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A War Expedition or a Pilgrimage? Acyutarāya's Southern Campaign as Depicted in the *Acyutarāyābhūdaya*¹

*ivadupakaṅthagatam sitacāmaradvitayam acyutarāya virājate/
tava mahodayadānajaḷārṇavaplavanakelijūṣo yaśaso bhujau //²*

Oh Acyutarāya! the pair of white chowries placed close to you,
shine as if they were the pair of arms of Fame, which enjoy the play of
plunging into the ocean of waters of your gifts conferring prosperity.³
(Praśasti, *Varadāmbikā Parīṇaya Campū* of Tirumalāmbā)

SUMMARY: A visit to a temple before a battle, or visiting a holy place on the way to a military campaign, as well as paying homage to a god and offering rich gifts after a victorious battle are well attested in literature and inscriptions. However, Vijayanagara ruler Acyutarāya's southern campaign depicted by the poet Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima, as will be shown further in the paper, is in fact a pilgrimage route of a pious Hindu. Thus, while accompanying the monarch on his war expedition, instead of witnessing bloody battles, the reader becomes acquainted with sacred geography of South India.

KEYWORDS: Vijayanagara, Acyutarāya, pilgrimage, sacred geography of South India, kings and poets.

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² VPC 1970: 153.

³ All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

The *Acyutarāyābhūdaya* is a historical *mahākāvya* written by Rājanātha, a poet belonging to a family of distinguished scholars and writers known as Gauḍa Ḍiṇḍimas. They acquired their name because at the invitation of a Cola ruler, they had migrated from the Gauḍa region to the south in the 12th century and achieved the privilege of announcing their arrival with resounding drums—*ḍiṇḍimas*. The poets of this esteemed family served Vijayanagara monarchs with their talents.⁴

The work, in accordance with its title, celebrates Acyutarāya (reigned 1529–1542), a son of Narasa, better known as Vīra Narasiṃha,⁵ and a younger brother of Vijayanagara emperor Kṛṣṇarāya (reigned 1509–1529) of the Tuluva dynasty and his successor

⁴ More about the Ḍiṇḍima poets in: Aiyangar Krishna 1942: 23–29.

⁵ Vīra Narasiṃha had three queens as Rājanātha informs the reader of his poem:

*tisro nṛpasyety abhavann abhiṣṭās
tippāmbikā tāsū ca nāgamāmbā /
puṭṭābhiṣiktā patidevatānām
uttamsabhūṣāmaṇir obamāmbā // ARA I. 52//*

He (King Vīra Narasiṃha) had three wives,
among them: Tippāmbikā, Nāgamāmbā—the chief queen
and Obamāmbā—the crest jewel of virtuous wives.

Two older queens gave birth to sons.

*tippāmbikāyāṃ dvijasampade 'bhūd
vikhyātimān vīraṅsiṃharāyaḥ /
nāgāmbikāyāṃ narasāvanīndoh
kīrtiyākaro 'jayata kṛṣṇarāyaḥ // ARA I. 53//*

Tippāmbikā gave birth to Vīraṅsiṃharāya,
who was famous because of (bestowing) wealth on Brahmins.
Nāgāmbikā gave King Narasa a mine of Fame—Kṛṣṇarāya.

Obamāmbā's pregnancy is described by the poet in detail in the first sixteen stanzas of canto II up to the birth of our hero—Acyuta:

to the throne. It seems reasonable to suppose that this poem describing the early years of Acyuta's reign was written between 1536 and 1542.⁶ Obviously, the hero of this literary composition is a historical figure as well as other personages mentioned in it; however, while searching it for historical information, one has to remember that the poet wrote it in order to eulogise his kingly patron, a fact which could have influenced his narration. Additionally, his work had to conform to the *mahākāvya* characteristic. One of the most important features of the *mahākāvya* is a description of a battle and subsequent triumph—*vijaya*—of the noble hero or killing the enemy—*vadha*. Even the titles of the poems,⁷ very often including one of the synonyms of the word 'victory', attest to the importance of this element in the *mahākāvya* structure.

