
Coercion, resistance, and hierarchy: local processes and imperial strategies in the Vijayanagara empire

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The Vijayanagara empire (*c.* AD 1300–1700) was among the most areally extensive imperial polities in South Asia, laying claim to a vast territory on the Indian peninsula that stretched from coast to coast and covered much of southern India (Fig. 10.1). However, the nature of this polity and its internal organization – in particular, in the nature, scope, and degree of power exercised by its rulers – is much in dispute. Scholarly interpretations range from images of a rather benign, ritually incorporated segmentary (B. Stein 1980, 1995) or theater state (Fritz 1986, after Geertz 1980), to images of a militaristic empire (Nilakanta Sastri 1975) or efficient extractor of produce (Palat 1987). More recently, Sinopoli and I have pointed out the great variability in the form and extent of economic power exercised by elites, including those at the eponymous capital city (Morrison 1995a; Morrison and Sinopoli 1992; Sinopoli and Morrison 1995; Sinopoli 1986; and see Morrison and Lycett 1994).

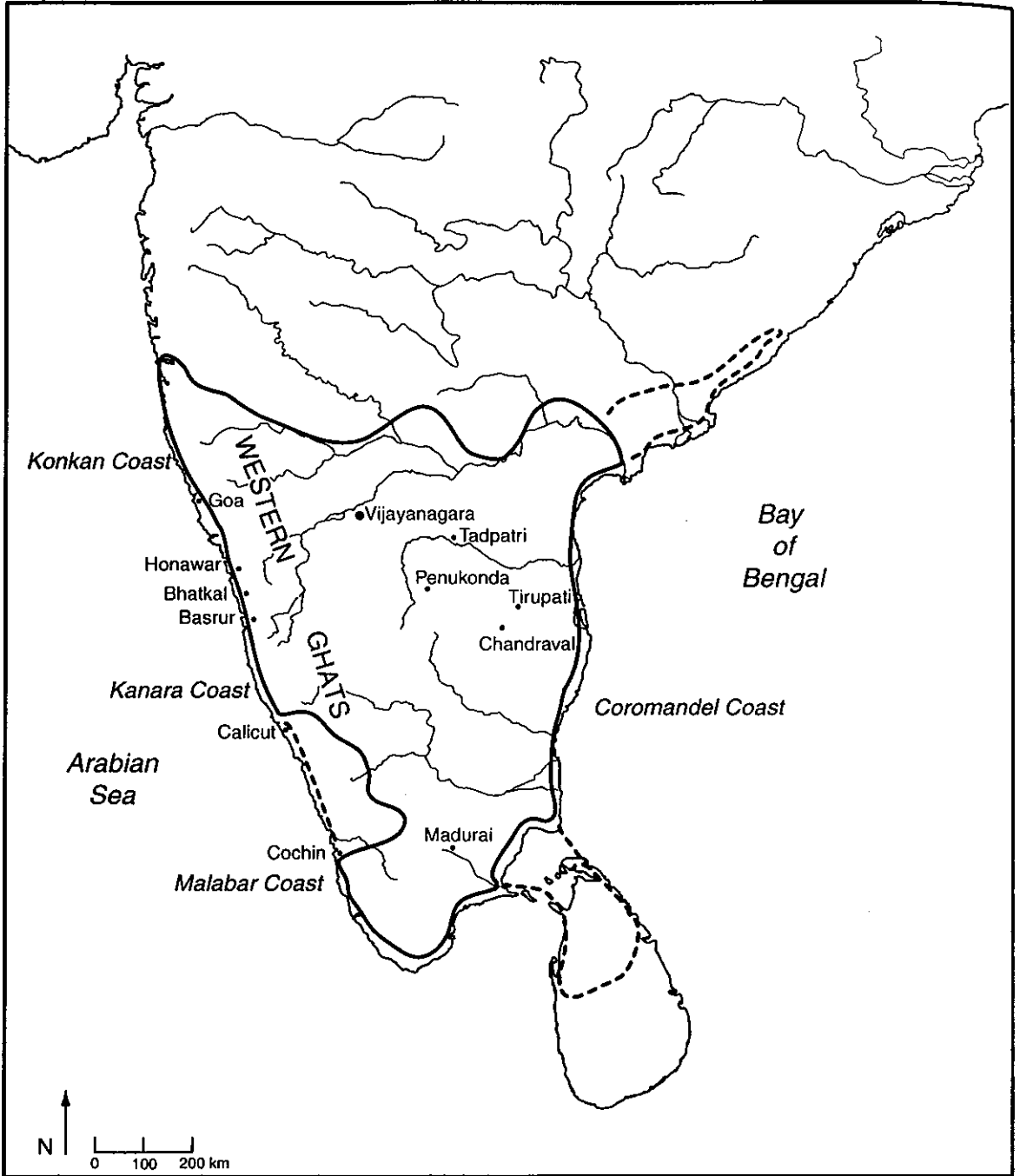
In part, this disagreement reflects the evolving state of scholarship on the Vijayanagara empire. However, much academic debate also stems from the significance of the Vijayanagara period itself for Indian history. Not only was this a time of transition from more regional polities to larger-scale imperial incorporation, it was also the period in which the influence of European trading companies and countries began to make itself felt, a period in which the structural conditions later encountered by European colonial powers were solidified. More than this, however, the later Vijayanagara period was a time of transition: of the movement of population on a large scale, the modification of natural environments, and the creation of various marginal and marginalized groups (or more properly, of the sets of economic and social strategies adopted by these groups), some of whom have come to be understood as remnants of an enduring, timeless Indian past. Such marginalized groups include various hunting and gathering peoples as well as peasant agriculturalists. Far from being holdovers from the deep past, however, such strategies were products of the complex political economy and political ecology of the Vijayanagara empire, products of the age.

In most previous analyses of the Vijayanagara empire, analytical effort has been directed primarily toward those who presumably constituted the most dynamic

actors on the imperial stage, elites of various sorts including kings and their families, officers, local leaders, priests, and temple managers. This chapter partially inverts this focus, moving away from viewing imperial strategies solely as intentional or unintentional acts of powerful elites and toward incorporating those at the margins of Vijayanagara imperialism into perspectives on the empire itself. From this perspective, imperial expansion and incorporation are not fully explicable in terms of the intentions and actions of leaders and rulers, or even of those intentions coupled with material and cultural possibilities and restraints. Instead, they appear as recursive and “negotiated,” both imposed from without and actively constructed, resisted, and manipulated by those who are brought into imperial systems (e.g., Irschick 1994). This “negotiation” is both ideological and physical, and in both spheres can be violent, bloody, and devastating. The phenomenon of imperial incorporation is thus more graphic, disjunctive, and immediate in the experience of subalterns than the rather dry language of scholarship written from the perspective of an imperial elite or reified imperial polity generally makes it out to be. As such, fuller understanding of key moments of political, economic, and environmental change associated with the Vijayanagara period requires analysis of both elite and non-elite action and experience.

Studying the construction, experience, and perhaps rejection and reworking of domination in the past is a difficult enterprise. I am aided in this by a tradition of theoretical scholarship in the social sciences and history, and I rely on the work of many historians of South Asia. However, I also bring to this work evidence from the archaeological record of Vijayanagara, perhaps the only “voice” that remains for many who have been largely or completely written out of text-based history (Morrison and Lycett 1997). The material record may not often make clear what Scott (1976: 4) refers to as the creation of social dynamite – the nature of exploitation in peasant society and the moral economy of peasants that interacts with that exploitation to create potentially explosive situations. And it probably even misses a great deal of the detonation of that dynamite (Scott 1976: 4), moments of rebellion or revolution (Wolf 1969). However, archaeological remains make clear, more so than texts, the material conditions of life under which participants in the Vijayanagara *imperium* labored, conditions that, as I suggest here, powerfully shaped both the possibilities and the course of Vijayanagara imperial expansion.

In this paper I consider some processes of imperial expansion and incorporation, their effects on those so incorporated, and, to the extent possible, the dynamic responses, strategies, and conditions of life of three different groups of subject peoples. The first group of people I consider are small-scale agriculturalists making a living on the semi-arid Karnatak plateau and living within a day’s journey of the city of Vijayanagara, one of the most populous places on the subcontinent in the sixteenth century. These farmers are known on the basis of both historical and archaeological data, and their impact on the landscape is also documented through studies of pollen and charcoal (Morrison 1994, 1995a). The second group, known only from the documentary record, is a more diverse



assortment of agriculturalists and craftspeople from what is now northern Tamil Nadu, a region several hundred kilometers distant from the capital city. Finally, I discuss what may be the most marginalized and least “Vijayanagara” of all the cases considered here, the gatherer-hunter-traders of the western coastal mountains. These are people who by and large were never under direct or even indirect Vijayanagara rule, but for whom the changes in land use and economy of the Vijayanagara period proved far-reaching. These three examples – briefly and preliminarily sketched out in this chapter – are meant to suggest a range of experiences with and responses to Vijayanagara imperialism from the local to the provincial to the remote.

