“Sultan among Hindu Kings”: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara

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In a change of clothing, people express their response to a changing world, and they claim, even create, a place within that world. . . . Many phases and many choices are represented in the laborious passage from ‘national’ clothing to the sartorial proclamation of involvement in a wider, and different, social milieu.

Sandra A. Niessen (1993, 1)

Eat what you like; dress to please others.

Arabic Proverb (Rugh 1986, 1)

When Robert Sewell inaugurated the modern study of the South Indian state of Vijayanagara with his classic A Forgotten Empire (1900), he characterized the state as “a Hindu bulwark against Muhammadan conquests” (Sewell [1900] 1962, 1), thereby formulating one of the enduring axioms of Vijayanagara historiography. From their capital on the banks of the Tungabhadra river, the kings of Vijayanagara ruled over a territory of more than 140,000 square miles, and their state survived three changes of dynasty to endure for a period of nearly three hundred years, from the mid-fourteenth through the mid-seventeenth centuries (Stein 1989, 1–2). According to Sewell, this achievement was to be understood as “the natural result of the persistent

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efforts made by the Muhammadans to conquer all India” ([1900] 1962, 1). Hindu kingdoms had exercised hegemony over South India for most of the previous millennium, but were divided among themselves when the Muslim forces of Muhammad bin Tughluq swept over the South in the early decades of the fourteenth century: “When these dreaded invaders reached the Krishna River the Hindus to their south, stricken with terror, combined, and gathered in haste to the new standard [of Vijayanagara] which alone seemed to offer some hope of protection. The decayed old states crumbled away into nothingness, and the fighting kings of Vijayanagar became the saviours of the south for two and a half centuries” (Sewell [1900] 1962, 1).

Although the rhetoric has softened since Sewell’s time, his simple formulation continues to exercise a powerful influence on the historiography of South India even today. To be sure, it is now widely recognized that the actual pattern of political conflicts and wars in South India between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be understood in terms of a simple Hindu-Muslim conflict. In the words of the Historical Atlas of South Asia, for example, “both Hindu and Muslim states fought among themselves as much as they did against one another” (Schwartzberg 1992, 195; see also the similar formulation in Thapar 1976, 324). But despite the increasing tendency to recognize the determining role of realpolitik in the formulation of Vijayanagara’s diplomatic and military policy, it remains a deeply entrenched notion that in the realm of cultural policy, Vijayanagara’s purpose was to contain the spread of Islam and preserve Hindu institutions in the southern peninsula. Moreover, it is generally assumed that Vijayanagara was largely successful in implementing this cultural policy. Thus, in one recent survey, Vijayanagara is characterized as “a Hindu state,” the existence of which “led to a preservation of Hindu institutions and customs in . . . Southern India quite in contrast to the areas of Northern and Western India, which had come under Muslim influence in the thirteenth century A.D.” (Kulke and Rothermund 1990, 184). Two points seem implicit in such a statement: first, that the historical significance of the Vijayanagara period is as an era of cultural conservatism, during which “classical” forms of Hindu culture were preserved with little alteration and transmitted down to the present; and second, that the culture of South India has remained more authentically and purely “Hindu” than that of North India, where cultural forms and practices—even within a Hindu context—have been greatly altered through a long period of contact and interaction with Islamic forms.

In this essay I will question both of these assumptions, and argue to the contrary that Hindu culture at Vijayanagara was in fact deeply transformed by its interaction with Islamic culture. If one moves beyond the restricted area of religious doctrine and practice to examine the secular culture of Vijayanagara’s ruling elite, one begins to recognize the extent to which Islamic-inspired forms and practices altered Indic courtly life in the Vijayanagara period, and, indeed, continue to leave their impress on many aspects of the “Hindu” culture of South India even today. Similarly, if one accepts as legitimate those cultural changes that have been precipitated through contact and interaction with the outside world—instead of viewing them as anomalous discontinuities threatening the internal coherence of a tradition’s historical development—then the Vijayanagara period can only be viewed as an exceptionally dynamic and creative era in the history of South India.

Increasingly in recent years, scholars have begun to recognize the Islamic antecedents behind a number of characteristic cultural manifestations of the Vijayanagara period in such diverse areas as military technology and strategy, political and administrative institutions, and the material culture of the court. What has not been recognized, however, is that the appearance of these Islamic-inspired forms and
practices is symptomatic of a far-reaching process of systemic change in the elite culture of late medieval South India. In the area of architecture, for example, the presence of Islamic-inspired forms in the courtly monuments of Vijayanagara has been long recognized, but even the important analyses by George Michell (1985a, 1985b, 1992a, and 1992b) and Catherine Asher (1985) have stopped short of viewing these innovative architectural developments as part of a larger process of fundamental cultural change—a process which I shall refer to in this essay as *Islamicization*.

One of the most profound instances of *Islamicization* at Vijayanagara appears in the system of men’s court dress, and it is on this previously unrecognized phenomenon that I shall focus in this essay. I will demonstrate that the traditional South Indian mode of dress was largely replaced, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, by a new system based on the use of garment types that had originated in the Islamic world. These were the *kabāyi*, a long tunic, derived from the Arab *qabā‘*, and the *kullāyi*, a high, conical cap of brocaded fabric, derived from the Perso-Turkic *kulāh*. I will further argue that this transformation, far from being the result of mere changes in taste or fashion, was a deliberately calculated act on the part of Vijayanagara’s courtly elite, and that it was integrally related to changes in the political culture of the court. The adoption of *Islamicizing* forms of courtly dress is in fact paralleled by the appropriation of *Islamic* modes of political language, the most striking instance of which appears in Vijayanagara rulers’ adoption of the title “Hindu-rāya-surattrāṇa,” literally “Sultan among Hindu Kings.” Clearly, the royal imagery projected by these rulers, through *Islamicized* styles of dress and address, was far more complex than the simplistic image in which the communally inspired historiography of our own age has cast them.

Although this study focuses primarily on the transformation of South Indian courtly dress, it is not out of an interest in the history of dress as such, but for its value in elucidating the broader phenomenon of *Islamicization* at Vijayanagara—a purpose to which the case of dress lends itself in an unusually rewarding manner. Paradoxically, although not even a single garment or textile fragment is known to have survived from the Vijayanagara period, a rich abundance of both visual and written documents does survive, offering detailed evidence of the formal and material qualities of garments and their manner of use, and, occasionally, even illuminating the basic assumptions underlying the operation of the dress system. It is thus far easier to understand the cultural significance of *Islamicization* in the sphere of dress than in the area of architecture, for example, where the material record is extensive, but only rarely illuminated through the detailed testimony of written documents (Michell 1992b, 65). Dress, on the other hand, was a subject of obvious and abiding interest to many contemporary writers, insiders and foreign observers alike, and their passing observations and comments provide an invaluable complement to the evidence of visual representations. Most importantly, it is this testimony that permits us to understand the changes in the Vijayanagara dress system, not as an isolated instance of cultural borrowing, but rather, as one specific transformation that forms an integral part of *Islamicization* as a broader process of cultural change. By focusing in detail on this one well-documented aspect of the process, I believe we may gain a number of useful insights into the nature of *Islamicization* itself.

*“Islamicization” as Cultural Change*

Before proceeding with the details of the Vijayanagara courtly dress system, it will be useful first to discuss the theoretical model of *Islamicization* proposed here.
By way of preliminary definition, I would suggest that this process of cultural change may be understood in terms of three characteristics. First, Islamicization refers to a political strategy, by means of which indigenous elites attempt to enhance their political status and authority through participation in the more “universal” culture of Islam. Second, this participation is effected through the adoption of certain Islamic cultural forms and practices, which—given the political nature of the process—largely pertain to the broad sphere of secular culture, as opposed to the narrower domain of formal religion. As such, the process of Islamicization has nothing to do with religious conversion or syncretism; certainly in the case of Vijayanagara, there is little evidence of conversion to Islam or even syncretic movements, despite the fact that the material and political culture of Vijayanagara’s elites underwent Islamicization to a remarkably high degree. Finally, to borrow a phrase of McKim Marriott’s (originally used to characterize Sanskritization, a closely analogous process about which we shall have more to say below), Islamicization does not necessarily occur “at the expense of” indigenous cultural traditions. In other words, when a given cultural form adopted from the Islamic world has a functional counterpart already existing in the indigenous culture, the import does not necessarily replace the established form in all contexts. While a given Islamicized form may be used in those social domains where a symbolic appeal to the universal norms of Islamic civilization would be both natural and expedient—as for example, in courtly audiences and receptions where political, military, and mercantile representatives from the larger Islamic world are present—use of the indigenous analogue will likely continue in other domains, where such an appeal would be irrelevant or even counterproductive—as for example, in the context of certain types of Hindu ritual performance, where it is conformity with brahmanical cultural norms that confers legitimacy.

