

Foundations and Foundation Myths

In the realm of Aunagondy lived a man called Niwary. Favoured by his king, he served as the chief of the Coonumnagur lands. In the Shaka year 1227, Niwary's domains passed to his three sons, one of whom, Ramninar, was noticed by the king for his knowledge, wisdom, and valour. The king, Ramroyl, therefore ordered Ramninar to destroy the Caler bands, who were plundering and killing travellers in Aunagondy's southern regions. Accordingly, Ramninar went south and drove all Calers across the Colada River. On his way back home, crossing the wood-apple jungle, he noticed the beautiful trees there and resolved to halt for some days.

Then, one of Ramninar's hunting dogs spotted a lizard ("mosoly") and ran to it, but the lizard jumped on the dog and bit it fiercely. Thereupon, Ramninar concluded this place was very powerful and he decided to settle down here. That night, the goddess Voopaloo Aumen appeared to him in a dream, telling him that she dwelt underground at this site. She urged him to build her a shrine, name his first son after her, and worship her, in return for various favours. Ramninar then sent for his troops, cut down the jungle, and fixed his domain's boundaries between the Colada and Valar Rivers and the villages of Aunacody and Calatoor. He erected a mud fort, populated his new town, and had his brother Bhoomaninar come over. With his other brother, Creestananinar, he travelled back to the Aunagondy king, now named Nroosinvaroyl, and informed him of all that had happened in the south. Arguing that the ancestral lands of Coonumnagur were not sufficient for his subsistence, Ramninar asked the king to install him as chief of the newly established territory.

So it happened. While his brother Creestananinar now became chief of Coonumnagur, Ramninar was granted various titles and other honours, including the use of a palanquin and the name of his household goddess, thus being called Ramvoopalamalavarayninar. He was made commander over twelve war elephants, 7,200 horse riders, and 8,000 foot soldiers. Governing his possessions as a subordinate of Coteyam Viswanitnaiq, ruler of Ponededesam, he steadily increased his power. When Ramninar was again called by the king to defeat the invading Pratoproodra, he razed the enemy's camp and snatched some of his emblems, such as the flag depicting Haunoominta. He then returned to his grateful king and received the lion-head emblem ("simala-tot"), whereupon he was sent back to his new town, named Aureyaloor. He reigned over his domain for many years and was then succeeded by his brother Bhoomavoopalamalavarayninar, followed by fifteen other relatives, together ruling for 469 years.¹

¹ BL/AAS, MT, class III (Tamil: Southern Provinces), no. 35: "Kyfeyeat of the Paulagars of Aureyaloor Paulaput," ff. 110-15. For a summary of a slightly different version, see Hemingway, *Trichinopoly*, vol.

These events, leading to the foundation of a dynasty by a certain Ramninar, are chronicled in the opening section of a text titled “Kyfeyeat of the Paulagars of Aureyaloor Paulaput.” This *kaifiyat* (local history) relates the past of the Palaiyakkarars, or chiefs, of Ariyalur, a town 25 miles north of Tanjavur. As the text states in its closing lines, it was composed around 1800 CE by an eminent servant of the Ariyalur chief, and in 1821 translated from the Tamil original into English, recorded in a nine-page manuscript.²

Apart from what the foundation story in this *kaifiyat* has to offer, little appears to be known of the origins and early history of the Ariyalur dynasty. Some local sources claim the polity was founded in 1573 by a chief named Arasunilaiyitta Krishnappa Malavaraya. Ariyalur’s rulers are said first to have been subordinates of the Nayakas of Senji and the last Aravidu emperors of Vijayanagara, before Madurai’s Nayakas became their overlords in the early 1700s. The place is briefly mentioned in a few other south Indian texts, mostly as a forested area sheltering expelled occupants of the Tanjavur throne.³

Records of the Dutch East India Company from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries occasionally deal with Ariyalur, since the Dutch concluded a treaty with its rulers for the purchase of textiles in the 1680s. These sources refer to them just as local chiefs (*visiadoors*) or as “land lords,” “free lords,” and “wood lords” (*lantheeren, vrijheeren, bosheeren*). All these terms imply a semi-subordinate position in the region’s dynastic hierarchy—according to the Dutch initially under Madurai, then under Tanjavur, but by the mid-eighteenth century largely autonomous—while the last designation confirms the wooded (and perhaps remote) nature of Ariyalur’s territory.⁴ Finally, a district handbook compiled by the

I, 344-5. The summary presented here retains the original English spelling of personal and geographic names. I thank Herman Tiekens for helping me make sense of some corrupted Tamil words. The meaning of “mosoly” is uncertain, but it may be a corruption of *mucali*, meaning lizard or alligator among other things. It may also derive from *mucal* or *muyal*, rabbit or hare. Considering the many hares in Indian foundation myths, the latter translation is tempting, but I have chosen for lizard, as “mosoly” seems closest to *mucali*.

² The text’s composer and translator are respectively mentioned as “Pachanotpilla” and “Boboo Row.”

³ R.V.R. Sai Sravan, “Coinage of Madurai Nayakas – A Reappraisal,” *Numismatic Digest* 42 (2018), 131; S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar (ed.), *Sources of Vijayanagar History* (Madras, 1919), 326-7; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II (Madras, 1976), 347.

⁴ NA, VOC, no. 1299, f. 139; no. 1313, f. 349v; no. 1333, f. 104v; no. 1340, ff. 1346v-8; no. 1349, ff. 1407-7v; no. 1350, ff. 27-9; no. 1449, f. 311; no. 1454, ff. 937-7v, 1011, 1019-20; no. 1494, ff. 636-1110 (no. 5); no. 2631, f. 433: letters from Nagapattinam and Pulicat to Batavia and superintendent Rijcklof van Goens on Ceylon, Dec. 1674, Apr. 1675, Oct. 1678, Aug. 1688, report on the Tanjavur lands and letter from Tirumullaivasal to Nagapattinam, May 1679, correspondence and treaties with Ariyalur, June-July 1688, June 1689, final report (*memorie van overgave*) of Jacob Mossel, Feb. 1744; DNA, DCGCC, no. 3352: report on visit of

British colonial government in the late nineteenth century declares that it proved impossible to gather any reliable information on the Ariyalur rulers before the mid-eighteenth century.⁵

However, the *kaifiyat* cited above, “mythical” though some of its passages may appear, reveals many aspects of the origin of Ariyalur’s ruling house—in any case aspects deemed significant enough by the dynasty to be incorporated into the family’s foundation myth. Some of the story’s elements are clearly linked to historical places, people, and events. The chiefs Niwary and Ramninar serve kings of a realm referred to by a term doubtlessly denoting Anegondi, a town that was part of Vijayanagara’s capital region. The kings’ names are obviously corruptions of Rama Raya and Narasimha Raya, names and titles borne by historical Vijayanagara rulers. As the text suggests, Ramninar is active in an area near the Kollidam (or Coleroon) River in the empire’s south to subdue Kallars—a caste, notably, to which Ariyalur’s historical rulers themselves belonged, according to some sources.⁶

Later, Ramninar is said to rule a piece of land that can still be easily located: it lay between the Kollidam and Vellur Rivers and was centred around the town of Ariyalur. His regional overlord, reigning over the Pandya Desam or Madurai realm, can be identified as Kotiya Vishvanatha Nayaka, founder of Madurai’s Nayaka dynasty. The invading enemy whom Ramninar defeats at the king’s request is most probably Prataparudra, the Gajapati ruler of Orissa. In sum, these elements of the foundation myth tell us about a chief who pacified an area in the Tamil zone (by subjugating what were possibly his fellow caste men), then ruled it as a subordinate of the Nayaka kings of Madurai, and was acknowledged by the Vijayanagara emperors. Ariyalur can thus be considered a Vijayanagara successor state in the sense that its dynasty traced its origin back to imperial recognition.

Other components of the text may seem harder to explain, but these are equally significant for understanding the dynasty’s origin. To start with, the story centres around an exceptional individual, whose name is rendered as “Ramninar,” perhaps a corruption of Rama Nayinar. His background is somewhat obscure, but his father occupies a politico-military position under a mighty king. Ramninar himself possesses great physical and intellectual skills and performs heroic feats in an area south of his ancestral lands. This links him to the ruling dynasty—Vijayanagara’s

an Ariyalur envoy to Colombo, Nov. 1683; *Beknopte historie*, 85. For Jesuit and French references to Ariyalur’s forests as a place of refuge, see respectively: A. Saulière (ed.), “The Revolt of the Southern Nayaks” [pt. 2], *Journal of Indian History* XLIV, I (1966), 175; François Martin, *India in the 17th Century (Social, Economic and Political): Memoirs of François Martin (1670-1694)*, ed. Lotika Varadarajan, vol. 1, pt. II (New Delhi, 1983), 561, 575, 587, 590, 592-7, 621, 641, 670.

⁵ Moore, *A Manual of the Trichinopoly District*, 254.

⁶ Moore, *A Manual of the Trichinopoly District*, 260. Ariyalur’s rulers may also have belonged to the Palli or Vanniyan caste. See Hemingway, *Trichinopoly*, vol. I, 344.

imperial house—which rewards his military services with titles, land, troops, and honours like the use of a palanquin (sedan chair). Besides receiving political recognition, Ramninar's prowess is acknowledged by a deity, the local goddess of the future principality's site, called "Voopaloo Aumen," which probably refers to Oppilada Amman.⁷ Through name-gifting and prosperity in return for worship, this deity is intimately tied to the dynasty-to-be. A natural miracle, that of prey (lizard) attacking predator (dog), further signifies the auspicious character of this spot and the status of the hero.

Ramninar subsequently establishes the new realm: he clears jungle areas, sets the borders, and has the capital populated and defended. While one of his brothers stays in the family's ancestral region, Ramninar's migration to the south has now become permanent. On other occasions, a link is forged with a local dynastic power—Madurai's Nayakas—and Ramninar acquires more royal insignia, such as emblems of a lion's head and "Haunoominta," possibly referring to the Monkey-King Hanuman. Finally, after Ramninar's long rule, the text continues with his successors, first his other brother, who has already played a role in the foundation, and then fifteen other relatives, all bearing the title of Malavaraya.⁸ Thus, Ramninar's installation is shown to have become a hereditary, dynastic office. By the time the Ariyalur *kaifiyat* was compiled, this position had allegedly been held by the family for almost five centuries.⁹

Analysing this origin myth, we distinguish the following motifs: the founder's descent and status, his physical skills, political ties with other dynasties, religious recognition, auspicious natural miracles, migration, land clearance and territorial markers, acquisition of royal symbols, and the establishment of a hereditary dynasty.¹⁰ All these elements seem to be aimed at legitimating or at least explaining the rise and present status of Ariyalur's royal house.¹¹ Thus, this *kaifiyat* serves

⁷ See Sai Sravan, "Coinage of Madurai Nayakas," 133.

⁸ The VOC also used this term for Ariyalur's chiefs, leading to corruptions like "Mallawaraijen" and "Malleweragie." See: NA, VOC, no. 1454, ff. 1019-20: correspondence and treaty with Ariyalur, June-July 1688; DNA, DCGCC, no. 3352: report on a visit of an Ariyalur envoy to Colombo, Nov. 1683.

⁹ Some parts of the text are unclear to me. I have not been able to identify ancestral "Coonumnagur." Perhaps it denotes Kunnam, about six miles north of Ariyalur. The year in which these lands passed to Ramninar and his brothers—Shaka 1227 or c. 1305 CE—seems illogical. Vijayanagara was founded several decades later and it is unlikely Ariyalur's chiefs wished to link themselves to earlier dynasties at Anegondi. Another version of the text states Ariyalur's foundation took place in 1405, which appears more logical. See Hemingway, *Trichinopoly*, vol. I, 344. Further, I cannot locate the villages of "Aunacody" and "Calatoor," although the latter may refer to Kolathur, some miles west of Ariyalur.

¹⁰ See also Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 144.

¹¹ For analyses of south Indian origin myths, see: Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 71-107; Kesavan Veluthat, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India* (2nd edition, Hyderabad, 2012), ch. 1, especially 48-51, 55. For Indian origin myths in general, see Pushkar Sohoni, "The Hunt for a Location:

as a useful example of south Indian foundation stories. Many of the text's motifs are also found in the origin stories of the larger and better-known Vijayanagara successor states, and of the empire itself.

This chapter is concerned with the question of how these elements manifest themselves in the origin myths of Vijayanagara's heirs. The purpose is not to thoroughly discuss the narrative of every story, the historical reliability of the texts, or the genre of foundation myths in general. Rather, the chapter aims at a comparison of motifs shared by all or most royal houses to see how these resemble or differ from one another. Foundation stories are regarded here as texts, produced by dynasties, their courtiers, and other associated parties, that relate to those dynasties' beginnings, regardless of the level of historical accuracy.

To deal with the problem of the uncertain provenance of a number of texts—making their relevance doubtful—this study concentrates on events and developments that figure relatively often in the different stories. Therefore, some of the following sections discuss composite versions of origin myths, combining those more regular motifs.¹² Such an approach can be justified in this case, as the purpose is to compare the stories' various elements, rather than to analyse each text on its own. However, attention is also paid to textual passages that deviate from the more common versions.

While historians have extensively analysed Vijayanagara's foundation myths, they have considered only some of the successors' origin stories in detail and have seldom researched them from a comparative perspective.¹³ One exception concerns a comparative analysis of the myths of the main heirs in the Tamil-speaking area, the Nayakas of Madurai, Tanjavur, and Senji. According to this analysis—already discussed in the historiography section of the Introduction—the foundation stories of those dynasties show that their form of kingship strongly differed from that of Vijayanagara's royal houses.¹⁴ However, based on a comparison of the motifs in a much wider range of myths, the present chapter concludes that this view needs further nuance since the origin stories of the various successor states varied

Narratives on the Foundation of Cities in South and Southeast Asia," *Asian Ethnology* 77, 1-2 (2018); Romila Thapar, "Origin Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition," in idem (ed.), *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (London, 1978), passim, especially 295-7, 302, 320-1; Simmons, *Devotional Sovereignty*, 18-19.

¹² I have partially borrowed this approach from William J. Jackson, *Vijayanagara Voices: Exploring South Indian History and Hindu Literature* (Aldershot/Burlington, 2005), 2.

¹³ These studies are referred to in the subsequent sections. Comparative analyses include: Phillip B. Wagoner (ed.), *Tidings of the King: A Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Rāyavācakamu* (Honolulu, 1993), 313-14; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, chs 3, 6; Heras, *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History*, 9-11; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, ch. 6. See also the next footnote.

¹⁴ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 38-56.

substantially among each other and at the same time all shared several elements with the empire's foundation myths.

Starting with Vijayanagara's dynasties and then turning to its heirs, the sections below first look at the actual origins of each royal house, followed by summaries of the foundation stories and overviews of the motifs found in them. In the last section, each motif is considered separately as it appears (or does not appear) in the origin myths of the different dynasties. The chapter ends with general conclusions on how all stories compare to each other.

Vijayanagara

Sangamas

Neither the empire's historical origins nor the provenance of its foundation stories is entirely clear. In fact, little is known with any certainty about the beginnings of Vijayanagara. Much of what is reasonably definite has been touched upon in the previous chapter. In brief, the early fourteenth-century expansion of the Delhi sultanate into south India and its forced withdrawal around 1340 enabled local chiefs and other military men to set up their own polities. These warriors included five sons of Sangama, a chieftain who may have served the Hoysala rulers or another local dynasty. Each operating from their own regional powerbase, the Sangama brothers together founded a state in the Kannada-speaking zone.¹⁵

Thus emerged Vijayanagara, with its capital on the banks of the Tungabhadra River in an arid and sparsely inhabited region. This strategically chosen spot was the abode of the local goddess Pampa, who guarded the river-crossing here and, through her marriage with Shiva's manifestation Virupaksha, was linked to the pantheon of pan-Indian Hindu gods. The site also had connections with Vishnu, the other main Hindu deity, because his incarnation Rama was believed to have visited the monkey-kingdom of Kishkinda, located at this place, as told in the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic.¹⁶

¹⁵ For recent summaries of these events, see: Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age*, 80-8; Devadevan, *A Prehistory of Hinduism*, 48-51.

