

3. ARCHITECTURE AND MYTHIC SPACE AT THE HEMAKUTA HILL: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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During its 1987 season the Vijayanagara Research Project inaugurated a new phase of operations in the sacred centre of Vijayanagara. This work was focused primarily on the architectural monuments of Hemakuta hill (immediately south of the Virupaksha temple), but was extended also to include the small group of related monuments west of the Manmatha tank (just beyond the northern enclosure wall of this same temple). These two sites are unique in possessing the highest concentration of pre- and early Vijayanagara period architecture to be found anywhere at the Vijayanagara capital or in the immediate environs. Since these early monuments are of crucial importance for clarifying the chronology and stylistic development of architecture at Vijayanagara, documentation and stylistic analysis of the Hemakuta and Manmatha temples was of course a major objective. Additionally, however, the Hemakuta and Manmatha groups are of considerable interest in their current role as outlying precincts of the Virupaksha complex to which they are subordinated. Thus, a second major objective was to determine the nature of the historical and cultic relationships between the Hemakuta and Manmatha temples and the much larger Virupaksha temple.

Documentation work completed at Hemakuta and Manmatha tank this season include the preparation of maps, measured drawings, architectural descriptions, and a photographic record of the site and its individual structures. This documentary material will be fully published in a monograph on the monuments of Hemakuta and Manmatha tank, currently under preparation. In addition to providing a descriptive inventory of structures, this volume will include interpretive sections on the chronology and stylistic development of architecture from the pre- to early Vijayanagara phases, as well as on the history, myth, and cult of the Hemakuta site as a whole. Here I confine myself to some preliminary observations on this latter topic.

THE SHIFTING BOUNDARIES OF HEMAKUTA

Fixing a precise spatial definition of Hemakuta is complicated by the fact that the name is used

simultaneously to refer to locations belonging to three different orders of magnitude. None of these three senses of "Hemakuta" is necessarily more authentic or accurate than any other; rather, all three senses must be considered together in order to gain a full appreciation of Hemakuta's significance.

In the most restricted and neutral sense, "Hemakuta" refers to the enclosed hilltop which lies just south of the Virupaksha temple in the Hampi Bazaar (Fig. 44). This is the "archaeological" sense, used by archaeologists and local villagers alike in referring to the location of the early temples south of the Virupaksha.¹ In a second and more mythically charged sense, "Hemakuta" is one of five sacred hills at Hampi (conceived as the "Southern Kasi"), the other four being Ratnakuta, Matanga-parvata, Gandhamadana, and Rishyamuka.² In this sense, not only the significance but also the boundaries of Hemakuta expand, so that the Virupaksha temple and even the Manmatha tank compound are considered to be on Hemakuta (Fig. 53). These boundaries are ritually defined in the bi-annual ritual of *giripradakshina* ("circumambulation of the mountain"), in which the processional images of Virupaksha and his consort Pampa are carried around the perimeter of Hemakuta on a palanquin.³ Finally, in the broadest and mythically most charged sense, the name "Hemakuta" is used to designate the entire sacred region or *tirtha* surrounding the Hemakuta hill (Fig. 54). This is the sense used in mythological texts such as the Sanskrit *Hemakutakhanda* and the Kannada *Pampamahatme*.⁴ Hemakuta, according to these texts, has as its centre the sacred Brahmakunda tank east of the Virupaksha temple (for the identity of which, see below) and extends outward in all directions to a distance of from eight to ten miles. Points of entrance into this sacred field are marked by "gateways" (*dvāra*) in the cardinal directions and "subsidiary gateways" (*upadvāra*) in the four intermediate directions. These *dvāra* and *upadvāras* are gateways not in any architectural sense, but rather in a ritual sense: they are microcosmic sacred centres in their own right, which replicate on a smaller scale the main sacred features of the *tirtha* whose outer boundary they define. As "gates", they mark the point of transition from profane to sacred space.⁵

In this last sense, "Hemakuta" is a term which competes with "Vijayanagara" to designate what from an objective point of view would be essentially the same area, comprising the royal and sacred centres as a core together with the outlying metropolitan zone. The designation "Vijayanagara", however, has its focus in the royal centre and emphasises the aspect of temporal power (*kshatra*) in its delineation of the capital, while the parallel designation "Hemakuta" focuses upon the sacred centre and emphasises the aspect of spiritual authority (*brahma*).⁶ It is with this in mind that one must consider the inscription of 1406 A.D. from Hassan District, which is often misinterpreted as evidence of the first Vijayanagara kings having ruled from the Hemakuta enclosure. The inscription indeed states that "his [Bukka Raya's] capital was the great *nagari* named Vijaya, situated in the Hemakuta, with the Tungabhadra as its protector..."⁷ Yet, "Hemakuta" here almost certainly refers not to the fortified enclosure nor even the sacred hill, but rather to the Hemakuta *tirtha*. Despite three months of intensive work in the Hemakuta enclosure, nothing has been found to suggest that a palace or other structure for royal residence ever existed in this area. The structures of the royal centre, however, clearly do fall within the limits of the Hemakuta *tirtha*.