It is striking—although hardly surprising, given the ideology of Hindu-Muslim communalism and its profound impact on all historiography of South Asia in this century—that nothing approaching the model of Islamicization here proposed appears to have been developed in the scholarly discourse of South Asia, whether for Vijayanagara or for any other region and period in the history of medieval India. In fact, the only anticipation of the model of which I am aware occurs in the writings of an Islamist who worked primarily outside the South Asian field, the late Marshall G. S. Hodgson. Hodgson’s work is particularly relevant, not only in that it anticipates certain aspects of the general theoretical model proposed here, but also because in doing so it makes specific reference to the state of Vijayanagara. In an article originally published in 1970, Hodgson wrote that “by the sixteenth century, most of the East Christian, Hindu, and Theravada Buddhist peoples found themselves more or less

1I recognize the problematic nature of these categories, and do not mean to suggest that the distinction between “religious” and “secular” categories of human experience is universally valid or that such a distinction was drawn within either the medieval Indic or Islamic worldviews. However, I do believe that it is analytically productive to distinguish between those cultural forms and practices that are commonly designated as “religious” (doctrinal and theological discourse, but also rituals and practice, and material adjuncts to that practice) and the residuum of “secular” cultural forms that do not bear a primarily “religious” significance. This is not to deny that “secular” cultural forms are sometimes religiously sanctioned, or that clear-cut boundaries between “religious” and “secular” categories are sometimes impossible to draw. Nonetheless, I believe there is a vast area of cultural forms and practices in premodern South Asia that has been either ignored or grossly misunderstood from the perspective of a critical discourse which gives primacy to the category of “religion”—witness Kulke’s misinterpretation of the narrative of Harihara and Bukka’s supposed “conversion” to Islam, discussed at the end of this essay.
enclaved in an Islamicate world where Muslim standards of taste commonly made their way even into independent kingdoms, *like Hindu Vijayanagar or Norman Sicily*” (Hodgson 1993, 120 [emphasis added]). Hodgson’s statement encourages us to view Vijayanagara in proper world-historical perspective, as but one of many states located at the periphery of an expanding Islamic civilization, which, as Hodgson characterized it in another context, “came closer than any other medieval society to establishing a common world order of social and even cultural standards” (Hodgson 1993, 176–77; note the reference to Vijayanagara in this passage as well). Furthermore, the statement emphasizes the fact that the acceptance of Islamic cultural norms could and did occur even in states which remained independent—like Vijayanagara and Norman Sicily—and were never subject to political domination by the caliphate or any of its successor states. Finally, it stresses that the impact of this cultural hegemony was in the area of secular culture rather than of religion. What Hodgson speaks of are “standards of taste” or “social and cultural standards,” and he pointedly characterizes these cultural phenomena not as Islamic, but as “Islamicate.” Hodgson reserves the adjective “Islamic” to mean “of or pertaining to Islam’ in the proper, the religious, sense;” he coins the term “Islamicate” to refer more broadly to “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims” (Hodgson [1974] 1977, 59). The distinction is a crucial one, and although there is often resistance to Hodgson’s idiosyncratic terminology, the concept itself predates Hodgson and has long been taken for granted among Islamicists. For South Asianists, however, the distinction is often lost due to the impact of communal ideology with its attendant blurring of the boundaries between religion and politics. Because of my belief that the distinction is of crucial importance for a successful interpretation of medieval Indian cultural history, I accordingly employ Hodgson’s terminology throughout the remainder of this essay, using the adjective “Islamicate” to emphasize the fact that the referent is a social and cultural complex that often extended across religious boundaries. Similarly, I use the term “Islamicization” to refer to the process of becoming “Islamicate,” in deliberate distinction from the term “Islamization,” generally used to signify the process of becoming “Islamic” (see, for example, Eaton 1993).2

2 Although the term “Islamicization” proposed here is not an altogether happy one, it nonetheless seems to be the least problematic among the options available. Its greatest drawback is that the word is not sufficiently distant from “Islamization” to underscore the substantial differences between the two processes to which they refer. In an earlier version of this paper, I suggested instead the term “Turkization,” in part to avoid the religious overtones that would seem to be implicit in any term derived from the word “Islam,” and in part in recognition of the fact that indigenous Indic sources in the Vijayanagara period do not speak of Islam or Muslims, but identify the bearers of Islamicate civilization in the Deccan in ethnic terms, speaking inevitably of “Turks” (Telugu traksa, Sanskrit turunjka) regardless of their actual ethnic status as Turks, Persians, Deccani Muslims, or otherwise (see also Wagoner 1994). But this term would appear too limited in scope, suggesting an appropriation of Turkic elements only—which is inaccurate in the case of elements like the items of dress considered here, which originally developed in an Arab or Persian context. “Persianization” would also be inadequate for largely similar reasons. In any case, the strongest argument in favor of “Islamicization” is a positive one, and revolves around the close conceptual link between the process described here and Hodgson’s conception of “Islamicate culture” as “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims” (Hodgson [1974] 1977, 59); even if many elements of that complex have little or nothing to do with the formal tenets and practices of Islam as a religion.
Kabāyi and Kullāyi

The clearest and most detailed visual evidence of Vijayanagara’s Islamicized dress appears in a painting from the Virabhadra temple at Lepakshi (Anantapur Dt., Andhra Pradesh), dating to the 1530s (Sivaramamurti 1937 and 1968; Gopalarao 1969; Kamesvara Rao 1976, 77–84; Pachner 1985; for color illustrations, see Michell and Filliozat 1981, 118, and Blurton 1993, fig. 128). In the painted ceiling of the temple’s outer pillared-hall or nātya-mandapa, one register depicts a group of male courtiers worshipping the deities of the shrine, Virabhadra and Bhadrakali (fig. 1). Most of the figures in this group are clothed in an identical fashion, with the white tunic that is termed kabāyi in vernacular texts, and the tall conical cap of brocaded fabric known as kullāyi. Other paintings and sculptures dating from the Vijayanagara period also include depictions of the kabāyi and kullāyi, but in the majority of these cases the descriptive detail and clarity do not match that of the Lepakshi painting. Accordingly, the form and construction of the two garments are best described on the basis of this important testimony.

In construction, the kabāyi is depicted as a tunic, characterized by long, snug sleeves, and a lower hem of variable length, which in some cases reaches as far as the ankles and in others stops at the knees. (At least in this painting, the difference in length appears related to differences in the wearer’s status, with the knee-length hem used only by the shorter figures who are probably to be understood as servants of the men in full-length kabāyi.) At the top, there is a large, circular neck opening with a narrow turn-down collar and a slit in front that seems to extend down the length of the chest. From details of several of the figures, this slit appears to have been fastened with a button of some sort. As for color and decoration, every kabāyi shown in this painting is made from a plain, undecorated white cloth, and the only accents are provided by the colorful sashes tied around the garment at the waist.

As for the kullāyi, it is depicted in the Lepakshi mural as a high conical cap with a rounded peak, up to one and a half times the height of the head. It appears to be constructed from a small number of attenuated triangular gussets sewn together side

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3For the tunic, the forms kabāyi and kabāya occur in both Telugu and Kannada; kapāyi is also attested in Kannada. For the cap, kullāyi appears to be the most common form in Telugu and kulāyi in Kannada, but many variant forms occur in both languages (see Brown [1905] 1979, 245, 299–300; and Kittel 1893, 362, 365, 449). In her discussion of the Lepakshi paintings, Pachner refers to the tunic inappropriately as a jāma (1985, 334). I have not come across any occurrence of the term jāma (or its derivatives) used to denote the Vijayanagara style garment. Although the word is used in Persian as a generic designation for clothing, it is customarily used in the Indian context to designate the particular type of robe worn in North Indian courts in the sixteenth century and later. With its overlapping front construction and widely flaring lower hem, the North Indian jāma is a garment of significantly different construction from the kabāyi.

4A number of examples of relief sculpture are discussed and illustrated in Verghese 1991. It should be noted that two Deccani manuscripts dating from the third quarter of the sixteenth century also provide valuable documentation of contemporary Vijayanagar dress: the Tārikh-i Husain Shāhī, an illustrated history of the reign of Husain Shah I of Ahmadnagar (r. 1554–65), produced at that center between 1565 and 1569 (now in the Bharata Ithiha Samshodhaka Mandal in Poona; see Zebrowski 1983, 177f.; and for illustrations, ACSAA 17: no. 1794 “Battle of Rakshasi-Tangadi,” no. 1797 “Defeat of the Hindu Army”), and the Nuğām al-‘Ulamā, a treatise on astronomy, magic, and military animals and weapons, ascribed to the Bijapur court c. 1570 (now in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; see Leach 1995, 2:819–89, and color plates 113, 117).
Figure 1. Vijayanagara courtiers worshipping deities. Ceiling painting in the nātya-mandapa, Virabhadra Temple, Lepakshi (Anantapur Dt., Andhra Pradesh). (Photo courtesy Andhra Pradesh Lalit Kala Akademi)
by side, and is depicted as having an even, continuously running lower edge, without side or back flaps and without any fold-up brim. Additionally, in the case of the two prominent men standing at the head of the group, two paired strips of flaring cloth issue from the top of the hat and hang down along its side. The decoration of the cap conforms to the outlines of the gussets from which it is made, and on the basis of motifs featured, may be divided into at least two main types. In one, three profile lotus blossoms are connected in a vertical series by a stem with a small rosette in the middle of each segment and are bounded on the sides by meandering stems from which foliage issues. In the other, a more geometric effect is obtained by the vertical linking of two or more ogival lozenges, with undulating, cusped forms contained inside.

