

# Exploring Materiality *and* Connectivity in Anthropology *and Beyond*

*Edited by*  
Philipp Schorch  
Martin Saxer  
Marlen Elders



**UCLPRESS**

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## 6

# Stallions of the Indian Ocean

Srinivas Reddy

### Introduction

The magnificent South Indian empire of Vijayanagara reached its apex in the early sixteenth century. Nestled among the imposing granite boulders of the Deccan plateau in South-Central India, the empire's capital city of Vijayanagara (modern-day Hampi in Karnataka State) was considered the 'best provided city in the world ... as large as Rome, and very beautiful to the sight' (Paes in Sewell 1972, 256–7). The leader of this prosperous kingdom was one of India's most celebrated monarchs, Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara, a warrior, statesman, philosopher and poet whose twenty-year reign from 1509 to 1529 is remembered as a golden age in pre-modern South Indian history. It was a dynamic and exciting time that witnessed a renaissance of classical Indian knowledge systems alongside an expanded awareness of India's growing global connections (Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 2004). Just as Krishnadevaraya was ascending the throne of Vijayanagara in 1509, Portuguese colonialist enterprises were quickly taking control of almost all maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. This ancient and thriving trade network, transcontinental and multicultural, was now under the centralised control of the Portuguese empire, bringing about a new form of imperial connectivity that linked Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. With ports, ships and trade routes under their command, the Portuguese effectively controlled the dynamic flow of critical material resources into south and central India. For a shrewd leader like Krishnadevaraya, then, developing trade ties with the powerful Portuguese empire was of critical importance.



For the South Indian and Deccani empires of this time, the most essential imported commodity was the warhorse. These foreign animals of war were in fact the critical factor in determining the outcome of pre-modern Indian warfare. The equation was simple: whosoever had the largest cavalry would prove triumphant in battle. As Eaton observes, ‘Heavy warhorses were in special demand, since in the Deccan, as in India generally, state power rested ultimately on units of mounted archers’ (Eaton 2005, 59–60). This essential commodity, however, was not readily available to Indians locally. Although some ‘country-breeds’ of horse were present in India (Nuniz in Sewell 1972, 381), the bulkier, more rugged breeds needed for battle demanded the constant overseas importation of foreign horses from bustling entrepôts like Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. At the centre of this dynamic geopolitical trade network were the enterprising Portuguese, who cleverly pitted Indian empires against each other as they exploited this most sought-after material resource. In this chapter, I hope to explore the transcontinental connections of this medieval horse trade as a ‘commodity ecumene’, an ‘extremely complex and interrelated’ formation of ‘structures and dynamics starting around 1500 CE’ that tied ‘together many diverse parts of the world’ (Appadurai 1986, 36). In this particular story, the central element in the sixteenth-century Indian Ocean commodity ecumene was the horse, a living, breathing material resource that determined the fate of empires.

But what form of materiality/connectivity can we assign to members of the animal kingdom? Should we, unlike actors in the pre-modern Deccan, view these horses as subjective beings? Is there an existential difference between humans and animals, and if there is how has our evolving socio-commercial relationship with animals shaped such perceptions? These questions can be explored productively in the context of ‘biosocial becomings’, the way beings move and grow in an environmental ‘zone of interpenetration’ and through a ‘meshwork of materials endowed with properties of vitality and movement’ (Ingold and Palsson 2013, 18). As the various chapters in the collection edited by Tim Ingold and Gisli Palsson (2013) demonstrate, all life is both social and biological; it is dynamic, never static, and ontological boundaries between humans, animals and the environment are best viewed as porous, mutually constitutive and relational. Furthermore, the volume develops themes of flux and flow, encouraging us to think not of what creatures are, but what they do, to explore the how and why of what they do (or have done to them), and ultimately to see them not as beings but becomings (Ingold and Palsson 2013, 7–8). In the context of the present volume, materiality and connectivity can be seen from a similar perspective such that both

concepts are not the qualities of a being, but *potentialities* of multiple interrelated becomings. From one thicket of these becomings emerges the medieval warhorse as a *thing~tie* through time and space. What I mean here is that a horse's materiality, its biological constitution, is not a fixed, bounded or unchanging quality, but rather a field of potential becomings that evolves as the horse moves and grows. Similarly, connectivity, or a horse's social constitution, maps his/her dynamic range of capacities for potential interactions. Thus, just as all life is biosocial, so too is all life imbued with the kinetics of becoming (and unbecoming) a *thing~tie*.