THE VIRUPAKSHA TEMPLE AND HEMAKUTA

As one of the five sacred hills at Vijayanagara (that is, in the second sense discussed above), Hemakuta comprises not only the Hemakuta enclosure, but the Virupaksha temple and the Manmatha tank enclosure as well. These three zones in fact exhibit a spatial unity, despite the fact that the monumental *prākāra* and *gōpurās* of the Virupaksha tend to obscure it. The high *prākāra* walls not only serve to isolate the sacred space they define around Virupaksha's shrine, but they additionally separate the other two zones from each other and obstruct perception of their interrelatedness. Thus the Virupaksha complex in its present form may be seen as an intrusion, disrupting the balanced unity of the earlier structures surrounding it on the sacred hill of Hemakuta.

This intrusive quality of the Virupaksha complex is best appreciated by focusing attention along its northern and southern edges. Along the south, construction of the Virupaksha's *prākāra* has created a meaningless zone of dead space along the north foot of Hemakuta's slope (Fig. 44). In this area, there is a monumental two-storeyed gateway

(Hem. 7) with a long colonnaded hall extending from its east and west sides (Hem. 2), a free-standing column (Hem. 5), and a number of small shrines projecting forward from the colonnade (Hem. 3, 4, 6, & 8). The orientation and plan of these structures is such that attention and movement are focused to the north. The colonnaded hall and the small shrines are all oriented in that direction, and most importantly, the gateway is conceived as an entrance into the zone to its north (thus, its single set of doors was at the southern side and was hinged so as to swing inwards toward the north). But if one follows this axis of approach, movement is suddenly and decisively cut off by the massive wall of the Virupaksha compound, which looms up as soon as one emerges from the gateway. No further movement is possible, since the wall lacks any gateway or entrance along this side.⁸

At the north side of the temple complex, movement between the Virupaksha compound and the Manmatha tank zone to its north has not been blocked, but has rather been encouraged through the provision of a *gōpura* which communicates between the two areas (Fig. 53). However, the intrusive nature of the Virupaksha complex is perhaps even more strikingly apparent here, in that the temple's *prākāra* and cloister have physically engulfed one of the small temples of the Manmatha group. This "buried" temple is the shrine of Gulaganji Madhava, accessible today only from within the Virupaksha complex. Just to the northeast of the Bhuvaneshvari shrine, a flight of steps leads down into the apparently subterranean chamber of this deity. But the shrine is subterranean in appearance only, and actually stands on the same level with the rest of shrines of the Manmatha group -- the closest of which is situated barely a few metres away on the other side of the *prākāra* wall. The shrine appears to be underground only because the raised platform of the Virupaksha cloister has been built over and around it. Both spatially and stylistically, the shrine belongs to the Manmatha group of temples, but this point has been totally obscured as a result of the changed point of access.

AXES OF MOVEMENT AT HEMAKUTA

When the present outlines of the Virupaksha complex were fixed between the mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, not only was the unity of Hemakuta hill compromised, but there was also a drastic change in the patterns of movement around the site. Before the intrusion of the Virupaksha



53. Hemakuta hill, site plan.

complex, movement into and through the Hemakuta area was channelled primarily along a north-south axis; afterwards, this axis was superseded by an east-west line of movement.

Paths of movement in the pre-Virupaksha phase can be reconstructed on the basis of such factors as the positions of gateways and stairways, and the orientations and alignments of temple structures (Fig. 44). The main entry into the sacred space of Hemakuta was through the imposing two-storeyed gateway near the southern edge of the hill (Hem. 36). A flight of steps cut into the sheetrock outside the enclosure wall led up through an opening in the wall (since filled in); after two sharp turns to the right and the left, one faced the gateway. Entering through its doors (on the south) and passing between its elevated platforms on either side, one emerged on the north and descended a monumental flight of stairs between two terraced platforms. Continuing straight ahead, the pathway led to a group of shrines clustered around a small temple preceded by a tank (Hem. 30), and then skirting these shrines on the left, angled off toward a shrine with a colonnaded ambulatory (Hem. 26). From this shrine, a pair of stairways east and west led down a slope, at the foot of which they converged onto a single pathway leading through a pair of open stone pavilions. Just before the rear shrine of a triple-shrined temple (Hem. 21), the pathway angled again to the left and opened on to a broad series of descending stone terraces lying in between Hem. 21 and the triple shrine to its west (Hem. 18). From the last terrace, the path continued in a northwestern direction past a group of shrines of various dispositions (Hem. 12, & 13; 10 & 9) and finally arrived at a second two-storeyed gateway (Hem. 7).