The testimony of the Lepakshi mural is an invaluable aid in understanding the form and decoration of the kabāyi and kullāyi, but does not permit us to identify the materials from which these items of dress were made or to gain a sense of the extent and social contexts of their use. The testimony of foreign visitors to Vijayanagara is, however, quite informative in this regard and provides a much-needed complement to the pictorial evidence. Written accounts of South Indian customs in the Vijayanagara age have survived from the hands of Arab, Persian, Chinese, Portuguese, and Italian travelers, which in many cases are models of careful ethnographic observation. Most importantly, these texts are marked by an attentiveness to descriptive detail rarely matched in indigenous texts, which, more often than not, pass over in silence the familiar realities of everyday life. The following analysis is based on passages culled from nine such “proto-ethnographic” texts.

As for the kabāyi, the foreign accounts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries consistently describe the king and the members of his court as wearing a sleeved tunic on the upper body, variously characterized in terms of familiar garments from the writer’s own dress culture. In the fifteenth century, Abdul-Razzaq Samarqandi (writing in 1442–44) describes the contemporary Vijayanagara king Devaraya II (r. 1422–46) as wearing “a tunic,” using the Persian word qabā (Abdul-Razzaq 1442–44, 310). In the next century, Italian and Portuguese writers characterize the garment variously as “a slender dress, somewhat like a petticoat, not very long” (Verthema 1502–8, 89), “short white shirts . . . which are gathered between the thighs but open in front (?)” (Barbosa 1500–16, 205), and “bajuris, which are like shirts with a skirt” (Nuniz 1535–37, 363). Domingo Paes (1520–22) goes a step further and records the name of the garment as cabaya, most likely transliterating from the Kannada kabāya (thus, of the lords and captains who appear before the king, he states that “they place their hands in the sleeves of their cabayas” [Paes 1520–22, 242], and on another occasion, he reports that “the king gave Christovão de Figueiredo a cabaya” [Paes 1520–22, 243]. The material from which these garments are made is generally described as being of cotton, silk, or brocade. Thus, Abdul-Razzaq describes the king’s tunic as made of “zaytuni silk” (Abdul-Razzaq 1442–44, 310); Duarte Barbosa speaks of “shirts of cotton, or silk, or coarse brocade” (Barbosa 1500–16, 205), and Paes refers to “a cabaya of brocade” (Paes 1520–22, 243). Cesare Federici (c. 1570, 161) also mentions velvet, satin, damask, and “scarlet cloth” in addition to white cotton,

1 For a brief review of this literature, see Loschhorn 1985, and the chronological bibliog-

raphy in Dallapiccola and Zingel-Ave Lallement (1985, 2:1–2). Although it has been fashion-
able in some quarters to question the reliability of such foreign accounts, it should be noted that their testimony generally accords closely with that of indigenous literary evidence and the archaeological record. For further discussion, see Wagoner 1993, 15 and 197 n. 5.
apparently in descending order of value and prestige ("according to the state and condition of the wearers, the apparel is of velvet, satin, etc."). Both Paes and Nuniz single out the king's garments as being of white cloth (silk, according to Nuniz), embroidered or worked with gold ("white cloths embroidered with many roses in gold," and again, "white cloths all covered with [embroidery of] golden roses" [Paes 1520–22, 243, 259]); "silk cloths [pacboiis] of very fine material worked with gold" [Nuniz 1535–37, 363]. Finally, the textual evidence suggests that there were both social and geographical boundaries within which use of the garment was restricted. Thus, Verthema is explicit in drawing a contrast between the tunic, worn only by "the richer people," and the dress of "the common people," who go about "almost entirely naked, covering only the parts of shame" (Verthema 1502–8, 89). Even though the kahäyi may thus be understood as an elite garment, it was not, however, worn at all South Indian courts, but appears to have been in use only at the court of Vijayanagara and its dependencies. By way of contrast, in much of the South Indian littoral zone—where a number of small kingdoms and city-states thrived on the maritime trade and preserved their autonomy from Vijayanagara—the evidence consistently suggests that traditional Indic dress remained the norm even at the courts. This was the case at Calicut in the 1440s, when Abdul-Razzaq notes that the ruling Zamorin was "as naked as the other Hindus [i.e., did not cover his chest but only his loins]" (Abdul-Razzaq 1442–44, 305), and on into the closing years of the century, when Vasco da Gama's chronicler remarks of "the most respectable" inhabitants of Calicut that "they go naked down to the waist, covering their lower extremities with very fine cotton stuff" (Da Gama 1497–99, 28); and according to Ma Huan—the Chinese Muslim who kept the official record of the voyages of the Ming explorer Cheng Ho—writing in 1433, it was also the case in Cochin, Quilon, Ceylon, and even in the Maldives, where the population was predominantly Muslim (Ma Huan 1433, 128, 130, 132–34, 149).

These authors are equally consistent—at least from the beginning of the sixteenth century—in describing the Vijayanagara king and members of his court as wearing a high cap, generally stated to be of brocade, which is clearly recognizable as the kulläyi. Verthema (1502–8, 89 [emended following Sewell [1900] 1962, 244, n.1]) states that "the king wears a cap of gold brocade two spans long;" while Paes (1520–22, 243) says of the ruler Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509–29) that "on his head he had a cap of brocade in fashion like a Galician helmet." Of the male members of the court, we read variously that "some wear silk or brocade caps" (Barbosa 1500–16, 205), "on the head they wear caps of brocade" (Nuniz 1535–37, 363), or "they wear long hats on their heads . . . made of similar materials [i.e., velvet, satin, damask, scarlet cloth, or white cotton]" (Federici c. 1570, 161). Paes, Nuniz, and Federici are all more specific in referring to these caps by a transliterated version of their Kannada name: collae (Paes 1520–22, 263), culae (Nuniz 1535–37, 363), or colae (Federici c. 1570, 161). Additionally, Paes gives two further details: first, that these caps are worn not only by men, but also by certain women of the court (the maids of honor who wait upon the queens), and that these women's colae are ornamented with "flowers made of large pearls" (Paes 1520–22, 263); and second, that the king's collae is worn not plain, but "covered with a piece of fine stuff all of fine silk" (Paes 1520–22, 243).

Considering this testimony together with the visual evidence of the Lepakshi mural, we may draw several general conclusions about the nature and use of the kahäyi and kulläyi. As for the kahäyi, it is clear that this was a long-sleeved, pullover tunic with front slit; that it was of variable length, with the lower hem extending to a point somewhere between mid-thigh and lower calf; that it was usually made of plain white
cotton or silk, but that the king’s kabāyi might additionally be ornamented with gold floral designs in brocade or embroidery; and that it was in widespread use among the male members of the Vijayanagara court, including the king, but was not worn either by common men, who left the upper body uncovered, or by the elite at courts beyond the sway of Vijayanagara. As for the kullāyi, we have seen that this was a high, brimless conical cap with rounded top; that it was usually made of silk brocade, which might be woven with floral designs or lozenges; and that it was the characteristic headgear of the king and male members of the court, and was in some cases also worn by women.

It is noteworthy that both kabāyi and kullāyi are new to South India in the Vijayanagara period; in fact, their adoption represents a radical departure from earlier traditions of Indic courtly dress. Prior to the introduction of the kabāyi in the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, men at South Indian courts did not customarily wear any upper garment, but instead left their chests and arms exposed, or at most, loosely draped their shoulders with a long, rectangular piece of untailored cloth (ambaram). Similarly, before the introduction of the kullāyi, preformed hats or caps of fabric were unheard of in South India, where rulers typically wore a jeweled crown (kirīta or kavana-makutā) or narrow fillet (pāṭṭa), and courtiers and chiefs wrapped the head in a turban (sirovestihi). Despite their novelty, however, the kabāyi and kullāyi were not totally unprecedented inventions of the Vijayanagara period; to the contrary, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that they appeared as adaptations of items in common use throughout the Islamicate world. This is indicated both by their names, clearly loan-words from the Arabic and Persian qabā and kulāh, and by their close formal correspondence with the Islamicate garments designated by these two terms.

The Islamicate analogue and ultimate source for the kabāyi is the qabā, a garment that is mentioned in Arabic literary sources from as early as the seventh century. Its subsequent history has been traced in detail by historians of Islamicate dress (Dozy 1845; Mayer 1952; Stillman 1986; Stillman and Stillman 1986). In its early Arab form, the qabā is worn as an outer tunic or robe covering the body-shirt known as kamīs. It possesses the same characteristics we have noted for the Vijayanagara style kabāyi: it is long-sleeved, with a front-opening neck slit that may be closed with buttons (another Arab garment, the farrūyi, is identical except that the neck slit is in the back [Stillman 1986, 733]). Most importantly, the qabā is clearly identified in contemporary sources as a luxury garment, which is often made of expensive specialty fabrics such as brocade (Arabic dibāj). By the eleventh and twelfth centuries, during the period of Seljuq ascendancy, a variant form known as the “Turkic qabā” (Persian qabā turkī) became widespread throughout the central Islamicate lands. It was distinguished by its overlapping front construction, in which the front panels are crossed one over the other and tied or buttoned on the side. By the fifteenth century,
yet other variants had appeared in the Iranian cultural sphere, as is evident from their frequent representation in Timurid painting. In contrast to both Arab and Turkic versions, these Timurid variants are either short-sleeved—a type apparently designated by the Turkic term dāgālī (see the glossary entry for this term in Thackston 1989, 380)—or long-sleeved and worn open in front, in either case revealing the contrasting color of a qabā̄ turkī underneath. Clearly, then, the Vijayanagara kabāī is based on the more conservative, Arab-style qabā̄̄ and not on the differently constructed Turkic or Timurid variants.

