1. Introduction

The Ramachandra temple occupies a central position in the plan of Vijayanagara, linking together urban elements of major significance. The unique function of this temple is manifested through its relation to the geometry of the city plan and to movement within the city; it is also related to the broader "mythological" setting of the capital. We propose that the location of the temple conveyed essential information concerning the behaviour of king and court, and the relation of kingship to the city, empire and even the gods. According to our interpretation, the temple was an essential component in the system through which kingship was defined and enacted. Like the god Ramachandra, the king was understood to incorporate the diverse elements of his empire, and to maintain their appropriate relationships according to traditional law (dharma). The temple of Ramachandra asserts an homology, perhaps even an equivalence, of king and god.

As the focal and pivotal element of the Royal Centre of Vijayanagara, the Ramachandra temple is the node of the system of urban movement. As well, the temple is located on an axis which separates the zone of public ritual and administrative activities of the king from his private and residential zone. In addition, the temple coordinates the king and court with feature in the landscape which are associated with the Ramayana.

To fully understand the urban context of the Ramachandra temple must first examine those elements of we space, movement and myth which it helped to organize and make intelligible.

2. Spatial Divisions of the City
(Figures 1 and 2)

Three distinct zones can be identified at Vijayanagara: (1) a zone of agriculture and suburbs, (2) a Sacred Centre, and (3) an Urban Core which includes both a residential zone and the Royal Centre. The first zone lies primarily to the south and west of the others, and extends from the modern town of Hospet to the village of Kamalapuram. A royal residence was built at Hospet by Keshava Raya and named after one of his queens. It was here that travellers from the west first encountered the city gates. Several areas of walled city within this zone protect the city on the south and west. Foreign visitors (quoted in Sewell 1900: 88 and Nilakanta Sastry 1958: 20-30) described the gardens and fields which lay to either side of the busy road which joined the area of Hospet with the city proper. The zone was irrigated by canals leading from the Tungabhadra river, and some of these channels are still in use today. The agricultural zone also extends along the irrigated valley which divides the Sacred Centre from the Urban Core to merge with other irrigated areas to the northeast of the city.

The Sacred Centre is sited on the southern bank of the Tungabhadra river. Here, four great temple complexes protected by fortification walls overlook the river. These complexes are linked by paths, often paved with stones, and gates. Numerous shrines, isolated sculptures on rocks, and columned halls dot the zone. The highest point in the city, Matanga hill, is located here; three paths lead up to its summit from the adjacent temple complexes and also from the Royal Centre.

The Urban Core is bounded by a continuous circuit of massive fortification walls. These follow the ridges of the northeast-southwest trending hills, and cut across the intermediate valleys. The Royal Centre lies at the southwestern end of the Urban Core. It is surrounded by "residential" areas to the north and east; these include the temple complex on Malavanta hill, numerous smaller temples and halls, ruins of mud and rubble walled structures, traces of roads and paths, and tanks and wells. Visible on the surface of the ground are great numbers of earthenware potshards, some metal slag and, occasionally, shards of glass. Chinese ceramics and coins. Mosques and tombs with Islamic styled decoration indicate a Muslim quarter at the northwestern end of this zone.

The Royal Centre itself consists of a series of walled compounds within which are pavilions, palaces, watchtowers, platform basements, temples, roads, gateways and elements of a complex water storage and distribution system. Of particular interest are two series of compounds. The first set includes enclosures II, III, IV ("king's palace enclosure"), and the surrounding alleys; the second set includes enclosure V ("mint enclosure") and IX, perhaps also compounds further to the west. A north-south wall which bounds enclosures V and IX on the east separates the two zones. There is no evidence of doorways in this north-south wall; the wall parallel to it on the east, however, has an entry into enclosure IV, and perhaps also into enclosure II.