In the case of Rājanātha's poem, the name of the king comes together with the noun *abhyudaya*⁸—Skr. sunrise, beginning, commencing, elevation, prosperity. The *Acyutarāyābhyudaya* (Acyutarāya's Exaltation) consists of twelve cantos describing Acyuta's ascension

*atha vaijanane dine śubhamyau
hariṅākṣī nṛpater asūta sūnum /
vasudhātibharāpanodahetum
vasudevapramadeva vāsudevam // ARA II. 17//*

Then on the happy day of the last month of (her) pregnancy, the king's deer-eyed one like Devakī gave birth to a Kṛṣṇa-like son, a cause of removal of an excessive burden from the Earth.

⁶ Aiyangar Krishna 1945: Introduction, p. 34; Sridhara Babu 1975: 15.

⁷ To name only a few '*vijaya*' poems: *Haravijaya* of the 9th-century poet Rājānaka Ratnakāra, *Yuddhiṣṭhiravijaya* of Vāsudeva (10th century), an anonymous 12th-century *Pṛthvīrājavijaya*, *Madhurāvijaya* of Gaṅgādevī (14th century), *Vāsudevavijaya* of Vāsudeva (16th century).

⁸ The examples of other texts with *abhyudaya* in their title are numerous, e.g.: *Kapphiṅābhyudaya* of Śivasvāmin, (second half of the 9th century), *Yādavābhyudaya* of Venkatanātha (13th century), *Sāḷuvābhyudaya* and *Rāmābhyudaya* written during the reign of the Saluvas or second Vijayanagara dynasty. In Nāyaka Tanjavur the works called *abhyudayamu* were "often

to the throne and strengthening of his power. The cantos dealing with his southern campaign will be discussed in the present article.

In the fourth canto of the *Acyutarāyābhyudaya* (IV. 46–57), we can see Acyuta informed by his minister about a revolt of one Cellapa, who “with concealed enmity ran away and lives within the limits of the Cera kingdom” (ARA IV. 56 ab: *channavigrahatayā palāyitas cellapo vasati cerasīmani*). That Cellapa has been identified with Vīra Narasiṃha Sāluva Daṇḍanāyaka (Nilakantha Sastry, 1955: 274–275), a governor of the Cola country, introduced by a Portuguese traveller and horse trader Fernão Nuniz in his chronicle as Salvayanay (Sewell 1992: 367). The next three cantos of Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima’s poem give account of Acyuta’s southern campaign. The army starts from the capital city of Vijayanagara in order to punish Cellapa and his protector. The king and his forces finally reached Candragiri and “with no haste he entered Candragiri fortress surpassing in splendour a heavenly city” (ARA V. 22cd: *śanakair agāhata sa candragirim nagarim śriyā hasitanākapurim*).

The choice of Candragiri to give rest to his soldiers seems a logical solution. According to some evidence, before the coronation Acyuta stayed at Candragiri fortress. Nuniz writes: “After his [Kṛṣṇadevarāya’s—LS] death Salvayanay became minister of the kingdom, and governed it till the coming of King Achitarao from the fortress of Chamdegar̃y” (Sewell, 1992: 367). So Candragiri and its surroundings were well known to the King.

But it turns out that in fact it was Candragiri’s neighbourhood that was more important in that case, namely its closeness to Tirupati:

composed by sons in honour of their fathers, they show us the king as he proceeds slowly through a typical royal day—typical, that is, in the highly ritualized and strictly patterned vision of the court” (Rao et al. 1998: 59). Evidently in the case of this type of poem, the appearance of the word *abhyudayamu* in the title informs that a day in the life of a hero is going to be described from its very beginning.

*akhilāni tatra viniveśya balā-
ny avilambitāṃ samavaruhya hayāt /
haripādabhaktim avalambya nṛṇām
adhipo 'dhyarukṣad ahirājagirim // ARA V. 23 //*

The King left the whole army there,
with no delay he got off the horse
and ascended the Śeṣādri Mountain
in order to devote himself to the worship of Viṣṇu's majesty.

It was not easy to climb the mountain:

[...] *padadvitayam/
ayam akṣamiṣṭa vṛṣabhādriśilāsv
atikarkaśāsu nijam arpayitum // ARA V. 25 bcd //*

He suffered while putting his feet on extremely harsh rocks of Vṛṣabhādri.

After reaching the place, the King had to prepare for the meeting
with God.