In this sense, materiality and connectivity both represent 'trajectories of movement and growth', 'pathways of biosocial becoming' and the ever-changing potentialities of a being's becoming (Ingold and Palsson 2013, 8, 18). One theme which I will develop in the forthcoming historical analysis is the notion of permeability, the state or quality of a material or membrane that allows things to pass through it. As Ingold states, biosocial becomings 'are brought about through fluxes and exchanges of materials across the membranous surfaces of its emergent forms' (Ingold and Palsson 2013, 9). More specifically, I use this idea not only to characterise various porous elements in the horse-trade ecumene, but to use it heuristically as a means of better understanding the ways in which the horse in Vijayanagara came to be a commodity of connectivity via multiple intersecting trajectories. As Anthony Leeds notes, 'A high degree of permeability, however, does not mean the absence of boundaries. ... It means, rather, a fluidity ... that functions as a boundary-maintaining mechanism for nodes or nodal networks' (Leeds 1994, 181). For the horse trade network of the early sixteenth century, this permeability of borders did not imply a free and unbounded flow of materials, but rather a complex set of factors that regulated, moderated and ultimately defined the terms of exchange. In other words, permeability modulates the materiality and connectivity of beings and their networks; it encodes not only what kinds of things are let into a system, but also what kinds of things are kept out.

Before we proceed to a detailed analysis of the historical archive, it is important to discuss the historiography of Vijayanagara scholarship and my methodological approach to these materials. The most significant contribution to the study of Vijayanagara history was Robert Sewell's 1900 publication of *A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar): A Contribution to the History of India*, which provided, for the first time in English translation, the eyewitness accounts of two Portuguese horse merchants, Domingo Paes, a trader in the company of the nobleman Cristovao Figueiredo, who visited Vijayanagara around 1520 during the reign of

Krishnadevaraya, and Fernao Nuniz, who, a decade later, spent three years in the capital city trading in horses. Both these chronicles provide historians with a wealth of information about Vijayanagara, its history, people and administration. In addition, I draw on Joan-Pau Rubiés's 2002 *Travel and Ethnology in the Renaissance: South India through European Eyes*, a remarkable compendium and analysis of almost four centuries (1250–1625) of European travel literature on South India. As the title of Sewell's book indicates, historians had forgotten about the empire of Vijayanagara. Like the empty ruins of the kingdom's capital city in modern-day Hampi, empirical knowledge of the empire was lost; all that remained was the vague memory of a bygone era, perpetuated by legends, myths and vernacular imaginations.

For locals, this indigenous memory was embedded (1) orally in local performances, songs and recited verses (Narayana Rao and Shulman 1998), and (2) textually in literary works that often blended empirical historical data with poetic metaphor. For this reason, much of this medieval literary corpus was not viewed as valid source material for historical analysis. The need to revisit the vernacular archive, however, was felt as early as 1919, when Krishnaswami S. Ayyangar published *Sources of Vijayanagar History*, a dry and non-analytical compilation of Vijayanagara source materials that included pertinent excerpts from Indian literary texts. With regard to Sewell's work, Ayyangar comments: 'Excellent as the work was for the time, and for the sources and historical material at his disposal, it suffered from the neglect of the evidence available in various forms in literature which go a long way towards filling up ... many gaps' (Ayyangar 1919, 1). And in respect of Ayyangar's project, Sir George Grierson, the celebrated British civil servant and linguist, wrote: 'I cordially agree with you in the importance you attach to casual references in non-historical Indian literature. These have too often been neglected by students, and they not uncommonly afford historical data which cannot be found elsewhere' (Ayyangar 1919, v). Clearly, Indian literature did have a contribution to make to historical inquiry; it just needed to be read in the right way.

