Centuries of rebuilding old sites, countless acts of wilful destruction, and the accumulated impact of severe monsoons have simply obliterated traces of most ancient Hindu capitals in India. However, one great site has been spared: this is medieval capital of Vijayanagara, "The City of Victory". Located in the middle of the Deccan (the rocky plateau of peninsular India), Vijayanagara preserves a large ensemble of civic and religious buildings, some of this vast site has been cleared and excavated, but the layout of the city and monumentality of its architecture and art provide a wealth of evidence for the investigation of imperial Hindu ideals in medieval south India.

After the invasion of south India by the Muslims in the early part of the 14th century, and the consequent disruption of the power structure of the Hindu kingdoms, two comparatively insignificant courtiers, Hakka and Bukka, were able...
to establish themselves in the ensuing struggle for control of the Deccan. 1136 is the traditional date given for the foundation of the kingdom of Vijayanagara, with the capital situated on the banks of the Tungabhadra river. Until its abandonment and sack by Muslim armies in 1565, Vijayanagara was the capital of the wealthiest and most powerful empire of south India at its time. For more than two hundred years the Vijayanagara rulers resisted Islamic expansion while maintaining traditional Hindu religious and cultural practices. They also developed enduring systems of social and political authority that survived, together with a diminishing empire, through the 16th and 17th centuries. Contemporary Muslim historians and European travellers, including Portuguese visitors in the early 16th century, attest to the huge size and sumptuous appointment of the city as an unrivalled showpiece of Hindu imperial magnificence. Like other imperial capitals (Rome, Angkor, Teotihuacan, etc.) Vijayanagara conveyed the prestige and power of its rulers, the interaction between courtly and priestly class, and the ideals of moral and cosmic order.

The ruins of Vijayanagara (often known as Hampi, after the village that lies in the northwest of the site) cover an area of more than 30 square kilometers within which several zones may be distinguished. (1) To the south and west are irrigated fields and sub-urban "satellite" settlements separated by lines of defensive walls. (2) The focus of the site is the fortified urban core incorporating residential areas for the court, military and populace. In the southwest of this core is the royal centre, a complex of enclosures containing various ceremonial, administrative and residential structures. (3) To the north are many large temples and small shrines overlooking the Tungabhadra river which flows through a wild and rocky gorge. (This sacred centre dates back to pre-Vijayanagara times when the site was a well known holy place; today this is the only part of the site still alive with visitors and pilgrims). Throughout the city huge granite outcrops are found, often utilized as part of an elaborate fortification system. In addition, there is abundant evidence of ancient canals and aqueducts, transporting water from the river to various parts of the city.

Some recent historians (Burton Stein) consider the Vijayanagara empire to have been a "segmentary" state. According to their view, the empire lacked a centralized and permanent bureaucracy, and was constituted in the acceptance of the king's rightful authority by a fluid but effective affiliation of local groups and rulers. This regal authority was pre-eminently moral and was expressed in a ritual idiom. While Hindu kings in India were not considered divine, the institution of kingship was. Royal authority was intimately bound up with divine power and cosmic regulation, and successful rulers were expected to create conditions of material prosperity and moral well-being. The Vijayanagara kings maintained a divinely inspired order by conquest and plunder, distribution of booty, land and income, and arbitration of disputes. An important aspect of their rule was the initiation of large-scale building enterprises, including temples and public works, such as fortifications, gateways and extensive hydraulic system. As preservers of cosmic order, the Vijayanagara kings were al-
Royalty was so involved in various religious rites that took place within the capital.

In our work of interpreting the city of Vijayanagara we believe that the capital was much more than a mere backdrop for life of the king, court, army and priesthood; nor was it just a passive setting for urban rituals and festivals. The layout of the city, as well as its monumental architecture and sculpture, helped to define the nature of royal power and its relationship to divine authority. Urban form suggested that the essential organizing principles of life were embodied in and proceeded from the king, whose power was a manifestation of the divine hero-king, Ramachandra. Such ideas were conveyed through the geometry of the city plan; the organization of actual and symbolic functions; the pattern of movement in the city; and, also, the mythological associations of the site.

