Unfamiliar as they were with the cultural context of Vijayanagara, the European visitors could hardly be expected to understand everything they observed, or evaluate all they were told. Furthermore, many of their chronicles seem to have been composed only after they had left India.3

The fact however is that these foreign accounts, especially if taken as a whole, still provide us with the most coherent and detailed interpretative framework which may serve as a starting point for a unified picture. One of the main reasons for this is that, while the results of archaeological research are either limited or very speculative, indigenous sources in Telegu, Kannada, Tamil and Sanskrit have been neglected. Translations or, more importantly, critical editions of these works, have been partial and discontinuous. Considering the nature of these texts, many of them imprecisely dated and of a highly literary and mythological character, these steps are crucial if we are to obtain any alternative basis for an indigenous interpretation of Vijayanagara. Textual criticism and contextual criticism are both wanting.

This does not mean, however, that we can simply take for granted whatever we find in foreign accounts. At this point I agree entirely with the particular observations

made by Burton Stein:

What is perhaps most striking about the use of a feudal conception in Vijayanagara history is that it appears to stem from the descriptions of European contemporaries of Krishnaraya and Achyutaraya of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese Domingo Paes' and Fernao Nuniz' reports on the reigns of these two kings of the third dynasty, in a.d. 1520-2 and a.d. 1535-7 respectively, provide the basic information on the nayaka system. These Portuguese views have been among the most influential in forming an understanding of Vijayanagara polity precisely because it is as a system that the polity is described.⁴

Given that foreign descriptions are so crucial for our understanding of Vijayanagara, it seems obvious that a necessary step consisted of studying these texts critically, with an awareness of the assumptions and intentions of their various observers. This interpretative framework is not only a guide to any future use of the texts as empirical sources: it is also a well-documented example of the experiences that conditioned early European ethnology, in the sixteenth century not yet a formal discipline, but already and quite dramatically a growing cultural discourse. Vijayanagara was only a marginal scenario of a wider process of European expansion, but the way writers like Paes, Nuniz and Barros dealt with it is remarkably similar to the way Pedro Cieza de León, Juan de Betanzos and Agustín de Zárate dealt, at similar dates, with Spanish-conquered Peru. This can lead in the future to more important conclusions.

Having sought to reconstruct this interpretative framework that developed with the Renaissance experience of foreign peoples, I would like to stress one idea in special; although each text possesses its own particular qualities and needs to be understood according to specific circumstances of its composition, all of them display a possibility of cultural understanding that cannot be

⁴ Stein 1980, p.375.
reduced to the mere imposition on an alien world of a set of prejudices. It is not just that travellers had to take account of empirical sensations which came to them from "outside", and which they were then able to interpret in various ways. More importantly, they could decode a cultural system, an indigenous language-game, even though this was necessarily accomplished with limitations (and here all the specific conditions for each text and author have to be taken into account). This idea of a cultural decodification raises some difficult questions about cultural diversity and human rationality which I do not have space to explore here. However, the fact that the Persian 'Abd al-Razzaq was able to decode a system in a way which was parallel to that followed by Paes and Nuniz, the fact that archaeologists trying to construct an hypothesis independent of the foreign descriptions have arrived at a similar kind of "system", and the fact that the best recent historical writing seems to support the belief that there was some kind of indigenous system along the same lines: - all this, I believe, supports the claim that beyond the crimes of Western "Orientalism", which are so often stressed, there was some kind of inter-cultural dialogue going on.

This dialogue was based on initial cultural homologies, but in the context of some travellers' personal involvement with Vijayanagara it went further than that, and became an active act of translation. The limits of such a dialogue - different assumptions, physical constraints, but ultimately, and decisively, the need born out of political expediency not to change one's assumptions beyond a certain point, a decision which is a crucial part of any human agency - these limits, I say, do not detract from the fact that different people from different cultures were able to meet and learn about each other.

But learning about other peoples was always a risk,
since it challenged the organization of cultural spaces which made identity and morality possible. At that time these spaces relied, for Catholics and Muslims alike, on a religious centre - a revealed tradition - which the practice of inter-cultural understanding, even if only on the basis of the use of everyday language for practical purposes, implicitly questioned. Sophisticated narrative strategies were developed to deal with that question, at least at the most immediate level. From a general perspective, however, the centre became less of a centre. The history of cultural translations is therefore also the history of identities, of their creation and dissolution in a continuous process of reproduction and change. Paradoxically, it is only as part of such an identity, through ideas of free will and moral choice, that it is possible to make sense of the contingent decision that allows each person to go beyond initial assumptions he makes about others and to learn from them, even if that knowledge ultimately entails a form of cultural death.

