

## **U3a Archaeology – Hampi – Vijayanagara Empire in South India**

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### **A. Intro / Background**

**[001]** [Black and White picture of the Chariot]

**[002]** It gives me great pleasure, once again, to talk about a city in South India. It is Hampi, capital of Vijayanagara Empire. Vijay means victory and Nagara means city.

It has been an UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986. I would like to give you an idea of as many key points of interest as possible within the time we have got.

The ruins were discovered in the 1800s by an engineer and antiquarian named Colonel Colin Mackenzie, an employee of East India Company. He prepared the first survey map of the site. His initial information was based on the memories of priests of one of the temples (Virupaksha temple).

**[003]** This Google map shows its location. As some of you already know, Bengaluru (Bangalore) is my home town. In Jan 2010, nearly ten years ago, we visited a friend in Hubli and took a day trip by private taxi from there to Hampi.

**[004]** It was a hair rising journey with loads of truckers on the road. It was not a dual carriage way. Truckers were not in favour of a railway line as they fear they would lose their jobs. This was a picture taken from our taxi.

**[005, 006]** These are the items I hope to cover in the next hour.

**[007]** The sources are my personal photographs supplemented with Google and Microsoft satellite views of the sites. There are a number of guide books and plenty of information on the internet.

**[008]** The Vijayanagar empire was founded in AD 1336. This chart shows the four dynasties. The most famous amongst the rulers is Krishnadevaraya. He was a scholar, poet, warrior and a statesman. He embraced all religions, and he traded with the Portuguese and Arabs - particularly for their horses.

Their supremacy ended after 230 years of rule at the Battle of Talikota, a place about 110 miles north of Hampi, on 26 Jan 1565. The Deccan sultanates attacked them. Two of the Muslim chiefs on Vijayanagara side switched sides. Hampi was looted and destroyed over a period of five months. The Mughal ruler of India at that time was Akbar.

Much of what you see today is around 500 to 600 years old. An odd item within a building may be from the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

**[009]** By sheer luck, the day of our visit, 26 Jan 2010, coincided with their preparations for a grand 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations there the following day.

So, you will see some extra decorations in brilliant colours and patterns on the floors at some of the venues. This particular one was like a studio setting for a Bollywood film.

**[010]** This Google map shows the terrain, location of some key sites and the river called *Tungabhadra*.

- Two big temples in this zone (Virupaksha and Krishna Temples)
- Two enclosures connected with the Royal family and the government (Zenana and Royal Enclosure)
- Another major temple in this area (Vitthala Temple with the famous chariot)

**[011]** Hampi is surrounded by hills. Granite, the basic building block for major structures, was available in plenty. They also used burnt bricks and lime mortar. The roofs have been made with granite slabs covered with waterproof brick jelly and lime mortar.

In the non-religious buildings, they seem to have adopted Indo-Islamic architecture. Examples: Queen's Bath and Elephants stable.

## **B. Ganesha Temples**

**[012]** On the hill where we were standing, there are a number of small temples. Several of the old temples have not been in use for many years as places of worship.

There is a superstition that if the main idol is damaged, it is a bad omen, and they cease to use it.

Next to this temple with relatively simple pillars, is a Ganesha temple (God with an elephant's head).

**[013]** Very ornate slender pillars.

**[014]** The idol is called Kadalekalu (gram seed) Ganesha. It is a seated figure, 4.5m high.

**[015]** In another small temple dedicated to the same God, the statue of Ganesha is smaller - just 2.4m high ... and it is called Sasivakalu (mustard seed) Ganesha.

This building is open all round, with plain relatively rough pillars.

### **C. Virupaksha or Pampapati (Parvathi) temple**

**[016]** Let us now move on to the first of the bigger temples – called Virupaksha Temple. It is dedicated to Parvati, consort of Shiva. The main idol is a Lingam (phallic symbol). Their wedding is celebrated annually with fanfare in Hampi. Certain parts of it have been in use since 7<sup>th</sup> century.

You can see the lay out here [Z]... A processional route, filled with bazars.

Rectangular complex divided into two large courts – outer court and inner court.

There is a little tower at the gateway to the inner court. The sanctum sanctorum is in the inner court.

But we did not go into the sanctum sanctorum which houses the Lingam. In some Hindu temples, they are very strict and allow only Hindus in that section.

Photography in that area is also often prohibited.

**[017]** This is the bazar area. This gentleman was our guide.

Considered to be the most sacred of the Hampi temples, and it is still in use as a place of worship.

**[018]** 52m high nine storey tower (Gopuram).

Two tiered stone base and brick superstructure.

**[019a]** View of the tower from the other side.

**[019b]** First courtyard – 78m x 51m. Several small shrines and mandapas (halls).

Colour decorations on the floor in preparation for the celebration.