*pariṇīḥ kṣiter atha kṛtasnapanah
paridhāya dhautasīcayadvitayam/
avagāhate sma maṇidhāma harer
adasīyacittam api bhaktahitaḥ // ARA V. 26 //*

The Lord of Earth after taking bath and putting on another clean cloth,
entered the abode of Hari, which was laden with precious stones.
[Hari] well-disposed to his worshipper plunged into his (Acyuta's) mind/
heart.⁹

Then "the Master of Earth after saluting respectfully to Him, who
gives all the desired things, began his praise" (ARA. V. 30cd: *abhi-
vandyā kāmaphaladam dharaṇer adhibhūḥ samārabhata varṇayitum*).

⁹ The interpretation of the last *pada* is based on the commentary
in Sanskrit provided by the editor of the text (Balasubrahmanyam 1907: 121).

Now in six consecutive stanzas comes Acyuta's hymn-prayer. After finishing it, Acyutarāya with modesty took the old garland, which fell down from Viṣṇu's crest. For him it was like a wreath offered by the goddess of victory, who had chosen him.¹⁰ He presented some ornaments to the Lord: a beautiful bracelet (*valaya*—v. 41), earrings (*kuṇḍala*—v. 42) a pendant (*padaka*—v. 42), a diadem inlaid with precious stones (*maṇikirīṭa*—v. 42), also some other ornaments (*ābharāṇa*—v. 43) as well as unguents (*anulepa*—v. 43), garlands (*mālya*—v. 43) and garments (*vasana*—v. 43). He stayed at the Tirumalai Hill for several days constantly serving Viṣṇu (ARA. V. 43 cd: *nyavaśad girau paricarān niyamāt katicid dināni kamitā dharāṇeh*).

Then he descended the Hill of Venkaṭa, mounted his fast horse and went to Kālahasti, the best place for attaining the final liberation as Rājanātha put it.¹¹

Here the son of Narasa offered enough land gifts to Śiva to end his poverty, "which was not removed even by his close friendship with the Lord of Wealth, Kubera".¹² Śrīkālahasti, situated on the banks

¹⁰ *mahimastavābhinavamālyabhṛto
madhusūdanasya makuṭād galitām/
srajam agrahīt savinayam ṅṛpatih
samarāśriyo varaṇadāmasakhīm // ARA. V. 38//*

The wreath which fell down from the crest of Viṣṇu, [who was] carrying quite new garlands eulogising (his) power, with modesty was taken by the King as if it were a wreath offered to a chosen one by the goddess of victory.

¹¹ *avaruhya venkaṭagireḥ śikharād
adhiruhya vāham atigandhavaham /
sa garīyasīm sakalamuktikarīm
api kālahastinagarīm agamat // ARA. V. 44//*

Then he descended the top of the Hill of Venkaṭa, mounted a horse faster than the wind and went to Kālahasti, the best place for attaining the final liberation.

¹² *draviṇādhipena dṛḍhasakhyavatā
na ca bhikṣutā asya samataḥyata yā /*

of the Suvarṇamukhī River (ARA. V. 45), is one of the most ancient Śiva *kṣetras* of Southern India. While Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara's abode at Tirumalai should be included into the pilgrimage route of a pious Vaiṣṇava, Śrīkālāhasti is the place of utmost importance for each and every Śaivite.

The Tuluva dynasty rulers, a line to which Acyutarāya belonged, were followers of Vaishnavism, although they gave support to Śaivism, as well. In fact, as Duarte Barbosa claims, Kṛṣṇadevarāya allowed such freedom that everyone could live according to his own creed. It seems that there were special links of Acyutadevarāya with the Tirupati temple, perhaps established during his stay in Candragiri. According to literary and inscriptional sources, Acyuta performed his first coronation at Tirupati before God Veṅkaṭeśvara. As Rājanātha describes it, he was sprinkled with water from the divine conch held in the hand of the Ruler of Tirumalai Hill.¹³

Acyuta was also consecrated in the Kālāhasti temple although Rājanātha is silent about this fact. The inscription on the northern and western walls of the third *prākāra* of the Kālāhasti temple dated 27 July 1532 records the gift made by Acyuta on the day of his coronation there.

apavāriteyam upahāritayā
narasātmajena navasīmbhuvā // ARA. V. 46//

The son of Narasa
by new land grants averted his (Śiva's) poverty,
which was not removed even by his close friendship
with the Lord of Wealth.