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It has been part of my objective to identify the importance of differences in cultural traditions in shaping historical agency. While it is clear that a tradition provides an individual with a given set of initial assumptions, images, ideas and cultural spaces that define a collection of language-games, the particular agent is not forever bound to repeat the same linguistic practices, nor is he the depositary of a tradition as a block. European and Persian travellers to Vijayanagara were able to decode indigenous language-games because they had a few initial homologies to work with, but also because, through their experience of otherness, they were able to move in the periphery of their own tradition and to change it. Any
original practice, a practice which responds to a particular historical context, is in some degree creative, and thus changes tradition, even if it also often takes the form of merely reproducing tradition.

The foreign interpretation of Vijayanagara was essentially two-fold: the identification of the city as the centre of a complex civil society and the recreation of its combined political, economic and ritual language-games in the institution of kingship. Merchants and ambassadors paid more attention to those aspects that concerned them most, so that European horse-traders insisted on economic possibilities, while the representative of the Persian Shah developed his own image of the ideal state governed by justice. What is particularly interesting is the extent to which travellers stopped short of "translating" the theoretical assumptions of the Hindu political system, mainly due to the fact that it was based on religious assumptions they could not accept. We need then to question whether that "blank area" affected their decodification of the political system they had experienced.

The Hindu tradition on which Vijayanagara rested integrated politics with morality (dharma) in a cosmological-religious system. Christianity and Islam, in which all the foreign travellers I have discussed had been educated, were based on a theocentric revelation to which law was necessarily related, or at least compatible with its particular theological and mythological premises. The Latin Christian tradition transformed this pattern because it developed, on the basis of the classical tradition in dialogue with the medieval "feudal" systems of privileges and international politics, a secularised political thought based on a discussion of systems of governments, historical particularities and the idea of a natural (and rational) law.

One obvious possibility of cultural translation was
to compare indigenous dharma with either divine or, less dangerously, natural law. The Hindu opposition between dharma (moral order) and artha (material prosperity) could thus be related to the classical and now European opposition between the honest and the useful. However, as one might expect, none of the Italian and Portuguese travellers to Vijayanagara developed openly any of these concerns as theory. This is easy to understand, because they were all merchants, soldiers and fortune-seekers, with a limited education in law, theology and the humanities. To use a contemporary parallel example from Spanish America, in the 1550s only a missionary like the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas was able to openly confront the basic dilemma of the ethnologist between a language of Civility and a language of Christianity which did not entirely coincide. On the other hand, a chronicler of Perú like Pedro Cieza de León, in a lay position similar to that of Fernão Nuniz writing on Vijayanagara, had a few years earlier hinted at that dilemma by presenting admirable and rational (if devil-worshipping) Indians confronted by destructive (if providentially assisted) Christians.5

These travellers did, therefore, make extensive use of some theoretical assumptions in their descriptive practices, because the use of everyday language involved concepts and connotations that were related to the more specialised elite discourse. This kind of approach did not permit an open discussion of the beliefs of idolaters, but it facilitated the implicit subversion of traditional dogmas, because travellers could justify, on practical and empirical grounds, a discourse on the other which was essentially a departure from the well-defined cultural

spaces of tradition. They elaborated, on the basis of their experience of the physical reality of Vijayanagara and its system of beliefs and practices, a detailed empirical description based on ethnographic and historical models which were to a very great extent independent of religious assumptions. A knowledge of popular literary genres - such as the medieval epic and chronicle - and of the classical models of history and cosmography, however vague, allowed merchants and adventurers of urban origin with a limited education to shape their narratives. It was however the empirical emphasis on faithfulness to experience on which they relied most. When their Christian assumptions denied them the space for a sympathetic approach to Hindu mythology, they concentrated on ritual practices and decoded their symbolism, which they could relate to their own understanding of power relationships in a natural and historical world. In this way they were able to catch a glimpse of dharma and artha, without actually mentioning them. They were only partially systematic and critical, but they consolidated the cultural space within which further developments took place in sixteenth century Europe.

This process would become more acute with the Jesuits in the second half of the sixteenth century. These university-educated Catholic missionaries, with dogmatically limited (anti-Erasmian) humanist leanings, entered upon a systematic programme of cultural analysis in support of their highly institutionalised aims of conversion of heathens. Confronting issues similar to those discussed by Las Casas and other missionaries in America, they initiated the strategy of conversion that would dramatically strengthen the idea of a natural religion. This attempt to bridge between "heathen beliefs" and "civilized behaviour" only made more obvious a cultural tension which had grown with the increasingly important ethnological discourse of Renaissance travel accounts.
The Persian traveller to Vijayanagara is a different case. 'Abd al-Razzâq was a judge and a historian, and he was perfectly aware of the tension between revealed law and the empirical and systematic reconstruction of human life. Here the philosophical assumptions were tighter than the relative diversity of cultural spaces created by the western tradition. His vaguely Platonic idealism nevertheless allowed him to elaborate an aesthetic recreation of the Vijayanagara system without openly declaring the threat of relativism implicit in his literary practice. He thus spoke of justice and related it to a very selective (though still rich) empirical description, while avoiding any discussion of either dharma or Koranic law.