¹⁶ For links between the Vijayanagara capital and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, see: John McKim Malville and John M. Fritz, "Cosmos and Kings at Vijayanagara," in Clive L.N. Ruggles and Nicholas J. Saunders (eds), *Astronomies and Cultures* (Niwt, 1993), 143-7, 154-60; Anila Verghese, "The Sacred Topography of Hampi-Vijayanagara," in idem and Anna Libera Dallapiccola (eds), *South India under Vijayanagara: Art and Archaeology* (New Delhi, 2011), 140-2; Anna Libera Dallapiccola, "Ramayana in Southern Indian Art: Themes and Variations," in idem, 182-9; Anila Verghese, "Deities, Cults and Kings at Vijayanagara," *World Archaeology* 36, 3 (2004), 421, 424, 429; idem, *Religious Traditions at Vijayanagara: As Revealed through Its Monuments* (New Delhi, 1995), ch. 4; John M. Fritz, "Vijayanagara. Authority and Meaning

Inscriptions left by the Sangama dynasty—as the Sangama brothers’ descendants came to be known—and other (near-)contemporary sources seem ambiguous about the founders’ political and regional background. This has given rise to a heated historiographic debate, mostly held in the 1920s and 1930s. As explained in the Introduction, the discussion concerns the question of whether the Sangama brothers had links with the Kannada area and the Hoysala dynasty, or with the Telugu zone and the Kakatiya house. In addition, Vijayanagara’s later dynasties appear to have produced foundation myths that naturally concerned their own past, but also pertained to the roots of the first imperial house. Thus, certain stories about Vijayanagara’s foundation by the Sangamas were probably not introduced before the empire’s third dynasty, the Tuluvas. Also, some studies suggest that several later Vijayanagara rulers traced their origins back to Kalyana’s Chalukya dynasty based in the northern Deccan or to the Delhi sultanate and the Kampili kingdom in the Kannada region.¹⁷

This coexistence of different foundation myths dating from several dynastic phases makes it hard to draw firm conclusions about Vijayanagara’s actual beginnings. Instead, we consider the stories themselves. Since we are interested in the various motifs in these texts, below follows a composite and abridged version of the better-known accounts on the origins of the Sangamas and their empire.

Some stories begin by relating that Muhammad-bin-Tughluq, sultan of Delhi, had installed his nephew Baha al-Din Gushtasp as governor in one of his southern provinces. But when the sultan died, his nephew rebelled against the successor. This new sultan sent an army, upon which Baha al-Din Gushtasp sought refuge with the king of Kampili, a mountainous, isolated kingdom. Finding his palace then besieged by the sultan’s overwhelming forces and valuing martial honour over a shameful capitulation, the Kampili Raja and his men resolved to fight to the death, while their women threw themselves into the flames. Delhi’s troops thus caught Baha al-Din Gushtasp and flayed him alive. But five sons of a chief named Sangama, who according to inscriptions descended from the Moon,¹⁸ were spared after they surrendered.

of a South Indian Imperial Capital,” *American Anthropologist* 88, 1 (1986), 52; idem, “Was Vijayanagara a ‘Cosmic City’?,” in Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallemand (eds), *Vijayanagara – City and Empire: New Currents of Research* (Wiesbaden, 1985), vol. 1, 265–71; Natalie Tobert, *Anegondi: Architectural Ethnography of a Royal Village* (New Delhi, 2000), 50–1.

¹⁷ Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 94–9; Wagoner, “Retrieving the Chalukyan Past”; idem, “Harihara, Bukka, and the Sultan”; idem, *Tidings of the King*, 184; Barbara Mears, “Symbols of Coins of the Vijayanagara Empire,” *South Asian Studies* 24, 1 (2008), 78.

¹⁸ For Lunar and Solar royal lines, see for example: J.G. de Casparis, “Inscriptions and South Asian Dynastic Traditions,” in R.J. Moore (ed.), *Traditions and Politics in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1979), 105–11; Ali, “Royal Eulogy as World History,” 176–93; Thapar, “Origin Myths and the Early Indian Historical Tradition,” 299–309.

As several texts go, some or all of these fierce brothers, who had defended Kampili's frontiers, were then taken captive to Delhi. There, one night, two of them, Harihara and Bukka, experienced a terrible thunderstorm. In the ensuing chaos, the prison door accidentally opened, but the brothers chose not to flee. Greatly impressed by their loyalty, the sultan released Harihara and Bukka and assigned them the task of pacifying the recently conquered southern lands, which were disrupted by plundering rebels.

Back in the south, the Sangama brothers came to govern a territory directly north of the Tungabhadra River. One of the myth's versions has it that one day, while sleeping in a forest, Harihara had a dream in which a wise man presented him with a *liṅgam*, Shiva's phallic symbol, saying it would bring him prosperity, victory, and a kingdom. On another occasion, when the brothers were hunting in the forests on the river's southern bank, close to a shrine of Virupaksha, a hare turned against the dogs that were chasing it and bit them. The great Brahmin sage Vidyaranya, meditating nearby, explained that this event demonstrated the great power of this spot, where no enemy could harm even the weak. A city and a kingdom should therefore be founded here.

In one tradition, this foundation had already been foretold to Vidyaranya by several deities and seers during a pilgrimage to Benares on the Ganga River (Varanasi on the Ganges). In yet an earlier stage, the sage tried to gain a vision of the goddess Bhuvaneshvari in order to attain wealth, but his efforts proved unsuccessful. Disappointed, Vidyaranya renounced the world and became a hermit. Only then did Bhuvaneshvari finally appear to him and grant his wish to be showered with gold from the sky to make the future kingdom prosper.

According to some texts, now that the hour to found the city had come, Vidyaranya determined the precise rituals and perfect time for the occasion. Exactly at the most auspicious moment, the sage would blow a conch shell from some distance upon which the founding ceremony was to commence. But a nearby wandering monk, announcing his begging for alms, happened to blow his own conch shell just a bit earlier. Vidyaranya's confused assistants now executed the prescribed rituals too soon, in consequence of which the city would not exist for 3,600 glorious years, but instead survive for only 360 less glorious years.¹⁹

¹⁹ For an explanation of this episode, see Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 31-47. One text says this accident was deliberately caused by Indra, king of the gods, who did not wish to see Vijayanagara city "remain forever fortunate and victorious." The reason for this is not given. See BL/AAS, MG, no. 11, pt. 3b: "History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy," f. 15 (account compiled in 1801 by Mackenzie's assistant Borayya Kavali Venkata from enquiries made in the area of Vijayanagara city; see also Colin Mackenzie (ed.), "History of the Kings of Veejanagur, or Beejanagur, and Anagoondy, from Enquiries Made at Alputtun and Anagoondy ...," in Lawrence Dundas Campbell (ed.), *The Asiatic Annual Register, or, View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce, and Literature of Asia, for the Year*

Nevertheless, the city's first king, Harihara, started constructing palaces, temples, and fortifications, moved his people there, and named the place "Vidyanagara" after the sage. After a reign of many years, he was succeeded by his brother Bukka.²⁰

Additionally, some versions of the foundation myths say that the Sangama brothers served the king of Warangal (instead of Kampili) before they were taken to Delhi and that the southern rebels they subdued on the sultan's behalf were in fact the

1804 (London, 1806), section "Characters," 24-33, which appears to be a published version of this manuscript).

²⁰ This inexhaustive summary is partly based on the composite story in Jackson, *Vijayanagara Voices*, 2-9, 14 (ns 12, 19), who in turn compiled his synthesis from several publications (see 14, n. 17). Vijayanagara's different foundation myths are dealt with in a whole body of primary sources and secondary literature. Some of the most obvious works—also used for the abridged version here—include: Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 6-15; Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire*, 16-23, 291-300; Rubiés, *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance*, 259-63; Heras, *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History*; Venkata Ramanayya, *Vijayanagara*; Srikantaya, *Founders of Vijayanagara*; Kulke, "Mahārājas, Mahants and Historians"; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 33-50, 77-86, 165-9, 181-90; idem, "Harihara, Bukka, and the Sultan"; Nobuhiro Ota, "Who Built 'the City of Victory'? Representation of a 'Hindu' Capital in an 'Islamicate' World," in Crispin Bates and Minoru Mio (eds), *Cities in South Asia* (London/New York, 2015); Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 187-92; M.H. Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagara Empire: Beginnings and Expansion (1308-1569)*, ed. M.H. Gopal, vol. I (Bombay, 1978), 10-23; Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 233-41; Anna Libera Dallapiccola (ed.) and C.T.M. Kotraiah (trans.), *King, Court and Capital: An Anthology of Kannada Literary Sources from the Vijayanagara Period* (New Delhi, 2003), 24; Verghese, "Deities, Cults and Kings at Vijayanagara," 419-21; Sohoni, "The Hunt for a Location," 226-7; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, chs 1-2; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 43-4; Dinnell, "*Sāmrājyalakṣmīpīṭhikā*," 57. See also B.A. Dodamani, *Gaṅgādevī's Madhurāvijayaṁ: A Literary Study* (Delhi, 2008), 3-7, for an interesting version of which the source is unfortunately not mentioned. For the Sangamas' Lunar descent, see for example: Robert Sewell (ed.), *Lists of Inscriptions, and Sketch of the Dynasties of Southern India* (Madras, 1884), 11-14; N. Ramesan (ed.), "The Krāku Grant of Harihara II," in N. Venkataramanayya and P.V. Parabrahma Sastry (eds), *Epigraphia Andhrica*, vol. II (Hyderabad, 1974), 74; N. Venkataramanayya (ed.), "Pedda Cheppalli Plates of Dēvarāya II," in idem (ed.), *Epigraphia Andhrica*, vol. I (Hyderabad, 1969), 33, 39; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 36; BL/AAS, MG, no. 10, pt. 15: "Danaputram at Chitteldroog," f. 237 (translated from a Sanskrit copper engraving found at Chitradurga in 1800); no. 3, pt. 4c: "Hurru-Hurra Royer Vumshum," f. 131. For more Vijayanagara origin stories in the English Mackenzie manuscripts, mostly concerning the role of Vidyanagara, see: BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 1: "Sketch of the general history of the peninsula," ff. 45-6 (probably translated from a Telugu text collected in 1801 from the Brahmins "Auhobala Sastry" and "Yanam Acharee" at the town of "Paughur," perhaps Pavagada west of Penukonda; see ff. 19, 23 and Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 29); no. 11, pt. 3b: "History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy," ff. 13-16 (see also Mackenzie, "History of the Kings of Veejanagur"); no. 40, last pt.: "History of the kings of Beejanagurr," ff. 357-70 (translated from a Telugu text in 1797, in turn translated by Brahmins at Nellore from a Sanskrit palm-leaf text, see ff. 353-5 and Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 400); MT, class VII, no. 23: "Chronological account of Bijayanagar," ff. 130-3.

Hoysalas. Finally, other accounts claim the Sangamas were local cowherds before Vidyaranya installed them as the rulers of Vijayanagara.²¹

As said, certain elements of these various stories perhaps date from the period of the later Tuluva dynasty. In particular the role of the sage Vidyaranya may have been introduced in the sixteenth century through forged inscriptions by the monastic order of Sringeri, in the Kannada area. The sage had been a member of this order, which thus sought to promote itself by emphasising its essential role in the empire's origins.²² The possible late provenance of these elements makes them no less relevant for our purpose, however, as it was under the Tuluva house that the dynasties of the main successor states were installed or incorporated into the imperial political system. It is therefore likely that the foundation myths of those dynasties were related to imperial origin stories current in the Tuluva period.

Saluvas, Tuluvas, and Aravidus

Besides what can be considered the “standard” foundation myths of Vijayanagara and the Sangama dynasty, there are sources concerning the origins of the empire's second, third, and fourth dynasties: the Saluvas, Tuluvas, and Aravidus. In its relatively few inscriptions and literary texts, the short-lived Saluva house (c. 1485–1503) refers to several direct forefathers who, as military officers of the Sangamas, destroyed the armies of the sultan of Madurai and other kings, and restored the important temple of Srirangam in the Tamil region.

A Sanskrit work titled *Saḷuvābhyudaya*, written at the Saluva court by the poet Rajanatha Dindima II, describes how the deity Narasimha (in his local manifestation Ahobilanarasimha) appears in a dream to the father of the dynasty's founder. The god, a form of Vishnu, announces his own birth in the human world as the father's son. This human Narasimha—the first Saluva ruler—performs various military feats (some in locations as far as the Himalaya mountains), worships Shiva at different temples, and honours Brahmins and scholars. He is anointed as *cakravarti* or universal emperor (literally “turner of the wheel”) in Benares, while music and a shower of flowers come from heaven. Hereafter Saluva Narasimha returns to the imperial capital, laden with tribute from subordinate kings.

The *Rāmābhyudaya*, another Sanskrit poem composed under Saluva rule, even states that Saluva Narasimha's immediate ancestors included several universal kings and a goddess. Other sources mention that the Saluva family originated from

²¹ For a recent discussion of Vijayanagara's foundation myths that includes these alternative versions, see Ota, “Who Built ‘the City of Victory’?”

²² Heras, *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History*, 11–35; Kulke, “Mahārājas, Mahants and Historians,” 122–4; Devadevan, *A Prehistory of Hinduism*, 50–2.

the Chalukya dynasty of Kalyana and had marital alliances with the Sangama dynasty. Finally, both inscriptions and manuscripts trace the Saluva family's ancestry back to several legendary figures and eventually the Moon.²³

The next dynasty of Vijayanagara, the Tuluvas (c. 1503-70), largely employed the same motifs to explain its origins: celestial descent, ancestors with great physical skills, links to earlier imperial houses, and connections with important temples and deities. Various poems written by or dedicated to the Tuluva rulers Krishna (or Krishnadeva) Raya and Achyuta (or Achyutadeva) Raya, such as the former's Telugu *Āmuktamālyada*, relate how their ancestors sprang from the Lunar race, defeated numerous kings and sultans all over India, and endowed Hindu shrines. Notably, the Telugu work *Manucaritramu* of the Tuluva court poet Allasani Peddana further specifies that this dynasty belonged to a more exalted Lunar family branch than the Sangamas, stressing the Tuluvas' distinct and particularly prominent status. In a somewhat contradictory manner, some inscriptions actually claim that Krishna Raya and Sadashiva Raya, the last Tuluva, descended from the Sangama house.²⁴

The origin myths of the final Aravidu dynasty (c. 1570-1660s) are of a similar kind, including frequent references to military heroes and the Moon as ancestors. But the Aravidu stories appear especially keen on establishing kinship ties with the earlier imperial houses and the Chalukyas of Kalyana (whom the Saluvas claimed as ancestors too). Although the first de facto Aravidu ruler, Rama Raya, was a son-in-law

²³ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 29-32, 85-6, 90-2; P. Rama Sarma, *Saluva Dynasty of Vijayanagar* (Hyderabad, 1979), 32-49; Ewa Dębicka-Borek, "The Bravery of Śaṣuva Narasiṃha and the Grace of Narasiṃha Deity," in Tiziana Pontillo (ed.), *Indologica Taurinensia: The Journal of the International Association of Sanskrit Studies*, vol. XL (Turin, 2014); Rāma Sharma, *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, vol. I, 87-8; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 119 (n. 35).

²⁴ Krishna(deva) Raya, *Sri Krishna Deva Raya: Āmuktamālyada*, ed. Srinivas Sistla (Visakhapatnam, 2010), 140-5; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 106-8, 133, 170-6; BL/AAS, MG, no. 10, pt. 2: "Vaamashavally of Cristna-Deva-Rayaloo," ff. 41-3 (which appears to be the introductory section to the *Āmuktamālyada*, see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 89-91); Allasani Peddana, *The Story of Manu*, trans. Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman (Cambridge (MA)/London, 2015), 18-27; Srinivas Reddy, *Raya: Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara* (New Delhi, 2020), 5-6; Padigar, "Inscriptions of the Vijayanagara Rulers," 162; Sewell, *List of Inscriptions*, 4-5, 12, 16, 18, 30; PV. Parabrahma Sastry (ed.), "Polepalli Grant of Achyutarāya," in idem (ed.), *Epigraphia Andhrica*, vol. IV (Hyderabad, 1975), 133; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 119 (n. 35). See also: Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "A New Imperial Idiom in the Sixteenth Century: Krishnadevaraya and His Political Theory of Vijayanagara," in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800* (Durham/London, 2011), 74; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 219.

of the Tuluva emperor Krishna Raya, one text declares him to be Krishna Raya's son. Another work from the Aravidu period states that the Sangamas, Saluvas, and Tuluvas all belonged to the same "race." Yet another story from this time suggests that Krishna Raya (third dynasty) was a son of Saluva Narasimha (second dynasty), who in turn was a son of the Sangama ruler Bukka (first dynasty). Still other texts have it that Vira Narasimha (third dynasty) was a son or distant cousin of Saluva Narasimha (second dynasty), that the former's brothers Krishna Raya and Achyuta Raya were Saluva Narasimha's descendants, or that the latter was the son of Praudha, the last Sangama ruler (first dynasty). Furthermore, various inscriptions mention Tuluva and Aravidu rulers with Saluva family titles.²⁵ All these claims seem to reflect efforts to connect the consecutive imperial houses to each other or even present them as one continuous dynasty or *vaṃśam* (family).