The eastern set of compounds consists of two entry enclosures (II and IIIa) with monumental gateways that lead from enclosure I to an elaborate third gate at enclosure IV. Within the latter enclosure is a complex assemblage of raised platforms which supported columned halls and other structures, courts and open areas, as well as tanks, aqueducts and
drains. There is evidence that these features experienced a complex history of construction and modification during the period in which the city thrived. Two structures here are associated with royal ceremony: the hundred-column hall with at least one upper storey ("king's audience hall"), and the multi-staged Mahavanam platform (or "throne platform"). Portuguese accounts (see Longhurst 1917: 59-69) suggest that the hundred-column hall was used to receive visitors and suppliants to the court. Several scholars identify the multi-stage platform as the spot where the rulers of the city witnessed the ceremonies of the Mahavanam festival. Most of the structures of this enclosure appear to be associated with the public life of king and court; that is, the reception of visitors, public ceremonies, possibly administration, and even bathing. Only one visible basement, without a preserved superstructure, may be associated with royal residence.

The western set of compounds includes a complex sequence of linked entry courts (enclosures VIIIa-e and IXa-e) which lead by circuitous routes to two areas (enclosures V and VIII) containing palaces. In enclosure V four palaces are indicated by stone faced basements and ruined rubble walls; they are surrounded by ancillary structures and cellular structures in "U" formations. This enclosure includes a tank and an (apparently) open space to the southeast. Enclosures VI, VII and VIII (together constituting "dakini's enclosure") contains palace basements and other structures which also may have been used as royal residence.

Enclosure V has been interpreted provisionally as the residence of the most important queens of Vijayanagara, or perhaps of highly ranked princes. The strict control of entry into this enclosure indicates the rank and privacy afforded its occupants. Apparently, only four doorways provided access: two lead through maze-like passageways from court Ix, while two in the south wall lead through switchback passages from area XXVIIa to the west. Privacy seems also to have been controlled within the enclosure: the palaces and surrounding structures are raised up, while a passage to the north and west between them and the enclosure walls is depressed by more than 2 m.

3. Movement in the City
(Figures 3 and 4)

The Urban Core is surrounded by a continuous circuit of walls that is pierced by more than seventeen gates and doorways. A northern extension of the wall (with a gateway) protects the Sacred Centre on its eastern flank. Within the Urban Core, another circuit of walls may be identified which encircles the Royal Centre: these walls contain more than eight gates and doorways. Our initial investigation has revealed that a series of roads and paths organized in a radial pattern converges on the gates of the Urban Core from the north, east and south. These roads link the environs of the city, and on a larger scale, the territories of the empire, to the capital.

Within the Urban Core, major roads from the northeast, east, southeast, and perhaps south converge near the Madhava temple immediately south of enclosure XIV ("zenana"). From this point, a road proceeds through the Ramachandra bazaar arriving at the eastern gate of enclosure I (here referred to as the Ramachandra court). Other roads enter this enclosure from the south, west and from the north via alleys between the enclosure walls.

Another system of roads located between the outer and inner circuits of walls bypassed the Royal Centre altogether. These routes are probably followed by the modern paved roads which now lead from Kamalapuram to Hampi. Thus, the Royal Centre was the focus and pivot of a complex road system: it was the point of convergence of the major roads of the city, and around it other roads circulated.

The Ramachandra court is not only the point of convergence of the major routes, it is also the point of communication between many of the compounds of the Royal Centre. Thus, gateways and doorways connect this area with enclosures XI, XIII, XV, XVI, II and IX. It is significant that the court links the elaborated and formal entries leading to both the zones of royal performance (through enclosure II) and royal residence (through enclosure IX). In fact, this court may have been the only connection between these two zones.

Within the zone of royal performance, circumambulation is of particular importance: enclosure IV is surrounded by one or two courts on its northern side, and by an alley on its eastern, southern and western sides. A set of steps (now blocked by a low wall) leads from the open area in front (to the west) of the Mahavanam platform into a court (enclosure IIIb). Movement was prevented to the north by a long building within the court, and to the west by a series of north-south walls, cellular rooms and small courts (now partly concealed by a modern road and excavation debris). In contrast, movement was possible to the east around a smaller court and into the alley, and eventually around the whole enclosure. Movement in the alley west of IV led northward past
enclosures IIIa and IIa to the southern door of the enclosure wall surrounding the Ramachandra temple.