In the middle – there is a lamp post and *Balipitas* (sacred sacrificial platforms).

**[020]** There is a real live elephant to greet you. For a small donation, you can get a blessing from it. That's my wife Josefina there.

**[021a]** Statue of a triple-headed Nandi (bull).

**[021b]** Another Nandi, just the normal single headed one.

**[022, 023]** A smaller three-storeyed tower leading to the inner courtyard.

You can see a variety of architectural styles used in the pillars in the next few slides.

**[024]** Some of the pillars – just simple square shaped with carvings.

**[025]** Further on, a round fluted and tapered addition to the squares.

[On the right] **[026]** Heavily patterned squares by the steps.

Further down **[027]**, a combination of square and fluted round pillars – either single round and two round columns in each. The details of the capitals are different in each of these two types.

**[028]** Then, we come on to the *Rangamandapa* – highly ornate. Composite pillars,

**[029]** 16 pillars of the central rectangle have rampant yalis (mythical creature – part lion, part horse, and sometimes part elephant as you will see later) with holes for chains to restrain them.

**[030]** Another special huge temporary decoration on the floor on this *Rangamandapa*. The ceilings have paintings in Vijayanagara style.

**[031]** In one row, there are the ten 'avatar' (forms) of Lord Krishna.

In one of the panels below that Arjuna is shooting a fish to win the hands of Draupati in a competition. You may recall ...in my last month's presentation on Mahabalipuram I mentioned how he ended up sharing her with his four brothers.

The story is in one of the two great Indian epics, Mahabharata. (The other epic is Ramayana). The challenge is to shoot a model fish that is circulating high up around a pillar by looking only at its reflection in the water below. His head should really be pointing down. I suppose it is an artistic license in this case. In the next scene, he is being married to the lady.

**[032]** There were a great variety of pillars.

**[033]** A combination of two circular fluted pillars with a square

**[034]** A combination of three circular pillars with a square one.

**[035]** The little tower looks golden in the sunshine as we make our way out of the temple.

**[036]** Abandoned cattle roam about freely.

**[037]** View of the long colonnaded bazar area. It is full of shops up to a point. It had double storeyed colonnaded structures. It is in ruins today. It is 10.6 m wide and 732m long.

**[038]** Over the years, people have been converting them into shops and homes.

**[039]** The authorities are gradually closing them down, and blocking them.

**[040]** This area has been substantially blocked.

#### **D. Krishna Temple**

**[041]** We move on to the second main temple. This is dedicated to Lord Krishna. It was built in the typical Vijayanagara style to celebrate the King Krishnadevaraya's victory over the eastern region (modern Orissa).

**Balakrishna** was the main deity – it means the young Krishna. It is now in a museum in Chennai.

**[042, 043]** 500m long bazar

**[044]** The gopuram at the entrance – you can see a typical method of construction. Brick and mortar.

**[045]** The other side of the gopuram is in a better state. The figures cover a variety of themes – some religious, some war scenes, warriors with shields, spirited horses and elephants – perhaps a war scene, and the odd one on sex (on the top left hand side).

**[046]** One of the pillars is carved with all the ten 'avatars' (forms) of Vishnu. Kalki is the one with the horse's head.

**[047]** This is a beautiful one in an elegant posture at the base of the pillar

**[048]** The main shrine. It looks very inviting.

**[049]** ... Zoom ... That mythical creature – a combination of lion, horse and an elephant by the steps

**[050]** Some pillars painted in red and white stripe fashion. They are holy colours, and you may have seen vertical red and white stripes on the walls of many temples.

You can see the ceilings as well in this picture.

**[051]** By now, you will be familiar with the types of pillars – the square ones, ones with a square and single round column or ones with a square and two round columns.

Lots of figures carved on the pillars.

**[052]** Interesting capital on this pillar.

**[053]** The towers are in a better state. The pillars are more basic, and this space is usually for communal gatherings as opposed to prayers.

**[054]** Some inscriptions in Kannada language – one of the Dravidian languages.

**[055]** On the tower, you can see 'Balakrishna' – the young Krishna between two figures of a mythical creature – half-snake and half human. The young Krishna resembles the statue that used to be in the sanctum sanctorum.

**[056]** Part of the outer wall of the temple.

### **E. Miscellaneous - Lakshmi-Narasimha statue, , Lingam and Two sisters**

Near the Krishna temple, there are two interesting small shrines.

[057] The first one is for God **Narasimha** in a seated position. It is a massive granite monolith, 6.7m high.

Only parts of the four arms remain now. Originally, there was a figure of goddess Lakshmi on his left thigh but only one of her hands remains now.

[058] The second shrine is dedicated to **Shiva** with a statue of Linga, the phallic symbol. The linga is 3m high, and part of it is permanently under water.