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I have attempted to identify the different registers of the process of transforming an experience of otherness into a narrative. I believe it can now be concluded that it is through defining or assuming similarities in a variety of language-games that foreign travellers came to terms with differences which belonged to a world of "otherness". Two assumptions were central to this practice: the ideas of nature and history. By nature I mean the assumption that the world is ordered, that it follows laws (with or without lawgivers) and regularities. History introduces the idea that events follow one another in an irreversible sequence. These two assumptions have to be understood as implicit mechanisms in the often unconscious and unsystematic use of everyday language for practical purposes, that is to say, independently of the various

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6 I am not here discussing possible conceptions of time and history. The idea of cyclical history, like the idea that time is only one more human illusion, could have been entertained in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and yet they are not the organizing assumptions of the narratives which I analyze, and whose logical consequences were increasingly allowed to shape discourse.
definitions of nature and history produced in the same period by other authors in other contexts. In their implicit form they are found in Muslim, Hindu, and Christian sources alike.

It was only after a long and original process that a particular kind of language-game about nature and about history developed in the European Christian tradition. This was a critical, systematic and empirical kind of discourse in which nature and history were the centre, and they were central precisely because theological figurations and moral values could be relativised by reference to them. This kind of discourse was critical insofar as it was prepared to identify and revise assumptions without fear, systematic insofar as it was carried on coherently in the framework of an institutionalised language-game, and empirical insofar as it stressed the importance of particular human experiences.

The process, as it developed in the Renaissance, took the form of a dialogue with classical models, and required the painful separation of reason and faith, ideally acting together, as two independent areas of discourse (and here I refer to faith and reason as areas of discourse, not as the abstract definitions of two fundamental human psychological faculties). While faith relied on a traditional mythology renewed through the experience of the ineffable, reason constituted itself as a new myth, the critical, systematic, empirical kind of discourse based on the assumptions of nature and history. That this kind of discourse became central (but neither unique, nor exclusive) in Europe owed a great deal to the early colonial experiences and to the contribution of the different genres of travel literature.

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We saw how, out of a medieval practice of reporting "marvels of the east" in which common-sense observations of diversities in customs coexisted with images of perfection and monstrosity, several pressures - the critical-intellectual demands of humanists like Poggio, the individualistic forms of identity of travellers like Varthena, the institutional support for politically-motivated scientific projects as Barbosa's - combined to create the conditions for the elaboration of cosmographical models of interpretation of foreign societies. Such elaboration did not merely copy traditional models, nor did it merely impose a European ideological construct on a passive, ultimately mysterious oriental society. In fact it involved a process of decodification which, despite its cultural and circumstantial limitations (as I have pointed out in each case), expressed one aspect of human rationality which has claims to being considered universal - the capacity to learn language-games and recreate cultural traditions through a contact with "otherness". I have spoken about a level of universality on the basis of the comparison of diverse and independent material, exemplified in particular by the introduction of Muslim sources on Vijayanagara. It was not however just a matter of finding the language to represent an objective reality, precisely because of the limitations I mentioned above.

The inner tensions of the cultural process are revealed more fully in the study of the most complete accounts of Vijayanagara by Paes and Nuniz, with special reference to their dependence on an inherited understanding of a social order (late-European "feudalism") and their limited use of cultural resources (such as historical narratives). However, the mechanisms of self-correction which would overcome such limitations were also an open and incipient linguistic possibility. Nuniz translated an
indigenous historical tradition and made it a Portuguese
chronicle, and Barros incorporated some of this into a
major Renaissance work on the Portuguese Expansion. Botero,
summarizing these sources, claimed that Vijayanagara was
a major example or oriental tyranny. Now, anyone could
challenge this by reading the original travel accounts more
carefully, or even by sending a new traveller to India who
would be aware of the problem under consideration and write
with studied questions in mind. After the Renaissance
Europeans tended to do this more and more, and travel was
openly discussed and recognized as a major form of
knowledge - knowledge of both others and self.