As for Aravidu links with the erstwhile Chalukya dynasty and its capital Kalyana, titles of for example Rama Raya and Venkata I glorify them as descendants and emperors of the Chalukyas, and as founders, lords, kings, and conquerors of Kalyana. Aravidu court literature, such as the Telugu *Rāma rāja charitra* (probably commissioned by Rama Raya himself), also mentions Aravidu rulers as having Chalukya ancestors, maintaining the Kalyana kingdom, and being Chalukya emperors themselves.²⁶ Finally, after the Aravidus had shifted the imperial capital

²⁵ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 79-80, 102, 190, 204, 210, 216, 224; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 70-1, 83; BL/AAS, MG, no. 3, pt. 4d: "Veera Narasinga Royer Vumsham," f. 141; no. 3, pt. 1: "Sketch of the general history of the peninsula," f. 47; no. 40, last pt.: "History of the kings of Beejanagur," ff. 370-2; no. 10, pt. 4a: "Account of Bisnagur," f. 65; no. 11, pt. 3a: "History of the Anagoondy Rajahs," ff. 9-10 (related in 1801 by the chief of Anegondi, probably named Timmapah and residing in Kamalapur, see: Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 98-100; Colin Mackenzie (ed.), "History of the Anagoondy Rajahs, Taken from the Verbal Account of Timmapah, the Present Representative of that Family, at Camlapore ...," in Lawrence Dundas Campbell (ed.), *The Asiatic Annual Register, or, View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce, and Literature of Asia, for the Year 1804* (London, 1806), section "Characters," 21-4, which appears to be a published version of this manuscript); no. 11, pt. 3b: "History of the kings of Beejanagur & Anagoondy," f. 17 (see also Mackenzie, "History of the Kings of Veejanagur"); no. 11, pt. 17: "Genealogy or Vanshavallee of Kistna Rayeel," 160 (collected or compiled in 1800); Robert Sewell (ed.), *The Historical Inscriptions of Southern India (Collected till 1923) and Outlines of Political History* (Madras, 1932), 241, 266; idem, *Lists of Inscriptions*, 2-3, 21; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 17-20; Kamath, *Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara*, 21, 23.

²⁶ Alan Butterworth and V. Venugopaul Chetty (eds), *A Collection of the Inscriptions on Copper-Plates and Stones in the Nellore District* (Madras, 1905), pt. I, 33, 41; Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan*, 94-9; Wagoner, "Retrieving the Chalukyan Past," 130-2; Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 85-116; H.H. Wilson, *The Mackenzie Collection: A Descriptive Catalogue of the Oriental Manuscripts and Other Articles Illustrative of the Literature, History, Statistics and Antiquities of the South of India; Collected by the Late Lieut. Col. Colin Mackenzie*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1828; published with

to the south of the Telugu-speaking region, inscriptions sometimes designated them as “sultan of Warangal.” Thus, they now also sought to associate themselves with Warangal’s Kakatiya dynasty, which had ruled the Telugu zone in the past.²⁷

Although there are differences between the origin myths of the four imperial houses—for example with regard to descent and alleged relations with earlier dynasties—the basic elements are largely similar to each other as well as to those in Ariyalur’s foundation myth, summarised in this chapter’s introduction. Looking at each of these motifs, one notices that all Vijayanagara’s dynastic founders are generally portrayed as being of extraordinary descent, with ancestors including the Moon and other deities, glorious past kings, and forefathers known for their heroic martial deeds. All founders themselves also excel in physical prowess, defending boundaries, subjugating sultans, or conquering kingdoms.

Each imperial house claims ties with earlier dynasties. Among these, the kings of Kampili and the sultans of Delhi seem most prominent in the stories on the Sangamas, some of which possibly emerged only under the Tuluvas and would thus actually reflect their views.²⁸ But, as explained, scholars have also mentioned the Hoysalas and Kakatiyas in this respect. The Saluva and Aravidu houses appear to share a focus on the Chalukyas of Kalyana. Additionally, the second, third, and fourth dynasties all link themselves to the previous imperial houses through military service and marital or blood bonds.

Connections of a religious nature range from the sage Vidyaranya and Harihara’s dream of receiving Shiva’s *lingam* to heavenly omens at Narasimha Saluva’s coronation and the relationships of all founders with temples. The natural wonder of a hare attacking dogs indicates the significance of the Vijayanagara site as a place of refuge, where the weak can withstand the powerful. As for migration, whichever earlier state the Sangama founders are associated with (a combination of Kampili and Delhi or one of the Hoysala and Kakatiya kingdoms), the brothers have to cover vast distances to reach their new territory. The same applies to the Saluvas and Aravidus, considering their claim to originate in Kalyana. Besides,

vol. II in one volume at Madras, 1882), 297-9, 303; William Taylor, *Catalogue Raisonné[e] of Oriental Manuscripts in the Library of the (Late) College, Fort Saint George, [Now in Charge of the Board of Examiners] in the Government Library*, vol. III (Madras, 1862), 200-1; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 182.

²⁷ Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice*, 196.

²⁸ For links with Kampili, see also: N. Venkata Ramanayya, *Kampili and Vijayanagara* (Madras, 1929); V.K. Bhandarkar, “Kampili Raya and the Founders of Vijayanagara,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 5 (1941).

Narasimha Saluva needs to travel back and forth to Benares in north India to be anointed as emperor. The sage Vidyaranya also visits Benares, and other locations around India, before he can play his part in the empire's foundation.

The clearance of land is referred to when the Sangama brothers are said to be hunting in forests while they spot the miraculous hare at the site of their capital-to-be. Further, origin stories from different dynastic periods make clear that Harihara's regal position becomes a hereditary office when it passes to his relatives. The texts mention as his successor his brother Bukka, followed by other Sangama descendants, or trace the family line directly to kings of later imperial dynasties.

Vijayanagara's origin myths appear to be silent on the acquisition of symbols of royalty. This might be explained by the fact that the imperial houses do not claim to have been installed by another, external dynasty. One story traces the Sangamas' initial appointment to the sultan of Delhi, but by the time they found their kingdom with the assistance of the sage Vidyaranya, this earlier link has been severed. The Sangamas therefore do not receive royal symbols from any overlord, unlike Ramninar of Ariyalur who acquires emblems and other honours when he renders military service to his master.

Finally, Vijayanagara's origin stories include an aspect seemingly missing in Ariyalur's myth: the acquisition of wealth to set up a kingdom. As we are told, Vidyaranya seeks to obtain a fortune but the goddess Bhuvaneshvari he prays to does not acknowledge him. Only when he gives up his worldly desires is his wish granted, with the condition that the treasure be used to foster Vijayanagara's prosperity. A variation on this theme might be the passage about Narasimha Saluva carrying his vassals' tributes on his return to the imperial capital.

Successor States

In comparison with Vijayanagara's many different origin stories, the foundation myths of its heirs are relatively few and uniform. The following pages first consider the Nayakas of Ikkeri, based in the Kannada region. Next, moving to the Tamil zone, this survey discusses the two houses consecutively ruling Tanjavur, the Nayakas and the Bhonsles, and then turns to the Nayakas of Madurai and the Setupatis reigning over Madurai's offshoot, Ramnad.

Nayakas of Ikkeri

The circumstances of the rise of Ikkeri's Nayakas are unclear. The dynasty's earliest inscription, dating from 1506 in the name of one Chaudappa, does not refer to the Vijayanagara emperors, even though they held sway over this region. Chaudappa,

an adherent of the Lingayat religious tradition (devoted to Shiva and rejecting caste discrimination), seems to have been a semi-autonomous chief wielding some authority in the area around the town of Keladi, in the hilly, wooded central Kannada zone. The dynasty's history becomes less obscure under Chaudappa's son Sadashiva Nayaka, who is thought to have reigned until the 1560s, now from the nearby town of Ikkeri. Inscriptions of the mid-sixteenth century state that Sadashiva governed several provinces on behalf of Vijayanagara's Tuluva rulers. By this time, the family's power had apparently been recognised and incorporated by the empire. Chaudappa and Sadashiva can thus together be considered as the founders of Ikkeri's Nayaka house.²⁹

The dynasty's origin myths are found in several texts. Two of these have been published in their original language and are extensively discussed in secondary literature. First, the *Śivatattva ratnākara* is an encyclopaedic poem, composed in Sanskrit by Ikkeri's King Basavappa (or Basavaraja) Nayaka in the early eighteenth century, that includes a section on the dynasty's history. Second, the Kannada *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam*, allegedly written in the second half of the eighteenth century by Linganna Kavi, a descendant of an Ikkeri court poet, narrates the story of the royal house from its foundation to its fall in 1763.³⁰

A third text, probably originally titled *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvali* in Kannada, is available in a forty-six-page manuscript English translation in the Mackenzie collections. This genealogical account of Ikkeri's Nayakas also starts with the founders of the dynasty but ends a few years before its termination, at least in the English version. Its author and date of composition are unknown.³¹ The abridged

²⁹ Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 12-30; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 7-13. For the Lingayat sect, see for example Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 435-6.

³⁰ Radha Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja: A Cultural Study* (Keladi, 1995); K.N. Chitnis, "Sivatattvaratnakara with Special Reference to Polity," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 28 (1966); M. Chidananda Murthy, "Keḷadinṛpa Vijayam – A Historical Poem," in G.S. Dikshit (ed.), *Studies in Keladi History (Seminar Papers)* (Bangalore, 1981); B.R. Gopal, "A Note on the Genealogy of the Early Chiefs of Keḷadi," in idem; Taylor, *Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. III, 237; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 6-8; Chitnis, *Keḷadi Polity*, 4-6. See also the introductions in the two volumes of Basavappa Nayaka (Basavaraja), *Śivatattva Ratnākara of Basavarāja of Keḷadi*, ed. S. Narayanaswamy Sastry and R. Rama Shastry (Mysore, 1964, 1969). For a comparison of the two texts, see K.R. Basava Raja, "Sources of the History of Minor Principalities," in S.P. Sen (ed.), *Sources of the History of India*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1988), 79-81.

³¹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 61-83v. For some (very limited) background information on this text and its probable original name, see: Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 63-4; Wilson, *The Mackenzie Collection*, vol. II, 48-9; R. Narasimhachar, "The Keladi Rajas of Ikkeri and Bednur," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (New Series) 43, 1 (1911), 188. This text possibly originated as a summary or collection of excerpts from the *Keḷadinṛpa vijayam* since it appears to overlap with

foundation story that follows (retaining the original English spelling of names) is based on this translated *Keḷadi arasara vaṃśāvali*, but largely agrees with the relevant sections in the other two texts.

In the village of Caladee near Halabaidoo, in an ant hole, the god Ram-Eswur appeared as a lingam (phallic symbol). At that time, the village headman (“goud”) of Caladee, Baswapah, was a pious worshipper of Eswur and a man of great wisdom. By his devout and virtuous wife Baswaka he had two sons, Choudapah and Badrapah. After their birth, Baswapah’s wealth and property increased. When the sons had attained manhood, they became great warriors and subsisted on husbandry. Ram-Eswur, the tutelary god of Halabaidoo, once appeared in Choudapah’s dream as a Brahmin, and explained he had incarnated in (what was now referred to as) a snake hole in the jungle of Caladee. That was proved by a black cow owned by Choudapah that went daily to the snake hole with her calf and poured her milk into it. Choudapah was further told that if he witnessed this and worshipped the lingam, he would obtain riches and affluence.

Overjoyed, Choudapah looked for the cow, observed what had been foretold, and found the lingam in the snake hole. He had the jungle cleared, built a small shrine of straw at that site, and allotted revenues for daily worship. One day, when Choudapah returned from his fields and was tired, he rested under a mango tree. His mother, alarmed by his long absence, went searching for him. She found him asleep under the tree, while a snake was rearing its crest and waving its head over him. The snake then moved away, and when Choudapah was woken up by his mother, it waved its head and signalled them to follow it into the paddy grounds. There the snake slapped the earth, urging them to dig here, and disappeared. Choudapah marked the spot and soon returned with his younger brother Badrapah. They found a great pot full of treasure in the ground and built a strong house with it.

Choudapah had a son named Sadaseva and married him to two virgins. They continued their worship of the god Caladee-Ram-Eswur and cultivated their lands. Now King Auchoota-Rayaloo of Veedyanagur heard about Choudapah and the treasure he had discovered. Thinking that a humble man should not be deprived of his good fortune, the king elevated Choudapah to a suitable rank and dignity. He sent him and his brother Badrapah a letter, palanquins, horses, and presents, and had them brought into his presence. Seated in his audience hall, the king received them graciously and enquired how they had obtained their riches. Hearing their reply, he concluded the brothers were truly devout worshippers and honoured them.

At this time, arrogant chieftains and Moorish people were causing disturbances all over the country, and the king ordered Choudapah and Badrapah to destroy or expel these people.

the sections of that work that have a more narrative character. I thank Caleb Simmons for bringing this to my notice. For a reference that possibly concerns the acquisition of the original version of either of these texts (although reported to be in Sanskrit, written in Kannada script) by Colin Mackenzie’s assistants from an “astronomer,” see BL/AAS, MT, class XII, no. 11: “Report of the Soobarow Marratta writer to Major C. Mackenzie” (1805), ff. 105, 111.

Accordingly, the brothers fought with them and brought several prisoners back. The king was so pleased with their valour that he granted them the eight districts of Caladee and other places, and honoured them with the conch shell ("sankoo"), the wheel ("chakrum"), other insignia, and troops. Then the brothers returned home, summoned the chiefs of their lands before them, and asked them to populate the country. Choudapah built a palace ("aramonnee") at Caladee, was acknowledged by royal order in the Shaka year 1422, and received precious offerings from the inhabitants of Caladee and Ekaree. In the latter place, he saw a hare resisting one of his dogs. Considering that this location was favoured by heaven and full of valour, he built a strong fort and a magnificent palace there. He also erected a stone temple for the god Ram-Eswur. After thirteen years Choudapah departed from this world and his son Sadaseva Naik reigned with great charity.³²

The text continues with the military feats performed by Ikkeri's new ruler Sadashiva Nayaka ("Sadaseva Naik") for Vijayanagara's Tuluva rulers. He subjugates a number of rebels and conquers some provinces of the Deccan sultanates, such as Kalyana and Gulbarga ("Calyanum," "Calabaraga"). In return, he receives honours from the emperor, including a valuable dagger, jewels, betel-leaves (to be consumed with areca-nuts), titles, and the ring of the captured sultan of Bidar. Furthermore, Sadashiva builds temples, endows Brahmin villages, and performs other religious duties.³³

As said, the origin myth above is only marginally different from the foundation stories in the *Śivatattva ratnākara* and *Keladinṛpa vijayam*. In the *Śivatattva ratnākara*, for instance, Chaudappa's boy servant is led by the cow to some bushes, where Chaudappa finds the *liṅgam* (Shiva's phallic symbol). After a dream foretelling the discovery of a treasure, Chaudappa stumbles upon it while ploughing his field. He uses this wealth to assemble a group of followers and increase his power. That attracts the attention of the Vijayanagara emperor—now Krishna Raya instead of Achyuta Raya—who grants him the title of Nayaka (V 2:27-50, 4:37-48). The *Keladinṛpa vijayam* adds that Chaudappa finds a sword together with the *liṅgam* and that Sadashiva Nayaka serves his namesake Sadashiva Raya, the last Tuluva emperor. Further, Chaudappa's father Basavappa is said to descend from Basaveshvara, a form of Shiva. Both texts also state that Sadashiva Nayaka's conquest of Kalyana is instructed by Vijayanagara's first Aravidu ruler, Rama Raya, in return for lands and titles.³⁴ Finally, according to some traditions, Chaudappa

³² BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 61-2, 64-5v.

³³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 6, pt. 11: "Historical account of Beedoonoor or Caladee Samstanum," ff. 65v-7.

³⁴ Krishnamurthy, *Sivatattva Ratnākara of Keladi Basavaraja*, 103-6; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkeri*, 12-22; Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 8-13, 52; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 194-6; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. III, 97-9, 189-92; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 177-9. For yet other (sometimes rather different) versions of the dynasty's origins and subsequent history, see: Mahalingam, *Mackenzie*

can acquire his treasure only in return for a human sacrifice. Two servants, Yadava and Murari, volunteer to be killed on the condition, as one story has it, that their names will be forever honoured by the Ikkeri Nayakas.³⁵

By and large, one observes the same elements here as for Vijayanagara and Ariyalur. To start with the founders' ancestry, this is portrayed as relatively modest in two of the three texts: Chaudappa's father is probably a village headman ("goud"),³⁶ belonging to a family of cowherds. One text states that his father is of divine descent, but that does not necessarily conflict with his humble profession. Next, Chaudappa and his son Sadashiva possess great military skills, and besides subduing rebellious chiefs, Sadashiva even defeats some of the Deccan sultans. The texts describe in detail the strong connections with the Vijayanagara overlords, both the Tuluvas and Aravidus, who acknowledge and enhance the status of Ikkeri's rulers after their heroic services.

A link is perhaps also forged with the erstwhile Hoysala dynasty. The tutelary deity Rameshvar ("Ram-Eswur") of "Halabaidoo"—not far from Keladi ("Caladee")—appears in Chaudappa's dream announcing he has manifested himself as a *liṅgam*. "Halabaidoo" is possibly a corruption of Halebid (some hundred miles from Keladi), the name of the Hoysala capital Dvarasamudra after its destruction by Delhi's forces in the fourteenth century. The main temple there is dedicated to Shiva, while the name Rameshvar and the *liṅgam* are also associated with this god. All this might suggest that the former Hoysala tutelary deity is now attached to the nascent Ikkeri dynasty.³⁷ That ties in with the religious credentials of the founders,

Manuscripts, vol. II, 403; Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, vol. III (London, 1807), 254-6; S.N. Naraharayya, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 1], *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* (New Series) XXI, 4 (1931), 370-3; T.C.S. Manian, "Keladi Chiefs: Their Contribution to the History of Mysore," *The Asiatic Review* (New Series) XXXIV, 120 (1938), 773-4; Ranganatha Rao, "The Belagutti Kaifiyats," 70; R. Shama Shastry (trans.), "Malnad Chiefs (Extract from Chronicles Compiled around 1820 A.D.)," *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society* XII, I (1921), 45-50. The text in the last work may be a *kaifiyat* (local history) of the town of Sagar, located between Keladi and Ikkeri towns.