¹³ *praṇāmaśīlah phaniśailaśāsituḥ*
kadācid agre karaśaṅkhavāriṇā /
payodhikāñcīpariṇetṛtās pade
pade 'bhiṣiktaḥ sa paramparāgate // ARA. III. 23//

He (Acyuta), while bowing before the Ruler of Tirumalai Hill,
was consecrated to the ruler's position
with the water from the conch (held) in the (God's) hand,
accordingly to the tradition.

The date of this event is given as Virodhi, Kārttika bahula pañcamī, which corresponds to 21st October 1529 (Krishna Aiyangar 1945:13).

A very clever move, indeed, these two consecrations at the holy pilgrimage centres.¹⁴ Especially, in the situation just after Kṛṣṇadevarāya's death. Acyuta was chosen by him as his successor to the throne in preference to his own infant son. However, Rāmarāya, the son-in-law of Kṛṣṇadevarāya,¹⁵ was trying to seize power in the name of the eighteen-month-old child (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 274). The coronation before Viṣṇu and Śiva could have been seen by the subjects and other rulers as divine sanction of his kingship, not to mention the support of influential Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava circles cemented by rich gifts offered to both temples.

As Kathleen Morrison writes:

In the Vijayanagara empire, political leaders had the military option as one direct course of action (although they held no monopoly on the use of force as local leaders also maintained armies), and religious patronage as another, indirect strategy. Patronage of Hindu temples, Brahmins, and other religious institutions linked rulers (and others; patronage was by no means limited to political leaders; Morrison and Lycett 1994) to these economically, ideologically, and socially powerful institutions (Morrison 2001: 258).

Back to the topic of the war expedition of Acyuta, let us add that after visiting Tirupati¹⁶ and Kālahasti, according to the poet's relation, he proceeded to the south choosing another holy city, namely Kāñcī, as a halting place. Here he paid homage to Varadarāja. The Varadarāja Perumal Temple has been one of the most sacred places for Vaiṣṇavas

¹⁴ The third official coronation took place at the capital. The inscriptions from Kāñcīpuram give the date corresponding to 20th November 1529.

¹⁵ He was called Aliya, which in the Kannada language means a son-in-law.

¹⁶ The three visits of King Acyuta are recorded in Tirupati inscriptions (Aiyangar Krishnaswamy 1941: 205–208) and the first one seems to follow closely upon his invasion of the South.

for centuries. He performed the *mauktikatulāpuruṣa* ceremony before Viṣṇu, i.e. he weighed himself against pearls and as Rājanātha puts it with their distribution he fulfilled the desires of good men.¹⁷ Among numerous inscriptions of Acyutarāya found in Kāñcī, there is a record dated 30th May 1532 (A. R. No. 542 of 1919), in which it is stated that Acyutarāya together with his wife and son visited the Varadarāja temple and made rich gifts to the temple including 17 villages, thousands of cows, some other precious gifts, and he also performed *muktatulābhāra*. This information is provided in three languages: Tamil, Telugu and Kannada (Raman 1975: 29).

Then Acyuta moves farther to the South but still we find him not at a battlefield but at a famous pilgrimage site:

śikhipiñchalāñchitaśikhaṇḍabharaiḥ
śritadhanvabhīḥ sitavarātaguṇaiḥ /
viśati sma tair anugato vinayād
adhipo ṛṅṅām aruṇaśailapurīm // ARA. V. 51 //

The King of Men entered humbly the city of Aruṇaśaila,
 followed by (the Kirātas) wearing crests
 decorated with peacock feathers,
 clinging to their bows and with strings of cowries tied.

This time he visits a Śaiva temple in Tiruvaṅṅāmalai, also known as Aruṇācala or Aruṇaśaila, and worships *agniliṅga* of Śiva (ARA. V. 51–54). The fire-*liṅga* at “Dawn-coloured Mountain” is one of the five *bhūtaliṅgas* or natural representations of Śiva, the other ones being the earth-*liṅga* in Kāñcī, the wind-*liṅga* at Kālahasti, the water-*liṅga* at Jambunath and the ether-*liṅga* at Cidambaram.

¹⁷ *adhirūḍhamauktikatulāpuruṣo*
'py atulo 'janiṣṭa sadabhīṣṭakaraḥ // ARA. V. 49 cd //

(He) ascended the scale to measure himself
 against pearls (*mauktikatulāpuruṣa*) but he was unequal.
 (In this way) he fulfilled the desires of good people.