Just by looking at the various descriptions of
Vijayanagara it becomes obvious that the education and aims
of each writer, as expressed within the conventions of a
literary genre, affected the way their experiences of the
same "object" were linguistically constructed. These
subjective elements, as objectivised by the historian, do
not however make the idea of such an "object" superfluous.
The evidence suggests that the political reality of the
Empire, as expressed in the physical reality of the city
as a functioning social entity, imposed on all travellers
a starting point for their analyses. The city, rather than
just the king, was the visible symbol of Empire in the eyes
of the Hindus, and articulated a complex set of economic
and cultural relationships of which the military was only
the key instrument. The city, rather than the king, was the
symbol of a South-Indian Empire in the eyes of the Muslim
sultans of the Deccan who eventually destroyed it. And the
city, again, and not just the king, was the measure of
power and richness captured by the foreign travellers we
know of. To that extent, at least, it becomes apparent that
from the perspective of a historical reconstruction of a
cultural process, one should not talk about a purely
subjective invention of India.
This is not to say that the literature, as part of a changing tradition, was tied mechanically to a physical reality. Soon after the battle of Talikota in 1565, the Venetian merchant Cesare Fedrici witnessed the magnificent decay of the city which had attracted the admiration of Nicolò Conti about one and a half centuries earlier, and of many more travellers since. At a time when Moghul India, China and Japan entered the scene or became better known, the disappearance of the Hindu city weakened the literary theme of Vijayanagara in first-hand foreign descriptions. It happened despite the fact that its last dynasty survived for many decades as a precarious regional power, and even welcomed Jesuit missionaries, and also despite the fact that Krishna Deva Raya of Vijayanagara remained a mythological model, a perfect imitator of Rama, in the indigenous historical traditions. On the other hand Vijayanagara survived, and was transformed, within the Renaissance genre of cosmography. It was referred to in anachronistic terms, as the major centre of attraction it had once been rather than as the unstable collection of lordships and ethnic groups it now was. Thus, as I observed earlier, the French cosmographer François Belleforest included a long description of le royaume de Narsinga in his Cosmographie Universelle of 1575, but it was based on the early reports by Varthema and Barbosa clumsily conflated with the medieval geography of Ptolemy. As early as the beginning of the seventeenth century writers

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7 After the battle of Talikota, the Aravidu dynasty kept alive the idea of a Vijayanagara overlordship for almost another century, but the original capital city had to be given up for the safest alternatives of Penugonda and Chandragiri further East. The new rulers could hardly ever impose their authority on the southern Nayakas, while their territorial base was at the same time being continuously eroded by the northern Muslim rulers of the Deccan. The Jesuit missions of 1598-1607 took place under the reign of Venkata II (1586-1614), the most successful of these late Vijayanagara rulers. See Heras 1927.

8 Belleforest 1575 II, pp 1660-70.
from Portuguese India tended to adopt a similar perspective. In his *Historia dos religiosos da Companhia de Jesus* (1604-14) the Jesuit historian Sebastião Gonçalves identified Bisnágá with Marco Polo's kingdom of Var in South India. The Agustinian Agostinho de Azevedo, who in his report *Estado da India* (c. 1603) displays a wide classical education and a remarkable knowledge of Hindu religion, was well aware that Vijayanagara 'leva o caminho do reyno de Cambaya porque casi todo esta destruido sendo dantes o mais opulento da India'. He had spent many years in India. Nevertheless, his description of Biznaguer was surprisingly ill-focused towards the greatness and the events of the middle of the sixteenth century.

In the period from the enthusiastic recording of Conti's words in the fifteenth century Roman Curia to the appearance of Ramusio's collection of travel narratives more than a century later (which included several of our Vijayanagara descriptions) there had occurred a major change in Europe which was to bring about the consolidation of travel literature as a highly influential, if varied, type of discourse. The beginning of modern ethnology can be dated to this period, and renewed institutional stimuli would soon accentuate a new stage of the cultural development of the travel narrative based largely on a more systematic use of classical sources and comparative methods in the context of the late Renaissance concerns with education, morality, centralised government, nationalist propaganda and religious definition. This intellectual climate affected, above all, the way travel literature was

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10 *Estado da India* (1960) p.225: 'is following the way of the kingdom of Cambay, because it is now almost completely destroyed even though it used to be one of the most opulent in India'.

11 Ibid. pp 224-6.

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read and discussed, and of course it created new attitudes among the travellers themselves. Thus a conscious reflection on human diversity, already present in the everyday language of the medieval merchant or missionary, and occasionally highlighted by the intervention of exceptional individuals such as Poggio, became - with the massive programme of conversion of the Jesuits, with the renewed tradition of Iberian colonial cosmographers, and with the increasing success of the widely-read travel narratives of independent, adventurous philosophes - a common practice in the ethnographic literature of the late sixteenth century.
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