The Islamicate source for the kullāyī is without doubt the Persian kulāb, a high or medium-high cap made of cloth fabric (for the kulāb, see Stillman and Stillman 1986, 747 col. 2). From at least the fifteenth century, it appears with great frequency in Persian paintings, although its origin certainly goes back to a still earlier period. Pictorial evidence shows a great proliferation of different types of kulāb, some relatively low and others nearly as high as the Vijayanagara kullāyī, some trimmed with upturned fur or cloth brims, and others unbrimmed as in the Lepakshi examples. In addition to the basic formal correspondence between kullāyī and kulāb, there is also a close similarity between some of the ornamental motifs depicted on the Lepakshi kullāyīs and motifs commonly used in the Persian decorative repertoire. In particular, there can be little doubt that the profile lotus motif seen in one of the Lepakshi kullāyīs (that of the figure at the head of the group in fig. 1) is derived from a similar motif occurring in sixteenth century specimens of brocade and compound weave fabrics of Persian manufacture (for a late-sixteenth-century example, in a velvet weave with metal strips, see Pope and Ackerman 1964, 11:1006).

Hopefully, this brief review has demonstrated two things: first, that the ultimate source for the Vijayanagara kabāī is some form of the more conservative, Arab type of qabā̄̄, and, second, that the formal inspiration for the kullāyī—and possibly even the specific types of fabric used to make this headgear—derive ultimately from some center of Persian culture. Recognition of these two points opens up a host of related questions, such as when and through what specific mechanisms these Islamicate garment types were transferred to the Vijayanagara court; but as worthy as these problems are, they are beyond the scope of the present essay.7 Instead, I would like to proceed to the even more fundamental question of why the Vijayanagara elite chose to adopt these items.

“Sultan among Hindu Kings”

In an inscription dated 1352, the second ruler of Vijayanagara’s first dynasty (the Sangama, c. 1330–1485)—Bukka I (r. 1344–77)—had himself described with the following series of titles: “the prosperous great tributary, punisher of enemy kings, Sultan among Hindu Kings, vanquisher of kings who break their word, lord of the eastern and western oceans, the auspicious hero” (SII 16: no. 4; translation mine).

7The issue of chronology has been addressed in part by Verghese, who argues (on the basis of her review of the sculptural evidence) that the kullāyī came into use at some point around the middle of the fifteenth century, and that the use of the kabāī (which she refers to not by name, but as a “close-fitting shirt or jacket”) was well-established by the early sixteenth century—although she cautiously suggests that one may already be represented in the same coarsely carved image of the ruler Mallikarjuna that affords the earliest sculptural evidence of the kullāyī (Verghese 1991).
This inscription represents the first documented use by a Vijayanagara ruler of the title *bindurāya suratrāṇa*, “Sultan among/of Hindu Kings.” In one form or another, this title continued in use by Bukka’s successors for at least another 250 years, through three changes in dynasty, until as late as the opening years of the seventeenth century. Most historians have glossed lightly over this title, mentioning its use without much further comment. Vasundhara Filliozat, for example, writes: “This word [bindurāya suratrāṇa] presents difficulties. Neither in Sanskrit nor in Kannada does it yield a satisfactory sense. We must assume that suratrāṇa represents a Sanskritization of the Muslim title Sultan, a phonetic transliteration independent of any meaning. In the same way, suratāḷu would represent an equivalent transliteration in Kannada. One thus obtains the more satisfactory meaning of “Sultan of Hindu kings,” a title which would have been given to Bukka by his Muslim neighbors” (1973, xvi, translation mine). To my knowledge, the only author who actually attempts to explain its significance and the rationale for its use is Hermann Kulke. He writes, “the meaning of this title is not very clear. But it is quite likely that the early kings of Vijayanagara laid claim to a status among the Hindu rajas equal to that of the Sultans among the Muslim rulers” (1985, 125). For Kulke, the title is thus to be understood in a homological sense, which has the effect of emptying the term “sultan” of any specific cultural content. Vijayanagara kings are not claiming actually to be sultans; they are merely suggesting that they are like sultans with respect to the status they claim as paramount rulers. I believe, however, that there are two points which militate against such an interpretation. In the first place, it puts Bukka I—who first used the title—in the paradoxical position of claiming absolute paramountcy with this one title, at a time when his other titles still cast him in the position of a subordinate ruler. With only two known exceptions (Filliozat 1973, nos. 50, 104), the earliest Sangama kings consistently referred to themselves as *mahāmaṇḍalaśvara* (“great tributary”) and *odeya* (“lord” or “chief”) and not with the “imperial” titles of rājādhirāja (“king of kings”) and rājaparamēśvara (“supreme lord of kings”). These titles were not adopted until the

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8In addition to the 1352 epigraph cited, the title occurs in at least four other inscriptions from the reigns of Harihara I and Bukka I (Filliozat 1973, no. 35, bindurāyasuratrāṇa [1354]; Filliozat 1973, no. 36, bindurāyasuratrāṇa [1354]; Filliozat 1973, no. 37, bindurāyasuratrāṇa [1354]; Filliozat 1973, no. 50 bindurāyasuratrāṇa [1358]). From a cursory perusal of just several epigraphic volumes containing inscriptions dating from the period after the end of Bukka’s reign, I have culled the following further occurrences of the title: used by Devarāya II (r. 1422–1446), bindurāyasuratrāṇa (Satyamangalam Plates, EI 3: 35–41), bindurāyasuratrāṇa (Mōpūru inscription, 1425 CE, SII 16: no. 28); used by Venarasisimhara (r. 1505–1509), indurāyasuratrāṇa (Kudiyantandal Plates, 1507 CE, EI 14: no. 17); used by Krishnadavaraya (r. 1509–1529), bindurāyasuratrāṇa (Udayambakam Grant, 1528 CE, EI 14: no. 12); used by Sadasivaraya (r. 1542–1576), bindurāyasuratrāṇa (Bevinahalli Grant, 1551 CE, EI 14: no. 16). Cynthia Talbot has kindly called my attention to five further epigraphic occurrences of the title (or seemingly related variants) used both by kings of Vijayanagara’s fourth and last dynasty (the Aravidu, c. 1570–1649) and by local chiefs and “little kings” in the Andhra region. In the form bindurāyasuratrāṇhini it is applied to the chief Sariyapati Timmāreddi in an inscription issued by his son and namesake in Chedalavada near Ongole (1482 CE, NDI Ongole 30) and is taken by one Timmāreddi (apparently identical with the son of the previous record) in an inscription from Santaravuru in Guntur Dt. (1496 CE, SII 10: no. 731). A different, but probably related form, ṣandraratrāṇah “Sultan of the Andhra country,” is applied to the famed Kapaya Nayaka in an inscription issued by his relative Singaya Nayaka (Akkalapundi Grant, 1368 CE, EI 13: no. 24), and yet another seemingly related title, urigalasuratrāṇah “Sultan of Warangal [capital of the pre-Vijayanagara Kakatiya dynasty],” is used by the Aravidu king Tirumala I (r. 1570–72) (Penuguluru Grant, 1572 CE, EI 16: no. 18) and by his successor Venkata II (r. 1586–1614) (Mangalampad Grant, 1602/3 CE, NDI copperplate no. 6). I am grateful to Talbot for supplying me with copies of these records.
reign of Harishara II (1377–1404), although the title bimdurāya suratrāṇa is attested in at least five inscriptions prior to the adoption of imperial titles (see note 8 above). Secondly, there are at least two further inscriptions from this same period in which the modifying component “of Hindu kings” (bimdurāya) is dropped, and Bukka is described simply as “Sultan” (suratrāṇa; Filliozat 1973, no. 39 [1355] and no. 44 [1356]). It is difficult to see how use of this simple and straightforward title, without any further qualification whatsoever, could still function in the figurative, homological sense proposed by Kulke. Clearly, a different explanation is needed.