DOMINATION AND EMPIRE FORMATION: BASES OF POWER

Imperial expansion and incorporation – empire-building – is at the core a process of domination, of the exercise of power. However, such power is always deployed (or attempted to be deployed) within specific historic, cultural, and material contexts. These contexts, and their potential implications for processes of empire formation, operation, and dissolution, are my specific concern here. Nevertheless, I do wish to make clear that by using terms such as domination and resistance, terms that can lead one into a kind of social science quicksand, I do not intend to imply that the existence of structured inequalities or the exercise of power can be understood solely as a product or process of elites, as a kind of “top-down” flow of action, ideas, and vitality. Instead, at the risk of belaboring the obvious, I would agree with other scholars that subalterns also play an active role in the making of history, that creating meaning as well as the material structures of life are processes in which all members of a society take part in some way. Subaltern actions and consciousness are not simply reactive, as use of the term resistance might imply. Instead, processes of power might be understood more fully in light of recent discussions that stress interplay and the mutual constitution(s) of power relations (e.g., Scott 1976, 1985; Irschick 1994; Agrawal 1999). Without sinking too deeply into this quicksand, I might simply point out that there is more than one type of “actor” on the imperial stage (central elites) or even two (elites and non-elites), but instead a plethora of players, individuals, and groups of differing status, interests, and abilities who may or may not share common goals (see Brumfiel and Deagan, this volume).

Nevertheless, while recognizing that non-elites also shape the forms of stratified society – a recognition that has been rather belated among archaeologists, perhaps as a result of the traditional focus of fieldwork on the monumental – it also seems necessary to add that this shaping is often done under severe constraint. In the empires discussed in this volume, there is inevitably a materiality to the exercise of power. People within an imperial society (and many without) operate within systems of structured inequality – what Wolf (1990) refers to as

10.1 The Vijayanagara empire. The solid line indicates the maximum area under direct imperial control; the dashed line indicates disputed areas or areas under indirect control.

structural power – so that their knowledge and understanding may pale before, and indeed be only minimally effective in, confronting institutional and cultural structures that oppress and limit them.

The Vijayanagara empire grew from a small regional polity based in the interior of the rather remote Karnatak plateau (Venkata Ramanayya 1933). Like several other South Asian empires before it (Inden 1990), the Vijayanagara empire burst forth from a resource-poor, semi-arid homeland to conquer large tracts of fertile agricultural land and its inhabitants, including the rich alluvial deltas of India's eastern coast. The limits of the empire shifted through time with conquest, incorporation, and rebellion (Sewell 1982 [1900]; B. Stein 1980, 1989). But even in the early years of the fourteenth century, there is little doubt that the polity incorporated a hugely diverse set of inhabitants, differentiated on the basis of economy, religion, language, and social organization. By the sixteenth century, when the empire reached its maximum spatial extent, there existed not only diverse groups of peoples within the empire, but also a wide range of degrees of imperial control over and interference in local patterns of governance and revenue extraction. While the Vijayanagara empire was certainly a conquest state, critically dependent on force and the threat of force to incorporate and hold together its domains, the polity was also integrated in other ways, notably through complex sets of ritual relationships (see B. Stein 1980; Inden 1990: 207–10) that were built upon relations of hierarchy¹ rather than simply coercion. These relationships had the potential both to ramify (e.g., Appadurai 1978) and conflict, creating a shifting field of power relations that admitted a certain cultural and political fluidity (e.g., Mines 1984; Ramaswamy 1985c; Karashima 1992).

In the following abbreviated case studies, I suggest that the diversity of responses to and experiences of Vijayanagara empire-building is predicated on four conditions or dynamics, as well as to more contingent and less predictable exigencies of historical circumstance. The first two conditions relate to the “center” (a falsely concrete construction when seen from some analytical distances; a reasonable abstraction from others) – to its material and organizational bases and to the intentions and goals of its leaders. The second two relate, on the other hand, to the “objects” of domination and incorporation (if they may be objects with agency), their ecological situation, their social, cultural, and political organization. That local conditions powerfully structure the course of imperial expansion and consolidation comes as no surprise; our challenge is to balance the analytical pull of our usually sketchy, biased, and always imperfect data to accommodate this complexity.

The first set of conditions structuring the course and consequence of imperial expansion relates to the organizational and material base of the imperial polity itself. What are the technologies, both organizational and physical, of domination? In the Vijayanagara empire, the answers to these questions change through time, with, for example, the possibilities for communication, transportation, and monitoring of activity over the long distances of the empire shifting with the

relocation of the capital city in the late sixteenth and again in the seventeenth centuries. The empire was extremely large and most military movement took place over land, so that imperial armies, though always on the move, could never patrol the entire realm. The troops attached to subsidiary rulers were always important, both as participants in imperial wars and raids and as threats to centralized control. When firearms became a routine part of warfare during the sixteenth century, the technology of war necessitated changes in defensive architecture and worked to change the contours of the conquest state.

No less important were the ultimate material bases of power: food and labor. How were workers in the imperial cause mobilized and how were elites, soldiers, and others provisioned? The Vijayanagara empire relied to a large extent on agricultural produce and the income from agricultural production (Mahalingam 1951; B. Stein 1980), and the productive capacity of both dry and irrigated land lies behind any consideration of imperial expansion, warfare, or politics. The location of the capital city in a small "oasis" of irrigation potential (Morrison 1994, 1995a) is certainly relevant to its survival; the location of the core provinces of the empire in a region of agricultural uncertainty is certainly relevant to its expansion. The success of the court depended on being able to avoid the uncertainties of rainfall and crop failure that most dry farmers in the vicinity of the capital faced. This was accomplished only partly through involvement in irrigation (Morrison and Lycett 1994; Morrison 1997b) – incorporation of more productive regions and a peripatetic court also served this purpose. In general, Sinopoli (1988) and I (Morrison and Sinopoli 1992; Sinopoli and Morrison 1995) have noted, with others, that the degree of central involvement in production and distribution varied with the product and its relevance to elite concerns. War horses from the Arabian peninsula and trade goods such as textiles occasioned great efforts on the part of rulers and royal officials (Digby 1982), while more quotidian crafts such as earthenware ceramics engendered almost no notice at all.

The second set of conditions structuring response to imperial domination has to do with the goals and intentions of central elites and the extent to which these are shared by (or at least not actively opposed by) those who actually execute those goals and by other elites. This concern for intentionality – what "the empire" was trying to accomplish, what the emperors did and meant to do – makes up the bulk of traditional Vijayanagara history (e.g., Sewell 1982 [1900]). There is no doubt that kingly intentions varied through time, including even their degree of ambition and scope. For example, the first few Vijayanagara kings did not claim the same kind of titles suggesting universal dominion that later rulers did.

That pretensions to universal sovereignty had real implications is not at issue. However, it may be necessary to break down analysis of intentional acts more carefully. For example, consideration of the goals and intentions of imperial rulers invites questions about the identity and recruitment of such elites, the bases of their power, and the means by and extent to which they were able carry

out their desires. In the Vijayanagara empire, political leaders had the military option as one direct course of action (although they held no monopoly on the use of force as local leaders also maintained armies), and religious patronage as another, indirect strategy. Patronage of Hindu temples, Brahmins, and other religious institutions linked rulers (and others; patronage was by no means limited to political leaders; Morrison and Lycett 1994) to these economically, ideologically, and socially powerful institutions. Vijayanagara emperors asserted their legitimacy, in part, as protectors of Hindu *dharma* (cf., Saletore 1982), a claim buoyed by their religious activity. Indeed, claims of sovereignty are often followed closely by accounts of religious patronage. The Śivatatvacintāmani (fifteenth century) for example, boasts:

The king (Dēvarāya II), just as [the god] Śhiva vanquished the mythological demons (*tripurāsūrās*) and achieved victory, too accomplished victory over the three sovereigns . . . and manifested himself as the supreme emperor at Vijayanagara and on that account he was known as Dēvarājendra (king of all gods). The king manifested himself like his patron god Virūpaksha [an aspect of Śhiva], in the bejewelled throne as the supreme emperor (*rājadhī-rāja-paramē śvaram*) Śrī-Vīra-dēvarājendra. That king subscribed to the construction of four beautiful entrance gateways to that temple of god Pampā-Virūpaksha, at the four cardinal points. They were all beautified with precious stones and glittering pinnacles on the top. (Kotraiah 1994: 36–7)

Religious institutions were also brought doctrinally into the business of imperial consolidation, as local deities, particularly goddesses, were incorporated into orthodox Hindu pantheons (B. Stein 1980).

These first two factors structuring the course and nature of attempts at imperial domination and control refer to aspects of the center and to political elites, and as such conform to conventional historiographic and archaeological understandings of the nature and operation of empires. As I hope to have made clear, this notion of a (thinking, goal-directed) center is perhaps falsely concrete, failing to take into account, for example, inter-elite competition (see Brumfiel and Fox 1994; also D’Altroy, this volume) and the contingent and sometimes shifting nature of “eliteness” itself. Analysis based on center-out, top-down perspectives, while important, leaves out vital elements of the imperial story.