This issue of historicity in Indian literary texts has been the subject of much discussion (Nayarana Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 2001; Ali 2002; Talbot 2001; Inden, Walters and Ali 2000). Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam compel us to reread these texts by feeling for their texture, that is, to discern the different layers of history and myth that are interwoven throughout these texts. Of particular importance to this study is a great poem (*mahākāvya*) written in classical Telugu by the king Krishnadevaraya himself. His *Āmuktamāyada* is

a long and ornate epic of almost one thousand verses that takes the story of a Tamil saint as its narrative kernel. Like all *kāvya*s, however, the text ranges over a variety of subjects and is filled with descriptive verses on cities, villages, seasons, flora and fauna. One of these sections is particularly unique and relevant to the present study. It is dedicated to *rāja-nīti* or political theory/ethical governance. Here, in some eighty verses, the king poetically describes his personal advice on how to be a good king. This was lived wisdom from a seasoned statesman: ‘no arm-chair pontificating but a largely practical synthesis reflecting the political, economic and institutional changes of the early sixteenth century’ (Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 2004, 605).

Below is an example of the kind of verse that reflects this new, historically rooted political consciousness:

Promote trade by providing for ports and encouraging the sale  
of horses, wild elephants, jewels, perfume, pearls and more.  
When foreigners arrive plagued with drought, disease or disaster,  
shelter and provide for them according to their station,  
But only gift lands, stables and mines to your most trusted allies.  
(*Āmuktamālyada* IV.245)

Insightful verses on state policy like this one illustrate many of the problems, concerns and challenges faced by a pre-modern Indian king; they also provide a first-hand account of how Krishnadevaraya approached and dealt with such critical matters of state. In the poem above, for example, the issue of maritime trade is highlighted, and we get a clear sense that the king was keen on developing such trade by supporting foreign (i.e. Portuguese) merchants.

By revisiting these sources and integrating the ‘hard’ chronicles of the Portuguese merchants with the ‘soft’ literature of Krishnadevaraya, I hope to move beyond the issue of empirical historicity, towards a discourse of relational historicity. That is, how do sources interact with each other? How do they reinforce, contradict and complicate our understanding of history? In contrast to European colonial powers, pre-modern India had a very different sense of history and historiography, but this does not alter the fact that Indic literary sources can, and should, be plumbed for richer and more inclusive historical perspectives. With this view in mind, the most significant result of returning to the literary archive is the recovery of ‘forgotten’ Indian voices. Drawing on this wide array of source materials, I propose to explore the sixteenth-century Deccani horse trade from both sides of the commodity exchange, to glean intentions, agendas

and policies from both native and foreign perspectives, and, ultimately, to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms by which new expressions of maritime connectivity interacted with the kinetic materiality of vital resources like the horse.