This western part of the alley was constricted at two points. A large elevated platform with massive basement mouldings overlaws the wall separating the alley from enclosure IXc. It is tempting to visualize members of the household observing ceremonies in the opposite court (IIIa) from this platform. West of enclosure Ila, a rubble walled structure intrudes into this alley, reducing its width to about 1.5 m. A passage may also have led from this alley into enclosure II.

4. Temple and Urban Plan
(Figures 5 and 6)

**God and King.** We believe that there was a close relationship between the god housed in the Ramachandra sanctuary and the king of Vijayanagara. The nature of this relationship is fundamental to our understanding of the role of this temple in the urban plan. In fact, the temple is the only structure of its type within the enclosures of the Royal Centre. Its proximity to the seat of royal activity and its ornate character led Longhurst (1917: 69) to identify it as the site of private worship of the king. Ramachandra may also have played an active role in the religious life of the king when he participated in rituals which affirmed his god-like nature.

That the Mahanavami festival, which was held at Vijayanagara in September—October, conveyed the incorporative role of the king has been suggested by Stein (1980: 384-392). Festivals at this season traditionally involve the worship of Devi or Durga. But the Mahanavami also shares with the final passages of the Ramayana the “conception of regal deliverance from threatening evil” (Stein 1980: 388). According to Salemore (1934: II, 372).

“Religious in atmosphere, (the Mahanavami festival) is essentially political in significance. For it commemorates the anniversary of Rama’s marching against Ravana, and in its twofold aspect of the worship of Durga and of the ayudhas or arms, culminating in the Vijayadasami (victorious tenth day), was particularly suited to Vijayanagara times when fatal issues loomed ominously in the political horizon.”

In other words, the Mahanavami festival conveyed that the king, like the god, defended Hindu institutions and law (dharma). Its activities at festival times integrated the potentially disparate elements of the empire. To this end, the captains and other notables of the realm were brought within the zone of royal performance, where they erected great towers or “castles” (according to the Portuguese observers: see Sowell 1900: 370). On the last day of the festival, the king accompanied by the image of his protective divinity, marched past the captains and their retainers and troops who acknowledged him “with great shouts and cries... (and) the discharges of arms and musquets” (Sowell 1900: 278-279).

Stein (1980: 390-391) suggests that the architecture of the Royal Centre, in particular the area that we identify as the zone of royal performance, conveyed the homology, if not the equality, of king and god. Stein cites the great gates mentioned by the Portuguese visitors through which the ceremonies of the festival were reached. Gopura-like towers over these gates (perhaps those linking enclosures I and II, and IIIa) plausibly asserted an equivalence between the location of the festival (tentatively identified here as within enclosures IIIa and IV) and a temple. Among the events in the festival asserting this homology was the obeisance of priests, and the performance of temple dancers and musicians before the king.

According to Stein, architecture and ritual were here united so as to assert the god-like qualities of the king, — the incorporation of diverse secular and divine powers, the protection from threatening evil, and the upholding of moral order. In this respect, the king was like Ramachandra, the ideal god-king. Our analysis of the city plan of Vijayanagara suggests other common qualities of the king and the god.

**Temple and City.** The Ramachandra temple is the focal element of the structural geometry of the plan of the Royal Centre. The temple sanctuary lies almost precisely on the north-south axis separating the zones of royal residence and royal performance. While the columned halls of the temple, from which the public and priests approached the god to perform worship, are located to the east of this axis (within the zone of royal performance), the sanctuary of the god is astride the axis which acts as a division of the king’s functions. In this position, the god Ramachandra subserves his unified being the contrasts implied in the spatial divisions of the Royal Centre. These divisions can be summarized by the following contrastive pairs or dualities:

- residence
- performance
- rest
- activity
- private
- public
- taking in
- giving out
- women
- men
- more vulnerable
- less vulnerable
- left
- right
The first contrast — east/west — identifies the direction of the two zones; possibly these directions were linked to other geographical or even cosmological contrasts. The following four dualities — residence/performance, rest/activity, private/public and taking in/giving out — define the types of behaviour associated with each zone. Like the god, the king had periods of rest and activity. During the former period, he acquired power through taking in or “ingesting” food, entertainment and other pleasures, and instruction in the privacy (perhaps “sanctity?”) of his residence. During the latter period, his public behaviour consisted in giving out gifts and honours, making decisions, overseeing administration of his household, capital and territories, and, generally manifesting and radiating his power during public and private audience. The next contrast — women-men — refers to the women of the king’s household, especially his queens, their female attendants, guards and entertainers (Sewell 1900: 247-249), and the men who participated in his public life, such as governors, ministers, generals and priests.