I would like to suggest that both titles, “Sultan” and “Sultan among Hindu kings,” were used in a much more literal and direct sense as a means of proclaiming that the Vijayanagara ruler could actually be considered a Sultan, not in terms of relative political standing, but in concrete terms of substance and style. In particular, the title bimdurāya suratrāṇa would have served to differentiate its bearer from ordinary Hindu (i.e., Indic) kings by signaling his willingness to participate in the political discourse of Islamicate civilization. Because of the fact that Muslim polities had risen to a position of dominance within much of South Asia by the Vijayanagara period, it was no longer sufficient for a South Indian ruler to articulate his claims to legitimacy solely within a traditional Indic idiom. By the early Vijayanagara era, not only was most of central North India under the hegemony of the Delhi Sultanate, but numerous regional Muslim states had established themselves along the Sultanate’s periphery as well, including Vijayanagara’s immediate neighbors to the north, the Bahmani kingdom of Gulbarga and Bidar (1347–1527) and its successor states, of which the most important were centered at Ahmadnagar (1490–1636), Bijapur (1489–1686), and Golconda (1512–1687). If a Vijayanagara ruler wished to be accepted not just by his own subordinates, but also by rulers of other states in the broader Indic sphere whose representatives were constantly at his court,9 he had to be equally sensitive to the norms and usages of Islamicate modes of legitimation. Moreover, it is also important to recognize that by the Vijayanagara age, the sphere of reference was no longer confined just to the Indic world but extended as well into the interstate system defined by the Indian Ocean trade. In particular, the port of Bhatkal (southwest of the Vijayanagara capital on the Kanara coast) served as a crucial commercial nexus and connected Vijayanagara into an extensive trade network that extended from the south China coast to the east to the ports of the Persian Gulf and Red Sea in the west. In fact, it was from Aden on the south Arabian coast and Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf that Vijayanagara received its most important overseas trade item, high quality war-horses, shipped to Bhatkal and then transported overland to the

9Contemporary accounts consistently refer to the presence of ambassadors or representatives of neighboring states at the Vijayanagara court, and vice versa. Nuniz’s detailed narration of the embassies sent from Bijapur to Krishnadevaraya is suggestive of the importance of diplomatic exchanges in determining the course of interstate relations (Sewell [1900] 1962, 332–340). A letter of Tristam de Paiva, an ambassador sent from Goa by Dom João de Castro between 1545 and 1548, describes his reception at the Vijayanagara court of Sadasivaraaya (r. 1542–76), and notes that in addition to the king and some sixty of his “captains and grandees,” the ambassadors of the Nizam al-Mulk (ruler of Ahmadnagar), the Imam al-Mulk (ruler of Berar, another Bahmani successor state), and the Qutb al-Mulk (ruler of Golconda) were also present at the audience (cited by Georg Schurhammer in his preface to Correia-Afonso [1955] 1969, xvi–xvii). For a discussion of literary evidence on types of diplomatic representatives and the nature of their operations in sixteenth-century South India, see Wagoner (1993, 13–15, 22, and 175 n. 26).
Vijayanagara capital.  

Given Vijayanagara's military dependence on this long-distance trade, one would expect the courtly elite to have developed an interest in the affairs of the other states bordering on the Indian Ocean. Indeed, at least by the 1440s, there was clearly an awareness of the most important contemporary imperial house in Iran and Central Asia, the Timurids, as is suggested by the fact that Devaraya II (r. 1422–46) eagerly sought out an emissary from Shah Rukh, his Timurid contemporary in Herat, who had been sent on a mission to Calicut on the Malabar coast (discussed below). Viewed against this background, then, adoption of the title “Sultan of Hindu kings” may be seen as part of an effort to expand the rhetoric of South Indian kingship by glossing it in terms of the Islamicate political lingua franca that dominated the world of the Indian Ocean.

If this interpretation is correct, it becomes possible to identify two specific factors which would have led naturally—perhaps even inevitably—to the adoption of certain elements from the Islamicate system of dress. The first factor, which would account for the adoption of the kalbāyi, may be traced to the sharply opposing attitudes to the body that underlie the Islamicate and traditional Indic systems of dress. In the Indic system, prior to the impact of Islamicate culture, the body was viewed as an integral aspect of the person and, as such, was held to reflect the inner state and qualities of the individual. Within such a cultural context, the function of clothing is not to conceal the body, but to reveal, frame, and accentuate its forms. These are precisely the functions served by the traditional Indic upper garment—a sheer, un tailored cloth draped loosely over the shoulders. To this attitude, the Islamicate stands in direct

10The role of Bhaktal in the Vijayanagara horse trade has recently been clarified by Sanjay Subrahmanya, who highlights both the unusually cosmopolitan character of the city and the involvement of Vijayanagara in the city's administration (1990). Despite Portuguese attempts to stop trade through Bhaktal, there is evidence from a Hadrami chronicle—the Tarikh al-Shibri, translated by Serjeant (1963)—that ships from Bhaktal continued to call at South Arabian ports throughout the late 1520s and early 1530s. When Bhaktal's fortunes finally declined in the 1570s, it appears to have been more on account of the collapse of its primary inland market (Vijayanagara was sacked and largely destroyed in 1565), than to the success of any Portuguese policy emanating from Goa (Subrahmanya 1990, 120–35). A number of recent works provide further information on the Indian Ocean trade in general and its integration with local peninsular trade in the sixteenth century and later. See especially the studies of Raychaudhuri and Habib (1982, chs. 4, 5, 11, and 13), Chaudhuri (1985, 1990), and Das Gupta (1994). Deloche's study of transportation routes and networks (1980) is especially important for its clear identification of Vijayanagara city as the central nexus upon which most routes in the lower Deccan converged. A number of other works have focused on the Indian Ocean trade in the pre-Portuguese era, utilizing Arabic historical sources and the commercial documents preserved in the Cairo Geniza (Hourani [1951]1995; Goitein [1958]1966 and [1963]1966) as well as archaeological material, including specimens of Indian block-printed cloth unearthed in Egypt (Barnes 1993; Gittinger 1982; Whitcomb and Johnson 1979 and 1982).

11If classical Indian poetry and sculpture often appear obsessed with the human body, it is for this very purpose, of communicating significant information about the character of the embodied. Bāṇa's description of his royal patron and hero, Harṣa, affords numerous instances of this tendency. For example: "He shone, with his broad chest, like Kālīśa with a cliff of crystal,—able to bear the shock of various armies, too sturdy to be confined within the limits of its garment (the limits of the sky), and made smooth in spite of its hardness by the thousands of elephants' tusks which had collided against it" (Cowell and Thomas 1968, 60). The Gupta Buddha image, which suggests the Buddha's enlightened state through the formal harmony of its idealized physiognomy, presents a comparable example from the realm of sculpture.

12Again, Bāṇa's description of Harṣa is informative: "he appeared, girt with his thin upper garment spangled with worked stars, like the round world with its surrounding ether cloudless and full of stars" (Cowell and Thomas 1968, 59–60).
opposition. The uncovered body is held to be naked and shameful, and it is said that clothing has been provided by God to cover man’s nakedness—a purpose well achieved by the many varieties of tunics and robes which characterize the Islamicate system of dress. Not only is the body to be covered, but clothing should be loose fitting, so as not to reveal the forms of the body beneath. Given these sharply opposing attitudes and vestimentary systems, we may well deduce that the minimal dress of South Indian rulers would have appeared immodest and barbaric by Islamicate cultural standards, and, moreover, that if the rulers of Vijayanagara were truly committed to presenting themselves as “Sultans” among the Hindu kings, they would have faced the necessity of adopting a style of dress that was more in conformity with Islamicate norms of modesty and public decorum. It is for this reason, I would argue, that the kabāyi became the standard upper garment worn publicly at the Vijayanagara court.

Confirmation of this interpretation is provided by an important Persian history of the Timurid period, the *Matla’-i sa’dayn*, whose author, Abdul-Razzaq Samarqandi, was a high-ranking functionary at the court of Shah Rukh (excerpts from this text relating to the voyage to Hindustan have been translated by Major 1857, 1–49; Elliot and Dowson 1867–77, 4:89–126; and, most recently, Thackston 1989, 299–321). In 1442, Abdul-Razzaq had been sent as an emissary to India, in response to a request for a diplomatic exchange from the Zamorin of Calicut. As soon as the Persian emissary landed in Calicut, he was met by a people who struck him as uncomfortably strange. They appeared, in his poetic characterization:

A strange nation, neither men nor demons, at meeting whom the mind would go mad. Had I seen the likes of them in a dream, my heart would have been upset for years.

(Thackston 1989, 304)

Clearly, one of the things that troubled the Timurid emissary was the scant clothing of these Hindus, whom he went on to describe as “naked blacks, with loin cloths tied from their navels to their knees.” Even the king went about bare chested, prompting Abdul-Razzaq to comment that “both king and beggar look like this;” and even on the occasion of a formal audience, Abdul-Razzaq found the king “to be as naked as the other Hindus.” And, as if to dispel any doubts as to the standard of comparison, the Persian envoy contrasts the dress of the Muslim traders living there, who “wear fine clothing in the Arab fashion, and indulge in ceremony of all sorts” (Thackston 1989, 305).

Even though it was at the Zamorin’s request that the Timurid emissary had been dispatched to Calicut, Abdul-Razzaq appears not to have been given a very enthusiastic reception upon his arrival. In fact the only other thing he has to say about the “naked” Zamorin is that “he did not pay full respect” when Shah Rukh’s letter was read and gifts were presented. Paradoxically, it appears that nothing at all would

13 This is suggested by the Qur’anic text: “Children of Adam, We have created for you raiment which covers your nakedness . . .” (7.27). The significance of this passage for the tradition is highlighted by the fact that it opens the section on “Clothes, their Material and Colours” in the hadith collection *Riyadh as-Salihin* of an-Nawawi (translated in Khan 1975, 155).