The royal centre was the residence of the king, his queens and attendants, and also the focus of courtly rituals and administration. Architecturally, the royal centre consists of a number of separate enclosures, each defined by high tapering walls with access through gateways or narrow doorways. Within these enclosures are carved stone basements of palaces, elevated platforms and columned halls; Muslim-styled pavilions, watch-towers, stables, fountains and bath-houses; and numerous drains, reservoirs, wells and aqueducts. The royal centre is divided by a north-south axis into two spatially and functionally distinct zones. This axis is partly defined by a wall which physically separates the zone of royal performance (to the east) from the zone of royal residence (to the west). Buildings and open spaces within the zone of royal performance indicate that here the king carried out his public, administrative and ceremonial roles. The largest enclosure within this zone is dominated by the remains of an immense square platform, probably the audience hall. Here a large floor area preserves one hundred column bases; a flight of steps suggests a vanished upper storey in timber. Clustered to the south are the rectangular stone basements of other smaller structures, probably civic buildings constituting the seat of the administrative apparatus of the king. Here the Indian excavators are currently revealing traces of rubble and earth walls, stucco floors and stone footings; the timber columns and roofs have now disappeared. Narrow alleys pass between these structures and there are several open courts; access is by stone steps. Finely finished slabs of green chlorite and white limestone are employed for pavements and basements. Throughout, there is considerable evidence of rebuilding and adaptation. Obviously, this area was in continuous use throughout the life of the city.

Within this same enclosure in the zone of royal performance is a large solid structure with an elaborately carved basement that rises as a stepped pyramid. Continuous friezes, unmistakably royal in character, are sculptured on the granite courses of the first and lower stage, and also on the delicately worked chlorite mouldings of the third and latest stage. Thus processions of elephants, camels and horses, with riders and attendants; hunting and pastoral scenes including the spearing of lions and tigers; warriors bearing shields, swords, sticks and banners; musicians such as drummers and cymbalists, and dancers and acrobats; and, perhaps most important of all, depictions of royal
figures in scenes of formal reception, or observing wrestling, dancing and acrobatic displays. We interpret this exclusively royal imagery as an illustration of the public activities of the king and court. Another aspect of the monument is seen in the chlorite additions in a style associated with the reign of Krishnadeva Raya (1509-30), one of Vijayanagara's greatest rulers. These additions may be the renovations to the "house of victory" undertaken after Krishnadeva Raya's victorious military campaign in Orissa described in one of the Portuguese chronicles: if so, it would reinforce the ceremonial and commemorative character of the monument. Several flights of steps lead to the upper level of the building which may once have supported a wooden and metal superstructure. Located at the highest point in the royal centre, this pyramidal platform dominates the surroundings.

The spatial layout and functions of buildings in this enclosure clearly contrast with those in the enclosure immediately to the west which belongs to the zone of royal residence. Here was located the royal household, including the queens and perhaps the king himself. Recent clearing work has now exposed a number of elaborate palaces, each with a stone basement and rubble and earth walls covered with plaster. These palaces are surrounded by cloistered subsidiary structures. The spacious and symmetrical arrangement of these palaces is strikingly different to the crowded and often linear arrangement of buildings in the ceremonial enclosure. Access to the palaces appears to have been closely guarded, and there is every indication of strongly controlled privacy. Within the palaces, too, there is a carefully modulated progression from open to closed spaces, with ever increasing privacy. In at least one example there was sculpture in stucco, but whether of royal or divine figures is not certain. Other parts of the royal centre are also residential, and many palaces are found in combination Muslim-styled and watch-towers.

The wall which separates the two zones proceeds northwards until it meets the Ramachandra temple complex, the key element in the organization of the royal centre. This temple is located in the middle of the royal enclosures where it acts as the focus of the radial road system inside the urban core. In the plaza in front of the temple converged many of the principal roads of the city. (These roads have long ago disappeared, but the alignment of gateways and other structures indicate their presence). In fact, almost all movement between the various enclosures of the royal centre passes through this plaza. Judging from the courtly carvings displayed on the enclosure walls that face outwards into the plaza, the Ramachandra temple must have had a particular royal significance. Here are found continuous figures.

The temple also gains significance from the cultural and mythological landscape of the city. It is geometrically and visually aligned with two natural features — nearby Matanga and Malyavanta hills — identified with episodes in the Hindu epic, the "Ramayana". The hero of this epic, Rama, is identical with Ramachandra to whom the temple is dedicated. Matanga hill is located due north of the temple on a continuation of the axis that divides the major zones of the royal centre. Thus the division of the functions symbolized by this north-south axis is continued into the greater urban area, and even into the countryside beyond. It may be that those zones of the city east of this axis were considered an extension of the public life of the king: in contrast, the predominantly agricultural and suburban areas to the west of this axis may have been related to the private life of the king's household. That a royal residence was established by Krishnadeva Raya at Hospet, southwest of the urban core, suggests that this conceptual urban model partly governed the expansion of the capital.