Understanding the diverse responses to Vijayanagara expansion requires the addition of at least two further structuring factors, both relating to the human and other conditions at the receiving end of imperial ambitions. Like any discussion of imperial “centers,” imperial “peripheries” quickly fall apart as coherent objects of study on close examination. Incorporated peoples rarely constitute single interest groups. Nevertheless, any understanding of the dynamics of imperial expansion will require attention to local conditions and at least some attempt to untangle the diverse threads of local interest and action.

The first of these conditions is the underlying (in the sense of preexisting, not in the sense of natural or given) ecological dynamic of the area and peoples

to be incorporated. This ecology is a human ecology that includes not only environmental conditions, flora, and fauna, but also human demography and the organization of production, distribution, and consumption. In the case studies below, factors such as the technology of agriculture – irrigation, storage, transportation – play an important role in the range of economic and hence political options open to subjects of the Vijayanagara empire. Irrigation networks cannot exist and the production of irrigated crops such as rice cannot take place without suitable sources of water, appropriate slopes and soils, and particular climatic conditions. Hunting and gathering as an exclusive subsistence strategy cannot be sustained under conditions of high human population density; what such a density may be is in part a product of local biotic conditions. To say that the ecological structure of a subject region and people makes a difference to the outcome of empire-building is, however, to say very little. To this must be added the fourth factor in our list of conditioning factors, the cultural and social dynamic of the conquered.

To build the example of irrigated rice production, we might then add to the soils, slopes, and rainfall regimes mentioned above the technical knowledge of canal and reservoir construction, as well as the ability to mobilize labor in facility construction and maintenance, agricultural operations, and crop processing. Vijayanagara rulers and local leaders consistently followed a policy of encouraging agricultural expansion into new areas as well as promoting the intensification of existing cropping regimes through the construction of irrigation facilities. Such policies require particular constellations of land, labor, and environment and, one might suggest, local cooperation in order to be successful. Elite goals and intentions, then, are not sufficient to understand the ways in which programs of agricultural expansion and intensification played out; local conditions are also critically important.

In organizational terms, there exist different possibilities for the domination and control of people integrated into powerful corporate organizations than for those who are not. Several scholars have described the merchant and producer guilds of southern India (K. R. Hall 1980; Abraham 1988) who, during the earlier Chola empire, not only regulated and ran workshops and markets, but in some cases even maintained armies, managed temple finances, and collected taxes. These powerful bodies disappeared during the early Vijayanagara period or survived in very altered form (Abraham 1988). Other locality-based forms of self-government also have a long tradition in southern India, and there is little doubt that localities within the Vijayanagara empire maintained considerable control over local affairs. The social (religious, caste, ethnic) composition of such local bodies was, however, limited to the upper, dominant groups, often landed agriculturalists (B. Stein 1980; Karashima 1992), leaving the landless and the low with little collective power. Smaller-scale communities standing outside of lowland caste society – “tribal” agriculturalists, gatherers, and hunters, for example – not only lacked the corporate organization of upper-caste landowners

or high-status craft specialists (Ramaswamy 1985b, 1985c), but also had fewer personal ties of patronage, dependence, and loyalty to the powerful than even landless laborers in the lowlands might have been able to muster.

The efforts of Vijayanagara rulers to create, consolidate, and extend their rule across southern India met with variable success. This variability was partly responsive to the factors outlined above. Dry farmers in the immediate vicinity of the capital city operated under very precarious economic and ecological conditions – this much is quite clear archaeologically (Morrison 1995a, 1997b). They also appear to have been rather peripheralized participants in networks of food grain exchange and prestation that were closely tied to both politics and ritual. In this, their domination cannot be understood without reference both to the ecological imperatives of dry farming (and to the economic conditions that kept them dry farming) and to their social condition. Unfortunately, in this case we still know little about their resistance to such exploitation and their strategies for circumventing it. That is, a number of texts refer to tenants “running away” from oppressive landholders, but we are unable to link any of these historical references to dry farmers in the immediate Vijayanagara hinterland. This situation contrasts with the case of several groups of farmers and craft specialists in a southern province of the empire who actively resisted imperial revenue demands and were able to obtain concessions from those in power. This success is mirrored by that of certain groups of weavers, for whom the Vijayanagara economy provided opportunities for social and ritual group mobility (Ramaswamy 1985a; and see Mines 1984). Finally, we move to the physical as well as conceptual margins of the Vijayanagara empire. There, upland gather-hunter-traders, in part of an ongoing process of displacement and oppression, were literally created as dispossessed and subject groups as a consequence of the operation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century economies, rather than as the result of some imperial policy.

DRY FARMERS IN THE URBAN HINTERLAND: FOOD GRAINS AND POWER

In precolonial India, literary descriptions of prosperous realms typically represent them in highly conventional terms as being lush, green, and (perennially) watered. The *Vijayakumāri Charite*, written by Srutakarti, a Jain poet from the Mysore region in about 1567 CE, evokes an earlier South Indian empire, the Hoysala, describing the landscape of its capital city, Darasamudra. This evocation of the long-faded Hoysala empire, an empire that expanded out of the Mysore region on the heels of the cataclysmic military defeat of the Vijayanagara armies in 1565, is certainly not coincidental. Like many texts, this one begins with a description of the Hoysala realm:

The country had a number of reservoirs, streams, ponds, stepped wells, and wells full of good water which supplied water to the gardens, irrigated lands, other lands, etc., all resulting in (increased agricultural production and) offering a pleasant sight to the eyes and mind. There were also fields with standing

crops of coconuts, sugarcane, superior variety of paddy [rice] (*ganidha-sāli*). There were groves of fruit-bearing trees yielding pomegranates, jack fruits, oranges, bananas, areca nuts, lime fruits and others. (Kotraiah 1994: 5)

Indeed, from such accounts, one might imagine all food grains to be rice and all fields to be irrigated. This was not the case.

In sixteenth-century southern India, food grains not only expressed and reflected status relations, but were also differently valued as ritual foods and as the means to pay taxes and other obligations. Because of the sharply defined conditions under which differently valued food grains would grow in the semi-arid interior, marked disparities existed in the diets, agricultural strategies, and economic articulation of different groups of grain producers. I consider here a few aspects of the production and disposition of food grains in the Vijayanagara hinterland, and the logically independent but articulated networks of circulation through which food grains traveled. I suggest that the dominant relations of power that structured Vijayanagara prestation – in the context of the temple economy and in the disposition of “traditional” produce shares, including those due to political leaders – were maintained by the demand for items of value (rice and cash). These demands forced producers without access to wet lands to participate in a market economy and to sustain a system of investment, ritual, and consumption to which they themselves did not have access.

These dry farmers are only partly visible in the historical record; much of what is known about their forms and strategies of production derives from the archaeological record. In the area around the city of Vijayanagara, archaeological survey data provide evidence for the tempo of settlement and agricultural expansion and intensification between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries (Morrison 1995a). The initial settlement expansion in this area dates to the mid-fourteenth century and is visible in the construction of the urban core walls of the city as well as the establishment of a number of large temple complexes. Early settlements, most of which continued to be occupied throughout the Vijayanagara period (and several into the present), tend to cluster nearer the river and the city and although they are found across a large area, parts of the region were not permanently settled during the fourteenth century. In a roughly 120 square kilometer survey area, we have identified more than thirty reservoirs that were partly or wholly constructed at this time; most settlements are associated with reservoirs. Other agricultural facilities associated with the Early period include at least five canals that drew water from the Tungabhadra River by means of *anicuts* or long diversion weirs. Rainfall farming of millets was, however, probably the mainstay of most agriculturalists. The pace of growth was rapid, and much early expansion was apparently fueled by immigration to the capital city.

The archaeological record of Early Vijayanagara settlement growth and agricultural expansion is complemented by historical and palaeobotanical data that reflect similar trends. Pollen and microscopic charcoal data from reservoir cores indicate a relatively open, treeless landscape and intensive regional burning during the Early period, consistent with the archaeological interpretation of

intensive agriculture and field clearance. Inscriptional data also show a strong overall temporal distribution, with an Early, fourteenth-century peak in the number of inscriptions followed by a trough in the fifteenth century and a dramatic expansion in the sixteenth century or Late Vijayanagara period (Morrison 1995a). Thus, the archaeological record of growth and stagnation in settlement and agricultural production is matched closely by the historical data. The fifteenth century is rather uneventful archaeologically; only one settlement and one reservoir can be definitely assigned to this period. The growth of the Early period seems to have stalled, and indeed this was a period of some dynastic uncertainty (Sewell 1990 [1982]; B. Stein 1989). This political uncertainty may be relevant for understanding both the lack of monumental construction and the decline in elite investment that characterized the fifteenth century. The sixteenth century, in contrast, was a period of phenomenal growth in and near the capital city as well as a period of territorial expansion and consolidation. Inscriptional, archaeological, and palaeoecological data all reflect this expansion. The sixteenth century was also, as far as we are able to tell, a period of political reorganization (e.g., Karashima 1992: 2) when new forms of governance were introduced into some of the provinces of the empire. By the end of the sixteenth century, the city of Vijayanagara was abandoned and both the boundary and the capital of the empire shifted further south.