³⁵ The sources for the story about the servants' sacrifice are not entirely clear in the secondary literature. Besides, the *Keḷadīṇṇpa vijayam* states Yadava Murari was a single person, a local chief who disobeyed the Vijayanagara rulers and was therefore captured by Sadashiva Nayaka. See: Chitnis, *Keḷadī Polity*, 9, 11; B. Lewis Rice, *Mysore: A Gazetteer Compiled for Government* (revised edition, Westminster, 1897), vol. II, 458; Naraharayya, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 1], 372; Lewis Rice, *Mysore and Coorg*, 156; Swaminathan, *The Nāyakas of Ikkēri*, 14, 26; Manian, "Keladi Chiefs," 773-4.

³⁶ "Goud" is likely to be a corruption of *gauda*, meaning village headman. See Chitnis, *Keḷadī Polity*, xvii.

³⁷ Studies of Ikkeri's temple architecture also suggest that these Nayakas sought to connect themselves with the Hoysalas, as well as the Chalukyas of Kalyana. See: Amita Kanekar, "Two Temples of the

who worship the deity and build him a temple (first of straw and then of stone), and obtain prosperity in return.

The stories contain several natural miracles: Chaudappa's special status is signified by a snake that protects him; the site of the kingdom's second capital Ikkeri ("Ekaree") is indicated by a hare fighting a dog; and a cow shows the way to the *lingam*.³⁸ With regard to the acquisition of wealth, the discovery of a treasure provides Chaudappa with the means to increase his power and make the kingdom flourish. In the process, arable land is developed from the jungles around the *lingam* and buildings are constructed. Ikkeri's founders receive various symbols signifying their royal status, such as titles, arms (including the sword found with the *lingam*), jewellery, and a ring of a powerful sultan. Further, the continuation of the family's position as a hereditary dynasty is emphasised in passages mentioning Chaudappa's reception in Vijayanagara together with his brother Bhadrappa, his son Sadashiva's marriage to two virgins, and this son's ongoing close relations with the imperial rulers.

Only the motif of migration appears to be lacking here. Ikkeri's dynasty is presented as being of local descent and its founders need not travel further than the imperial capital (also located in the central Kannada area) and back to set up their kingdom. Finally, some stories contain an element that seems largely absent from the myths of other dynasties: the personal loyalty of the founder's subjects or followers and the great value this represents—or at least, that could be what the sacrifice of Chaudappa's servants Yadava and Murari symbolises. Through their extreme devotion, Ikkeri's Nayakas obtain the capital with which they can build up their polity.³⁹

Ikkeri Nayakas," *South Asian Studies* 26, 2 (2010), 150-8, 159 (n. 11); idem, "Stylistic Origins and Change in the Temples of the Ikkeri Nayakas," 349, 352-3, 359-60. "Halabaidoo" may also refer to Hallibailu, directly south of Keladi.

³⁸ The common Indian story of a cow pouring milk often served to mark a spot where the divine and human worlds met. See Sohoni, "The Hunt for a Location," 217-18.

³⁹ One scholar points to a rarely cited version of Vijayanagara's foundation containing the same theme. Here, the goat-herd Meshapala offers to sacrifice himself so that Harihara and Bukka acquire a treasure. The source of this story is not given. See Naraharayya, "Keladi Dynasty" [pt. 1], 373. Similar stories are found in texts about the foundations of the town of Chandragiri and the Velugoti lineage, members of which served Vijayanagara's Aravidu house. In the former case, to appease local demons, the washermen Chandra and Giriya volunteer to die on the condition the town is named after them. See BL/AAS, MG, no. 9, pt. 2b: "Historical account of Chandragerry," ff. 11-12 (probably translated from a Tamil text, perhaps collected at Chandragiri in 1802; see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 78-9). For a similar text, see Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges*, 86-9. For the Velugoti lineage, see Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 245-8, where sacrifice is associated not only with loyalty but also with ideals of land defence and prowess.

Nayakas of Tanjavur

We next move to the Tanjavur kingdom in the Tamil region's Kaveri River delta, once the heartland of the Chola realm (Cholamandalam) and conquered by Vijayanagara soon after its emergence. In the early modern period, Tanjavur was initially ruled by a Nayaka house, installed by Vijayanagara's Tuluvas. Again, little is known with any certainty about the foundation of this dynasty. Inscriptional sources suggest that its first ruler, Shevappa (or Cevvappa) Nayaka, belonged to a Telugu family of high military officers serving the Vijayanagara court and originally stationed in the north of the Tamil zone. Shevappa appears to have been appointed governor of the Tanjavur area by Emperor Achyuta Raya in or around the 1530s. He is believed to have ruled until the 1570s, when his son Achyutappa Nayaka succeeded him.⁴⁰

Of the literary texts dealing with the beginnings of this dynasty, most relevant for our purpose seem to be the Telugu *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, the Sanskrit *Raghunāthābhyudayamu*, and the Telugu *Raghunāthanāyakābhyudayamu*. The first of these, composed by an unknown author probably at Tanjavur in the first half of the eighteenth century, is a chronicle relating the dynastic foundations of both Tanjavur's and Madurai's Nayakas. The second text is a kind of biography of Raghunatha Nayaka, the third of Tanjavur's Nayakas, written by his court poetess Ramabhadramba. The third work is largely devoted to describing a day in the life of Raghunatha and was authored by his son Vijayaraghava Nayaka.⁴¹ Various other texts containing references to the dynasty's foundation are available in the English manuscripts of the Mackenzie collections, have been published, or are discussed in secondary literature.⁴² Below we consider a composite, abridged version of the dynasty's origin myths, synthesised from all these sources.

⁴⁰ Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 9-34; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 173-5, 286-7; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 40.

⁴¹ Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 3-5; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 44, 59, 335-6; idem, *Textures of Time*, 129-30; Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 254, 284, 319; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 173.

⁴² Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 9-34; N.K. Venkatesam, "Govinda Deekshita: The Minister of the Tanjore Nayak Kings," *The Quarterly Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society* II, 3-4 (1928), 221-3; P.R. Srinivasan and Marie-Louise Reiniche (eds), *Tiruvannamalai: A Śaiva Sacred Complex of South India*, vol. 1.1, *Inscriptions* (Pondicherry, 1990), 115; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 173; F.R. Hemingway, *Tanjore Gazetteer*, vol. I (Madras, 1906), 38; BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 8: "The Cheritee or actions of the Vadaka-Rajahs of Tanjore, Trichinopoly & Madura," ff. 71-2; no. 1, pt. 24: "The Kyfeyat of Aachoota Bhoopal Naiq," f. 185 (translated from a Tamil text received in 1807 from someone employed at the Tanjavur palace); Mackenzie Miscellaneous collection (hereafter MM), no. 110, pt. 7 (at back of folder): "The Charythy of the Vadoka Raja of Tonjore, Trinchunnapully & Madura," ff. 2-3.

As some texts say, Govinda Dikshita, a young, knowledgeable Kannada Brahmin, moved to Vijayanagara city and was invited to Emperor Achyuta Raya's court. After a while, the Brahmin met Shevappa, an orphan of poor descent belonging to a Shudra caste, and took him into his service as a cowherd. When Govinda Dikshita once saw the boy sleeping while a cobra waved its hood over him, he knew a royal future awaited him. The Brahmin introduced Shevappa to the emperor—sometimes identified as Krishna Raya rather than Achyuta Raya—who appointed him as his personal betel-bearer.

Soon, according to one tradition, Shevappa distinguished himself intellectually and in battles, and also came to be cherished by the queen. He married Murtimamba, the younger sister of Achyuta Raya's consort Tirumalamba, and received the governorship of the Chola country as dowry. In this position, Shevappa built a fort and a water tank in his capital Tanjavur and restored and endowed temples. Towards the end of his peaceful reign, he installed his son Achyutappa Nayaka as *yuvārāja* (heir apparent) and made him responsible for the kingdom's administration. The Brahmin Govinda Dikshita continued to serve Tanjavur's Nayakas as general and minister.

On the whole, the origin myths of Tanjavur's Nayakas seem of a limited scale compared with those of other Vijayanagara successor states. Together, however, the different versions contain most motifs found in the texts discussed earlier, although the various stories do not agree on some points and none of them covers all stages of Shevappa's career. The texts are particularly unclear about Shevappa's ancestry and do not trace it back further than a few generations. Some sources state he was the son of a certain Timmappa Nayaka—door-keeper and warrior under Vijayanagara's Krishna Raya—and belonged to the Mannaru clan (*gotra*), whose similarly named tutelary deity was a form of Vishnu, residing at Mannargudi near Tanjavur.⁴³ Most stories mention his *nāyaka* descent and thus suggest that his immediate ancestors were warriors connected to the imperial court. At the same time, several texts emphasise a modest background, referring to Shevappa's poverty, his belonging to the low Shudra *varṇa* (caste category), and, in some cases, his orphaned status.

Shevappa displays his martial skills in the empire's battles. But before that, a close link is already established with Vijayanagara's Tuluva rulers when Shevappa is appointed to the honourable position of Achyuta Raya's personal betel-bearer. Later, the bond grows even more intimate when Shevappa marries the emperor's sister-in-law and consequently receives the government of what is called the Chola

⁴³ Vriddhagirisan, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 25-7; Srinivasan and Reiniche, *Tiruvannamalai*, vol. 1.1, 115; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 173.

country. It is probably far-fetched to interpret this appointment as an indication that Tanjavur's Nayakas claimed ties with the Chola dynasty. The same may apply to their association with Mannaru, whose temple at Mannargudi was first built by the Cholas. However, the family's relations with this deity demonstrate its religious connections, as does the role of the Brahmin Govinda Dikshita and Shevappa's sponsoring of temples.

While no natural wonder is needed to indicate the exceptional status of Tanjavur's location—having already served as the royal capital for many centuries—one tradition mentions the miracle of a snake protecting the future dynastic founder, foretelling his greatness. Migration is referred to both when Govinda Dikshita (originating in the Kannada region) travels to the imperial capital and when Shevappa moves from there to his new territory. Some texts further appear to emphasise the continuation of Shevappa's office as a hereditary function when they say he declares his son Achyutappa crown prince and gives him governmental responsibilities while he is still alive.

In contrast with other origin stories, the foundation myths of Tanjavur's Nayakas do not mention land development or the acquisition of wealth and royal symbols. These elements were maybe unnecessary because the Tanjavur region was already a political unit under the Cholas and Vijayanagara before Shevappa's installation—unlike Vijayanagara itself, Ikkeri, and Ariyalur. Therefore, Shevappa founded a dynasty rather than a kingdom. This ready availability of a state could account for the absence of references to land clearance and the acquisition of wealth. The fertile, heavily populated Kaveri River delta was already cultivated and yielded vast revenues. For these reasons, the mention of royal symbols was perhaps also less urgent than for other houses. Closely linked to the imperial family through both political and marital ties, and ruling a rich, well-institutionalised kingdom from the start, the Tanjavur Nayakas may have been secure in their regal position and felt little need to include symbols of royalty in their myths.

Bhonsles of Tanjavur

However, Tanjavur's Nayaka house was short-lived when compared with most other successor dynasties. As related in detail in the Epilogue, the family was terminated under its fifth ruler in 1673, when its namesakes from Madurai conquered the Tanjavur capital. Madurai then appointed a governor at Tanjavur, but an escaped son of Tanjavur's last Nayaka ruler tried to regain his ancestral throne. Assisted by the former Tanjavur courtier Venkanna, this prince, named Chengamaladasa, turned to the sultan of Bijapur for help, who sent his Maratha General Ekoji (alias Vyamkoji or Venkaji) Bhonsle. The Marathas originated in the Marathi-speaking region in western India and many of them served as warriors under various rulers.

Ekoji was a son of Shahaji—also a Bijapur general—by his second wife, and a half-brother of the well-known Maratha King Shivaji Bhonsle. In the 1640s, the family had been appointed governors of the Bangalore region.

Dispatched by his Bijapur overlord to Tanjavur, Ekoji Bhonsle expelled the Madurai forces. According to some sources, he installed Chengamaladasa on the Tanjavur throne, with his aide Venkanna as chief minister. Disagreements quickly arose between the new king and his minister, however, which would have led Venkanna to present the kingdom to Ekoji himself, no doubt in return for a new high position at court. The Maratha general is said to have accepted this offer, causing Chengamaladasa to flee Tanjavur. But soon after, Venkanna—considered an opportunistic traitor by Ekoji—also fled. Whether the Chengamaladasa interlude actually took place or not, by early 1676 Ekoji had assumed power in Tanjavur. He severed his ties with Bijapur, although his half-brother Shivaji, supposedly backed by the sultanate, now claimed to be his overlord, albeit with limited success.⁴⁴ Thus the Bhonsle dynasty of Tanjavur was established.⁴⁵

Two literary works are particularly relevant for the foundation of this Bhonsle house. One is the abovementioned Telugu *Taṇḱāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, thought to be composed under Tanjavur's Bhonsles. Besides the earlier Nayakas, it deals with the Bhonsle dynasty itself. The other text, in modern times given the title *Bhonsale vamsa caritra* (or, more commonly, *Bhonsle vamsa charitra*), is an exceedingly lengthy inscription in Marathi on the enclosing walls of the Brihadishvara Temple at Tanjavur (see illustration 2).⁴⁶ This family chronicle—completed (at least in its stone form) in December 1803—was composed by the royal Secretary (*chitṇis*) Bapu Rao (or Babu Raya) and commissioned by Tanjavur's then Bhonsle ruler, Sarabhoji II.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Several sources suggest Ekoji took control of Tanjavur's capital in January-February 1676. A local text states that he conquered the town on 12 January and was installed as king on 5 March of that year. See: Jadunath Sarkar, *House of Shivaji* (3rd edition, Calcutta, 1955), 75; NA, VOC, no. 1321, f. 883; letter from Nagapattinam to Batavia, Aug. 1676; Tulajendra Rajah P. Bhosale, *Rajah Serfoji – II (With a Short History of Thanjavur Mahrattas)* (Tanjavur, 1999), 11; Martin, *India in the 17th Century*, vol. 1, pt. II, 511.

⁴⁵ Vriddhagirisani, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 149-54, 162-7; Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore*, 1-12; Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, 51, 123-34; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 305-12; idem, *Textures of Time*, 130-5; Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 144-7; Tryambakayajvan, *The Perfect Wife (Strīdharmapaddhati)*, ed. I. Julia Leslie (New Delhi, 1995), 13-14.

⁴⁶ For images of the inscription, see also: George Michell and Indira Viswanathan Peterson, *The Great Temple at Thanjavur: One Thousand Years, 1010-2010* (Mumbai, 2010), 36-7; Usha Ramakrishna Ranade, "Comparative Study of Tanjore Marathi (1750-1850 A.D.) and Modern Marathi" (unpublished dissertation, Savitribai Phule Pune University, 1988).

⁴⁷ The text's genre has been characterised as a *bakhair* (narrative, memoir). For publications and discussions of the text, see: V. Srinivasachari and S. Gopalan (eds), *Bhonsle Vamsa Charitra: Being*

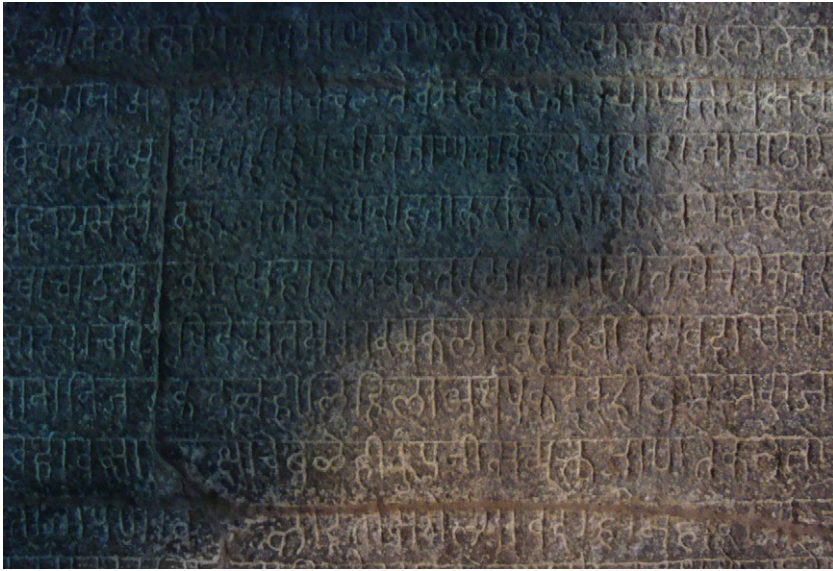


Illustration 2: Detail of the *Bhomsale vamśa caritra* inscription, Brihadishvara Temple (south and west enclosing walls), Tanjavur, 1803 (photo by the author).