Acyuta's visit to Aruṇācala has not been corroborated by any epigraphical evidence. There are some inscriptions from the Tuluva dynasty period there, also dated back to Acyutarāya's reign and honouring that King (Mack 2000: 92), but generally it seems that this temple was not so important for political interests of the Vijayanagara monarchs. There were only six kingly gifts recorded for Aruṇācaleśvara. Three of them were bestowed by Kṛṣṇarāya (Mack 2000: 90). The two inscriptions register gifts of land by individuals in honour of King Acyuta (Srinivasan 1990: 103).

If we assume that Acyutadevarāya did not visit the Tiruvaṅṅāmalai temple during his southern campaign, one could ask what was the reason for Rājanātha to add this particular pilgrimage place to the route described in his poem. If we look carefully at the pilgrimage sites frequented at that occasion by Acyutarāya, we would be able to spot a certain pattern. The pictures of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples intertwine one with another: Tirupati, Kālahasti, Kāñcī and Tiruvaṅṅāmalai. However, now the question arises why the Cidambaram temple was not selected while depicting the way of the monarch to the south? This religious Śaiva centre was bigger and of more importance than Tiruvaṅṅāmalai. Additionally, in Cidambaram there are Acyutarāya's inscriptions registering donations to the temple, among them the enormous gift of 82 villages "towards the celebration of the annual car festival of Nataraja and the construction of the north gopuram" (Natarajan 1974: 56).

Perhaps it was a choice of the poet to include Tiruvaṅṅāmalai shrine to the list of the pilgrimage places visited by the King? Some connections of his family with the shrine of Aruṇācala are indicated by the names of his ancestors appearing alternatively: Aruṇagirinātha or Aruṇācaleśvara. On the other hand, the Tiruvaṅṅāmalai location was at the crossroads of two major strategic routes through South India frequented in the Vijayanagara period (Mack 2010: 66) and it could have happened that Acyuta's army was passing by it. If so, did he really stop there or just bow to the god seeing his abode from afar? There is no certainty about Acyuta's presence there as no other source confirms it.

The next halting place on the way should be the Vaiṣṇava sanctuary if our reasoning is correct. We learn from the poem that Acyuta went in the direction of the Kāverī River and proceeded to the holy town of Śrīraṅgam. His army encamped in the forest on the Kāverī banks and he himself, after taking a bath in the waters of the river, went to the shrine of Viṣṇu Raṅganātha¹⁸ and bowed down before him. In fact, this is the end of King's journey. The Salaga prince (*salaganṛpasuta*—v. 64 c) asked the King:

*premṇaḥ pātrikuruṣva priyaramaṇa bhuvah preṣaṇād eṣa dorbhyām
neṣye preṣyaṃ hi garvagrahilaṃ iha javāc cellapaṃ cerasīmnaḥ
/ ARA V. 64 ab /*

O Beloved of the Earth!

Through your kindness, do me a favour, quickly sending me (for fighting)!
And with my two arms I will quickly fetch here from the Cera kingdom
the servant Cellapa possessed by pride!

Acyutarāya agreed to his proposal and stayed in Śrīraṅgam worshipping Viṣṇu and watching results of the southern campaign now led by the Salaga prince, Cinna Tirumala, who was his brother-in-law as his Queen Varadāmbikā was a Salaga princess.

The sixth chapter depicts a real military campaign. Cinna Tirumala marched with the army passing Madurai up to the Tāmraparṇī River. That was the northern edge of the rebel activity. The Vijayanagara forces encamped on the Tāmraparṇī banks and finally they won the battle with the Cera ruler, who surrendered. Victorious Tirumala the Younger went to Anantaśayanam to worship Śrī Padmanābha. By no means was it a pilgrimage. We can assume that under cover of a pilgrimage, he wanted to control the situation and establish

¹⁸ *kṛtamajjanādiniyamaḥ kṣitipaiḥ
saha kaiścid āśnuta sa raṅgagrham // ARA. V. 57 cd //*

He performed immersion etc.
and reached the abode of Śrīraṅganātha with some other rulers.

the order desired for Vijayanagara politics. The seventh canto gives an account of Tirumala's return by way of another place of pilgrimage, namely Rāmeśvaram. He reached Śrīraṅgam and reported the success to his King,¹⁹ who immediately praised Śrīraṅganāthasvami (ARA. VII. 35–37). The object of the military campaign was completed but there are still many unanswered questions concerning this war expedition, which, at least for the King, changed into a pilgrimage.