The contrast between more/less vulnerability to pollution follows from the suggestion that the western zone was identified with women of the king’s household. In traditional Indian homes the areas most closely associated with women (for example, cooking areas) are considered most vulnerable to pollution by non-family members. In contrast, areas that open onto public thoroughfares, and where members of the household (particularly men) interact with outsiders, are least vulnerable to pollution (Miller 1985, Sinopoli 1986).

The following contrast — left/right — is tentatively suggested by movement in the west alley of the circumambulatory path that leads past enclosures IV, III and II. This alley is bounded by the axis which divides the zone of royal performance from that of royal residence. Thus, in any movement northward toward the Ramachandra temple, the zone of performance is to the right, and the zone of royal residence to the left.

Ramachandra, then, is located between these contrasts of direction, behaviour, sex and vulnerability. In a sense, the god is above, or outside, these contrasts. But he also subsumes and incorporates these contrasts for it is in his power to create and make concrete the world of distinctions by willful acts in the realms of activity and rest.

Ramachandra and his cult of worship are the visible focus of ritual attention. The tall granite lamp column that once stood to the east of the temple, in front of the (Garuda?) shrine, was clearly seen throughout the Royal Centre, particularly to those who approached this zone from the east. In fact, this column, the gate of the Ramachandra bazaar, and the tower over the principal shrine of the temple were among the most important visual references for those moving inwards towards the Royal Centre. Of course the king was also the focus of attention, for all activities of the Royal Centre were ultimately directed towards him and his service. Undoubtedly, the towers over the great platforms of enclosure IV, as well as those over the gateways leading into this enclosure, were other major landmarks.

Dynamics of Movement. The temple as the focus of the Royal Centre is conveyed with particular force by movement in the city. Within the Royal Centre, the temple and its enclosure wall dominate the Ramachandra court which wraps around the temple compound on the north and east. The enclosure walls of the temple are the most monumental and most highly sculptured feature of the court. All other walls are broken by doors and gates, or are set behind intervening structures. Because the entrances of major enclosures open onto this court, movement in the Royal Centre is focused on the temple.

Circumambulation (pradakshina) of enclosure IV gave the temple a particularly significant local quality, for the route beginning at the high platform of the king ended here. Perhaps after being worshipped in the zones of the king’s power the deity returned to its shrine through this route. This very act of pradakshina would have expressed the homology between king and god; according to this rite, the seat of the king’s activities would have been sanctified and also identified with that of the god.

The temple was also pivotal with respect to movement within the city. Firstly, movement bypassing the Royal Centre circulated around the walled enclosures, in the middle of which was the temple. Secondly, movement through the Royal Centre — for instance, from north to east — passed around the temple, as did all movement between these enclosures. Thirdly and most significantly, movement from the zone of royal residence to that of royal performance led from the gate in the western wall of the Ramachandra court around and in front of the temple, across its east-west axis (defined by the temple and the column and shrine to the east), and into the gate leading to enclosure II.

The sculptures on the outer walls of the temple enclosure convey the ceremonial and processional character of the space which it helped to define.
Rows of elephants, horses, armed soldiers and dancing women move towards seated and mounted royal and deities figures (see Chapter on Historical Context). All movement is clockwise, the direction of pradakshina; these friezes may depict the actual processional circumambulation of the temple (see Chapter on Sculpture). But walls prevented circulation on the southern side of the temple, and the absence of friezes here indicate that complete circumambulation could not be achieved in practice. On festival occasions the direction of these processions pivots around the shrine of the god may have been the seat of the king himself. If these friezes depict the actual processions of the Mahanavami festival, they would be yet another part of the visual imagery that identified with king the Ramachandra.