Additionally, the English translations in the Mackenzie collections include an unpublished 211-page manuscript ending with a dedication to Sarabhoji II and a note saying this work was composed in March 1803 by “Cheetniss Bauboorau,” a servant of Sarabhoji II.⁴⁸ With regard to both its overall structure and numerous

the Marathi Historical Inscription in the Big Temple, Tanjore, on the History of the Mahratta Rajas of Tanjore (3rd edition, Tanjavur, 1990); Sohoni, *The Great Inscription at Tanjore*; Vidya Gadgil, “The Bṛhadiśvara Temple Inscription of the Bhosales of Tanjore: A Critical Study,” in R.K. Sharma and Devendra Handa (eds), *Revealing India's Past (Recent Trends in Art and Archaeology): Prof. Ajay Mitra Shastri Commemoration Volume*, vol. II (New Delhi, 2005); Ranade, “Comparative Study of Tanjore Marathi (1750-1850 A.D.) and Modern Marathi”; Sumit Guha, “The Frontiers of Memory: What the Marathas Remembered of Vijayanagara,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, 1 (2009), 277; idem, “Transitions and Translations,” 30.

⁴⁸ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: “The historycal account of the Tonjore,” ff. 31-136. The text is written in quaint English and some sections are hardly legible. The English translation probably dates from December 1804. Notably, this manuscript is filed under class III, indicating the original was in Tamil (the translation itself is silent on this), while the *Bhomsale vamśa caritra* inscription is in Marathi. Therefore, the original manuscript may be the Tamil version mentioned in Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 142. That manuscript might in turn be a Tamil copy of a Marathi text. See also Sohoni, *The Great Inscription at Tanjore*. I have not been able to check how these texts relate to a chronicle on Tanjavur’s Bhonsles written by one Babu Rao Chitnis in 1803 and published in K.M. Venkataramiah, *Taṅcai Marāṭṭiya Maṅṅar Varalāru (History of the Maratha Rulers of Thanjavur,*

details, this text, titled “The historical account of the Tonjore,” greatly resembles the *Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra* inscription. Considering the contents, dates, and author’s names of both works, it is likely that the original manuscript from which Mackenzie’s translation was made, dating from March 1803, also served as the basis for the inscription, finished in December of that year. “The historical account of the Tonjore” therefore is probably an English version of the *Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra*.

This text begins with a history of the ancestors of Tanjavur’s Bhonsles going back to mythical times. Next, it describes in detail the lives of Ekoji Bhonsle’s father and half-brother, Shahaji and Shivaji. The chronicle’s last section deals with Ekoji himself and his descendants on the Tanjavur throne up to Sarabhoji II. What follows are several summarised excerpts (with the original English spelling of names) concerning Ekoji’s ancestry and his foundation of the Bhonsle dynasty at Tanjavur.⁴⁹

Living in the Maratta lands, many members of the Bhoosala race were famous kings, known for their valour, prowess, and virtues. In the Caleeyokum age (Kali Yuga or present era), King Sambhoo Rajah had a dream in which the deity Stree Sampooceva told him he would enjoy children and fortune. Soon, a son named Yacoojee Rajah was born. The deity Stree Somuscondah Moorty appeared in a dream of the latter’s son Surpah Rajah and gave him a secret mantra. Through this, he obtained the favour of the Badasha (Muslim ruler) of the southern country and was granted some land. Afterwards, Surpah Rajah assisted his Muslim overlord in a battle with 50,000 horses. To his son Yahajee Rajah appeared the deity Sambaceva who announced that his race would become Maharajahs or superior kings.

Several successors followed, some of whom fought against Muslim rulers. A descendant in the fourteenth generation, Mullojee Rajah, served in the army of the Nezam Badasha of Devagery Droog. He went to the fakir Sahasareef Banaly Colonder to express his worries about the lack of male offspring. The fakir predicted the birth of two sons who would become warriors, and presented him with two swords, two cloths, and an object (“punjau”) of Hussan and Wossun, gods of the Mussulmans.

In the Shaka year 1531, Mullojee Rajah had two sons, one of whom was called Shahajee Rajah and married two women. He was appointed to rule his own kingdom with the consent of the Nezam Badasha. Shahajee was a great warrior and defeated the armies of Jahangeer Badash of Dilly and the Allyadulsha of Veejaeepoor. But a conflict at the Nezam Badasha’s court made Shahajee return to his country Sattar and join the Allyadulsha. In the Shaka year 1551, Shahajee’s second wife, Ceejawboy, gave birth to her second son named Seevajee Rajah. In the

Mackenzie manuscript D 3180) (Tanjavur, 1987). All three works may well be versions of the same text. See also: Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 242; Sascha Ebeling, *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India* (Albany, 2010), 117 (n. 17).

⁴⁹ For another brief summary of the *Bhomsale vaṃśa caritra*’s first part, see Guha, “The Frontiers of Memory,” 277-8.

Shaka year 1552, Shahajee's first wife, Tookaboysaib, gave birth to her first son called Yakoojee Rajah, the fourth in the race bearing this name.

Now a war against the Allyadulsha and the Dilly Badasha followed in which Shahajee was joined by the ninety-five other Maratta officers, who descended from the Sun and the Moon. Later, when the Allyadulsha and Auvaringazabe of Dilly were displeased with each other, Shahajee assisted the former and defeated the Rajahs of Tonjore, Matoora, Chinjee, Veeteeyanagur, and other places. The Allyadulsha was extremely pleased and granted Bangalore to Shahajee, who moved there with his family. As Yakoojee Rajah was born to Shahajee's first wife and was her eldest son, he became the Youvarajee (heir apparent), inherited all titles, and was installed as Bangalore's governor. His half-brother Seevajee Rajah was appointed at Sattar and Poonah.

When Yakoojee was ruling the kingdom of Bangalore, the Naikers of Tonjore and Trichenapoly were displeased with each other. The latter wished to possess the country of Tonjore, and the former, unable to defend himself, asked the Allyadulsha of Veejaepoor for help. Thereupon, the Allyadulsha dispatched two viziers to Yakoojee and ordered him to go to Tonjore and fight the Trichenapoly people. Having driven them out and reappointed the Tonjore people, Yakoojee encamped with his army in Treeromoollyvoil. In a dream the deity Bawgavan told him to go back to Tonjore and, as the Tonjore people would ask him the next day, enjoy the kingdom for many generations. Accordingly, since the Naikers of Tonjore were in dispute with each other and their prime minister, the kingdom was offered to Yakoojee. He marched to the Tonjore fort and arrived at the gate at an auspicious time. There, some relatives and warriors of the Naikers attempted to prevent Yakoojee from entering, but he forced them to flee. The two viziers of the Allyadulsha, who had accompanied Yakoojee all this while, resolved that he was indeed the best person to reign over Tonjore.

Thus, in the Shaka year 1597, Yakoojee ascended the throne and sent presents to the Allyadulsha of Veejaepoor. The latter was very pleased, replied that Yakoojee should enjoy the kingdom from generation to generation, and gave him valuable clothes. In the Shaka year 1604, Yakoojee departed his life and was succeeded by his eldest son Shahayee, the third king with this name.⁵⁰

The *Taṇḷjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* has various details to add about the activities of Ekoji ("Yakoojee") Bhonsle after he ousted the forces of Madurai ("Trichenapoly," Tiruchirappalli) from Tanjavur ("Tanjore") and installed the young Nayaka Prince Chengamaladasa on the throne. He was given part of the buried treasure of the Tanjavur Nayakas in compensation for his expedition, and withdrew his troops to the nearby town of Kumbakonam. But soon, as related above, he was visited by Chengamaladasa's former adviser Venkanna, who had been dismissed from

⁵⁰ BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: "The historical account of the Tonjore," ff. 31-95; Srinivasachari and Gopalan, *Bhonsle Vamsa Charitra*, i-ix.

his ministerial post. Venkanna tried to persuade Ekoji to expel Chengamaladasa and take over Tanjavur's reign. As the text has it, Ekoji was initially reluctant to remove the prince he himself had enthroned and also claimed to be incapable of governing this southern land. Moreover, he needed permission from his overlord, the sultan of Bijapur, to ascend the throne. Then, however, news came that the sultan had been killed in battle, and so Venkanna could finally convince Ekoji to take the Tanjavur kingdom.⁵¹

Other texts broadly agree with the two works examined above. They further mention, for instance, that Ekoji, in addition to a share of the treasure, received splendid robes, ornaments, and lands from Chengamaladasa. Besides, once he started ruling, Ekoji subdued the chiefs in Tanjavur's vicinity and reconquered some territory taken by the neighbouring kingdom of Ramnad.⁵²

Clearly, the origin stories of Tanjavur's Bhonsles differ a great deal from those of the other dynasties. Like his predecessors, Tanjavur's Nayakas, Ekoji Bhonsle did not found a new kingdom, but he did not even really found a new royal house either. He belonged to a family that considered itself to have been a dynasty since mythical times, as the various elements of the stories demonstrate. Ekoji's ancestry is traced back first to several legendary kings and then to more direct forefathers holding high military offices, all of whom are great warriors. Also, it is repeatedly foretold that more great kings and warriors will follow. Further, the Bhonsle family is said to belong to a group of ninety-six Maratha families descending from the Sun or the Moon.

By and large, Ekoji is simply the latest member of a long-existing line of ancestors and relatives holding political and (at times) royal power. Yet, he occupies a special position. Contrary to what is accepted as historically accurate, the *Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra* declares that Ekoji, rather than his half-brother Shivaji, is born of his father's first wife, as her eldest son, and therefore inherits all titles and the government of Bangalore. Therefore, he already holds a high rank when he arrives

⁵¹ Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 325-7; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 132-4.

⁵² See: Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 200-3 (it is unclear which text—in Telugu, despite the volume's title—has been translated here, but it seems to resemble the *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*); idem, *Examination and Analysis of the Mackenzie Manuscripts Deposited in the Madras College Library* (Calcutta, 1838), 126-8; Śrīdhara Venkatēśa (Ayyaval), *Śāhendra Vilāsa (A Poem on the Life of King Śāhaji of Tanjore) (1684-1710)*, ed. V. Raghavan (Tanjavur, 1952), 5-6; Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 345-7. For a partially different description of the events after Madurai was expelled from Tanjavur by Ekoji, suggesting the latter was not sufficiently indemnified by the Tanjavur court and therefore took over the kingdom, see BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 32: "The History of the Tonjore Rajas," ff. 88-90v.

in Tanjavur. That Ekoji also possesses martial skills is obvious from his military position under Bijapur (“Veejaeepoor”) and his defeat of Madurai’s troops, the last remaining supporters of Tanjavur’s Nayaka house, chiefs around Tanjavur, and Ramnad’s forces.

The Bhonsle family maintains close ties with various dynasties over the course of time. In the first place, Ekoji, his father Shahaji, and his grandfather Maloji serve the Nizam Shah (“Nezam Badasha”) of Ahmadnagar and the Adil Shah (“Allyadulsha”) of Bijapur at various points.⁵³ Moreover, the *Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra* states that Ekoji is officially recognised as Tanjavur’s ruler by the sultan of Bijapur, while the *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* relates he is willing to ascend the throne only after his Bijapur overlord has deceased. In either case, assuming the reign over Tanjavur without claiming the sultan’s consent was apparently problematic. Second, various stories appear to forge a link with the Nayaka predecessors, too. Ekoji receives robes, land, and other presents from Chengamaladasa and thus becomes part of the Nayaka realm to some extent.⁵⁴ However, no texts seem to seek any direct connection with Vijayanagara, apart from an inscription issued under Ekoji that mentions some of Tanjavur’s earlier Chola, Vijayanagara, and Nayaka rulers.⁵⁵

Religious appreciations of the Bhonsle dynasty’s position are manifold. Throughout the family’s history, Hindu deities appear in dreams with auspicious messages. Eventually, Ekoji himself has a dream in which the deity Vaidyanathasvami at Tirumalavadi (“Treeromoollyvoil”)—a form of Shiva—tells him to take and enjoy the Tanjavur kingdom.⁵⁶ There is also support from Islamic quarters when Ekoji’s grandfather Maloji visits a Muslim saint and obtains swords, clothes, and an object called “punjau” that is associated with the Shiite martyrs Hasan and Husain (“Hussan and Wossun”), possibly denoting the *pañjā* or symbol of the hand representing the five members of the Prophet’s family: Muhammad, Fatima, Ali, Hasan, and Husain.⁵⁷

⁵³ Other corrupted names in the cited text include the following: Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (“Auvaringazabe of Dilly”), Senji (“Chinjee”), Devagiri fort (“Devagery Droog”), Mughal Emperor Jahangir (“Jahangeer Badash of Dilly”), Madurai (“Matoora”), Pune (“Poonah”), Satara (“Sattar”), and perhaps Vijayanagara (“Veeteeyanagur”). See also the rest of the paragraph.

⁵⁴ For efforts in the multilingual dance drama *Mohini vilāsa kuravañji* (c. 1700) to link the Bhonsles to this territory, see Seshan, “From Folk Culture to Court Culture,” 333-4.

⁵⁵ C.R. Srinivasan, “Some Interesting Aspects of the Maratha Rule as Gleaned from the Tamil Copper-Plates of the Thanjavur Marathas,” *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India [Bharatiya Purabhilekha Patrika]* XI (1984), 42.

⁵⁶ See also Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions*, 147.

⁵⁷ This saint or *pir*, Shah Sharif Banali Qalandar, resided at Ahmadnagar. See William Hickey, *The Tanjore Mahratta Principality in Southern India: The Land of the Chola, the Eden of the South* (Madras,

Migration is a recurring motif in the Bhonsle foundation myths. Shahaji lives in the town of Satara in the Marathi-speaking region before he moves to Bangalore in the Kannada area, and his son Ekoji travels from there to Tanjavur in the Tamil south. The *Bhonsale vaṃśa caritra* puts much emphasis on the continuous and hereditary character of the Bhonsle dynasty. The births of Ekoji and his sons are all mentioned on separate occasions. Names like Shahaji, Ekoji, and Sarabhoji are borne by individuals of different generations and the text often specifies which consecutive number people with such names have, as in “Yakoojee Rajah number 5.”⁵⁸ Finally, a few texts refer to royal symbols. Ekoji receives clothes and other insignia from his Nayaka predecessor and the Bijapur sultan, but these are not specified. It seems that since Ekoji’s assumption of power in Tanjavur was basically the result of conquest, there was no truly rightful overlord from whom he would have received insignia that were worth describing in detail or could be specified at all.

As with Tanjavur’s Nayakas, the motifs of natural miracles, land development, and the acquisition of wealth appear to be missing in the origin stories of Tanjavur’s Bhonsles. With respect to wealth, Ekoji receives part of the former Nayaka treasure, but this is possibly meant to compensate for the expenses of his campaign rather than to serve as a financial basis for the new dynasty. The absence of these three elements could be explained by the same factors suggested for Tanjavur’s Nayakas: Ekoji ascended the throne of a kingdom that had long existed, was already brought under cultivation, and produced great wealth.

Nayakas of Madurai

South-west of Tanjavur, at the tip of the Indian peninsula, lay the kingdom of Madurai. This Tamil-speaking region was traditionally the realm of the ancient Pandya dynasty. When Vijayanagara conquered the area in the late fourteenth century from the short-lived Madurai sultanate, the Pandyas initially remained on Madurai’s throne as the empire’s vassals. But in the early sixteenth century, Vijayanagara’s Tuluvas replaced the Pandyas with a Nayaka governor from a Telugu-speaking background.

As with the other imperial heirs, the actual circumstances under which this Nayaka house came to power are obscure. Most historians agree that the dynasty’s first ruler was Vishvanatha Nayaka, son of the imperial courtier and military officer Nagama Nayaka. He belonged to one of the Balija castes (part of the Shudra

1873), 70. I thank Subah Dayal for suggesting the possible meaning of “punjau.” For both the saint and “punjau,” see also Sohoni, *The Great Inscription at Tanjore*.

⁵⁸ For some examples, see BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 87: “The historycal account of the Tonjore,” ff. 32-2v, 44v, 81v, 83, 95-6, 98.

varṇa or caste category), which originated in the Telugu region and whose members undertook both military and mercantile activities. Vishvanatha was possibly installed at Madurai around 1530 and reigned until c. 1563.⁵⁹

There are several texts concerning the origins of Madurai's Nayakas. One elaborate version is found in the aforementioned Telugu work *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra*, thought to originate in eighteenth-century Tanjavur. In addition, a Tamil chronicle covers the house until its fall in the 1730s, and even up to the late eighteenth century when the dynasty's descendants attempted to regain the Madurai throne. This work has been published in Tamil with a full English translation, titled "History of the Carnataca Governors who ruled over the Pandya Mandalam."⁶⁰ Both that text and the section of the *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* about this dynasty's foundation have been extensively summarised and analysed in secondary literature, and it seems the former work is a Tamil variant of the latter.⁶¹ Further, the so-called Mrtyunjaya manuscripts—collected in the early nineteenth century by Madurai's chief Brahmin "Mirtanjeya-Pattar"—include a work resembling the two other texts to a considerable extent. This was published in its original Tamil with an English translation as "A description of the Carnataca Lords."⁶² What follows is an abridged composite of these three works.

⁵⁹ Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 48-67; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 38-40; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 131-2; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLIII, 191-2, 218, 232, 258-60. But see also Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, 288, where Vishvanatha's founding of a dynastic governorship is doubted, as he may have been replaced by another officer rather than his son Kumara Krishnappa. The latter would have been installed later and only then started the hereditary line of Madurai's Nayakas.