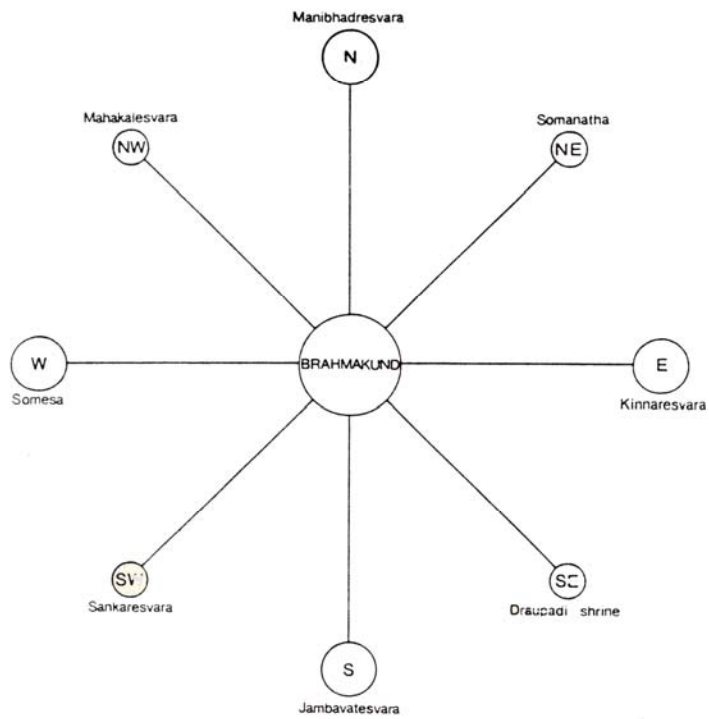
What this second gateway led to is a matter about which one can only speculate now. No exposed part of the present Virupaksha temple can be dated earlier than the end of the fourteenth century by which time Hem. 7 appears to have been built. (Exceptions are the Gulganji Madhava shrine, discussed above; and the Bhuvanesvari shrine which, although early, has almost certainly been dismantled from another location and rebuilt here on the cloister platform, which post-dates it stylistically.) Perhaps there was an early shrine or group of shrines on the spot of the present Virupaksha which was dismantled at the time of the Virupaksha's construction. One point however, is clear: Hem. 7 lies on a common axis with the north *gōpura* of the Virupaksha, the north gateway leading into the

Manmatha enclosure (Man. 15), and the massive and atypical "gateway" just north of this (Fig. 53). Thus the path of movement most likely continued in this direction, and probably reached its goal in the Manmatha enclosure at the open space between the temples on the west and the tank on the east. A second, shorter path of approach apparently led from the river on the north, through the two gateways and into this same space. The two paths of approach combine into a single, clearly defined north-south axis of movement, represented in Fig. 55A.

