In a sense this study is an essay on the historiography of the Vijayanagara Empire, though not originally conceived as such. Initially I had intended, rather naively, to do a survey of the social formation of medieval South India which could serve as a prelude to future inquiries on modern economic and social developments. It was assumed that historical scholarship on South India was sufficiently well advanced to permit the charting of long-term trends. Consequently, it was thought that it would be possible, from the vantage point of the 'Middle Ages', to view developments, both forward and backward in time.

However, it soon became apparent that historical investigations, a few noteworthy exceptions apart, were almost solely concerned with dynastic history, the history of events or L'histoire événementielle as Braudel is fond of saying. How could I glibly move on from the military campaigns of one king to the problems of accession of another - this trivia of the past, I dare say - and hope to understand the structural changes which occurred in medieval South India? How could I not turn towards the small group of economic and social historians in this country who were, along with their more successful colleagues in the Western world, engaged in determining the inflexible boundaries that mark
the possibilities and impossibilities of human action in different epochs of production.

In the absence of adequate secondary sources and given the constraints of time it was imperative therefore that I take only a part of South India as my subject rather than the entire area as originally intended. As soon as I realised this compulsion, I became acutely conscious of my deplorable knowledge of all South Indian languages. Consequently, I began to look for a region from where most or all of the inscriptions were published in translation. Jayanakonda\-\-colamanḍalam came closest to this requirement as almost all the inscriptions from Tirupati, which was included within its limits, has been translated and published. Moreover, it was a region which contained a number of places which were visited by contemporary European travellers and their accounts have come down to us.

In addition to these sources I have consulted the summaries of inscriptions published in the *Annual Reports on (South) Indian Epigraphy*. However, these summaries by and large contain information only of a political and administrative nature and are not of much help in the quantification of social and economic data. While I did profitably consult a few books of the *South Indian*
Inscriptions series, most of the volumes were not of much use to me as they did not contain translations.

Further, since most of the indigenous literary works have not yet been rendered into English, I could use only fragments of such sources as have been translated in the *Sources of Vijayanagara History* edited by S. Krishnaswamy, in Volume III of the *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History* edited by K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and N. Venkataramayya and in the various secondary works.

Most of these records, both literary and lithic, could not be used in the quantification of data of a social and economic nature due to the inadequacies of summaries, the paucity of translations and the insufficiency of my knowledge of Tamil. As a result, I have been forced to limit my attempts at quantification to the inscriptions of Tirupati, though I am fully aware of the dangers of generalisations based solely on one set of inscriptions but it is hoped that the imbalances that must necessarily follow the adoption of this method will be rectified in the course of future research as I believe that the questions posed here have a certain validity.

It may perhaps not be out of place here then to mention that in these efforts at quantification — e.g. Tables V-1 and 3 to 8 — the inscriptions which do not
mention the śaka year on which the grants were made have not been taken into consideration. Further, two or more inscriptions relating to the same transaction (e.g. TTDES/IV/8, 9, 10; V/72, 86) have been treated as a single inscription. Grants of unspecified areas of land (e.g. TTDES/III/27) or of unspecified amounts of money (e.g. TTDES/III/100) have also not been taken into account.

Moreover, any inquiry into the nature of the agrarian system of medieval Jayankondacolamandalam which does not take into account the conditions prevailing within the rest of the Vijayanagara Empire, of which it was a constituent, is bound to be deformative in many important aspects. Jayankondacolamandalam was also connected economically with places as distant as Portugal and China, Arabia and the Indonesian archipelago. If adequate attention is not paid to conditions in these areas our subject cannot be correctly viewed in its totality. Again, due to the constraints mentioned above - lack of time and relevant secondary sources - it has not been possible to study these 'extra-territorial' regions satisfactorily.

In a bid to rectify, at least partially, these defects I have examined in some detail the works of our predecessors on the history of the Vijayanagara Empire and
have then attempted to reformulate some of their conceptions. This expository mode entails a brief restatement of their arguments which make tedious reading for those already acquainted with the literature. This also explains, in part the unusual length of this dissertation. However, I am convinced that given the nature of the problem and the availability of sources I had no other viable alternative.

The need for a critical re-examination of the works of our predecessor historians is perhaps most clearly seen in the fact that though it is now some two decades since Burton Stein first began to revise the interpretations of the pioneers of South Indian history, his own works have not yet been subjected to critical scrutiny. Bearing in mind this point I have examined Stein's theses at some length and in this endeavour I have attempted to reformulate certain crucial conceptions present in his work. The most important among the reinterpretations suggested in this study relate to the characterization of the Vijayanagara state, to the perception of the citramēli-perianādu-s, to the attribution of reasons for the decline of the nādu-s and the brahmādēya-s, to a new estimation of the economic significance of grants to temples and to the nature of trade during the period under review.
Though I have been as careful as possible, there are undoubtedly many imperfections in this study. Some of these relating to minor details — the erroneous location of a few sites on the maps for example — may not substantially affect the arguments offered here. However, when subjected to examination, many of my interpretations will require major modifications. These are of course inevitable. May I hope too that I am not excessively reproached for advancing certain hypotheses which are bolder than warranted by prudence?

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