[059] Along one of the roads, you see this formation of the rocks. It is called **Two sisters (Akka Thangi Stones)**. Legend has it that the two sisters were turned into stone for ridiculing Hampi. So, beware of what you say after this presentation.

Next, we can have a change of theme from temples to other civil/royal structures. We can take a look at the first of two enclosures – the Royal Enclosure.

### **F. Royal Enclosure**

[060] It occupies an area of about 15 acres. I will cover just a few selected items such as the public bath, stepped tank, an entertainment or performance area and aqueducts.

[061] By the entrance to the enclosure, there is a pair of massive **stone doors** on display. The way they have displayed it is interesting as you can see the front of one and the back of the other. They look like wooden doors, with lotus buds and bevelled cross bars. You probably needed an elephant to open or close them.

[062, 063] Big stone walls. Built with interlocking pieces.

[064] As you enter, you see this impressive three storeyed stone platform, 8m high. It is called *Mahanavami Dibba*.

One can go up that to get an overall view of the site. Incidentally, these plastic bags contain the colouring material they use for decorations on the floor that we saw in the main Virupaksha temple. The volunteers to decorate – the ladies with white caps - are probably waiting for the rest of their team to arrive to start work here.

**[065]** From the top of the platform, you can get a bird's eye view of the site. Water was brought into the area through a main aqueduct and fed 23 tanks.

**[066 to 070]** Lots of tanks for various utilities.

**[071]** This was the most ornamental tank - stepped bath made of black schist stones. You can see the aqueduct.

**[072]** One can also see the signatures of the workers on the slabs. This tank was discovered in the 1980s.

**[073]** Let us take a closer look at this **Mahanavami Dibba**. It is one of the most important ceremonial structures made of granite and enclosed in sculptured schist stone. **[Z]** Some big animal carvings by the steps.

**[074] [Z]** Row by Row

Some elephants / ... / Some wrestling .... Women attacking a wild elephant / A lady shooting an arrow at a lion /

**[075] [Z]** Row by Row ... 5 rows of carving at the base level.

Foot soldiers attacking

Hunting on foot.

The horses, camels and elephants.

**[076]** Details - again from the bottom layer – people on foot, then on horses, camels and elephants.

**[077]** I think this is beautiful ... someone helping to remove a thorn from a lady's foot. You can get an idea of the size of the slabs from this hand.

**[078]** Different types of stones in another part of the stage. The texture of the stone is finer.

**[079]** We then move on to the **Royal Baths** which is secluded from the main area. There is a theory that it may have been used for Water sports. You can see that there are not many windows at lower level and the enclosure is plain from outside.



**[080, 081, 082]** But it is highly decorative inside. Bath measures 15m square by 1.8 m deep. Beautiful projecting balconies.

**[083]** Bright corridors.

**[084]** Decorative ceilings – this is just one of many different types.

We move on to the next area ...

### **G. Zenana Enclosure**

**[085a]** Google satellite view of it ..

It is a walled area. Some believe that a major part of it was reserved for Royal women or a harem, with eunuchs guarding it.

We will look at the Watch Towers, Lotus Mahal, the Treasury, Queen's Palace and an Elephants' Stable.

**[085b]** You can see the type of wall here – interlocking stones.

**[086] Lotus Mahal.** The upper storey has balconies with windows that have recessed and foliated arches. At the top, there are nine pyramidal domes. Originally, they were decorated, painted and covered with lime-plaster work.

**[087]** A blend of Islamic and Indian architecture. Used to have a large amount of lime plaster and stucco ornamentation along the exterior. One of the kings, Rama Raya, may have spent time here with specialists in literature, music and art.

**[088]** Arches using 24 square pillars.

**[090]** Very plain inside except near the corners.

**[091, 092]** There are **Three Watch Towers** – in three corners, built in Indo-Islamic style. Made up of two stories. I have pictures of two of them here. You will see the third one shortly by the Queen's palace. They were also good viewing areas for ladies to see the processions or see what's going on outside.

**[093]** As regards the next building, there are doubts as to its true purpose. Some believe that the absence of windows suggest that it was **The Treasury. Others**

**think that it was the Guards quarters, Concert Hall or a building for martial training purposes.** A corridor runs all along with the arches at regular intervals.

**[094]** It is in Indo-Islamic style, with a high verandha in front, high arches. We did not go inside it but we gathered that there is an open courtyard surrounded by a closed pillared corridor.

**[095]** This was part of the **Queen's Palace**. It is the largest Queen's palace excavated so far. It is 46 x 29 m. The deep rectangular tank beside it is to supply water to the palace.

**[096]** There is a 12m high Watch Tower strategically located by the Queen's Palace. The base of of the Palace has three tiers, with stone carvings. The super structure was probably made of wood or other not so durable a material.