14 See, for example, the following dictum in a medieval Persian Mirror for Princes: “Neither men nor women should wear a tight robe beneath which their body is revealed; it is related in the Traditions that women who wear such robes are accursed,” *Bāhr al-Fawā’id* 9.6, translated by Julie Meisami as *The Sea of Precious Virtues* (1991, 91).
have come of his mission, had it not been for the fact that the ruler of the larger and much more powerful state of Vijayanagara had learned of the Timurid ambassador’s presence in Calicut, and immediately had him summoned to his own capital. Thus it was that Abdul-Razzaq arrived at Vijayanagara and was accorded a gracious reception at the court of Devaraya II. The emissary’s long and approving account of Devaraya and his city presents a striking contrast to the perfunctory and unenthusiastic description of Calicut that precedes it. Vijayanagara enjoys “a king of perfect rule and hegemony” and its inhabitants “have no equals in the world.” Moreover, Abdul Razzaq reports that his reception at court was exemplary: Devaraya seated the ambassador beside himself and politely stated, “We are pleased that the great Padishah has sent us an emissary.” He also recorded that he was granted private audience twice weekly, and given a generous daily allotment of provisions and cash. And most significantly, this king who was so well versed in the finer points of etiquette and so interested to learn about Shah Rukh presented himself as no naked Hindu but properly dressed, as Abdul-Razzaq clearly states, “wearing a tunic of Zaytuni silk” (Thackston 1989, 310). Through his proper covering of the body, Devaraya identified himself as a fit and proper king who could legitimately compare with Shah Rukh or any other Islamicate ruler. Clearly, the Persian ambassador had finally come to the right place and had succeeded in finding a “Sultan among Hindu Kings.”

If a concern for respecting Islamicate attitudes to the body can thus begin to account for the adoption of the kabāyi as the proper dress at the Vijayanagara court, there is a second factor which not only would have reinforced its use, but would have accounted for the prominence of the kullāyi as well. This was the well-known Islamicate courtly ritual of presenting special items of dress as gifts of honor, or khil‘at. The objects presented in this ritual are best understood as “transactional” symbols, the exchange of which served on the one hand to bind giver and receiver together in a relationship of service, and on the other to confer legitimacy on the donor and honor on the recipient (this definition owes much to Gordon 1994). The items given generally included a full set of clothes, of whatever type was characteristically worn at the court in question, but distinguished by their luxuriousness and quality. The use of such transactional symbols, including items of dress, is well documented in the traditional Indic sphere before the impact of Islam, but in the Vijayanagara period the practice was modified in such a way that it came into closer conformity with Islamicate practice. Specifically, items of dress began to receive more prominence as transactional symbols in formal audiences, while jewelry, scents, and pān appear to have been relegated to a secondary position; additionally, the identity of the garments used changed, as upper cloths and turbans were replaced by kabāyi and kullāyi. These changes would have contributed an increased measure of familiarity and intelligibility to ritual transactions in the city of Vijayanagara at a time when some of the most important segments of its population were Turkic mercenaries serving in the king’s army, Muslim traders from southern Arabia and the Persian Gulf (Abdul-Razzaq refers to the presence of a resident population of Hormuzis at the capital in the 1440s), and resident ambassadors representing the rulers of neighboring Muslim states (see note 9 above).

Let us briefly consider just two texts relating to the ritual use of kabāyi and kullāyi in this fashion, the one indigenous, the other foreign. The Rāyavātakamu, a late-sixteenth-century Telugu historiographic text dealing with the reign of Krishnadevaraya (1509–29), records several instances of the presentation of kabāyi and kullāyi as gifts of honor. In the first, the king honors his minister Saluva Timmarasu by giving him “the seven worthy gifts: a kullāyi, a kabāya, a necklace, a pair of pearl
earrings, a yellow shawl, fragrant musk, and pān” (ucita-saptāṃgamu kūlāyi kabāyi tāli caucaṭlu pīṭāṃbaram gamdhā kastūri tāṃbūlādīgī yicci; Ramachandra Rao 1982, 30; translation Wagoner 1993, 106). In a second passage, Krishnadavaraya confers honors on his court poets Mukku Timmaya and Alasani Peddanna by presenting them with “kabāyiis and kullāyiis, necklaces and pearl earrings, bracelets, and ceremonial garments” (kullāyi kabhāyi tāli caucaṭlu āsari pērulu kōkatākhal yicci; Ramachandra Rao 1982, 80; translation Wagoner 1993, 160). It is interesting to note that in the first passage, the two items are said to belong to the canonical grouping of “seven worthy gifts,” ucita-saptāṃgamu, employed by kings as gifts of honor. This grouping, however, is defined differently in more prescriptive texts, which do not include kullāyi and kabāyi but instead specify traditional unstitched items of dress as turbans (śirovēṣṭī) and upper cloth (ambaram). In the more descriptive account of the Rāyavācaṭam, not only do the Islamicized garments replace their traditional Indic counterparts, but, significantly, they have also been placed together as a pair that heads the list.

The second text to be considered is Domingo Paes’s account of his experiences at Vijayanagara, which, like the Rāyavācaṭam, also relates to the reign of Krishnadavaraya. Paes narrates a detailed account of a royal audience given to his countryman, Christovão de Figueiredo, in which the latter was presented with the characteristic gifts of honor:

... the king was as much pleased with him as if he had been one of his own people, so much attention did he evince towards him; and also towards those amongst us who went with him he showed much kindness. We were so close to the king that he touched us all and could not have enough of looking at us. ... The king gave to Christovão de Figueiredo on dismissing him a cabāya of brocade, with a cap of the same fashion as the king wore, and to each one of the Portuguese he gave a cloth embroidered with many pretty figures, and this the king gives because it is customary; he gives it in token of his friendship and love.

(Sewell [1900] 1962, 243–44)

According to Paes, Christovão de Figueiredo received nothing more than a brocaded kabāyi and “a cap of the same fashion as the king wore,” or in other words, a kullāyi. Whether this was all that was given, or Paes simply did not deem it necessary to mention other items such as scents and jewelry, is not known; in either case the account is suggestive of the preeminent status of the kabāyi and kullāyi as transactional symbols in Krishnadavaraya’s court. The fact that the Portuguese leader received the two Islamicized garments, while each of his countrymen received only an embroidered cloth, only further underscores the point.

To recapitulate, I have argued in this section that the title bhimurāya suratrāṇa offers an important clue for understanding why the kabāyi and kullāyi came to be used at the Vijayanagara court. By the fourteenth century, the political landscape of South India had changed drastically, as Turkic states became well entrenched in the upper Deccan, and the peninsula became more thoroughly integrated into the commercial world of the Indian Ocean. Recognizing the international relevance of Islamicate political culture, Vijayanagara’s early Sangama rulers adopted titles and modes of dress that permitted them to participate in this political culture as “Sultans among Hindu Kings.” By covering the upper body with a kabāyi, men of the Vijayanagara court comported themselves according to Islamicate norms of public decency, and, by restructuring the indigenous system of transactional symbols around the Islamicate inspired kabāyi and kullāyi, Vijayanagara court ritual was made intelligible in terms of the political lingua franca of the wider Islamicate world.
Code Variation in the Vijayanagara Dress System

Up to this point I have necessarily emphasized the pervasiveness of the kabäyi and kulläyi at the Vijayanagara court, but it must now be pointed out that traditional modes of dress were by no means completely eclipsed by the newly imported ones. Although the testimony of foreign visitors suggests that kabäyi and kulläyi were universally and consistently worn by men at the Vijayanagara court, there is in fact a significant body of material cultural evidence which attests to the continuing relevance of Indic-style garments for the Vijayanagara elite and suggests that in certain contexts, at least, these were preferred over the Islamicate kabäyi and kulläyi. Two questions are thus posed by this visual evidence. In the first place, since it suggests that Indic dress continued in use together with the newly imported Islamicate forms, is it possible to “map” the distribution of the two modes according to the different social contexts or domains in which they occur? In other words, if the Islamicate and Indic styles are seen as having constituted distinct “languages” of dress, then were there culturally shared rules of code use which entered into an individual’s choice of which code to use in any given dress situation? Secondly, how is one to reconcile the testimony of this indigenous visual evidence—suggesting the occurrence of variation between Islamicate and Indic codes of dress—with the apparently conflicting evidence of the foreign literary accounts, which implies instead a consistent and uniform use of kabäyi and kulläyi?

Let us analyze one key example of this visual evidence, which not only serves to demonstrate the phenomenon of code variation but, moreover, is highly suggestive of the underlying factors which patterned this variation. The evidence in question is a dyed pictorial textile in the collection of the Association for the Study and Documentation of Asian Textiles (AEDTA) in Paris (fig. 2). Although it is datable to the second half of the seventeenth century and as such postdates the Vijayanagara period proper, the fact that its provenance has been persuasively argued to be Madurai (Gittinger 1982, 121–27)—the center of one of Vijayanagara’s most important successor states—invests it with a distinct relevance in view of the lack of comparable material surviving from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The two main registers clearly manifest a narrative intent and depict an unidentified royal personage engaging in a series of leisure activities within a palatial building. In the upper register, he is entertained by female musicians (left), proceeds through a chamber (center), and sits in another room where he enjoys an amorous encounter (right). At the left end of the

I borrow the concept of “domain” from the literature of sociolinguistics, where the term is used to refer to “a sphere of activity representing a combination of specific times, settings, and role relationships” (Romaine 1995, 30). This concept has proven especially important in analyzing patterns of language use in bilingual communities, where a number of studies have established that alternation between the two languages is not arbitrary, but socially coded, such that one language is favored for use in certain domains and the second is preferred in others (see especially Sankoff 1980, 29–46). The term diglossia is conventionally used to refer to the collective, societal bilingualism found in such speech communities, and to emphasize the “functional differentiation” between the different languages (Edwards 1994, 85). Although their original sphere of reference is the functional differentiation between verbal languages, I believe that the concepts of domain and diglossia can quite naturally and productively be extended and applied to the functional differentiation obtaining between distinct “languages” of dress—and indeed, between distinct “languages” of architecture and of other nonverbal semiotic codes—such as characterizes the Vijayanagara cultural system after Islamicization.
No. 2221, Collection AEDTA, Paris. (Photo courtesy AEDTA).
lower register, he sits inside with his female companion gazing outward toward a procession, which works its way through a broad open courtyard adjoining the structure (right). Here, the parasol and raised standards clearly indicate the royal status of the equestrian figure leading this procession; he is perhaps intended to represent a prince or officer returning in victory from a military campaign. What is of primary significance in the present context is the clear distinction in dress between the two royal figures: while the figure in the procession wears what can readily be recognized as a khabāyi, the royal figure inside is consistently shown bare chested, wearing only a dhoti and upper cloth.