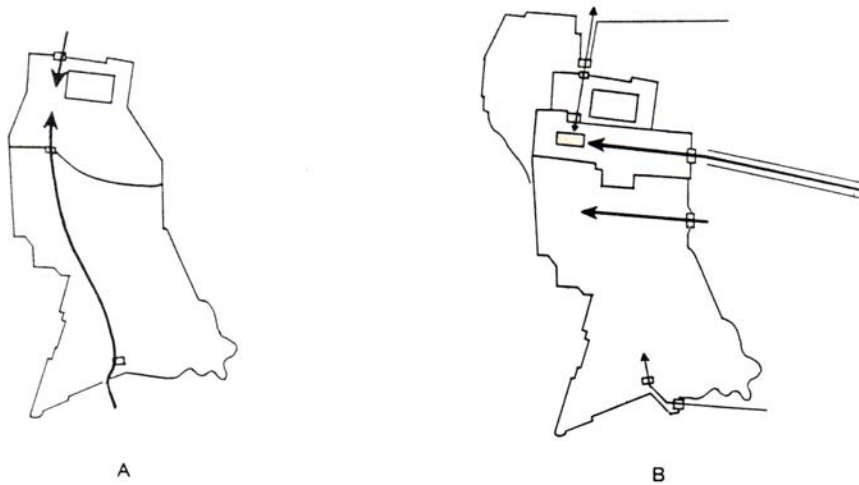
With the construction of the Virupaksha complex in its present form, this primary axis was sharply disrupted and replaced by a less unified system of east-west axes. Above all, it is the plan of the Virupaksha which refocuses the lines of movement. The linear sequence -- nearly a full kilometre long -- of colonnaded street, main eastern *gōpura*, courtyard, "*rāyagōpura*", *bali-pīṭha* and *stambhas*, *ranga-maṇḍapa*, *ardha-maṇḍapa*, *antarāla*, and finally *garbha-griha* combines to form a powerful axis which focuses all movement from east to west and culminates at Virupaksha's shrine. At the same time, the Virupaksha's east-west axis seems to have exerted a "magnetising" influence on subsequent building within the Hemakuta enclosure, so that here too an east-west course of movement was encouraged. A major new line of approach was provided by the building of a new gateway to the compound in the form of a *gōpura* (Hem. 1); a raised pathway carried on westwards from this gateway to the group of structures at the northwest end of the enclosure. Similarly, the old southern entrance was altered by building a southern extension into the wall together with a gateway to the east (Hem. 42), thus serving to generate an east-west line of approach to the enclosure and then deflect it northward once the gate was entered. The two new patterns of movement are represented in Fig. 55B.

THE RITUAL AND MYTHIC DIMENSIONS

The majority of the temples and shrines in the Hemakuta and Manmatha enclosures no longer function as living institutions, having been abandoned long ago and allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Exceptions in the Manmatha enclosure are the four temples -- Man. 1, 6, 7, and 11 -- which house respectively the images of Chandresvarasvami, Sankaresvarasvami, Naganandesvarasvami, and Durgadevi, who figure as secondary deities in the daily ritual of the Virupaksha temple. In the Hemakuta enclosure, three temples are still centres



54. Hemakuta tirtha conceptual plan.



55. Axes of Movement on the Hemakuta: A. Pre-Virupaksha Phase; B. Post-Virupaksha phase.

of a living cult. Hem. 19 is a triple shrine housing Ramalingesvara flanked by the goddesses Chandesvari and Gayatri, who receive a complete programme of daily worship performed by a full-time Devanga priest. Hem. 30 houses the *linga* of Mulavirupakshesvara,⁹ who is worshipped in a simple daily ritual by the priest of Hem. 19 as a voluntary extension of his duties. It is also the centre of a more elaborate *pūja* each Monday, performed by a local Lingayat man. Several other people in the Hampi-Hospet area (most of them also Lingayats) count themselves as special devotees of Mulavirupaksha and visit the temple at least on a weekly basis. It is also an important centre for *sādhus*, who pass a special vigil here on the night of the annual *phalapūja* festival, when Virupaksha and Pampa celebrate their betrothal. Finally, Hem. 32 houses a stone slab that is carved with a colossal relief of Hanuman, known as Mulanjaneyasvami. Although architecturally simple and unimposing, this shrine is an attraction for followers of the Virabrahmamgaru cult who occasionally come as pilgrims from as far away as coastal Andhra. In contrast to the living shrines at Manmatha, none of these temples are today connected in any way with the ritual of the Virupaksha temple at the base of the hill.

A mythic cycle, represented in somewhat varying forms both in oral tradition and in written texts, centres on the Mulavirupaksha temple (Hem. 30) and is of great significance for interpreting the sacred history of the Hemakuta. According to oral tradition, and as its name implies, the Mulavirupaksha ("original Virupaksha") temple is the "original" home of Virupaksha; it was only "later" that his temple was "moved" down the hill to the present Virupaksha complex. It was here on the peak of Hemakuta that all the major events in the Saivite mythology of the site transpired in a previous age. Virupaksha had been seated here engaged in ascetic practices, when Pampa, the mind-born daughter of the sage Matanga, sighted him and conceived a desire for him. Matanga's hermitage was at the top of Matangaparvata to the east of Hemakuta; every day his daughter would go to a point on the river at the foot of Hemakuta in order to draw water for his ritual use. It was on one such occasion that she spotted the ascetic Virupaksha and resolved to obtain him as her husband. After great austerities on her part -- and with the encouragement of the love-god Manmatha who struck the meditating Virupaksha with his desire-awakening arrow -- the ascetic lord finally returned her love and agreed to marriage. Pampa's father

Matanga, however, was not so easily persuaded; he held deep reservations about the bridegroom's desirability since the austere-looking Virupaksha had no visible source of income with which to support his daughter. But Virupaksha allayed his fears by picking up a chunk of gold from his mountain -- "Hemakuta" literally is a "peak of gold" -- and presenting it to Matanga; the marriage was duly celebrated.