In the immediate hinterland of the city of Vijayanagara, the security and abundance of agriculture relied almost exclusively on the control and storage of water. The capital city is situated in the dry interior, in an area that receives approximately 500 mm of rainfall annually. This scanty rainfall is subject to an estimated 25 to 30 percent variability, so that in any given season the summer monsoon rains may fail to come at all. Under these climatic conditions, only very hardy crops such as sorghum (*Sorghum* sp., known as *jowar* or *cholum*) and other millets can survive without supplemental watering and, as such, were and are the food grains of the poor.

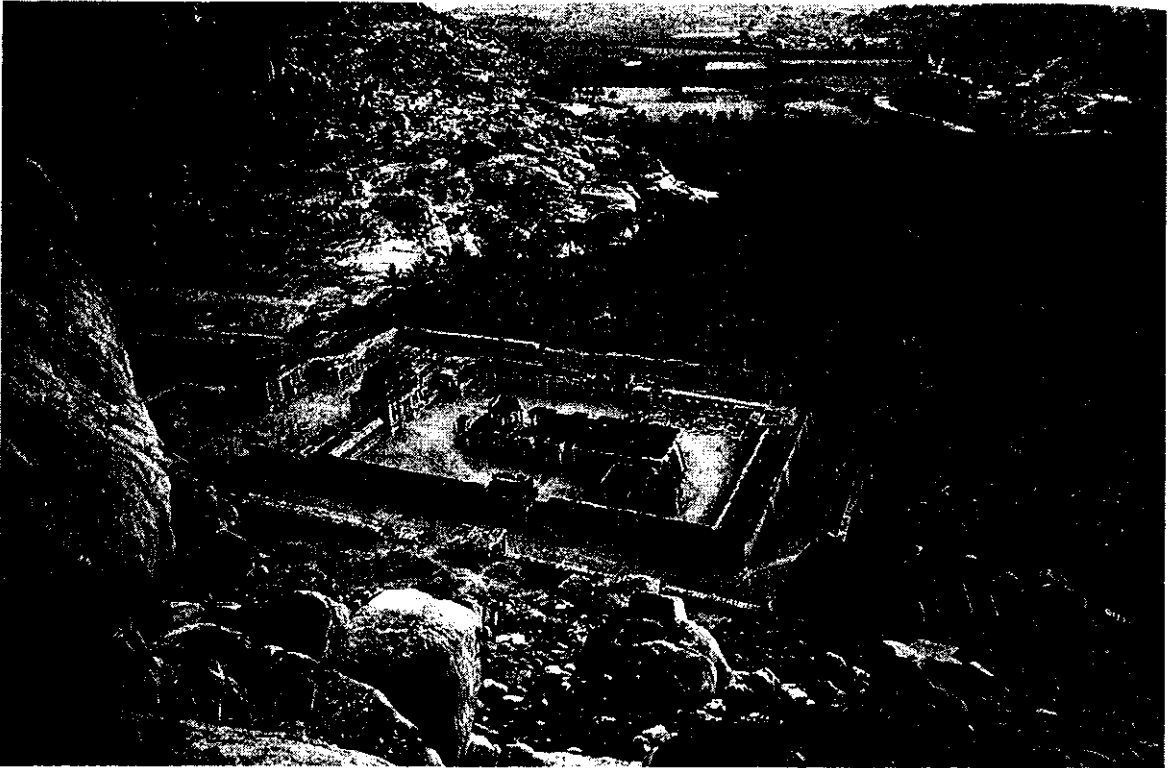
Rice (*Oryza sativa*) was a highly valued food, the grain of choice for those wealthy or powerful enough to afford it. Rice figures prominently in many rituals and its social "value" has been discussed by many scholars (Hanchett 1988; Raheja 1989; Reynolds 1991; and see Howe 1991). Rice is also discussed in texts describing the activities of Vijayanagara elites. One such text (the *Sanatkumara Charite*), said to date to 1485 CE, described the consumption of at least twelve different rice dishes at a royal wedding, as well as the presentation by the host to the guests of "auspicious rice" (*akshate*; Kotraiah 1993: 3–7). In elite (vegetarian) cuisine, a cuisine also relished by the gods, rice dishes constituted one of the four major categories of cooked food. In fact, while rice is never missing from menus of feasts and food offerings, millets are never explicitly present.²

In the region around the city of Vijayanagara, rice was grown in paddies, specialized and constructed microenvironments with level ground, secure sources of flowing water, and complex networks of ditches, borders, and drainage channels. Long-term existence of rice paddies in an area actually modifies soil structure,

creating a hard pan underneath the plow zone. Thus, rice transformed physical environments as well as social and economic ones. In the Vijayanagara hinterland, wet crops such as rice were supported by a network of canals and canal-fed irrigation features (Fig. 10.2). Canal construction occurred in two major episodes, the first during the initial period of urban occupation and the second several hundred years later in the early sixteenth century. Although it is difficult to be certain what crop mixes were grown in specific areas, existing botanical evidence suggests that rice was a major focus of production in these canal-irrigated zones. The desire for rice and elite demands for rice may, in part, lie behind some of the early focus on intensive irrigated agriculture in the Vijayanagara region. However, in addition to its powerful status associations, paddy rice is also a highly productive crop that can significantly outproduce other grains. Further, rice is extremely storable. Particularly in its less processed forms, rice may store without deterioration for several years. Old rice has been said to taste the best, and rice reportedly may be maintained in storage for generations (Breckenridge 1985: 49). In fact, rice that is not cured but is cooked immediately after harvest tends to become pasty, lose solids in solutions, fail to swell, and disintegrate (Grist 1975: 385).

Rice land was not well distributed throughout the Vijayanagara hinterland. Land in canal zones was limited and the extension of canal irrigation may well have displaced individuals or groups with limited potential to assert their use rights over the land. Outside the canal zones, it would have been possible to raise only very small plots of rice under the more reliable reservoirs and/or by using water laboriously lifted from wells. The labor demands associated with paddy rice cultivation are considerable and even small holdings under paddy cannot generally be maintained without recourse to extra-household labor. Mencher (1978) has noted a striking association between cropping patterns and the proportion of low-caste landless laborers in South India. Where wet rice dominates, the proportions of landlessness are highest and distinctions of class and caste most marked (and see B. Stein 1980). Thus, rice production requires significant access to resources such as low-lying, level land, water rights, and labor. In turn, rice and other valued foodstuffs were involved in the assertion and replication of power relations in the form of both temple ritual and investment and the market.

Dry grains such as sorghum and other millets such as *ragi* (*Eleusine corocana*) and *bajra* (*Pennisetum typhoideum*) probably always constituted the staple food for the majority of the population. Millets can be grown under a rainfall regime, although such production is very risky and a variety of strategies were devised to facilitate crop growth. In the Vijayanagara region, these strategies included the construction of a range of soil and water control features such as check-dams, terraces, and gravel-mulched fields. Reservoirs, ranging in size from simple dams a few meters long to massive constructions several kilometers long, also addressed the problems of crop production in the context of the highly seasonal and low rainfall (Morrison 1993). Land under reservoirs was referred to by a term meaning “dry crops on wet lands” (Ludden 1985), suggesting that millets



10.2 *The Tiruvengalanatha temple in a canal-irrigated zone of the Vijayanagara imperial capital (note canal in upper right).*

were the primary staple grains grown under reservoirs. Agricultural facilities supporting the production of millets varied not only in size, but also in their degree of connectivity. Thus, there were major organizational differences between the production of dry crops in fields with a few small check-dams, features whose placement only modestly affected the overall runoff and erosional characteristics of the larger landscape, and those grown under reservoirs or larger terrace systems that significantly altered regional watersheds and slopes (Morrison 1997b). The physical linkages of the latter imply concomitant social linkages that are absent in smaller-scale dry farming.

Dry grains do not figure prominently in the historical record even though it is clear on the basis of archaeological data that they constituted the major staple crops. *Ragi* could be stored in pits for several years, but there seems to be general agreement that millets do not store as well or as long as paddy (Breckenridge 1985: 49). The disposition of different food grains served to reinforce existing relations of power by forcing producers of less valued dry grains to participate, albeit indirectly, in a network of prestation, ritual, and investment from which they were excluded. The remarkable structure of temple investment in the Vijayanagara period, a structure with significant political, social, and ecological as well as religious ramifications (Appadurai 1978; B. Stein 1980; Heitzman 1987), has been referred to by Breckenridge (1985) as a system of "social storage," as I discuss shortly. It is important to note, however, that this social

storage was not for everyone, even for everyone drawn into the system. For the majority of small farmers and agricultural laborers, storage was of the more material kind and social storage on a regional scale was perhaps more personal and less institutional than that envisioned by Breckenridge.