What does this scene imply about the systemic rules governing code choice? In the first place, we may note that the social domains in which the two royal figures appear are clearly differentiated. Although spatially both figures are located within the broad ambit of a “palace,” their respective spheres of action differ decisively in terms of the specific combinations of settings, participants, and activities which define them. Thus, the figure shown in the upper register and at the left end of the bottom register is situated inside, in a sphere of male-female interaction, where he is engaged in ritualized leisure activity and entertainment, while the mounted figure at the lower right is situated in the open courtyard outside, where he is the focus of a grand military procession. If, for the sake of convenience, we refer to these two palatial domains respectively as the “residential” and the “performative” (following the terminology used by John Fritz in his analysis of the spatial structure of the Royal Center at the Vijayanagara capital; Fritz, Michell, and Nagaraja Rao 1984, 150), then the testimony of the AEDTA textile would imply that according to the logic of the Vijayanagara dress system, the Indic code was marked as appropriate for use in the residential domain, and the Islamicate as appropriate in the performative.

Underlying this differentiation between “residential” and “performative” domains, I believe we may recognize a familiar and more fundamental distinction, namely, that between “domestic” and “public” social situations, which has been drawn indigenously in South India since at least the fifth or sixth century. These conceptually opposing categories are lexically represented in all the South Dravidian languages as well as in Telugu, but are best known as expressed through the Tamil words akam and puram, respectively signifying “interior, domestic” and “exterior, public.” This binary taxonomy of social situations not only provided the traditional basis for classifying the genres within classical Tamil poetry (which are differentiated thematically by their respective focuses on the subjects of “love” and “war” [Ramanujan 1985]) but also continues to be of contemporary relevance, as the late A. K. Ramanujan convincingly demonstrated with his akam/puram-based classification of performative genres within Kannada folklore (1986). As Ramanujan emphasized in this context, “the division . . . is not between private and public, between personal and impersonal, but between the domestic and the public—between the inner circle or the immediate kin within the four (or more) walls of a house and the larger circles of the extended family, the subcaste, the caste, and the society at large” (1986, 49–50). In the scene of the AEDTA textile, the “residential” and “performative” domains can readily and productively be viewed as particular transformations of the “domestic” and “public” situations represented by the concepts akam and puram. Thus, the royal figure in Indic dress appears within the interior, residential zone of the palace, accompanied by the female “kin” of the royal household; while the mounted royal figure with khabāyi is outside, surrounded by an army of male warriors, returning from the quintessentially puram activity of warfare.
Analysis of the AEDTA textile thus suggests that there were indeed systemic rules governing the choice between Indic and Islamicate modes of dress within the Vijayanagara dress system, and that these rules were in large measure structured by the akam/puram taxonomy of social situations. It suggests that although the Islamicate code had come to be preferred in those situations which were, broadly speaking, of a “public” or puram nature, the traditional Indic code continued to enjoy a favored status in those domains which conformed more closely to the “domestic” or akam category. Finally, recognition of this principle of code variation permits us to return to the second question posed above and to see in proper perspective the apparent uniformity and homogeneity of court dress implied in the foreigners’ accounts. If these foreign visitors consistently describe men at the Vijayanagara court as wearing the Islamicate kabāyi and kullāyi, is it not for the simple reason that interaction with such foreigners would generally have taken place within domains that were, by definition, intensely performative and public in nature?

Islamicization and Sanskritization

In this final section, I would like to move from the details of dress per se to the larger process of Islamicization, in the interest of further refining the concept as an analytical model of broader applicability. To this end, I believe we may usefully start by recognizing the structural similarities between Islamicization and the more familiar process of Sanskritization.

There has been much debate over the appropriateness of the term “Sanskritization” since M. N. Srinivas first introduced it (1952); moreover, the term (or one of its substitutes) has been applied to a wide range of distinct and seemingly unrelated processes. Nonetheless, as Kulke has pointed out, the relevance of the basic concept has never been seriously questioned (1976, 399). Srinivas’s original formulation

16Joanne Waghorne has called my attention to some intriguing material cultural evidence which suggests that this particular pattern of code variation still occurs today and extends into the religious context of the dressing of the portable, metal images of deities used in South Indian temple festivals (personal communication). Waghorne has photographically documented the dress of the bronze images of Padmanabhaswamy in his new temple at Adyar in Madras, consecrated in 1995. One image, which is taken outside the temple for use in processions, is dressed in a long-sleeved, tailored tunic of green velvet (worn over a Kanchipuram silk dhoti), which is probably a distant echo of the Islamicate kabāyi popularized by Vijayanagara court practice (note, in this connection, that Kittel gives “a dress for idols” as one of the definitions for the Kannada kapāyi [1893, 362]); the second metal image, which remains inside the temple, is dressed in purely Indic fashion, with unstitched white silk dhoti and upper cloth draped over the shoulders, leaving the deity’s chest bare. This pattern—which Waghorne explains to be typical for the gods in Tamil Nadu—would seem to represent another manifestation resulting from the structuring function of the akam/puram taxonomy, as well as attest to the further extension of “Islamicized” cultural forms into the religious sphere—not an unexpected development, given the pervasively royal idiom inflecting the temple cult in South India. I am grateful to Waghorne for bringing this evidence to my attention, and for sharing copies of her photographs with me.

17There would seem to be numerous historical parallels to the diglossic, domestic/public articulation of dress systems, in which recently imported outside forms are given preference in public domains. For one such parallel, see Dalby’s discussion of the Westernization of Japanese men’s dress during the Meiji era, as a result of which yōfuku (western dress) came to dominate in the workplace and men’s kimono came to be relegated to the home and associated with leisure (1993, 84–86).
emphasized two aspects of the process that have remained central in subsequent discussions and that seem particularly relevant for a comparison with Islamicization. First, he characterized Sanskritization as a practical strategy for social change adopted by lower-ranking castes as a means of achieving a higher status; second, he showed that this strategy revolved around the abandoning of certain local cultural forms in favor of practices and ideas associated with the Sanskritic culture of the more broadly based “Great Tradition.” In this formulation, Srinivas suggested that it was the “customs, rites, and beliefs of the Brahmins” that were the primary cultural forms involved in the process (Srinivas 1952, 30), but in a later article he emphasized that Sanskritization need not proceed through emulation of the Brahmin class, and that Sanskritic forms were by no means inevitably restricted to those associated with Brahmanism (Srinivas 1956). Another important modification was made by Marriott, who first emphasized that Sanskritization does not always occur “at the expense of” local traditions, as Srinivas had originally suggested (Marriott 1955). It is now widely recognized that local forms are in many cases not actually displaced by Sanskritic borrowings, but instead continue to persist alongside the new forms (as when a village pantheon is expanded to accommodate Sanskritic deities together with local gods and goddesses), or else are reinterpreted or recast in terms of Sanskritic forms (as when a local mother goddess is “recognized” as a manifestation of the pan-Indic Goddess). Still other authors have further modified and refined the concept by elaborating alternative models of the process, stressing the role of groups claiming Rajput or Kshatriya status (Sinha 1962); by drawing parallels with modes of linguistic change (Staal 1963); and by distinguishing between those forms of the process that proceed “from below” and those that are engineered “from above” (Kulke 1976, 401).

Although there are obvious differences in idiom and scale, I believe that there are otherwise few differences between a situation in which a state’s ruling elite attempts to bolster its international standing by Islamicizing the culture of its court, and one in which the members of a “little community” attempt to raise their collective status by Sanskritizing their customs, beliefs, and pantheon. Both situations involve processes of universalization, in which certain “local” cultural forms are replaced by functional analogues from a second, intrusive culture of broader geographic extent. Moreover, in both cases the new forms are adopted as a means of advancing the collective self-interest of particular social groups, and in both cases an eventual concomitant of the process is the increasing participation of the members of these local groups within the varied social arenas of the universal culture. And, finally, the adoption of imported cultural forms and practices results, in both cases, in a more complex ordering of tradition within the “universalized” culture. Just as Sanskritization does not necessarily occur “at the expense of” local traditions, so too with Islamicization, as witnessed in our discussion of code variation in the system of Vijayanagara court dress.