⁶⁰ Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 3-49. For another English translation of this Tamil text, see three more or less identical manuscript copies in: BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 18-27; MG, no. 4, pt. 6a: "History of the former Rajahs of the Tellugoo nation who ruled over Paundium Mundalom," ff. 87-106; British Library: Manuscript and Map Collections, London (hereafter BL/MMC), Additional Manuscripts (hereafter AM), no. 18021, "History of Kurtakull" (translated in 1803, see f. 25). See also Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 50-1.

⁶¹ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 38-40, 44-56; Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 97-106; J.H. Nelson, *The Madura Country: A Manual* (Madras, 1868), vol. III, 87-97; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 453-5; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 133-7; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLIII, 191-2, 232, 253-7. Translated excerpts of the *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* have been published in: Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, 319-27; Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, 131-2, 134. See also: Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. II, 344-8; Chekuri, "Fathers' and 'Sons'," 139-40.

⁶² Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 105-12. It is unclear where this text ends in Taylor's volume. Possibly, other sections of the work are published on 113-20, 147-67, 169-78, 182-217,

As the texts say, Nagama Nayaka was an important officer and revenue collector of the ruler of Vijayanagara. Since he had long been childless, he went on a pilgrimage to Benares, where he performed acts of charity and bathed in the Ganga River daily. After forty days, the deity Vishvanatha appeared to Nagama in a dream, announcing he would have a vision of the god the following day, whereupon he might return home and would have a son. The next morning, while Nagama was bathing in the Ganga, something underwater struck him, and he moved to another part of the river. There something struck him again. He now searched the riverbed and found an emerald *lingam* (Shiva's phallic symbol). Having thus viewed the god, Nagama went back to Vijayanagara and in due time a son was born, named Vishvanatha after the Benares deity. He grew up to be admired for his wisdom, prowess, and beauty.

When Vishvanatha was sixteen years old, a buffalo was sacrificed at Vijayanagara's annual Navaratri festival, devoted to the goddess Durga, as happened every year. Tradition required it to be beheaded with one single blow, but this year the buffalo was particularly strong, with horns extending all the way to its tail. Therefore, none of the king's men dared to perform this duty, lest the animal's head be not immediately severed and thus Vijayanagara's future be in peril. Now Vishvanatha, in a dream informed by the goddess of the king's concern, offered to carry out the sacrifice, provided he could choose a sword from the king's armoury. Though the king considered Vishvanatha too young, he let him select one of his weapons. As the goddess had predicted, Vishvanatha found a special sword lying on top of the others. He took this and with one blow cut off the buffalo's head. The king rewarded him with jewels and clothes, took him into his service, and promised him a kingdom. Later, Vishvanatha was sent north to subdue rebels, and having defeated them he received from the king all their banners and trophies, as well as some of the king's own emblems.

One day, as the texts continue, the Chola king of Tanjavur invaded the Madurai kingdom and dethroned its Pandya king. The latter sought help from his Vijayanagara overlord, Krishna Raya, who dispatched Vishvanatha's father Nagama Nayaka to drive off the invader and restore Madurai to its rightful ruler. Nagama marched southward and defeated the Chola king, but then installed himself on the Madurai throne and brought the kingdom under control. Receiving complaints from Madurai's expelled Pandya king again, Krishna Raya ordered Nagama to return to the imperial capital and give up the Madurai kingdom. The latter refused, arguing that he had spent a fortune on his campaign, whereas the Pandya king not

224-6, 229-35, 238-48, 252-64. But those texts may also be separate manuscripts in the Mrtyunjaya collection.

only had done nothing to keep his kingdom, but also was a low-caste bastard rather than a real Pandya and would not send revenues once reinstalled.

Infuriated, Krishna Raya invited his courtiers and officers to bring him the head of Nagama Nayaka. To his surprise, Nagama's son Vishvanatha Nayaka offered to do so, declaring that loyalty to his king was more important than loyalty to his father. Having travelled south and arrived near Madurai, Vishvanatha sent a note to his father saying that if he would reinstate the Pandya now, he could still be saved. But Nagama stuck to his position, stating he had conquered Madurai only for his son's sake and asking Vishvanatha to join him. The latter was equally resolute and so a battle was fought between father and son, won by Vishvanatha. Taken to Vijayanagara to be decapitated, Nagama was however pardoned by Krishna Raya, impressed as the emperor was by Vishvanatha's loyalty.

Since Vishvanatha Nayaka was to be rewarded with a kingdom of his own for his exceptional behaviour, Krishna Raya installed him at Madurai as Lord of the Southern or Pandya throne. According to some works, the grateful but incompetent and heirless Pandya king gave up his claims and adopted Vishvanatha as his son, giving him the Pandya crown, dagger, sceptre, seal, and fish umbrella. Krishna Raya presented the new king with an image of Durga, the goddess protecting Vijayanagara. Further, Vishvanatha received the wealth acquired by his father Nagama, who revealed that the Madurai goddess Minakshi had foretold his son's royal future in a dream. Vishvanatha then rebuilt Madurai's fort and temples, constructed irrigation facilities, founded new villages, subjugated robbing bands, and made the country's population increase.

He appointed seventy-two subordinate chiefs to each govern a part of his realm, collect revenues, and recruit troops. Five chiefs in the south, however, who were distant relatives of the former Pandya ruler, rebelled against the new king and a bloody war ensued. Eventually, Vishvanatha proposed to fight man to man with the chiefs. They delegated the strongest among them, but the king killed him, upon which the other rebels surrendered and flowers fell from heaven. After a long reign, Vishvanatha was succeeded by his son Kumara Krishnappa Nayaka.

Most other origin stories of Madurai's Nayakas basically agree with the texts synthesised above, although there are some variations. The Telugu *Baliyavaṃśapurāṇam*, for example, states that once Vishvanatha had defeated his father Nagama, the Pandya king already adopted Vishvanatha as his successor. Another work declares the Pandya king was initially reinstalled by Vishvanatha, who only ascended the Madurai throne himself after the king and his son had passed away and the Pandya line became extinct. There is also a text saying that Nagama, after expelling the Chola ruler, killed the Pandya king and usurped the throne, which the Vijayanagara emperor then passed on to Vishvanatha. Yet another work extensively refers to the

clearing of jungles under Vishvanatha's reign. Further, some traditions have it that the Nayakas did not only receive their sceptre from the local goddess Minakshi but were also born from her.⁶³

Finally, a lengthy description of the Nayakas of Madurai compiled by the Dutch East India Company in 1677 includes a different version of the dynasty's foundation. In this work's opening lines, its author Adolph Bassingh writes that he was informed about the Nayakas' origins by "some old Brahmins from their chronicles." Thus apparently presenting a local tradition—perhaps the earliest surviving account—Bassingh's text relates that under Vijayanagara's first Tuluva rulers, Madurai was farmed out to a wealthy merchant, one Peda Chetti, who frequently lent money to the court. This office passed to his son, who was given greater authority over the area and received the title of Nayaka. He was in turn succeeded by his son, named Nagama Nayaka, who fell out of favour with the imperial court and was not succeeded by a relative after he died. Instead, the emperor appointed as Madurai's ruler his loyal servant and betel-bearer Vishvanatha Nayaka ("Wiesewenaden Naik") of the Baliya ("Wellen Chitti") lineage, which had a higher status than the line of Nagama and his predecessors. Vishvanatha acquired the title of Nayaka when the king married him to a "daughter of princely blood." From him descended the successive Nayakas of Madurai.⁶⁴

In these various texts, one encounters almost all the motifs identified in the origin stories of other dynasties. Beginning with the founder's ancestry, Vishvanatha's pedigree never seems to be traced back further than just one generation, apart from the claimed descent from the local goddess Minakshi. While one chronicle

⁶³ Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, vol. I, 239-41, vol. III, 177-8; BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," f. 24; MG, no. 1, pt. 3: "An account of the Pandia Rajahs who reigned at Madurapuri," ff. 16-17; MM, no. 109, pt. 37: "The humble representation of ... Bangaroo Teeromaly Nack," ff. 2-4 (compiled around 1800 by Bangaru Tirumalai, descendant of the expelled Nayakas of Madurai, see f. 1); no. 109, pt. 43: untitled document, ff. 1-4 (similar to MT, class III, no. 25); Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 190-1; Shulman, *The King and the Clown*, 304; Venkata Ramanayya, *Studies in the History of the Third Dynasty*, 456-61; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLIII, 257-8, 261-2, XLIV (1915), 37-8. See also BL/AAS, MG, pt. 4, no. 4: "Mootiah's chronological & historical account of the modern kings of Madura," ff. 44-8 (based on a Tamil original). According to this text, it was Vishvanatha who was sent by Krishna Raya to Madurai to subdue some chiefs rebelling against the Pandya king (making the latter unable to pay tribute to the empire). Having disciplined the rebels, Vishvanatha usurped the Madurai government, imprisoned his father Nagama who had come to congratulate him, and massacred the entire Pandya family. After returning to Krishna Raya with treasures and repenting for his sins, Vishvanatha was crowned king of Madurai by the emperor. For a brief discussion of this text, see Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 76-7 (n. 42).

⁶⁴ Vink, *Mission to Madurai*, 284-8, 344-6.

suggests Vishvanatha belongs to a higher-ranking caste than Madurai's previous governors, virtually all texts agree he comes from a *nāyaka* or warrior background. His father Nagama is in charge of the imperial treasury but also serves as a general and defeats the Chola king. Vishvanatha himself possesses outstanding military skills: he beheads a formidable buffalo with one blow when he is sixteen years old, he overpowers his own rebellious father, and he kills a strong insurgent chief in a man-to-man fight.

The stories connect him firmly to the imperial Tuluva house. Possibly serving Krishna Raya as betel-bearer, Vishvanatha shows exceptional loyalty to the emperor, receives gifts from him, and is installed by him as king himself. An early tradition even suggests that he, like the founder of Tanjavur's Nayaka dynasty, married into the imperial family. Additionally, almost all texts establish some kind of continuation between Vishvanatha and his Pandya predecessors. Either adopted by the last Pandya king and receiving that dynasty's regalia—including the sceptre (*ceṇkōl*), a curved sword or scimitar, and the fish standard—or ascending the throne after the Pandya line has ended, Vishvanatha is portrayed as the rightful successor of Madurai's previous dynasty.⁶⁵

There are also several instances of religious recognition. Vishvanatha's birth is foretold by his divine namesake residing in Benares (a form of Shiva), who manifests himself to his father Nagama in a dream and as a *lingam*. Vishvanatha's regal destiny is revealed to Nagama by Madurai's own goddess Minakshi (the local consort of Shiva), said by some to be the family's ancestress. And Durga, the protective goddess of Vijayanagara, moves with Vishvanatha to his new residence.

As with most other dynasties, Madurai's origin stories refer to southward migration. The Telugu-speaking Nagama and Vishvanatha move from the Deccan to the Tamil zone and the latter becomes "king of the south." With respect to wealth, when Vishvanatha ascends the throne, his father provides him with the capital acquired in his career so as to make the kingdom prosper. Unlike riverine, fertile, and densely inhabited Tanjavur, the Madurai territory requires further development, and texts mention the clearance of jungle areas, the population of new

⁶⁵ For other efforts by Madurai's Nayakas to forge links with the Pandyas, see: Branfoot, "Dynastic Genealogies," 336, 370-5; idem, "Imperial Memory," 330-3; idem, "Heroic Rulers and Devoted Servants," 173-4; Elaine M. Fisher, *Hindu Pluralism: Religion and the Public Sphere in Early Modern South India* (Oakland, 2017), 165; Gita V. Pai, "From Warrior Queen to Shiva's Consort to Political Pawn: The Genesis and Development of a Local Goddess in Madurai," in Diana Dimitrova and Tatiana Oranskaia (eds), *Divinizing in South Asian Traditions* (London/New York, 2018), 64-8; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 87. For Vishvanatha being granted Pandya emblems and titles, see also: Mears, "Symbols of Coins of the Vijayanagara Empire," 79; idem, "Propaganda and Power: The Coinage of Vijayanagara," in Anila Verghese and Anna Libera Dallapiccola (eds), *South India under Vijayanagara: Art and Archaeology* (New Delhi, 2011), 287-8.

villages, and the construction of irrigation works. The realm is also clearly settled by way of a territorial division into seventy-two subordinate chiefdoms, whose chiefs are referred to as Palaiyakkarars (or in its anglicised form as “Poligars”). Some of the abovementioned elements also pertain to symbols of royalty, such as the acquisition of the Pandya regalia and the imperial Durga image. Besides, in an early stage Vishvanatha receives jewels, clothes, and emblems from the emperor, and banners and trophies of rebels he has subdued for his overlord.

The motifs of dynastic continuation and natural miracles are less conspicuous in the stories. The *Taṇjāvūri āndhra rājula caritra* relates that Nagama Nayaka deliberately rebels against the emperor to give his son Vishvanatha the opportunity to show his loyalty and prowess and win himself a throne.⁶⁶ In that sense, Nagama can be said to aim at founding a hereditary dynasty. But unlike texts of other royal houses, Madurai’s origin stories do not mention the founders’ successors until these commence their reign. Natural wonders are also absent in the myths, apart from the moving *liṅgam* on the Ganga’s riverbed predicting Vishvanatha’s birth. This reminds us of the origin stories of Tanjavur’s Nayakas and can be explained in the same way. While the dynastic founder’s greatness is announced, his kingdom’s special position need not be demonstrated by a miracle. The town of Madurai and its surroundings had long been the epicentre of the Pandya realm (Pandya-mandalam). Vishvanatha takes over a throne instead of establishing one, thus founding a dynasty rather than a kingdom.

Setupatis of Ramnad

The last kingdom whose foundation stories are examined is Ramnad, situated in the far, somewhat marginal and desolate south-east of the Tamil zone. Once again, the origins of the kingdom’s royal family are unclear. The first historical member of the line, Sadaika Tevar or Udaiyan, was installed around 1605 as a vassal of the Nayakas of Madurai, who then held sway over this region. Sadaika Tevar was a member of the Maravar caste (again belonging to the Shudra *varṇa* or caste category), which dominated the Ramnad area. Known for their martial skills, Maravars were involved in activities ranging from banditry to kingship.

Ramnad’s royal house bore the title of Setupati, “Lord of the Bridge,” referring to the Setu (bridge), the string of islets and sandbanks between the kingdom’s south-eastern tip and Ceylon. The Setu was associated with events in the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic and had long been an important pilgrimage destination, in particular the Ramanathasvami Temple on Rameshvaram island. As their dynastic name indicates, the Setupatis acted as guardians of this sacred spot, and soon after his

⁶⁶ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 50.

instalment, Sadaika Tevar allegedly received a sceptre (*ceṅkōl*) from temple priests at Rameshvaram.⁶⁷

Both texts produced by the Ramnad court itself and works deriving from the Madurai overlords deal with the Setupati's origins, but the focus lies here on the former category. Of these manuscripts, one Telugu work has been entirely published in an English translation (not in its original language) as "A chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis." This text is thought to have been composed in the early nineteenth century.⁶⁸ The Mackenzie manuscripts include English translations of several other texts, the originals of which all seem to be in Tamil. Among these, one manuscript—probably dating from the late eighteenth century—stands out for its detail and length of thirty-one pages,⁶⁹ but a few other works, though much shorter, are also valuable.⁷⁰ Below follows a summary of the first section of the longest text (with the original spelling of names and some terms), titled "General history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum."

As the Ramayan mentions, in former ages Raavan-Eswar abducted Seeta Davee, the consort of Sree Ram, to the island of Lanka. Then Sree Ram gathered an army of monkeys ("vaanarah") and marched to the ocean's shore. There, digging up mountains from the sea, the monkey soldiers erected a bridge, called Satoo. Sree Ram presented the lands near the Satoo to one of the Maravaars residing in the forests. This Maravaar turned out to be a relation of Goohoodoor, an intimate friend of Sree Ram and chief commander of the Gunga River. Delighted, Sree Ram denominated the new king Ragoonad Satooputty and proclaimed that all who came to bath

⁶⁷ Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," 5-20; Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, "From Protector to Litigant—Changing Relations between Hindu Temples and the Rājā of Ramnad," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14, 1 (1977), 76, 81-2, 88-9; S. Thiruvenkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad* (Karaikudi, 1959), 17-20; Sathyanatha Aiyar, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, 89-93; Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India*, 71-2, 83. For the Maravar caste, see for example: Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (Madras, 1909), vol. V, 22-48; Kadhivrel, *A History of the Maravas*, 6-17; Shulman, "On South Indian Bandits and Kings," 287-90; idem, *The King and the Clown*, 349-51, 364-5.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 49-52. Despite its inclusion in Taylor's publication of Tamil texts, this work was originally written in Telugu. See also Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," 1.

⁶⁹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 171-201. As stated on f. 201, the original text was compiled by "Soma-Soondara-Pillai," then "transmitted by Kylasputty from Madura," and in 1805 translated by Kavali Venkata (Borayya?), one of Mackenzie's assistants. Judging from its contents, the text was composed around the late eighteenth century. See also Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 51-2.