Precolonial Hindu temples were symbolically and economically powerful loci for the consumption and distribution as well as, less directly, the production of food grains. Temples ranged in size from small shrines without resident religious specialists, to large complexes that attained the size of small cities. Many temples had storerooms and large kitchens. In the capital city, major temple complexes were designated as towns in their own right (Filliozat and Filliozat 1988) and supported large populations of various kinds of specialists (Ismail 1984).

In the historical record, temples appear as the recipients of gifts. Gifts given to temples included land, rights to produce from specified villages, valuables, and, less often, cash or livestock. Local political leaders are the most ubiquitous donor class in this period, but a wide variety of privileged groups and individuals made gifts to temples that are recorded in stone and copper-plate inscriptions. These groups included royalty, merchant groups, groups of landowning villagers, and religious functionaries. The vast majority of these gifts went to temples, with other religious endowments such as feeding houses for Brahmins occasionally receiving independent gifts. Temples used gifts of land and produce rights partly to support themselves and to provide large-scale semi-public feasts on festival days (of which there were many). Temples also acted as "development agencies" (after Breckenridge 1985) for agricultural production, using donations to invest in the construction of agricultural facilities, often pooling smaller donations. The temple was then entitled to a produce share from the lands watered by the new facility, land that could produce a more secure and reliable crop, if not a more valued crop. Thus, temples did not simply amass resources, but actively invested them in agricultural production. A great deal more remains to be learned about the construction and investment activities of temples, and it would be important to know, for example, how labor was mobilized for construction projects.

Gifts to temples accrued religious merit for the donor and for those specified by the donor. Such gifts were also recognized by being recorded in stone or, less publicly, on copper plates. However, such prestations were not simply alienations but also investments through which donors received a material benefit (cf. B. Stein 1980, 1989). This benefit accrued in the context of ritual consumption and distribution. In her analysis of the great temple and pilgrimage center at Tirupati, in the southern part of the empire, Breckenridge (1985: 56) notes that, in the fifteenth century, the preferences of the gods at Tirupati shifted from gifts of valuables such as pearls, festive lighting, and cows, to food. After the fifteenth century, then, the Tirupati gods' enjoyment of feasting required gifts of food. This shift brings to mind the complex sets of injunctions in normative Hinduism about receiving food of different kinds from people of different kinds and, inversely, about prestations that may be given as well as accepted. The gift of food to goddesses and gods entailed the services of priests acceptable as food-givers,

and patterns of caste and community affiliation no doubt differed with the situation of the god. More than the identity of the giver, however, we might be concerned with the identity of the gift.

Gods had refined palates, and enjoyed the full range of dishes also relished by elites. Thus, rice would have been appropriate in the context of temple worship,³ while other grains – at least in the larger temples – may have been less enthusiastically received. Food offered to the gods was returned as *prasada*, or sacred leftovers. At Tirupati, three quarters of the *prasad* was allotted to the temple and one quarter to the original donor (Breckenridge 1985: 57). *Prasad* had sacral, caloric, and market value since it could also be sold to pilgrims. Thus, *prasad* embodied and produced “value” in a number of different contexts. Both temples and donors could and did enjoy the continuing return on their original investment both in their diet and by converting *prasad* to other desired commodities in the market. In this sense, we can see that rice was commoditized by temples and elites in a specific sacral context, although a separate market for rice outside this system of circulation also existed (Filliozat 1978: 58). Producers of less valued food grains were forced to support this structure, even though they themselves did not participate in it, either as donors or as donees.

There has been considerable debate about the nature of taxation during the Vijayanagara period, a debate complicated by both regional and temporal variability (see discussions by Mahalingam 1951; B. Stein 1980, 1989; Karashima 1992). Our understandings of Vijayanagara economic arrangements are complicated by the growing monetization of the period. Although coined money had existed for several centuries, cash was becoming increasingly important throughout the sixteenth century (cf. Palat 1987). South Asian ethnographic and historical literature is replete with descriptions of the apportionment of the “grain heap” at harvest time, and the various in-kind shares due to occupational specialists such as barbers, washermen, potters, and other service people (e.g., Berreman 1972: 57–61; Beals 1974: 70–1; but see J. P. Parry 1994). That this normative arrangement also obtained during the Vijayanagara period is generally assumed (e.g., Mahalingam 1951). The disposition of shares depended in part on the tenancy arrangement of the land, with the “royal” or “landlord’s share” (*melvaram*; Breckenridge 1985: 50) in some cases due to temples and in others to political leaders. An almost bewildering number of arrangements obtained, but the relevant point here is that at least for the superior share – that due to governments or temples – obligations of rice were to be paid in kind, but obligations in other food grains or in garden produce were to be paid in cash. This requirement would have forced many subsistence agriculturalists, producers of millets, to participate in the market economy in order to obtain cash.

The requirement for cash may be partly accounted for by the superior storability of rice, in that only less perishable foodstuffs would have been desired by the authorities. However, I suggest that the social value of rice and its appropriateness for prestation were also relevant to this demand. Simply put, like the gods, temples and kings desired food and only certain products constituted

appropriate foods in the context of prestation. Where rice was not produced, cash had to be obtained. Thus, agriculturalists without access to the significant resources required to produce valued foodstuffs – water, land under a canal, labor – were forced to provide other culturally appropriate goods and, in a way, to perpetuate the differential valuation of grains. The changing preferences of the gods from valuables to food, the market in *prasad*, the investment of temples in agriculture (particularly if construction workers were paid in cash), and the demand for cash payments of what were formerly produce shares contributed to a context in which food and cash circulated in a number of conceptually distinct but, in practice, interlocking systems of circulation – “traditional” produce shares given at the harvest, cash payment of taxes, market exchange, and temple ritual and feasting.

Finally, I want to return to the issue of social storage. In her analysis of investment at Tirupati, Breckenridge noted that donors often made gifts that spanned long distances so that temples and donors had rights in produce that crosscut ecological zones. This pattern of entitlements was particularly important in dry zones, such as that surrounding the city of Vijayanagara, linking donors with the wetter and more fertile deltas of the east coast. Breckenridge (1985) has perceptively referred to these networks of entitlement as a form of social storage. This storage, however, operated at a rather high level so that the majority of the population in the Vijayanagara hinterland, for example, certainly had no call on east coast produce. For these producers, the balance of resources created by temple gifting must have been somewhat remote, belonging to a sphere in which they barely participated.

Unlike the donors to Buddhist monastic institutions in the first few centuries CE, in the Vijayanagara period no “housewife and householder, fisherman and gardener” (Dehejia 1992: 35) appears as donor. Instead, donors came from more privileged groups. In a challenge to the dominant intellectual theme of hierarchy that has pervaded studies of South Asian Hinduism (e.g., Dumont 1970; Marriott 1990), Raheja (1989) has recently suggested that centrality and not simply hierarchy may be the organizing principle of prestation. That is, gifting itself marks the centrality of donors (rather than their hierarchical ritual status), so that donors with significant access to resources are at the midpoint of widening circles of prestation. Sixteenth-century Vijayanagara, with its nexus of in-kind payment of shares in rice and cash payment of shares in millets, could also be conceived in terms of Raheja’s contemporary observations. Only those with significant access to resources such as land under a canal, water, and labor could produce socially and ritually valued foodstuffs such as rice and only these producers could make payments of shares in kind. That at least some of these producers were included in the village assemblies featured as temple donors is clear. Other producers, without access to canal-irrigated land, were excluded from gifting foodstuffs to (some) temples or to the government through the payment of obligatory shares (taxes). The agricultural improvements initiated by temples, however, ensured that farmers would become increasingly obliged to

them. Nevertheless, millet growers were not outside temple ritual, but supported it through their forced participation in the growing market economy. This burgeoning market in food, in turn, allowed the traffic in *prasad* and thus further enriched donor and temple alike. Giving gifts may have made donors more "central," but it seems that the changing conditions of production, distribution, and consumption of food in the Vijayanagara period made dry farmers more peripheral participants in a structure of privilege to which they had little access.

In some conventional sense, Vijayanagara rulers had little control over (or interest in) dry farming, even in the area around the capital city (Morrison and Sinopoli 1992). However, dry farmers found themselves caught up in structures of inequality that implicated both rulers and temples (cf. Wolf 1990). We know little about the specific participation of small-scale dry farmers in corporate groups such as village assemblies. Certainly the large range of facility elaboration, scale, and degree of regional connectivity suggests some variability in the wealth and connections of such farmers and thus perhaps in their ability to resist the economic changes of the sixteenth century. For a closer look at forms of resistance documented historically, however, we must move on to the second case.