If there is much in common between Islamicization and Sanskritization, there is one area in which the two processes differ significantly: while Sanskritization is effected primarily through the medium of religious culture—through the adoption of Sanskritic norms of belief, ritual, and religiously sanctioned social behavior—Islamicization operates largely within the medium of secular political culture. In the case we have considered here, not only were the motivating factors behind Islamicization political rather than religious, but, moreover, the specific elements affected were those—like dress and titles—that served important functions within the political culture of the court. The fact that Islamicization is a process unfolding through the medium of secular culture and, as such, has little to do with religion per
se cannot be overstressed in the South Asian context. Indeed, failure to recognize the distinction stressed by Hodgson between the Islamic religion and an associated, but distinct and separable, Islamicate civilization lies at the root of many fundamental misunderstandings that continue to hamper interpretation of the history of Vijayanagara, and, one suspects, of medieval South Asia in general.

I will close this essay by addressing just one vivid example of this kind of misunderstanding, which happens to be particularly relevant in that it surfaces in Kulke’s aforementioned discussion of the title Hindurāyaṇasuratrāṇa. After explaining his interpretation of the term as a means of “laying claim to a status among the Hindu rajas equal to that of the Sultan among the Muslim rulers,” Kulke suggests that the historically attested use of such a title by Vijayanagara’s founding kings, the brothers Harihara and Bukka, constitutes the strongest argument possible against the truth of a well-known Vijayanagara period historiographic account which—in Kulke’s interpretation at least—holds that the brothers had once converted to Islam. According to the story as Kulke summarizes it, Harihara and Bukka had begun their careers in the service of Prataparudra, the Kakatiya king of Warangal; when Warangal fell to the troops of the Delhi Sultanate in 1323, the brothers fled to Kampili, a stronghold in the vicinity of the future Vijayanagara. When Kampili also fell to the Sultanate just four years later, the brothers were taken as prisoners to Delhi, where they converted to Islam. In reward, they were sent back to the Deccan to quell an uprising and rule over the newly incorporated territories on behalf of the Sultan. Once there, however, they quickly moved to apostatize from Islam, proclaim their independence, and establish the new Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara (Kulke 1985, 120).

Kulke’s reasoning for rejecting the story runs as follows:

If this interpretation [of the title] is correct, it is inconceivable, at least for the present author, that Harihara and Bukka would have thought it advisable or even would have dared to acquire the title in a Hindu context if they had once really been converted to Islam. In this case, they would have preferred to pass over this inglorious event in silence. If this inference is correct, it would be another, if not the strongest, argument against the story of their conversion to Islam in Delhi.

(1985, 125)

One may detect two flaws in Kulke’s argument, both of which clearly arise from his

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18It must be stressed that Kulke’s summary is in fact a composite pastiche based on the modern historiographic constructions of such early-twentieth-century scholars as Sewell, Nilakanta Sastri, and N. Venkataramanayya. These are based in turn on a wide body of disparate and contradictory sources—ranging from fourteenth-century Persian and Arabic histories (Barni, Ibn Battuta) to sixteenth-century inscriptions and Sanskrit historiographic texts (Rājakalānīrṇaṇa, Vidyāranyakālalajñāna, Vidyāranyatāka) to even later Kannada historical ballads (Kumārārāmanacarite, Ballālarāyanayuddha)—leavened with a strong measure of modern Hindu-Muslim communal sentiment. The Sanskrit accounts all mention the brothers Harihara and Bukka by name, and place their origin in Warangal under Kakatiya Prataparudra, before having them come to serve Kampilaraya. It should be clearly noted, however, that none of the accounts of Muslim authors—including Barni, Ibn Battuta, and also Firishta writing in the seventeenth century—mention the names of Harihara and Bukka in recounting the episode of the Sultan’s victory over Kampilaraya, or speak of any connections with the Kakatiyas. Ibn Battuta states that eleven “sons” of Kampilaraya (all unnamed) were captured and taken to Delhi; Barni speaks of only one individual, identified as “one of the relations of Kanya Naik” (whose identity has been the subject of much debate among modern authors); and Firishta does not mention anything at all about subordinates of Kampilaraya being captured. See note 19 below for references.
failure to draw the necessary distinction between the religion of Islam and Islamicate political ideas and practices. The first flaw lies in his unfounded assumption that the political meanings of the title sultan are overshadowed by religious connotations. The title, however, is decidedly lacking in religious associations; indeed, a hallmark of medieval Islamic political thought is a theory of dual authority, which accords supreme military and political authority to the office of sultan but leaves religious leadership—“preaching and prayer,” in one author’s formulation—as the exclusive preserve of the caliph (Lewis 1988, 51–53). The second flaw, which is even more problematic, appears in Kulke’s unexamined supposition that the story in question is ultimately a narrative of religious conversion. But this is most decidedly not the case. If one merely examines the original Sanskrit works that provide the detailed textual basis for the story—as opposed to the communally charged twentieth-century constructions that Kulke is really addressing—one will be struck by the fact that religion simply does not figure in the texts’ treatment of this episode. Neither the Rājakāilanirṇaya nor the Vidyāranyakālajñāna—the two most frequently cited sources for the story—has anything to say about religion or conversion; instead, their language clearly and consistently emphasizes political relationships (for the Sanskrit text of the relevant passages, see Venkataramanayya 1929, 34–35). The sultan, impressed with the brothers’ display of trustworthiness (satyasandha), rewards them by giving them land in Karnataka; thus commanded (ājñāpta) by the sultan, they go happily to rule their new territory. In fact, everything about the story, from its language to its narrative structure, suggests that it must not be read as a record of religious conversion but as a key component in the foundation myth of the Islamicized Vijayanagara state, tracing the political authority of the kingdom’s rulers to its founders’ supposed history of service to the Delhi Sultanate. Although this suggestion may appear astonishing from the perspective of the established communal view of Vijayanagara as the “last bastion of Hindu orthodoxy,” it does accord perfectly with the picture that has begun to emerge of the extensive Islamicization of the state’s political and material culture. Kulke’s arguments notwithstanding, the story is by no means controverted by the Sangamas’ use of the title Hindurāyasuratrāma; to the contrary, the narrative becomes all the more comprehensible if only we pause long enough to understand the real sense of what it meant to be a “Sultan among Hindu Kings.”

To conclude, I have argued for the necessity of conceptualizing the premorden history of “Hindu-Muslim” interaction in broader terms than has been customary, and, in particular, of viewing the phenomenon not simply in religious terms, but as

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19It is worth noting that, to my knowledge, the detail of conversion to Islam figures only in the accounts of two fourteenth-century Muslim authors, Ibn Battuta and Barni. Ibn Battuta mentions conversion explicitly, writing that “the city [of Kampilaryya] was entered and its population taken prisoner, together with eleven of the sons of Rāy Kanbila, who were brought before the Sultan. They all accepted Islam and the Sultan made them amirs and honoured them greatly owing to their noble lineage and their father’s action” (Gibb [1971] 1986, 711). Barni is less explicit, but his account implies that conversion had taken place, since he clearly refers to apostasy: “About the same time one of the relations of Kanya Naik, whom the Sultan sent to Kambila, apostatized from Islam and stirred up a revolt. The land of Kambila also was thus lost, and fell into the hands of the Hindus” (Elliot and Dowson 1867–77, 3:245–246). Neither Nuniz (Sewell [1900] 1962, 279–286), writing in the sixteenth century (on the basis of an unidentified indigenous chronicle), nor Firishtha (Briggs [1829] 1966, 1:240–241), writing in the seventeenth, has anything to say about the matter of religious conversion, even though they report in detail the episode about the Sultan’s campaign against Kampil Raya (whom Nuniz does not identify by name, but refers to anachronistically as the “King of Bsnaga [= Vijayanagara].”
a more widely based and complex form of cultural interaction. Religious interaction was of course a part of the process, but by no means the only or most important, as indeed is suggested by a growing body of literature stressing the importance of ethnic—as opposed to purely religious—identities in the medieval era (Ernst 1992, 18–37; Wagoner 1994; Talbot 1995; Metcalf 1995). Yet, the familiar, communal stereotypes have a power of their own, and will remain difficult to escape until they can be replaced by a more detailed understanding of the complex realities of actual cultural practice in the premodern age. I believe that one of the more promising routes toward this understanding lies through the concurrent analysis of material cultural and textual expressions of this practice, as I hope this study of court dress has demonstrated. The novelty and apparent uniqueness of Vijayanagara court dress has been long recognized on the basis of visual representations, yet the fact that its most characteristic garments are derived from specific Islamicate models becomes clear only when the forms of these garments are linked with the names which were used to designate them in contemporary vernacular texts. Moreover, to understand the significance of the cultural practice of wearing Islamicate dress, it is necessary to consider a wide array of both textual and visual evidence which relates to that practice in one way or another—from inscriptions documenting the use of novel forms of titulature and texts recording the reactions of outsiders to the varying forms of South Indian dress, to both textual and visual records of the manners and contexts in which these forms were used. Taken together, this evidence has suggested that the adaptation of Islamicate dress at Vijayanagara was a fundamental part of a broader, far-reaching process of Islamicization, through which selected Indic cultural forms and practices were replaced in key “public” contexts with analogues drawn from a more universal, Islamicate culture. And, most importantly, the evidence has suggested that this process unfolded not as some inevitable consequence of “the onslaught of Islam,” but quite the opposite, as the result of conscious and deliberately calculated acts by creative individuals seeking to maximize their opportunities in an ever-widening world.

Abbreviations

EC Epigraphia Carnatica
EI Epigraphia Indica.
NDI Nellore District Inscriptions.
SII South Indian Inscriptions

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