It is not the only *mahākāvya* which shows a monarch visiting different pilgrimage centres during his military campaign. Let us only mention the *Vemabhūpālacarita* dealing with the exploits of the Redḍi king, Peda Komaṭi Vema (ca. 1402–1420). But perhaps the uniqueness of the *Acyutarāyābhyudaya* lies in the fact that the depiction of an important military campaign is completely pilgrimage-dominated or pilgrimage-oriented. We can see the King with his soldiers leaving the capital but later on the army or activities pertaining to the subject of war are very rarely mentioned. We behold the royal pilgrim who behaves in a manner suitable for a pilgrim as it was minutely described in the case of his visit paid to Veṅkaṭeśvara. He was not accompanied by his soldiers at all. It seems that he was alone on his way to the Tirumalai and Kālahasti hills. However, the inscriptions say that his Queen Varadāmbikā and his son Cinna Veṅkaṭādri together with some officials, accompanied him on such visits. We are astonished by the shower of gifts to the temples. Only sometimes do we realize that in fact this is a route of a war expedition, his *digvijaya* performed almost immediately after his coronations.²⁰ For instance, when the visit to Kāñcī is referred to, we find information about forest kings (*kirātas*) waiting for him with their presents (ARA. V. 50–51) and tributes.

¹⁹ It would be worth pointing out that these passages characterize the Salaga prince very well: ready to take initiative, courageous and ambitious. After the death of Acyuta he became regent despite the opposition of the nobles and finally caused his nephew Veṅkaṭa I and other members of the royal family to be assassinated.

²⁰ It seems reasonable to calculate that the expedition against Cellapa was undertaken between 1530 and 1532.

What was the importance of this pilgrimage? Or perhaps better to put it: what was the importance of a pilgrimage in the Vijayanagara Empire? In fact, as is well known, in India, a pilgrimage is not essential for spiritual welfare for almost all religious groups but everywhere one can find thousands of pilgrims moving from one place to another. As was mentioned by Aḡehananda Bharati:

All Indian scriptures, canonical and semicanonical, as well as almost all commentaries, make ample mention of pilgrimage. As an observance it has been ubiquitous but never compulsory (Bharati 1963: 145).

On the map of India there are numerous *tīrthas* or places of pilgrimage. The sacred geography of India seems to be an extremely complicated and fascinating issue as well as the whole “theory” connected to a pilgrimage: each pilgrimage has its different *phalaśruti*, i.e. the merit which can be achieved through it, as well a particular time assigned to its undertaking and a whole procedure (Bharati 1963: 145).

Starting from the *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* and then *Tantras*, we have lists of holy places, detailed instructions pertinent to a pilgrimage and all the merits listed accordingly. One has to agree that sometimes it looks as an advertisement of a spa: the landscape is beautifully described and all profits gained from the long and so much recommended trip are mentioned. One can assume that all these centres of pilgrimage became powerful institutions in the due course of time. And the word “institution” is the best one to connect the pilgrimage sites to Vijayanagara political strategies.

King Acyutarāya, facing a revolt just after his ascending to the throne, used his war expedition to bestow enormous gifts on the most important temples. The sequence of his visits, at least as described by his court poet, undoubtedly proclaims his attitude: he starts with a Vaiṣṇava holy place, then visits a Śaiva *kṣetra* only to come back again to a Viṣṇu temple and soon moves from it to a shrine of Śiva. Finally he stays in a Vaiṣṇava shrine awaiting the news from his general.

The verses depicting Acyutarāya's visit at the Venkateśvara temple show his close links with this particular shrine. It is proven not only by a considerable number of verses devoted to that episode. There are stanzas showing the King's attitude clearly:

*mahatā prabhālivalayena mahī-
patinārpitena phaṇṣaīlapatiḥ /
upariśritendradhanurullasitaṃ
haritaṃ vyaḍambayad ivāmbumucam // ARA V. 41 //*

The Lord of Śeṣagiri was offered by the Ruler of Earth
a big, constantly shining bracelet,
so he imitated a blue cloud
brighten up by the Bow of Indra (rainbow).