THE NORTHERN TAMIL PROVINCES: REBELLION AND DISSENT

Vijayanagara conquest and consolidation moved primarily from north to south, with portions of what is now the state of Tamil Nadu incorporated into the empire early in its history. Much scholarly attention has been paid to the Tamil country under Vijayanagara rule, and I attempt no review or synthesis of this literature here. Ecologically, this broad region includes both semi-arid inlands and more mesic coastal areas, as well as the fertile delta of the Kaveri river, where irrigated rice fields supported a dense population (Ludden 1985). Although this area is well studied historically, archaeological data are virtually absent.

Karashima (1992) has suggested that the nature of Vijayanagara rule over the Tamil country changed in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with the imposition of *nayaka* rule, *nayakas* being military leaders, many of them Telugu speakers from the northern part of the empire, assigned specific territories by the king (see also Nilakanta Sastri 1975; B. Stein 1980, 1982, 1989; Talbot 1994). This contrasts with the earlier, looser, system of ministers, governors, and generals (Karashima 1992: 2), many of whom were local. *Nayakas* have been compared, controversially (see the excellent review by Kulke 1995), to feudal lords, but this comparison should not be taken very far. What is clear, however, is that *nayaka* power was significantly predicated on their military role, that many sixteenth-century *nayakas* were outsiders, and that *nayaka* rule increased the success of revenue extraction over the Tamil provinces.

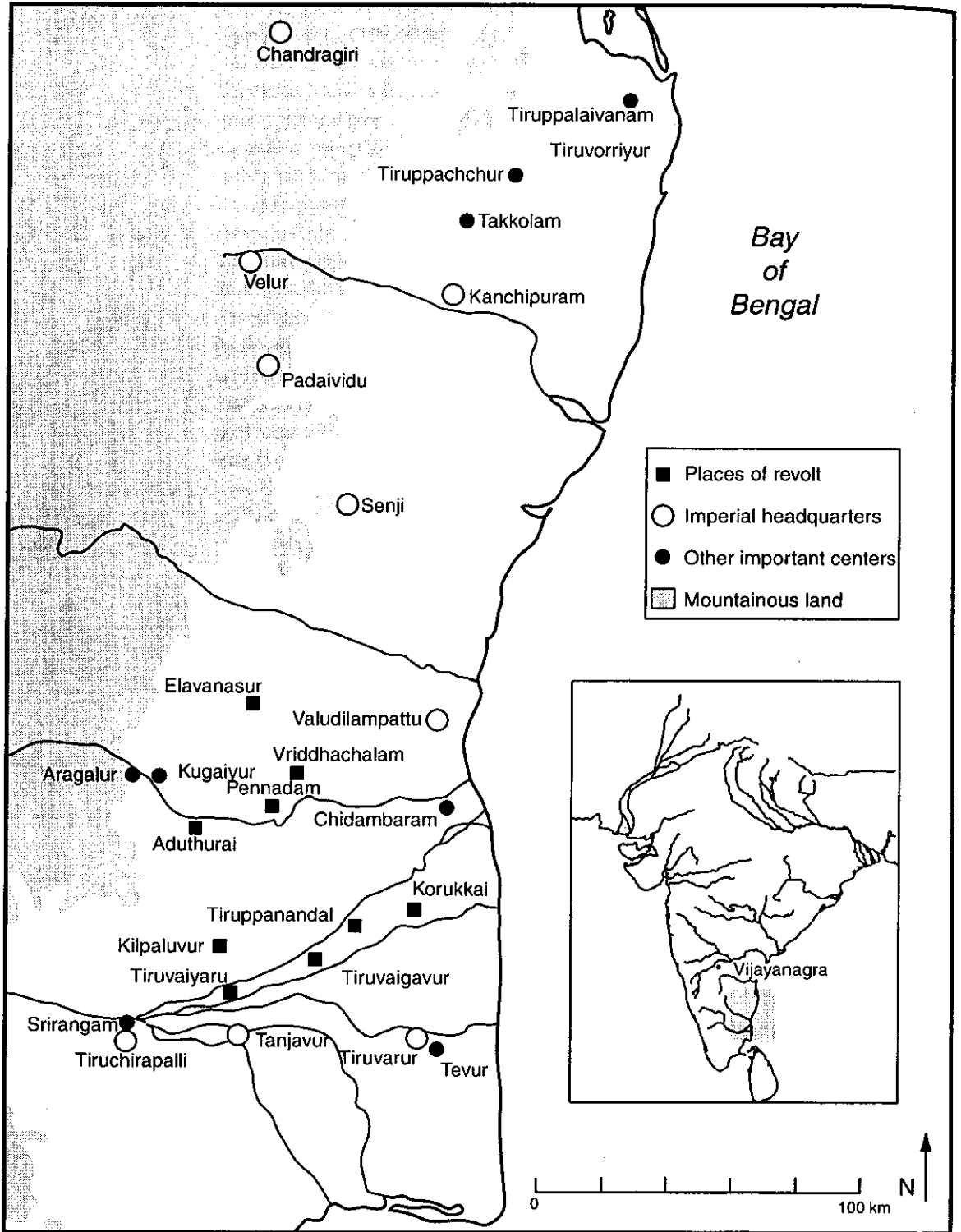
The establishment of the *nayaka* system over the Tamil country was preceded

by several recorded resistance movements of the lower classes of society. What are sometimes called the *Valangai-Idangai* revolts are recorded in nine inscriptions from the greater Kaveri delta (Fig. 10.3). These resistance movements explicitly targeted oppressive tax assessments and loss of control over land and its produce (Karashima 1992: 141–58). Although there were independent peasant proprietors who owned and farmed their own land, it appears that an increasing portion of agricultural land was coming under the control of a few landlords who leased it out to tenant cultivators. A powerful subtext of these revolts relates to the growing monetization of the period and resistance to expanding market mechanisms that followed both from the dependent status of tenant farmers and from demands for taxes in cash. The terms Valangai and Idangai refer to broad social/occupational categories (literally, the “right hand” and “left hand”; see discussion by Appadurai 1974; B. Stein 1980) that grouped agriculturalists in the right-hand category and non-agricultural groups such as merchants and craftspeople in the left. Although there are exceptions to this categorical division, the basic economic interests of each group differed and it is worth noting the earlier record of conflict (some violent) between Valangai and Idangai groups.

In 1429, agricultural tenants and craftspeople – Valangai and Idangai groups together – rose in open revolt against landlords and the state, and successfully (for a time) negotiated lower tax rates and an end to money taxes on farmers (Karashima 1992: 141–8) that forced food producers into market participation. Craftspeople, who in any case were largely dependent upon markets for food, continued to pay taxes in cash. Karashima (1992: 142) summarizes part of one inscription:

1. We, the people belonging to Valaṅgai 98 and Iḍaṅgai 98 of Vaḷudilampattu-uchāvadi [a territorial division], assembled in this temple in full strength and let the following be engraved on the wall of said temple.
2. In this *maṅḍalam* (Vaḷudilampattu), even if the *uchāvāḍi pradhāni* (the local Vijayanagara governor), Vaṅṅiyar (military people), and *jīvitakkārar* (holders of official [land] tenure) coerce us, or the Brāhmana and Vellālla *kāniyālar* (holders of *kāni* [land] right) try to oppress us in collusion with the *irājagarattār* (government officers), we shall never submit to such oppression.
3. If there appears any single person among us who helps the intruders, betrays us . . . or destroys the (current) measuring rod [for land assessment], we shall assemble as of today and enquire into it . . .

It may be worth noting that local elites (Brahmins and others possessing certain rights in land, in particular) as well as “intruders” came in for criticism. Several other inscriptions stress the corporate nature of the uprising and the importance of unity on the part of the oppressed (Karashima 1992: 144). That this at least partly successful resistance was based in the resource-rich Kaveri delta, a rice-growing area critically dependent on labor beyond that available to most landholders and where corporate organizations of agriculturalists and others have a



long history, may not be coincidental. One further contrast between the Kaveri delta and the Vijayanagara hinterland is, of course, precisely its location far from the putative seat of imperial power in the north.

The inscriptions relating to the movements of 1429 refer both to the imposition of Vijayanagara rule (Karashima 1992: 144) and to more proximate concerns of control over land and its produce. It is impossible to say whether non-local rule was a cause or simply an idiom of discontent; one suspects that the oppressed were concerned more with their structure of access to resources and less with the regional identity of their oppressors. Interestingly, the revolt of 1429 and other episodes of unrest were led by precisely those people who are most severely affected by famines in stratified, market-based societies – landless laborers and craftspeople. Further, the specific complaints – taxation and land control – directly implicate both access to productive potential and the price of food (cf. Sen 1981). The historical record indicates a series of famines in southern India during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The famine of 1396 was particularly severe and widespread, causing large-scale depopulation, and was also said to last for twelve years (Appadorai 1936: 748; Loveday 1982 [1914]: 17), as unlikely as that may be (cf. Watkins and Menken 1985). The 1423–4 famine is also said to have affected the entire Deccan (Appadorai 1936: 748; Loveday 1982 [1914]: 17), as did the famine of 1471–2. Not only do the famines of the fifteenth century coincide with the period of unrest just described, but they also coincide with the lull in construction and settlement expansion seen archaeologically. Whether or not there is some causal link between famine on the one hand, and dissent on the other, is difficult to say. But it is certainly intriguing that issues of price and of exchange entitlement (in Sen's [1981] terms; encompassing land control and market participation) were the very issues disputed and the very factors that have proven so important in the historical study of famines.