There is further evidence that movement in the court had a ceremonial function: the western wall of the enclosure is stepped on its eastern face. Five ascending tiers are wide enough to accommodate a crowd of spectators who could have stood or sat here to observe the ceremonial rites in the open court. The west face of the wall extending north from the gateway in the Ramachandra bazaar is similarly stepped.

Myth. The temple is nodal and perhaps also pivotal in respect of the mythological landscape of the city. It links two prominent features of the landscape which are associated with the Ramayana—Matanga and Mahalakshmi hill. Matanga lies due north of the Ramachandra temple. An observer in the middle of the columned hall of its principal shrine can view the small shrine on its peak through the sequence of doorways of the north porch and gateway. This alignment may have been more forceful in the past, for a doorway leading to enclosure XI was located directly opposite the northern gateway of the temple compound. The relation of the temple and Matanga was visibly manifested during the circumambulation of enclosure IV. Those moving northward toward the temple would have observed the mountain-like form of the tower of the principal shrine repeated in the form of the hill behind and above it. Mahalakshmi lies east—northeast of the temple, and can also be seen from the middle of the columned hall through the doorways of the east porch and gateway. In this way the seat of the god Ramachandra is axially related to the actual locations of his activities in the area.

The temporal sequence of these activities may also be of importance. After arriving in the region from the north, according to the Kishkindha—Kandha section of the narrative, Rama encounters Sugriva on Matanga hill, and then restores Sugriva to his kingdom north of the Tungabhadra river (an act that may have metaphorically expressed the desire of the Vijayanagara kings to re-establish their rule over the territories north of the river). Rama then awaits the outcome of Sugriva's help on Mahalakshmi hill. When Sita is discovered in captivity in Lanka, Rama moves southward and eventually captures the island citadel, thus destroying Ravana's power. These mythical events of the Ramayana, therefore, can be seen to pivot around the temple from north to east to south, like pradakshina of the temple deity, the motion here is also clockwise.

5. Conclusions

The significance of the Ramachandra temple for the urban context of Vijayanagara can now be understood. The temple establishes the relationship among important sites in the sacred landscape of the capital. The mythical events of the Ramayana honour the god by moving around him in a clockwise direction. Movement in the same direction leads around the temple from the zone of royal residence to the zone of royal performance, again honouring the god. Circumambulation of the major site of royal performance leads from the king to the god, thus linking them. The temple is also the focus of centripetal movement in the Royal Centre, the Urban Core, and the larger surrounding region. In addition to its role in movement in the city, the temple is an important visual focus. Finally, the immanent power of the god is set on the "neutral" axis which defines the contrasting worlds of the king—at—rest and the king—active.

The temple is relevant to the concepts of kingship and divinity at Vijayanagara for it asserts a profound connection between the ruler and Ramachandra. Occupying the same landscape, the domains of the king and god share common structures and processes: the god resides at the centre point of royal power. God and king are visual nodes towards which, and around which, attention and movement are directed. In the manifest and mythical events of kingship the energies of god and king radiate back through the landscape, suffusing it with epic form and dynamism. The siting of Ramachandra on the boundary between the dualities of the king's functions suggests that the ruler, like the god, incorporates the distinctions of the world. Though they move between these distinctions, royal and divine beings ultimately stand outside them. Finally, the architecture of the Royal Centre, in particular the temple—like gateway towers along
the circumambulatory routes of the Royal Centre, suggests the intermingling, perhaps even the merging, of divine and royal domains. If a processional image of the god was carried in pradakshina around the seat of the god was carried in pradakshina around the seat of regal activity, this rite would assert that the
Figure 2 Location of temples (circle) within the royal centre, indicating wherever possible Shaiva (Sh), Vaishnava (V) and Jaina (J) Cults
Ramachandra Temple

Figure 3 Roads leading into the royal centre
Figure 4 Movement within the royal centre
Figure 5 Functional divisions of the royal centre
Figure 6 Routes of circumambulatory movement around the Ramachandra temple; axial alignments with natural features