*śravaṇe kathāsya mananaṃ ca manaś
caraṇe śiraḥ svayam alaṃkurutaḥ /
iti kuṇḍalam padukam eṣa hareḥ
kim ihārpayan maṅkiriṭam api // ARA V. 42 //*

His (Viṣṇu's) story (is an ornament) for a pair of ears,
meditation (on him) decorates the heart/mind/chest,
(his) feet themselves ornament the head.
(Realising) this, how he (could not) present earrings,
a pendant and a diadem inlaid with precious stones to Hari?

The items given to the God were specified with some objective in mind. It is not a list prepared at random. The poet shows the King as a thoughtful devotee, trying to select the most precious and meaningful gifts for his Lord. The inscriptions corroborate that the Venkateśvara temple at Tirumalai was generously endowed by the rulers of the Tuluva dynasty and due to the rise of royal patronage, it finally became the most important pilgrimage centre in South India.

It is only in the case of the Tirumalai pilgrimage that we can see a kingly pilgrim in the process of transformation before his *darśan*

with the Lord of the Seven Hills. The footpath to the top of the hill is 15 km long. This strenuous and long way gives a chance to forget about everyday mundane life and open for the spiritual matters. The spiritual transformation connected to the phenomenon of pilgrimages was discussed by many scholars in the context of spirituality shared by a group. However, Acyuta, as is shown by the poet, does not belong to a community of pilgrims. He undertakes his journey alone. His way to the god's shrine will be an individual experience.²¹

As was already mentioned, the record of the Śaka year 1454 (1532 A.D.) at the Varadarājaswāmi temple in Kāñcī attests to the rich gifts Acyutarāya offered to this Vaiṣṇava temple, including 17 villages and a thousand cows, not to mention weighing himself against pearls in order to distribute them (Raman 1975: 29).

This kingly *yātrā* shows the Vaiṣṇava predilections of the monarch but also demonstrates his will to support the Śaiva temples. Perhaps his *yātrā*, no matter how many Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva temples and in what order he visited, was equally important as the Tāmraparṇī battle won by the Salaga prince Tirumala—consolidating the society, leaving behind physical signs of his presence, namely inscriptions and conspicuous gifts, resulting so often in architectural consequences, imprinting the territory with symbols of dominance and royalty, such as the royal portrait sculptures or Vijayanagara crest emblems.²² As Kathleen Morrison notices: “Indeed, claims of sovereignty are often followed closely by accounts of religious patronage” (Morrison 2001: 258) and

²¹ Also Someśvaradeva of Kalyāṇa, in his *Vikramāṅkābhūdayam*, while describing the Śrīparvata pilgrimage of Āhavamalla, undertaken in order to obtain a virtuous son, informs that the army stayed behind and the King ascended the mountain alone.

²² The Vijayanagara crest emblem with images of a boar, sword, moon and sun, apart from the City of Victory, can be found in different places of the empire. The crest emblem as seen on the east gopura of Alagar Perumal temple, Alagarkoil (16th century), additionally contains the Vaiṣṇava symbols: a wheel (*cakra*) and a conch (*śaṅkhā*) and in this way attests to Vaiṣṇava preferences of the Tuluva kings.

in this particular account, religious patronage is articulated in connection with a pilgrimage, in fact a very special one—the empire-building pilgrimage.²³

And Rājanātha Dīṇḍima, a poet at the service of the Vijayanagara Empire, had his share in propagating these imperial politics. Note once more, however, that one cannot be sure about the real sequence of the visits to the sacred spots. Perhaps some of them were visited after the Tāmraparṇī victory? The first inscription of Acyutarāya in the Venkaṭeśvara temple corresponds to the 31st January 1533. Acyuta's southern campaign is mentioned in the Kālahasti inscription (A.R. No. 158 of 1924) dated 1532: Acyuta is said to have subjugated Sāluva Nāyaka, married a Pāṇḍyan princess and set up a pillar of victory on the bank of the Tāmraparṇī River. The record at Kāñcī dated 1532 confirms his visit to the Varadarāja temple and weighing against pearls. The inscription from Śrīraṅgam (A.R. No. 142 of 1938–1939) dated 1530 registers gifts offered by a certain Anantalvar-pillai, who prays for the success of the *digvijaya* of Acyutadevarāya. Another badly damaged Śrīraṅgam inscription (A.R. No. 316 of 1950–51) seems to refer to the setting up of some pillar of victory by Acyuta. Its Śaka date corresponds to the 2nd March 1530. The inscriptions, as one can see, provide that most important information concerning this military expedition of the Vijayanagara Empire, namely its cause and the results: the victory and political marriage of Acyutarāya. Even their dates do not give certainty when exactly the southern campaign took place. The detailed report on the campaign, beginning with the departure from the capital city and describing all the stops on the way (= the temples visited), comes from a poet who arranged the kingly itinerary nicely but not necessarily faithfully. It is in fact a kind of Acyuta's manifesto concerning religious issues.