A second set of concepts is related to another aspect of the overall layout of the city. The northern zone contains the great temples along the Tungabhadra river (the world of gods), while the southern zone consists mainly of agricultural suburbs (the world of ordinary men). Separating these two zones is the royal centre within the urban core of the city (the world of the king). On an
urban scale, then, the king was central; in the middle of his zone of activities was the god Ramachandra. The actual and mythological events of the city pivoted around both king and god, establishing an identity of the domain of the king's activities with that of the god. However, the god's role is fundamental. The sanctuary of the Ramachandra temple housing the divine image is precisely located on the north-south axis that divides the king's functions within the royal centre. These functions may be understood to represent certain dualistic contrasts between the worlds of men and women, between the public and private life of the court, and between activity and rest. As Ramachandra sits is a neutral position, at the boundary between these contrasts, he may be considered to be outside the world of human distinctions. Just as the orderly functions of the city and empire are maintained by the king, the king's functions, in turn are sustained by Ramachandra.

This partnership between king and god was also affirmed through particular rituals that took place in the royal centre at Vijayanagara. The highly important events of the nine-day "mahanavami" festival, described in some detail by Portuguese visitors, were concentrated on a structure termed by them "house of victory". Apparently, it was around and within this building that the principal activities of the festival took place. From here the king observed processions, displays and games; here also he accepted gifts and tribute presented by nobles of the empire, returning gifts and honours himself. The Portuguese visitors observed that the king sometimes shared his throne with a richly decorated image, possibly of the goddess Durga. Within the "house
of victory” was a special cloth sanctuary where the king performed worship. In front, temporary pavilions accommodated the most illustrious nobles. The ceremonial area was strongly guarded, and could only be reached after passing through a number of protected gateways.

During each of the first nine days of the “mahanavami” festival there was the viewing and worship of the protective deity, a variety of athletic contests, dancing and singing, and a display of fireworks; on the tenth day there was the sacrificial consecration of the king’s arms, soldiers and animals. Throughout, the royal character of the festival is pervasive: it is to the king that everything must be subordinated. Thus, for example, the pavilions of all the nobles who visited the capital were within the precincts of the royal centre, under the direct protection of the king; images of deities from temples elsewhere in the realm were brought to the capital and presented to the king for his adoration; furthermore, the brahmins and temple dancers also performed obeisance to the king.

On and around the “house of victory”, identified with the pyramidal platform described above, many events of the “mahanavami” festival probably took place; perhaps also before the audience hall. Within this enclosure of the zone of royal performance the god (or goddess) visited the king and was received with honours and homage. Linking the pyramidal platform and the Rāmachandra temple is a sequence of courts and narrow alleys that lead from the platform, around the enclosure on three sides, to the small doorway in the south wall of the temple complex. This alley may have been used by the king himself for private access to the temple which, possibly, functioned as a state chapel. More significantly, the alley may have served as a courtly processional pathway at a festival time when the god, accompanied by the king, returned to his sanctuary. By circumambulating the royal enclosure in a clockwise direction, the god paid homage to the seat of the king’s public life, thus once again affirming the mutual dependency of king and god.

Clearly, such rituals both religious in atmosphere and political in significance; they celebrated divine kinship and provided a visible argument for regal power and authority. This relationship between royal and sacred power is the very basis for the planning of the royal centre and, indeed, of the imperial capital as a whole.

Bibliographical Note

Surprisingly little has been published on the urban layout and monuments of Vijayanagara. Two guide books provide useful information: A.H. Longhurst, *Hampi Ruins: Described and Illustrated* (Madras, 1917), and D. Devakunja-ri, *Hampi* (Archeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1970). There is also the recent work of F. Filliozat, “Town Planning at Vijayanagara”, *Art and Archaeology Research Papers (AARP)*, 14, 54-64. Splendours of the Vijayanagara Empire-Hampi, edited by V. Filliozat and G. Michell (Marg Publications, Bombay, 1980), illustrates recent mapping and measuring work at the site. The new excavations have been briefly reported in *Indian Archaeology: A Review (1975-6, onwards)*.

Acknowledgements

Our research at Vijayanagara is carried out in cooperation with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Karnataka (Dr. M.S. Nagaraja Rao, Director). Mapping, drawing and photographing protected monuments is with the permission of the Archaeological Survey of India. Field work and analysis has been generously supported by grants from the Smithsonian Institution, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the British Academy. The project has also benefitted from the contribution of numerous students and colleagues, both within India and abroad. Without the assistance of these institutions and individuals our work would have been impossible.

Courtly processional reliefs sculptured on the outer walls of the Ramachandra temple. (Fig. 59).