⁷⁰ For instance: BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 7: "Memoir of the Satoo-Putty or Ramnad Polligar," ff. 161-3 (likely translated from a Tamil text, see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 51); MM, no. 109, pt. 44: "Historical memoir of the Satoo-Samstaan," ff. 1-4.

in the waters of the Satoo must pay their respects to this king, lest their vows be of no effect. North of the Satoo, Sree Ram built a great city and installed Ragoonaad Satooputty as its ruler.

Now, with his army, Sree Ram crossed the ocean on the back of Hanoomunt to Lanka, extirpated all demons ("raachasas") and their King Raavan-Eswur, and liberated his consort Seeta Davee. Returning from Lanka and shooting his divine bow, he broke the Satoo at three places to prevent the demons from crossing. In compensation for killing Raavan-Eswur, who was a Brama, Sree Ram erected a lingum and a temple for the god Ram-Eswur at one of the Satoo's islands. Before he returned home, Sree Ram instructed Ragoonaad Satooputty to worship the god, govern the kingdom with care, and follow the Pandia king's orders. Ragoonaad Satooputty ruled his jungle kingdom, performing all charities as directed by Sree Ram. He visited the Pandia king and related all the gracious benefits conferred on him by Sree Ram. The Pandia king approved of this and, exempting Ragoonaad Satooputty from tribute, ordered him to cut down the jungle, establish new villages, populate them, and promote their prosperity. Ragoonaad Satooputty followed these instructions and built the town of Ramanaadpoor.

In the time of the third king of this race, Veera Goondoo Satooputty, the Pandia king was attacked by the Chola king. The Satooputty fought against the latter's army and threw it into great confusion. The grateful Pandia king granted him Tondi and two other ports, with the title of "Warden of the Tondi harbour." Later, the Carnatic king attacked and was about to kill the Pandia king. But the Satooputty saved him and defeated the enemy, for which he received some land and the title of "Establisher of the Pandia throne." Later again, the Andhra king invaded the Chola kingdom and its ruler fled to the Pandia king. Together with the latter, the Satooputty drove the Andhra king off and received from the Chola ruler the title of "Establisher of the Chola country." More fights and services followed, leading to titles like "Conqueror of all countries in sight, who never lets go conquered countries."

When Emperor Kistna Rayel was attacked by Muslim rulers ("Paadshahs"), the Pandia king sent Ranaputty Satooputty to assist him. During battle, the Chola king was imprisoned by the enemy, but the Satooputty liberated him and brought him back to Kistna Rayel's camp. As a reward, he received land from the Chola king and the Hanooma and Garooda standards from the emperor. After some time, the Pandia king grew apprehensive of the Satooputties' power and valour. He summoned Jayatoonga Ragoonaad Satooputty to Madura and put him and his pregnant wife in prison, where they died. The Pandia then tried to get possession of the country, but the strong Maravaars, entrenched in the jungle, warded him off. Finally, some agreement on the collection of revenues was reached between the Pandia king and the Maravaar chiefs.

One day, Jayatoonga-Tavadoo, of the race of the imprisoned and deceased Jayatoonga Ragoonaad Satooputty, had a dream in which the god Ramanaad-Swamy told him: "Your ancestors ruled this land and took care of my worship, food, and ceremonies, which have fallen into decline now. You shall have a son, who will obtain power and authority and will rule over the Satoo realm." A son named Vodeyar Tavur was born, who at the age of twelve married a Maravaar virgin and always worshipped Ramanaad-Swamy.

One night, his deity told him in a dream that his ancestors had buried money, which he should take to gather troops and acquire power over his country. Vodeyar dug up the money and sent a message to the Pandia king, saying that after his ancestors were removed from their position, all land revenues were taken by the king's officers, while the land had become desolate. The king replied that, since the officers had been appointed, he had not received revenues and therefore Vodeyar might now rule the country and deliver the money. Vodeyar then dismissed the king's officers, collected all revenues, cut down the jungles, repaired the roads to the Satoo, subdued robbers harassing pilgrims, and renewed the endowments to the god Ramanaad-Swamy. At that time, devotees of the god came from the north and urged the Pandia king to restore the Satoo realm and recognise Vodeyar as its lord. So did the Pandia king, exempting Vodeyar from tribute and presenting him clothes and gifts. The devotees from the north gave him a red umbrella to be preserved forever in their name. He then ruled over the country and was succeeded by his son Cootun.⁷¹

Other texts on the Setupatis' origin offer different versions of the story. "A chronicle of the acts of the Sethupathis" states that for many generations Ramnad had been governed by seven appointed guardians. Finally, their chief—"Sadaika Devaiyer" (Sadaika Tevar) or "Udiyan" ("Vodeyar" in the manuscript quoted above)—went to the Nayaka of Madurai and was appointed as the kingdom's ruler with the consent of the other guardians.⁷² Another work claims that the Setupatis had once ruled for centuries over the Madurai and Tanjavur kingdoms and employed members of the Pandya dynasty as their ministers and generals, before they were treacherously subjugated by Vijayanagara and its Nayaka governors. The dynasty was reinstated only when 12,000 devotees from the north threatened to destroy the entire "Nayaka race" if the Nayaka of Madurai would not release the imprisoned former Setupati, Sadaika.⁷³ Also relevant in this regard are inscriptions issued by the Setupatis that contain long strings of dynastic titles. Several of these include such designations as "chief" or "ornament" of the *sūryavaṃśa* (sun lineage), suggesting that Ramnad's house considered itself part of the Solar line of kings.⁷⁴

⁷¹ BL/AAS, MG, no. 4, pt. 8: "A general history of the kings of Rama Naad or the Satoo-Putty Samastanum," ff. 171-9. For explanations of some of the titles mentioned, see Seshadri, "The Sētopatis of Ramnad," 228-32.

⁷² Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, Appendix, 49.

⁷³ BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 7C: "History of the Satoo-Putty of the Maravun Vumshum," ff. 61-5 (probably translated from a Tamil text, see Cotton, Charpentier, and Johnston, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in European Languages*, vol. I, pt. II, 7-8). See also: William Taylor (ed.), "Marava-Jathi-Vernanam," *Madras Journal of Literature and Science* IV (1836), 351; Wilson, *The Mackenzie Collection*, vol. I, 195.

⁷⁴ Jas. Burgess (ed.) and S.M. Naṭeśa Śāstrī (trans.), *Tamil and Sanskrit Inscriptions with Some Notes on Village Antiquities Collected Chiefly in the South of the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1886), 71, 74, 77, 80, 83, 85, 92, 102.

Additionally, there are stories about the dynasty's foundation that are of unknown provenance but include noteworthy elements.⁷⁵ One tradition has it that the first Setupati, appointed by Rama, was Guha, who originated from the north and, as Rama's boatman, had rowed him across the Ganga River. Perhaps he can be identified with the abovementioned commander of the Ganga, "Goohoodoor." It is also said that the Maravar chief assisting Rama belonged to the Sembinnattu sub-caste, from which the later, historical Setupatis sprang as well. Other stories claim that the dynasty was established by the Cholas or Ceylonese kings, or that the entire Maravar caste came from Ceylon. Yet another tradition holds that at the age of twelve Sadaika Tevar was found sleeping under a tamarind tree, while a cobra spread its hood over him.⁷⁶

Finally, the "History of the Carnataca Governors who ruled over the Pandya Mandalam," a text deriving from Madurai's Nayaka court, contains a section on the foundation of the Setupati dynasty. It relates that in the early seventeenth century, during the reign of Muttu Krishnappa Nayaka, the Ramnad area was in a disorderly state. It paid no revenues and, being covered with forests, teemed with bandits who robbed pilgrims on their way to the Setu and Rameshwaram island. At that time, the chief *guru* (preceptor) of the Nayaka visited these sacred places and was safely escorted back and forth by the village chief of Pogalur, named Uдайyan (Sadaika Tevar). Uдайyan received land, clothes, and ornaments from the grateful Nayaka and returned to Ramnad. There he assembled troops, restored order, and collected revenues for the Nayaka. The latter then instructed Uдайyan to clear the forests, cultivate the newly available lands, and thus increase revenues. When these orders

⁷⁵ For surveys of such traditions, see: K. Seshradri, "The Origin and Restoration of the Setupatis," in Somalaya (ed.), *The Saga of Rameswaram Temple: Kumbabishekam Souvenir* (Rameshwaram, 1975) (?); T. Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual* (Madras, 1889), 196-214; Nelson, *The Madura Country*, vol. III, 109-14; Heras, *The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara*, vol. I, 354-7; T.R. Rangaswami Ayyangar, "The Setupatis of Ramnad," *The Calcutta Review* (New Series) 32 (1920).

⁷⁶ Mahalingam, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*, vol. I, 59; N. Vanamamalai Pillai, *Temples of the Setu and Rameswaram* (Delhi, 1982; first published 1929), 108-9, 114-16; Raja Ram Rao, *Ramnad Manual*, 154, 213; Seshradri, "The Origin and Restoration of the Setupatis," 186f-g; Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India*, 26, 37; Thiruvengkatachari, *The Setupatis of Ramnad*, 17; James Boyle, "Chronicles of Southern India: Part II.—The Marava Country," *Calcutta Review* 59, 117 (1874), 29-31, 37-8; J.L.W., "The Chronicles of the Marava Country in Southern India," *Calcutta Review* 66, 133 (1878), 447-9; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. V, 24-5; Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLV (1916), 105; J.E. Tracy, "On the Coins of the Sethupatis [Sethupati Coins]," *The Madras Journal of Literature and Science* 32 (1889-94); Wilson, *The Mackenzie Collection*, vol. I, 195. See also: Anna Libera Dallapiccola, "Ramayana in Southern Indian Art," 184, 191, plate 6 (between 278-9); BL/AAS, MG, no. 1, pt. 7A: "Account of the Hindoo Rajium. The Raja-Cheritram or history of the ancient Rajahs of the Dutchana-Dickum or southern country of Pandia Mundalum, Colla-Mundalum & Tonda-Mundalum," ff. 52-3.

had been executed, the pleased Nayaka invested Udaian with the title of Setupati, presented him with elephants, horses, banners, and other gifts, and had him sprinkled with Ganga water as he installed him as governor. Udaian then built a mud fort at Ramanathapuram and ruled like a king.⁷⁷

Although less value might be attached to the undocumented traditions and the Madurai text than to works deriving from Ramnad itself, if all sources are considered together, one observes all elements found in the origin stories of the other dynasties. Starting with the ancestry of the founder (Sadaika Tevar or Udaian), this is traced much further back than for most other heirs of Vijayanagara. Already in the mythical era of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic, the first Setupati—either an anonymous member of the Maravar caste or boatman Guha—is installed by Vishnu's incarnation Rama ("Sree Ram") himself. His descendants are great warriors, possessing military skills surpassing those of neighbouring kings and earning them many rewards. Inscriptions further claim that the Setupatis belong to the Solar race. The dynasty falls into a temporary decline only because of treason.

The founder (or rather re-founder) Sadaika is also noted for his prowess as he subdues robbers, restores order, and protects the *guru* of Madurai's Nayaka. Ramnad's origin stories forge links with several earlier dynasties. Foremost are the so-called Pandyas of Madurai, a term initially referring to the actual Pandya house and later denoting the Madurai Nayakas. Both dynasties acknowledge the Setupatis as the rulers of Ramnad. Their power is also said to be recognised by the Cholas of Tanjavur and Krishna Raya of Vijayanagara's Tuluva house.

The Setupatis enjoy various religious credentials. To begin with, the foundation of their dynasty is interwoven with the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode of Rama's invasion of Lanka, by way of the Setu ("Satoo") bridge built by the Monkey-King Hanuman ("Hanoomunt"), to rescue his abducted wife Sita ("Seeta Davee") from the hands of Ravana ("Raavan-Eswar"), king of the demons. Further, the god Ramanathasvami ("Ram-Eswur" or "Ramanaad-Swamy," a form of Shiva), revered by Rama after his return from Lanka, appears in dreams of both Sadaika and his father and asks them to resume worshipping him. In fact, the guardianship of Ramanathasvami's sanctuaries is declared the Setupatis' *raison d'être*. A connection is also sought with the sacred Ganga River through the first Setupati, said to be either the oarsman Guha—a *Rāmāyaṇa* figure who rows Rama across the river—or a Maravar chief related to "Goohoodoor," chief commander of the Ganga.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *Oriental Historical Manuscripts*, vol. II, 27-9. A largely similar account is found in BL/AAS, MT, class III, no. 25: "History of the former Gentoo Rajahs who ruled over the Pandyan Mandalom," ff. 28v-9v. See also Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura," *Indian Antiquary* XLV, 105-6. For a discussion of this passage, see Dirks, *The Hollow Crown*, 105-6.

As for natural wonders, although its source is obscure, one tradition has it that Sadaika Tevar is sheltered by a snake, indicating his exceptional future, similar to the founders of Ikkeri's and Tanjavur's Nayaka houses. No miracle has to demonstrate Ramnad's special location, claimed as it is to have been the dynasty's kingdom since the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Like most dynastic founders, Sadaika acquires a treasure that helps him increase his power. The motif of migration is less obvious as most texts say the Setupati house and its Maravar caste have local origins. Yet, a connection with the far north is established through the first Setupati who comes from the Ganga region himself or has a relative living there. Besides, the stories mention journeys of Sadaika and earlier Setupatis to the Nayaka and Pandya courts at Madurai, but as with Ikkeri, these are temporary and brief sojourns. In the end, the dynasty is founded at the place the founder comes from.

Land development figures prominently in Ramnad's origin stories. From the very start, the Setupatis are said to dwell in forests and to be instructed by their overlords to cultivate these lands. Thus, safety, population, and revenues are to be increased. Besides, Ramnad's territory is clearly marked, both by the construction of towns, forts, and roads, and by the lands and ports received from the Pandyas and the Cholas, whose locations are specifically mentioned.

Symbols of royalty frequently appear: the dynasty acquires titles from the Pandya and Chola kings, the standards of Hanuman and Garuda from Vijayanagara, and animals, clothes, banners, and other gifts from the Nayakas of Madurai. Finally, the hereditary continuation of the dynasty is emphasised, but this concerns Sadaika's predecessors rather than his successors—although he is also said to marry a Maravar virgin at the age of twelve. Most stories relate how Sadaika descends from the old, temporarily removed Setupati line. His birth and the re-establishment of the Ramnad realm are foretold in a dream of his father, himself “born in the race” of the previous Setupatis.

Conclusions

The previous sections have considered the origin myths of Vijayanagara and its heirs one by one and explained how certain motifs manifest themselves in all or most of these stories. The multitude of rulers, families, deities, animals, and other actors in the texts can all be linked to the elements that together form the myths, and so the stories of the various dynasties can be related to one another. This concluding section first considers how each of the motifs varies among the foundation stories and then compares the origin myths of the different royal houses as a whole.

With regard to the founders' ancestry, all dynasties refer to forefathers who had some form of politico-military power. Whether the family is traced back to a mythical age or just a few generations, every founder is said to descend from warriors, chiefs, kings, or at least a village headman. Fully-fledged royal ancestors, however, are claimed only by Vijayanagara's Saluvas and Aravidus (the Chalukyas of Kalyana), Tanjavur's Bhonsles, and Ramnad's Setupatis. The latter two families in fact maintain they are not new dynasties but continuations of ancient royal houses. In contrast, the Nayakas of Ikkeri, Tanjavur, and Madurai, all direct heirs of Vijayanagara, do not mention royal forefathers.

A comparable division is found for celestial descent, which is explicitly claimed by the imperial dynasties (the Lunar line), Ramnad's Setupatis (the Solar line), and Tanjavur's Bhonsles (mentioning both lines). Less unequivocally, only a few sources declare Madurai's and Ikkeri's Nayakas to have sprung from Minakshi and a form of Shiva, respectively. Caste does not appear to play a substantial role in the foundation myths, except in those of Ramnad, where the Maravar identity is brought up regularly. In sum, in all origin stories the founders share a martial background, but divine or royal ancestry is generally not referred to by Vijayanagara's direct, Nayaka heirs. In particular, the Telugu Nayakas in the Tamil region, appointed as non-local governors by the imperial rulers, usually trace their lineages to modest origins.

As for the physical skills of the founders themselves, all of them are portrayed as exceptional warriors. They conquer lands, perform martial feats, subdue enemies and rebels, and restore order, all in the service of their overlords, to whom they display great loyalty. These events usually mark the points in the stories where the founders in return acquire land, titles, honours, gifts, and the like. While some dynasties seem to stress the motif of the founders' prowess more than others, by and large the origin myths do not differ much in this respect.

All dynasties forge ties with other royal houses. Such links can be divided into two types, the first of which concerns bonds with the overlords whom the dynasties' founders initially serve and by whom they are sometimes actually installed or recognised. Thus, in their origin stories, Vijayanagara's houses refer to the sultan of Delhi (and the later imperial families also to the Sangamas), the Nayaka dynasties to Vijayanagara's Tuluvas, Tanjavur's Bhonsles to the sultan of Bijapur, and Ramnad's Setupatis to Madurai's Nayakas. A difference between the Nayakas of Ikkeri and those of Tanjavur and Madurai is that the former also mention Vijayanagara's Aravidus while the latter two do not, suggesting they did not wish to associate themselves with the last imperial family.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ See also Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, for instance 30-3.