**[097]** Some details ... **[Z]** ...elephants and swans in this second layer...

**[098]** This is called **Elephant Stables** – It is a long, lofty building.

There are 11 large chambers with arched entrances. On either side of the central chamber, there are different types of domes – circular, ribbed ones, and vaulted octagonal with ribbed *sikharas*.

**[Z]** Central chamber has a square, turret-like superstructure over a flat ceiling, with slender columns.

**[099] [Z]** You can see the details better in this.

**[100]** The ceilings of the chambers have lotus motifs.

Although originally this structure was labelled as Elephant Stables, recent opinions suggest that it was the secretariat of one of the rulers.

**[101]** A fitting tribute here in the Elephant Stables ... *Ganesha* motif on the decorations. He is the God with an elephant's head.

## **H. Vitthala Temple**

**[102]** The final section I want to cover is Vitthala Temple. It is the swan song of the Vijayanagara Empire. It combines the art, architecture and magnificence of the empire.

It is located about 2 miles from the first temple we looked at earlier.

The walled enclosure covers 3.2 acres.

Two Colonnaded market streets. One is almost a kilometre long **[103]**, **[104]**. This is the other **[105]**.

**[106a]** This is one of the three gateways with towers. Interior of the walls – pillared colonnades.

**[106b]** The temple is dedicated to Vitthala – a form of Lord Krishna.

**[107]** Built over a period from 1422. Two major patrons – Devaraya II (1422-46) and Krishnadeva Raya (1509-29). It was in active worship until the fall of the empire in 1565.

**[108]** The composite pillars of the *mahamandapa* have roaring animals and a cluster of slender pillars – all hewn out of a solid granite block.

**[109]** In the previous temples we have seen composite pillars with one or two round pillars. Here, you can see an almost unlimited number of round pillars. I would like to quote from a book:

‘The main highlight of the Maha-Mantapa is its richly carved giant monolithic pillars. The outermost of the pillars are popularly called the musical pillars. These slender and short pilasters carved out of the giant pillars emit musical tones when tapped. Probably these do not belong to any of the standard musical notes, but the musical tone of the vibes earned its name. Unmindful curiosity of the visitors has damaged many of these pilasters and tapping on it is banned for the sake of preservation.’

You can see a guard here ...

**[110]** Some details

**[111]** Beautiful corner treatment

**[112]** The finish on the ceiling

**[113]** Part of a base

**[114]** Get a glimpse of the interior

**[115]** Special statues on the pillars by the steps leading into the temple

**[116]** Ceilings in this section ... remind me of the structure at Neasden Hindu Temple

**[117]** A drummer who has lost his arms

**[118]** One of the deities

**[119]** Second of the three gateways in the background. [Z] On the statue, in the lower level, monkey God *Anjaneyar* guarding a temple. Upper level - a lady relaxing, perhaps dreaming about cows.

**[120]** Third of the three gateways in the back ground with a stone chariot, called Garuda's Radha (Lord of the Eagles) in the foreground.

**[121] [122]** This chariot is the most iconic structure in Hampi. It had a brick superstructure originally. The wheels are so realistically fitted, one could visualise it turning. Again, I believe one could turn it. They have now been wedged to prevent people from trying it.

These two elephants were not there when this chariot was discovered. You can in fact see the remains of the hoofs of a horse.

**[123]** There was a masonry tower above it that was in ruins when it was discovered by some hunters from Britain during the British Raj days. This is a copy of a photograph taken in 1856, courtesy of V & A archives.

**[124]** You can see that there were no elephants when they found it.

The tower was removed during restorations.

This is how it looked when we finished the tour!

### **Concluding remark:**

In 1520, [Domingo Paes](#), a Portuguese traveller, visited Vijayanagara as a part of trade contingent from Portuguese Goa. He wrote his memoir as *Chronica dos reis de Bisnaga*, in which he stated Vijayanagara was "as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight ... the best provided city in the world".

The historian [Will Durant](#), in his *Our Oriental Heritage: The Story of Civilization* recites the story of Vijayanagara and calls its conquest and destruction a discouraging tale. He writes, "its evident moral is that civilization is a precarious thing, whose delicate complex of order and liberty, culture and peace" may at any time be overthrown by war and ferocious violence.

If we have a few minutes left, I can show you a **five minute video clip** from a Bollywood movie. It is typically glamorous and romantic but set in Hampi amongst several of the items I have just covered.

There will be a short quiz about the film at the end... I can give you the question now if you want...how many costume changes are there?

Thank you.

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### Sources:

1. Many websites on the internet, including Wikipedia.
2. Book: Hampi by D. Devakunjari - World Heritage Series
2. Video on You Tube: [https://youtu.be/ChchmDc\\_OhI](https://youtu.be/ChchmDc_OhI) (11 mins)