The same story, essentially a localised version of the myth of the marriage of Siva and Parvati, is told with some variations in the Kannada *Pampa-mahatme*, where, however, the exact geographical setting is not so precisely identified. However, another passage in this text apparently identifies Virupaksha's temple not with the present Virupaksha, but with the Mulavirupaksha. Thus, in the description of the Hemakuta *tīrtha* and its *dvāras*, discussed above, the location of each *dvara* is given in terms of its direction and distance from the sacred Brahmakunda tank which represents the centre of the *tīrtha*. This tank is described as lying a stated number of cubits to the east of Virupaksha's *linga*. In the Virupaksha complex, there is no tank which even remotely fits this description -- the Manmatha tank lies to the northeast and is considerably farther from the shrine than the distance stated. But the description accords closely with the spatial layout of the Mulavirupaksha temple and its tank.

One other episode in the contemporary oral version of the mythic cycle merits attention here. This is the account of the sacred spots visited by the first Vijayanagara kings when they came to the area and chose it for their capital. First, they came to the Hemakuta, entering through its main southern gate (Hem. 36) and stopping to worship Mulavirupaksha (Hem. 30) and Mulanjaneya (Hem. 32). Then they proceeded down the hill to worship at the Manmatha tank. Next they continued down the river to the Kodanda Rama temple and the Vijaya Vitthala temple, whence they "returned" (back to the royal centre where they proceeded to found their capital?). Although this itinerary -- set in the fourteenth century -- anachronistically includes important temples constructed as late as the sixteenth century, it is striking that the image presented of Hemakuta is that of the *pre*-Virupaksha phase, when one could still pass freely from Hemakuta's peak down to the Manmatha tank area, and when there was nothing of sufficient interest to merit a stop in between these two zones.

In conclusion, the evidence of myth and ritual lends further confirmation to the interpretive pattern

that emerges from analysis of the architectural record. Not only was Hemakuta the site of the earliest architectural activity at Vijayanagara, but it was moreover in all likelihood the Hemakuta peak that was the original Virupaksha *tīrtha* and thus the pre-eminent sacred focus of the entire area, to which its name was eventually extended. In this earlier phase, the Hemakuta hill consisted of two zones linked directly by a north-south axis of movement: to

the south, the boulder-strewn peak sacred to the masculine god, and at the foot of the hill to the north, the low-lying tank sacred to the goddess.¹⁰ It was not until later, during the Vijayanagara period, that the Hemakuta was spatially re-organised through the construction of the vast Virupaksha complex, so that the two divine principles could be integrated through a different, essentially more royal paradigm.

REFERENCES

1. See, for example, A.H. Longhurst, *Hampi Ruins, Described and Illustrated* (Delhi: Government of India, 1933), p. 94 and map.
2. Oral tradition recorded 1987.
3. Dipak Ketecha, *Hindu Ritual Movement: Study of Sri Virupaksha temple, Hampi* (Thesis, School of Architecture, Ahmedabad, 1982), p. 73 and fig. 59.
4. Both texts are currently being translated by scholars affiliated with the Vijayanagara Research Project: *the Hemakutakhanda* by Allan Shapiro, and the *Pampamahatme* by S. Kalburgi. For a brief synopsis of contents of the *Hemakutakhanda*, see *Mackenzie Collection, Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts* (London: India Office Library and Records), I: pp. 1387-1389.
5. The same spatial model of a tirtha surrounded by four *dvaras* (and according to some traditions, four intermediate *upadvaras*) is also found at Srisaïlam in Andhra Pradesh. See P. Sitapati, *Srisaïlam Temple Kaifiyat, Andhra Pradesh*, vol. I (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1981), p. 2.
6. For the concepts of *brahma* and *kshatra* in traditional Indian political theory, see A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1942).
7. *Epigraphia Carnatica* V, Hn. 133 (italics mine).
8. There is in fact an unassuming doorway near the east end of this wall, but this merely serves as an entrance leading from the eastern forecourt of the temple into this zone, which is presently utilised as a toilet area.
9. Not to be confused with the so-called "Underground temple" at the west end of the royal centre, which is sometimes referred to as "Mulavirupaksha".
10. Kotecha, *Hindu Ritual Movement*, p. 96, has used similar terms in describing the relationship between the later Virupaksha temple and the tank.