The second kind of dynastic ties are those that are established with earlier royal houses that did not in fact install the dynasties' founders but were based in (more or less) the same area. Vijayanagara's dynasties look back to Kampili, the Chalukyas, the Hoysalas, or the Kakatiyas. While Ikkeri's Nayakas perhaps construct a link with the Hoysalas, Tanjavur's Bhonsles clearly refer to Tanjavur's Nayakas, and both Madurai's Nayakas and Ramnad's Setupatis to the Pandyas. The origin stories of Tanjavur's Nayakas seemingly do not mention an earlier local dynasty, but it has been suggested they saw themselves as heirs of the Cholas.⁷⁹ Overall, it appears that all dynasties seek to derive legitimacy from both their formal overlords—who can be seated in different regions—and more local predecessors who have become extinct.⁸⁰

The element of religious recognition is found with every dynasty. All origin stories link the royal houses to deities, temples, or spiritual men. Nearly every founder (or sometimes their father) experiences dreams in which gods or goddesses foretell the dynasty's foundation, reveal a hidden treasure, or give orders to assemble troops or build temples. The deities who appear in these dreams or are otherwise connected to dynasties, for instance through temple worship or ancestry, often represent forms of Shiva. Shiva's *lingam* (phallic symbol) also figures regularly in the texts. In fact, in all but one case, the royal houses are associated with this pan-Indian god. His counterpart Vishnu is present in the stories of only the Nayakas of Tanjavur and—together with Shiva—the Saluvas of Vijayanagara and the Setupatis of Ramnad.⁸¹ In all foundation stories, these great gods manifest themselves as local deities, connected to particular temples or sites.⁸² This seems to be another way for royal houses to establish links with the area they rule over, in addition to ties with previous local dynasties.

⁷⁹ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 42. See also Vriddhagirisani, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 126.

⁸⁰ See also Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, particularly sections II–III.

⁸¹ For the dynasties' religious affiliations, see also for example: Verghese, "Deities, Cults and Kings at Vijayanagara," 422; Ajay K. Rao, "A New Perspective on the Royal Rāma Cult at Vijayanagara," in Yigal Bronner, Whitney Cox, and Lawrence J. McCrea (eds), *South Asian Texts in History: Critical Engagements with Sheldon Pollock* (Ann Arbor, 2011); Chitnis, *Keladi Polity*, 53; Vriddhagirisani, *The Nayaks of Tanjore*, 124; Seshadri, "The Setupatis of Ramnad," 82, 201, 203.

⁸² In the various origin stories, Shiva manifests himself as: Virupaksha and a *lingam* at Vijayanagara (Sangamas); Rameshvar and a *lingam* at Keladi (Ikkeri's Nayakas); Vaidyanathasvami at Tirumalavadi (Tanjavur's Bhonsles); Vishvanatha and a *lingam* at Benares and Minakshi at Madurai (Madurai's Nayakas); and Ramanathasvami and a *lingam* at Rameshvaram (Ramnad's Setupatis). Vishnu appears as: Narasimha (Vijayanagara's Saluvas); Mannaru at Mannargudi (Tanjavur's Nayakas); and Rama (Ramnad's Setupatis).

Finally, Islam, although an influential political and cultural factor in south India from the fourteenth century onward (see Chapter 5), is virtually absent in the texts as a legitimising force in a religious sense. The sole exception concerns one of the origin myths of Tanjavur's Bhonsles, which has the founder's grandfather seeking support and recognition from a Muslim shrine. Among Vijayanagara and its heirs, this seems an isolated case. The inclusion of this event in the Bhonsles' foundation story may well be related to the family's past as military commanders under the Deccan sultanates.

Natural miracles appear in the origin stories of most dynasties: Vijayanagara's Sangamas, Ikkeri's Nayakas, Tanjavur's Nayakas, Ramnad's Setupatis, and to some extent Madurai's Nayakas (as well as Ariyalur's rulers). The foundations of most of these houses coincide with the foundations of new kingdoms. The miracles signify the sites where capitals are to be built or the special status of the future founders. Vijayanagara's later dynasties and the houses of Tanjavur and Madurai are all founded in kingdoms that already exist and no miracle is needed to indicate the significance of these places.

It has been argued that natural miracles are of two kinds: those suspending the predatory order and those reversing it. The first sort is thought to denote spots with spiritual power, while the second type would refer to sites with worldly power.⁸³ To some extent, this model is applicable to the foundation myths analysed here. The three cases of snakes spreading their hoods over sleeping men—suspending the order—signify the exceptional talents of Chaudappa Nayaka of Ikkeri, Shevappa Nayaka of Tanjavur, and Sadaika Tevar of Ramnad. They are destined to found kingdoms or at least dynasties, which requires not only worldly (politico-military) skills but also spiritual qualities, such as pleasing deities, understanding omens, and endowing temples. The instances of hares (or lizards) turning against hunting dogs—reversing the order—indicate suitable places to establish capitals. Here, worldly factors seem more important than spiritual ones. Although the site of the Vijayanagara capital had strong religious connotations, its strategic position, both militarily and commercially, must have been decisive in its selection. Likewise, Keladi was replaced with Ikkeri as capital soon after the Nayaka dynasty's foundation, which was probably also determined by worldly rather than spiritual issues.

Some scholars have suggested that the myth of the hare and hounds symbolises the challenge and overthrow of the existing political order by a growing regional power, associated with a specific heroic location. The miracle would thus refer to the assertion of independence and the establishment of a new political landscape. Such an explanation certainly fits the foundation of Vijayanagara. Besides, in

⁸³ Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 44-5.

this view the myth could recur among smaller principalities emerging under the empire's control, signifying a degree of autonomy granted by the imperial court. This model applies well to the Nayakas' move from Keladi to Ikkeri, representing the set-up of a new, royal centre that nevertheless was still loyal to the empire.⁸⁴

It has been proposed that the tale of prey attacking a predator was part of the wide range of politico-cultural influences the Islamic world had on south India from the fourteenth century onward.⁸⁵ Local use of this story may seem older, however, as it figures, among many other instances, in the origin myths of Kampili and the Hoysalas. The latter's first capital was even called "City of the Hare," after a hare chasing a tiger.⁸⁶ But it is of course also possible that these references were introduced after the period they describe. In any case, the repetition of this tale could concern another effort by the rulers of Vijayanagara and Ikkeri to link themselves with the Hoysalas.

All but one foundation myth include the acquisition of wealth in some form. Several stories refer to the unearthing of a hidden treasure (Ikkeri, Ramnad), while other texts mention a heavenly shower of gold (Vijayanagara) or fortunes donated by the founder's father (Madurai). Nayaka Tanjavur is an exception, which could be related to the kingdom's fertile and densely populated territory, providing sufficient riches on its own. The role of wealth in the origin story of Tanjavur's Bhonsles, enjoying the same fruitful lands, is ambiguous. They obtain part of the former Nayaka treasure, but this may be an indemnification for their military expenses rather than capital to establish their rule. All other dynasties are specifically said to use the acquired money to strengthen their power, gather supporters, and make the kingdom prosper.

Migration occurs in almost all foundation stories. Ikkeri's Nayakas are the sole dynasty presented to be entirely of local origin. But Ramnad's Setupatis—even though some of their myths connect the primordial Setupati installed by Rama with the Ganga River—are also largely portrayed as having a local background. The texts of the Ikkeri and Ramnad houses just refer to a kind of "roundtrip," from

⁸⁴ Suchitra Balasubrahmanyam, *The Myth of the Hare and Hounds: Making Sense of a Recurring City-Foundation Story* (New Delhi, 2014), 5-6, 10-14, 18-23, 31-4; Sohoni, "The Hunt for a Location," 219-20. For yet another interpretation, see Jackson, *Vijayanagara Voices*, 12, 48.

⁸⁵ Sohoni, "The Hunt for a Location," passim, especially 219-20.

⁸⁶ Venkata Ramanayya, *Kampili and Vijayanagara*, 6-7; Balasubrahmanyam, *The Myth of the Hare and Hounds*, 4-9, 14-31; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 44-5, 176 (n. 38); Heras, *Beginnings of Vijayanagara History*, 9. This theme is also found in the foundation myth of the Bahmani sultanate. For another example of a future chief being protected by a snake, see Eaton and Wagoner, *Power, Memory, Architecture*, 166-7.

the family's native area to the overlord's court and back, instead of a permanent change of residence.⁸⁷ The myths of all other successor dynasties clearly speak of migration in some form. That is not surprising in the case of the Nayakas and the Bhonsles in the Tamil zone, of course, since they originated from other linguistic areas.

The origins of Vijayanagara's founders remain unclear, but they could have come from another region as well. At any rate, the standard myth relates that the Sangama brothers travel from Kampili to faraway Delhi and back before they set up their realm, while the sage Vidyaranya goes on a pilgrimage to equally distant Benares. The Saluva and Aravidu houses refer to Kalyana as their family's origin. Thus, migration, or at least a roundtrip, is an important element in Vijayanagara's foundation stories too. What nearly all dynastic movements—including that of Ariyalur—have in common is a southward direction. The foundation myths thereby reflect the general trend in late medieval and early modern south India of people (*nāyakas*, *vaḍugas*, Marathas) moving south in search of political and economic opportunities.

As with the acquisition of wealth, Tanjavur—both under the Nayakas and Bhonsles—is the only kingdom where land development is absent in foundation stories. This probably stems from the fact that its territory had already been brought under cultivation. Texts of all other dynasties refer to jungles that must be removed to populate the country, bring safety, and increase revenues. The lands thus obtained are usually marked with capitals, forts, villages, temples, and irrigation works. Territorial additions, such as land grants from overlords and conquests from enemies or rebels, are often specified in detail in the stories. All in all, the texts generally emphasise the acquisition of land, its geographic location, and its strategic and economic value.

Symbols of royalty are included in the origin myths of only some dynasties. Among them, the houses of Ikkeri and Ramnad (and Ariyalur) are most specific, referring in detail to titles, emblems, honours, and gifts received from their overlords. The other successor dynasties are usually less precise. Madurai's Nayakas list the Pandya regalia separately but describe the symbols granted by Vijayanagara in general terms. Tanjavur's Bhonsles mention clothes sent by the sultan of Bijapur, and robes and ornaments received from Chengamaladasa of the Tanjavur Nayakas, but do not give details. Tanjavur's Nayakas themselves, as well as Vijayanagara's dynasties, do not state anything in this regard.

⁸⁷ For the notion of a "roundtrip" between birthplace and royal city, see Ota, "Bēḍa Nāyakas and Their Historical Narratives," 174-6.

The general trend appears to be that dynasties of a local origin that are incorporated into their overlord's realm receive many royal symbols or at least attach much value to detailing them in their texts. For dynasties whose founders originate from the imperial court and are appointed as non-local governors (the Nayakas in the Tamil region), this seems unnecessary, or even inappropriate, because of their more direct bond with Vijayanagara. Tanjavur's Bhonsles obtain their kingdom through conquest, then sever their ties with Bijapur, and therefore have no overlord to receive symbols from. Vijayanagara's actual origins being obscure, little can be said about its founders in this respect. The Sangamas resemble both the Nayakas of Tanjavur and Madurai—in that they are appointed by Delhi and thus initially have close, hierarchical links with their overlord—and the Bhonsles, in that relations with Delhi have ended by the time the empire is founded and there is no overlord anymore to recognise them. Either way, the acquisition of symbols of royalty would seem less likely.

Finally, most origin stories emphasise the continuous, hereditary character of dynasties once they are established. Some royal houses are founded by several close relatives rather than one individual. Five sons of Sangama are involved in establishing Vijayanagara and its first ruler, Harihara, is succeeded by his brother Bukka (as happens in Ariyalur). The foundation of Madurai's Nayaka dynasty is the result of a complex interaction between father and son, Nagama and Vishvanatha. The same applies to Ikkeri, where Chaudappa's political activities—mostly undertaken with his brother Bhadrappa—are expanded by his son Sadashiva, fully securing the family's regal status.

Another effort to underline dynastic heredity concerns the stress Tanjavur's Bhonsles and Ramnad's Setupatis put on the great antiquity of their dynasties, to which they are rightful heirs. Further, Tanjavur's Nayakas mention that the founder Shevappa installs his son Achyutappa as crown prince and administrator while he is still in power. All these references to the continuation of family rule seem to express the desire of later rulers to emphasise their descent from the glorious founders and justify their position on the throne.

Having considered how the various elements manifest themselves in the dynasties' foundation stories, several patterns can be noticed. Some motifs are largely similar for each royal house: descent from warriors, the founder's own martial skills, links with overlords and preceding regional houses, ties with local deities connected to pan-Indian gods, and dynastic continuity. Thus, for these motifs, the myths of the heirs resemble those of the imperial houses, and these elements were apparently indispensable in the foundation stories of all dynasties.

Other elements occur in the texts in varying ways. All imperial families trace their forefathers to mythical times and the Moon, whereas their direct Nayaka heirs in Tanjavur and Madurai do not go further back than a few generations and mostly hint at a modest background. The indirect successors—and to a lesser extent Ikkeri's Nayakas—claim high antiquity or divine ancestry again. This pattern largely corresponds with the different stages of state formation: first the imperial houses, next the direct successors appointed by the imperial court in outlying provinces (the Nayakas in the Tamil zone), and finally locally installed heirs (Ikkeri's Nayakas) and indirect successors (the Bhonsles and the Setupatis) that seceded from or replaced the direct heirs.

Some motifs point to other divisions between the dynasties. Different sorts of natural miracles are necessary for new dynasties, for allegedly re-established houses, and for whole new states. Further, migration is largely missing in the myths of houses of local origin, which instead pay more attention to symbols of royalty than other dynasties. All these elements seem related to the question of whether dynastic founders originated from the Vijayanagara court or came from another background. Both the acquisition of wealth and the clearance of jungles are more or less absent from the foundation stories of Tanjavur's two dynasties, probably because of this country's exceptional geography and demography.

In short, some of the myths' motifs reflect general prerequisites for the foundation of a royal house, while other elements represent variations among the dynasties and their kingdoms. Because of this diversity, the foundation stories of the successor states differ from those of Vijayanagara and from each other. Therefore, these origin myths, including their "mythical" aspects, provide a fairly accurate picture of the actual background of each dynastic founder and the specific nature of his realm.⁸⁸

Thus, the composers of the foundation stories of Vijayanagara's heirs seem to have followed traditions deriving from the empire—and perhaps from earlier polities—but chose from these traditions those elements, interpretations, and details that suited them best. The predatory hares of Vijayanagara's Sangamas and the Hoysalas may have been an inspiration for Ikkeri's Nayakas (and, in the shape of a lizard, for Ariyalur's chiefs) but were apparently of no use to the Nayakas of Tanjavur and Madurai. Likewise, the shower of gold falling on the sage Vidyaranya reappeared as the treasures found by Ikkeri's Chaudappa and Ramnad's Sadaika and the money offered to Madurai's Vishvanatha by his father, but was seemingly not deemed essential for Tanjavur's Shevappa and Ekoji.

⁸⁸ See also Ota, "Bēḍa Nāyakas and Their Historical Narratives," 187.

As explained in the Introduction, it has been argued that the main Nayaka dynasties in the Tamil region—Madurai, Tanjavur, and Senji—depended on five factors for the formation of their states: portable wealth, mobility, a territorial base, personal loyalty to a higher authority, and deities. At the same time, Brahmins, as ministers or priests, and exalted pedigrees are said to have been no longer necessary to create a kingdom, unlike before.⁸⁹

Most of these factors can be linked to motifs in the origin stories of the Vijayanagara successor states. But looking at the heirs' individual foundation myths, one does not see those first five factors at work for every dynasty. Mobility did not play a substantial role in the origins of the Ikkeri and Ramnad houses. Portable wealth, as in moveable treasures, appears to be largely missing from the foundation stories of Tanjavur's Nayaka and Bhonsle dynasties, for whom land-based revenues rather than movable treasures seem to have been important. However, a territorial base, personal ties with higher authorities, and deities were evidently considered vital elements in the foundations of all royal houses, including the imperial families.⁹⁰

Turning to the factors the Nayaka founders in the Tamil area are thought to have dispensed with—Brahmins and proper ancestry—these elements are certainly lacking in the origin stories of Ikkeri's Nayakas. However, at least some of the myths of Tanjavur's Nayakas do actually refer to the crucial role of the Brahmin Govinda Dikshita. Further, while Brahmins are largely absent from the foundation myths of Tanjavur's Bhonsles and Ramnad's Setupatis, those dynasties do claim to be of exalted descent.⁹¹ Thus, based on the foundation myths discussed here, it can be concluded that the abovementioned basic elements of Nayaka statehood in the Tamil region are not entirely applicable to all Vijayanagara's heirs. Rather, all dynasties dealt with their own set of conditions, which affected the founding of their kingdoms and transpired in the varying origin stories.

The next chapter traces the fortunes of the dynasties after they were established, discussing all rulers who succeeded the dynastic founders.

⁸⁹ Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance*, 53-6. See also Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 225-8.

⁹⁰ See also Wagoner, "Harihara, Bukka, and the Sultan," 314.

⁹¹ See also Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, "Ideologies of State Building," 228.