²³ All the details given by the poet prove that the aspect of a pilgrimage was very important here; it was not a mere description of going along religious centres but a real pilgrimage of a monarch.

To conclude, even if the route of Acyutarāya to the south could have been in reality different, the poet, descending from a family serving the royal patrons for ages, definitely knew very well how to create a picture of his monarch and how to present his deeds in order to put him in the centre of the world built accordingly to his dynastic claims and expectations. It is also worth pointing out that an employment of skilful court poets by the monarchs could serve as a means of validating their dynastic claims. Just as Bilhaṇa once described this symbiotic king-poet relation:

*pṛthvīpateḥ santi na yasya pārśve kavīśvarās tasya kuto yaśāṃsi /
bhūpāḥ kiyaṅto na babhūvur urvyāṃ jānāti nāmāpi na ko 'pi teṣāṃ //²⁴*

Where could the lord of the earth have fame from,
if there were no lords of poetry at his side?
How many kings lived on the earth
whose names are not even known to anybody?
(Bilhaṇa, *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* I. 26)

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²⁴ VDC 1875: 3.

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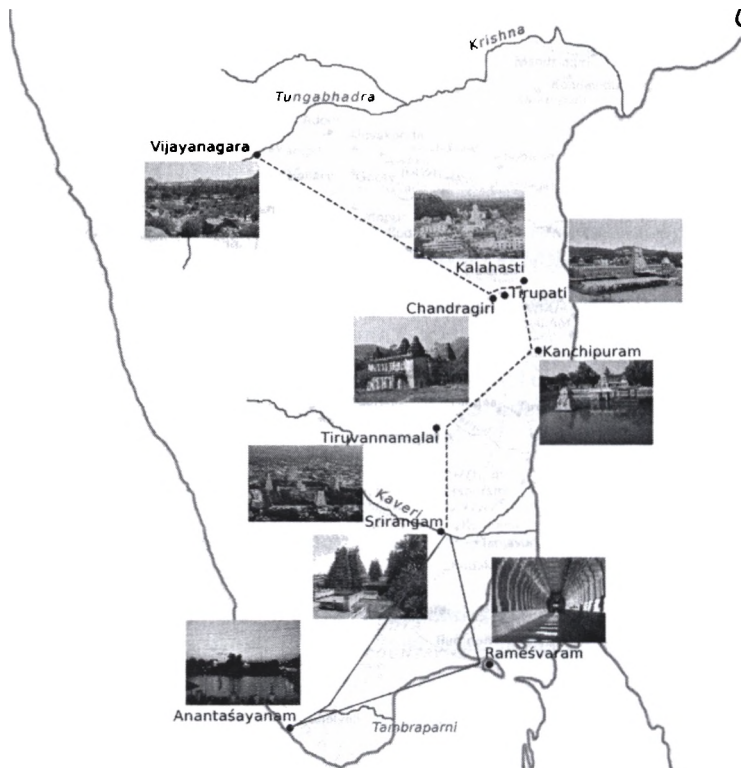
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Acyutarāya's southern campaign (c. 1530) as depicted by Rājanātha



dotted line - Acyutarāya's route

black line - Cinna Tirumala's route

Skr. Anantaśayanam – Thiruvananthapuram

Chandragiri – Skr. Candragiri

Kalahasti – Skr. Kālahasti

Kanchipuram – Skr. Kāñcīpuram

Kaveri – Skr. Kāverī

Rameśvaram – Skr. Rāmeśvaram

Srirangam – Skr. Śrīraṅgam

Tambraparni – Skr. Tāmraparṇī

Tiruvannamalai – Skr. Tiruvaṅṅmalai

Tungabhadra – Skr. Tuṅgabhadrā