Although the forms of data are not strictly comparable, the contrast between the situation of small-scale farmers in the Vijayanagara hinterland and that of Kaveri delta laborers and craftspeople is striking. The latter, hundreds of kilometers from the capital and incorporated in a relatively loose way into imperial political structures, faced different structures of power and had different possibilities for redress. In this lush, irrigated rice-growing region, the operation of canal networks was linked on a regional scale and demands for labor were high. These conditions contrast with those of the more ecologically and economically isolated dry farmers of the Vijayanagara region. These farmers, not joined together by the flow of irrigation water, managed very small-scale facilities and grew crops of little political and ritual value. In the Tamil provinces, corporate structures for local action were well developed and it may be that social conditions for such concerted effort also differed. The later imposition of the *nayaka* system over this region was certainly not a simple response to these few efforts at resistance, but it may be significant that, although references to peasant flight from hardship continue, there do not seem to be any further recorded episodes of successful uprisings.

10.3 Locations of the Valangai-Idangai revolt in the Tamil provinces of the Vijayanagara empire.

FORAGER-TRADERS OF THE WESTERN MOUNTAINS: ON THE MARGINS OF EMPIRE

In South Asia, peoples involved in the hunting of wild animals and the gathering of wild plants have long been involved in relations of exchange and interdependence with agriculturalists. These relationships, far from being immutable and historically fixed, were marked by a high degree of variability and flexibility with specific groups altering their strategies in relation to ecological, demographic, and political imperatives. I consider here some of the changes in the organization of foraging/trading groups in southwestern India. These changes were coincident with the political and demographic expansion of the Vijayanagara and other lowland polities and peoples, and with the expansion of the coastal spice trade and the increasing integration of this region into a world economy between about 1400 and 1700 CE. In so doing, I want to illustrate how imperial expansion created, mostly inadvertently, conditions under which strategies of commercial foraging expanded. I suggest that the movement of hill peoples into diverse kinds of subsistence economies including the collection and trading of forest products constituted, in spite of its great social and economic cost, a kind of successful resistance to incorporation into lowland polities and societies, a strategy persisting to the present.

The southwest coast of India is set apart from much of the rest of the peninsula by both physiography and climate. Bounded by the Indian Ocean on one side and the Western Ghat mountains on the other, this region consists of evergreen and semi-evergreen tropical forests dissected by well-watered alluvial valleys. The Ghats' orographic effect on summer monsoon precipitation not only ensures high rainfall along its western slopes but also creates the semi-arid conditions of the interior plateaus. The Malabar coast was the primary (but not sole) locus of spice production in India, of which the most important was pepper (*Piper nigrum*), indigenous to the region. Forests inland and upland from the Malabar coast also contained other important forest products including ginger, cardamom, honey and wax, various gums and resins, dyes and scented woods, and medicinal and poisonous plants (B. Morris 1982). In India today, as in the Vijayanagara period, a number of "tribes" subsist in the Malabar Ghats by hunting and collecting forest products for external markets, trading those products, and by wage labor and agriculture (Fox 1969; B. Morris 1982; Hockings 1985: 226; Bird-David 1992; Stiles 1993). Many forest groups depend on lowland products, notably food grains, textiles, and iron, for their basic subsistence. Thus, such exchange relations are essential rather than simply incidental.

Although the orthodox perception seems to be that contemporary foragers are descendants of an unbroken tradition dating back as far as the Mesolithic, there are alternate routes by which groups could have moved into specialized collecting and trading. Hockings (1980, 1985), for example, considers the case of refugees from caste society – marginalized groups who move into the forests to take up new opportunities or to escape intolerable situations in their home-

land. Even if some upland groups represent refugees from the intensively cultivated lowlands, it is also likely that other specialized forager-traders reliant on imported foodstuffs began as more generalized foragers and/or as swidden agriculturalists.

I suggest here that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constituted a key period in the move toward specialized foraging, a period in which the options open to hill peoples became greatly reduced. This transition may have been responsive to two factors. The first relates to the demands of the spice trade and other, politically based demands for forest produce. The second factor is more indirect but no less important, and this is the pressure on the forests from below created by expanding agriculture. Both the land use "push" and the political "pull" or demand for produce from below forced foragers and forager/agriculturalists into an increasingly specialized and increasingly marginalized position as participants in a world market.

By the first few centuries BCE, an extensive network of exchange stretched across the Indian Ocean, indirectly connecting the Mediterranean with East Asia. Historians of both Europe and South Asia (Braudel 1972; Digby 1982; Mathew 1983; Chaudhuri 1985) are in broad agreement that the volume of pepper, as well as of other products such as ginger and cardamom, increased significantly in the sixteenth century, and the structure of the trade in pepper and other South and Southeast Asian forest products has been extensively discussed. The expansion and restructuring of demands for produce that accompanied this growth promoted changes in the opportunities and strategies of different collectors and producers and fostered relationships of economic interdependence between them that survive, in altered form, into the present.

Briefly, the expansion of the spice trade prompted changes in both lowland and upland subsistence strategies. In the lowlands, increased demands for rice may have prompted expansion and intensification of production. One significant factor in this may be direct demand for tribute in the form of rice, in order to supply Portuguese forts and settlements (Subrahmanyam, this volume). These demands fell almost exclusively on the kingdoms of the Kanara coast, particularly Honawar, Bhatkal, and Basrur (Desai *et al.* 1981; Subrahmanyam 1984: 445). The amount of rice involved was considerable; convoys of several hundred small ships, often under Portuguese guard (Pearson 1981: 77), sailed up the coast to Goa. In the 1570s and 1580s three to four convoys per year to Goa alone are reported (Pearson 1981: 77). In addition to the consumption of rice in the lowlands, the intensification of pepper production may have also created an escalation in demand for rice and other staples as pepper producers (and gatherers) focused their attention away from subsistence crops. As discussed below, the shipment of staples to the forested interior was necessary to support the foragers and cultivators of spices.

Increased demands on forest products followed from the expansion of the west coast trade. In the most direct way, the demand for pepper and other goods was accelerated by purchases and forcible extractions that followed on

Portuguese colonization. Numerous other small polities stretched up and down the coast, however, and these were also engaged in the spice trade. The Vijayanagara empire never controlled large portions of the west coast, and in those areas it did claim there is little evidence of central involvement in the spice trade. However, Vijayanagara did figure as a major consumer of products involved in the trade of the west coast (Subrahmanyam 1990b: 78–9), and its contribution to the survival of the Portuguese trade empire has often been noted (Heras 1927).

Connections between primary producers and collectors and colonial or indigenous governments benefiting from forest produce were generally indirect. Intermediate brokers or “secondary traders” (cf. Dunn 1975: 99) forged relations of dominance and indebtedness with forest peoples and these brokers dealt with more proximate political authorities. Thus, a multi-link chain of power stretched from the coast into the mountains. The contractual system depended on keeping foragers constantly in debt and personally dependent on the broker, who also acted as the supplier of subsistence goods (B. Morris 1982: 23, 94).

Tribute could also be exacted through local leaders, rather than directly from producers or collectors, in a way similar to that used to collect taxes from agriculturalists. Between the ninth and thirteenth centuries CE, Chola kings demanded tribute in forest products from territorial units located in the Ghats (Hockings 1985: 115; see also B. Stein 1982). Fox (1969: 144) notes early reports that the Kadar made periodic visits to Tripura to carry tribute and to exchange “gathered” items such as tame elephants, wild honey, cardamom, and other forest products for rice, iron, chilies, and opium. B. Morris (1982: 23) cites inscriptional evidence for a contract between the local king of Attingal and the Hill Pandaram, appointing the latter “tenants” of the forest, in return for which the *muppan*, or chief, should bring certain forest products to the capital every year. In return, cloth and other “gifts” would be given. In this case the local king was subject in turn to the Raja of Travancore, to whom he had to pay tribute. Thus, forest products moved down from the mountains to the coast through an ever-widening circle of political authority.

The Portuguese, too, used this system of intermediaries (see Diffie and Winius 1977: 319 on Sri Lanka). The Portuguese purchased goods on fixed-price contracts with a go-between. The Portuguese did prefer, however, to induce local rulers to supply them with spices at an agreed-upon price (Danvers 1966 [1894]; Mathew 1983). Presumably, then, these rulers employed the intermediaries. Pearson (1981: 28) notes that the Portuguese had no direct control over pepper-producing areas and thus were dependent upon coastal rajas and local merchants for their supplies. As an empirical pattern, then, we see with increasing scope of political authority an increasing physical distance from the source of the product, an increased concentration of stored goods, an increase in settlement nucleation, and an increase in the status of landholding groups. Along parts of Kanara coastal strip, for example, Brahmins were the major landowners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Further inland, landholding was largely in the hands of

the Bant, a "clean" Sudra caste (Subrahmanyam 1984: 439). Still further inland were the tribal swidden farmers and hunter-gatherers. This social ordering corresponded well with the pyramidal structure of power relations that knit together large areas of forests with fewer inland riverine towns and even fewer coastal cities.

The scheduling demands of pepper cultivation, and particularly of pepper collection, are of particular interest. Cultivation of pepper in mid-elevation, mixed crop swidden fields seems to be most appropriate for the requirements of the plant. Its drainage needs often result in its growth on hill slopes (Aiyer 1980: 269). In modern varieties, the harvest time falls between February and March (Aiyer 1980: 276), but "wild" strains usually have fruit at all stages of maturity on the vine at any given time. According to Buchanan (1988 [1807]: 334), dry rice in the Anamalai region of the western mountains would have been harvested at about the same time as cultivated pepper, occasioning conflict in scheduling and labor demands involved in the different activities (and see Subrahmanyam 1990b: 66). Thus, demands of labor and scheduling for grain production and pepper production (and even more, the collection of wild pepper) had to be balanced.

While specialized pepper production in the context of hill swiddens might have met the demand for pepper, the scheduling requirements of such a strategy would seem to preclude at least some forest gathering activities. B. Morris (1982: 63) notes that the more sedentary Hill Pandaram who have made a commitment to their swidden fields can only go for daily foraging trips. What, then, were the effects of the sixteenth-century spice trade on Ghat tribes? It is difficult to say with any certainty since historical data tend to focus on the coasts and on literate societies, and archaeological data are scanty. Still, it may be significant that cultivation of pepper is only occasionally mentioned in historical documents until the sixteenth century, while there are abundant references to the pepper trade in both this and earlier periods. For example, in the corpus of Tamil Sangam poetry, dating to the first three or four centuries CE, some poems mention a coastal intra-Indian trade in pepper and honey, both forest products (Nilakanta Sastri 1975: 110; B. Morris 1982: 15). Indo-Roman trade also included such forest products as sandalwood, ivory, pepper, ginger, cardamom, myrobalan (*Terminalia chebula* and *T. bellirica*) (B. Morris 1982: 15), as well as other woods, aromatics, and dyes (Ray 1986: 114). Finds of Roman coins are reported from both coastal and inland sites in southwest India (Begley and DePuma 1991). Thus, there is no doubt that pepper and other forest products had long been items of trade. While some of these forest products may have been collected by lowland traders or agriculturalists, the degree of specialized knowledge involved and the dispersion and seasonal availability of such products suggest instead that they were collected by upland groups at least partially specialized toward gathering and trading of forest produce.

In a review of archaeological data from the Nilgiri mountains of the west coast, W. A. Noble (1989) concludes that these mountains were not occupied prior to

the first century CE. Pollen data from northern Kerala analyzed by Caratini *et al.* (1990-1) also suggest at least small-scale occupation of the Ghat forests (and probable swidden cultivation) by the first few centuries CE. While reconstruction of subsistence is still far from clear, it seems that there existed a complex mosaic of practices that included swidden agriculture, gathering of forest products for trade with lowland groups, and no doubt gathering and hunting for subsistence as well. There are hints of the presence of specialized foragers in inscriptions predating European documents. But certainly by the time documentary sources become abundant from the sixteenth century onwards, there are clear indications of the presence of named groups engaged in specialized collection of forest products for exchange, as well as subsistence activities that included agriculture, gathering, and hunting.

In South India, inscriptional evidence from at least the tenth century CE has as a constant theme the expansion of agriculture at the expense of forests (B. Stein 1980, 1982), a pattern consistent with what little palaeoecological data exist (Morrison 1994). In the Nilgiris, Hockings (1980) has documented the expansion of the Badagas ("northerners"), a refugee group supposedly fleeing the destruction of the Vijayanagara empire in the late sixteenth century. The Badagas were accommodated by various hill groups and, according to the soil evidence (von Lengerke and Blasco 1989: 44), established permanent fields about three or four hundred years ago. Thus, forest dwellers have come under increasing pressure as the result of agricultural land use practices, as well as from demands for produce. In the Vijayanagara empire, agricultural expansion was particularly rapid during the sixteenth century, and there may have been significant pressure on the eastern foothills of the Ghats at this time.

Several different options may have been available to upland groups faced with both pressures on land and demands for produce. One such option was, evidently, to begin producing rather than simply collecting pepper. Pepper growers, then, concentrated on their agricultural plots and the scheduling demands of those plots almost certainly limited the spatial scale of their gathering and hunting. An alternative strategy available to groups with knowledge of forest resources would be to abandon cultivation as a major subsistence activity and become specialized forager-traders, collecting ginger, cardamom, and other forest products. It is difficult to say to what extent competition for land at lower elevations (where swidden plots of pepper were presumably appearing) would provide the "push" for the adoption of this strategy and to what extent scheduling consideration would have come into play.

Such strategies, which are ultimately dependent on long-distance rather than local exchange links, and on world markets, are inherently risky. The relations of domination and the precarious nature of forager-trader economies point to the marginality of their position. This marginality is not, however, eternal but has been created by a complex set of historical and ecological circumstances, only a few of which I have been able to sketch here. The marginality of southwestern Indian forager-traders is historically constructed, not given, and a great deal

more research – particularly archaeological research – remains to be carried out that will more fully and accurately explicate the nature of that construction.

In considering the situation of Western Ghat cultivators and collectors, we move beyond the conventional boundaries of the empire to suggest that the consequences of the political, economic, and ecological expansion of the Vijayanagara period had implications for the lives of even those outside direct imperial rule. Ghat hunter-gatherers had few, if any, of the organizational tools we see employed by the Valangai-Idangai groups of the Tamil country and operated in an environment quite unlike either agricultural landscape discussed above. Although in a sense they participated in both Vijayanagara and Portuguese empire-building, in neither case can their plight be understood solely with reference to policy, intent, or elite goals. Instead, they responded to a complex and diverse set of ecological, social, and political pressures to forge a series of strategies for survival and, through their withdrawal, perhaps for resistance as well.

COERCION, RESISTANCE, AND POWER: CONSTRUCTING VIJAYANAGARA

In beginning to break apart the experiences of a variety of subjects under the Vijayanagara empire, particularly those on the economic or social margins, and their variable degrees of success in resisting and simply surviving structures of power, I am suggesting that processes of imperial expansion and incorporation are fundamentally responsive to both imposed and extant conditions as well as to contingent circumstance. By this, I mean that structures of power are themselves constructed under specific material, organizational, and historical conditions at both “centers” and “peripheries,” by both ruler and ruled. This construction is not simply creative or free but labors under parameters of environment, social organization, and politics, as well as will. In studying the courses and consequences of imperial expansion, consolidation, and even disintegration, we would do well to consider both action and intent at the imperial center as well as the diverse responses and conditions of incorporated peoples.

In the expansion of the Vijayanagara empire, some groups of people – certain weaving communities, warriors, and others – were able to parlay their economic and political roles in the empire into either forms of upward social and ritual mobility or simply economic success. Others became marginalized or further marginalized by structures of power and privilege largely beyond their control. These people on the edges of the system – dry farmers, gatherer-hunters, landless laborers – were simultaneously marginal participants in the empire and integral parts of it. Their precarious positions were enhanced or, in a few cases, even created by the political economy and political ecology of the period. Their positions were, however, not merely byproducts of imperialism, but fundamental aspects of its operation, props for the forms of elite power and lifestyle that scholars often concentrate on, or even valorize as being the real loci of imperial

systems. Marginalized participants in and on the boundaries of Vijayanagara imperial expansion were not, however, simply hapless pawns of this South Indian polity. Efforts to resist exploitation and the appropriation of produce are evident in records of farmers fleeing heavy taxation, in continuing creative modifications of the physical landscape in ways that enhanced agricultural productivity, in the overt rebellions of the fifteenth century, and in the forms of avoidance and cultural separation that kept forager-traders from being assimilated into lowland society.

In the course of Vijayanagara imperial expansion, regions, peoples, and polities were incorporated in divergent ways, ways that changed through the life of the empire. Such variability complicates scholarly efforts at model building in as much as models are by their nature ideal and systemic, often glossing over problems of failure, miscommunication, resistance, and compromise and ignoring contingency altogether. Thus, to consider Vijayanagara as a particular *type* of empire (see Barfield, this volume) is an analytical exercise that may capture something valuable for comparison, but it is also an exercise that elides process altogether. The level of current disagreement about the “fundamental” nature of the Vijayanagara empire and, indeed, about the analytical category *empire* itself, reveals something both about the variability (through space and time, and across social distance) of this and other empires and about scholarly comfort with such variability.