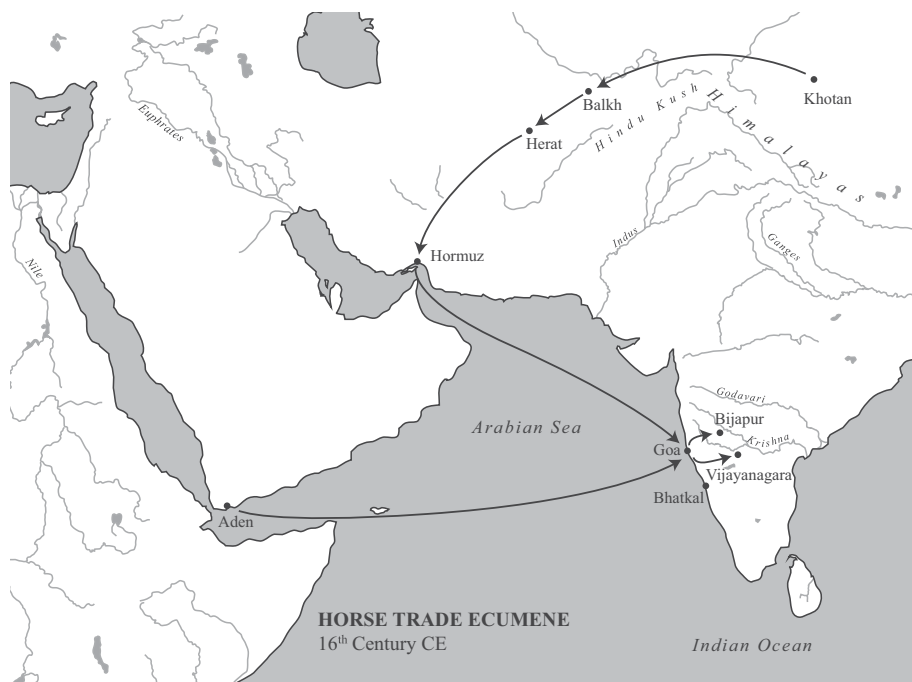
## Revisiting the historical archive

The early sixteenth century was a period of remarkable dynamism: enterprising Portuguese ships were crisscrossing the world, capturing critical ports along established trade networks in Africa and the Middle East, and effectively linking disparate peoples and lands into a new, centralised order of global connectivity (Correia-Afonso 1981; Pearson 1981; Crowley 2015). Here it is important to bear in mind that the Portuguese presence in the Indian Ocean did not create a new trade network. Rather, it streamlined an already thriving system dominated by Arab merchants and consolidated it into a single, widespread but centrally administered trade ecumene (Pearson 2008, 11–12). The key to the Portuguese's success was their rapid seizure of key port cities like Malindi on the east coast of Africa, Hormuz and Aden along the Arabian Peninsula, and Goa in India. These nodes of Indian Ocean maritime trade were permeable and enduring at the same time. Even after their seizure by the Portuguese, these ports continued to thrive and bear witness to the constant in- and outflow of ships, commodities and merchant communities. In this regard, the Portuguese, unlike other European colonial powers to come, were a coastal empire of ports and shorelines. These littoral lands, as Heesterman avers, 'forms a frontier zone that is not there to separate or enclose, but which rather finds its meaning in its permeability' (Pearson 2003, 38). This new meaning defined the Portuguese empire as an 'ocean power' – robust and wide-ranging, but also dependent on the 'land power' of inland kingdoms to drive its imperialist commercial designs.

For example, after the capture of Goa in 1510, the Portuguese needed to make connections to Indian polities further inland towards the east. This brought them to the Deccan, a large, arid plateau located in south-central India. This expansive, elevated region is flanked by the twin mountain ranges of the Eastern and Western Ghats that rise from India's coastline. It is a dry and landlocked region that required constant connectivity with coastal communities to bring in key imports like the horse. Akin to the dynamism of ports and littoral communities, the medieval Deccan was a geo-cultural frontier zone. At the crossroads of the subcontinent, it was a region marked by a startling diversity of languages,

religions and social customs (Gribble 1896; Sherwani 1985; Eaton 2005; Eaton and Wagoner 2014). By the early sixteenth century, five distinct kingdoms (Ahmadnagar, Berar, Bidar, Bijapur and Golkonda) had splintered off from the disintegrating Bahmani superstate, the Gajapatis of Orissa were making inroads into the eastern Deccan, and further south the Vijayanagara empire was conquering large swathes of lands covering almost all of peninsular India. It was a volatile political environment, to be sure, but one permeable enough for the Portuguese to make their foray into Deccani politics.

Amongst South Asianists, there is a heated debate about the indigeneity of the horse in South Asia (Nath 1961, cited in Danino 2014; Leach 1990; Bökönyi 1997; Danino 2014). The empirical evidence suggests that there was a horse (or horse-like creature) present in India for thousands of years. This horse, which Nuniz would later call a ‘country-breed’ (Nuniz in Sewell 1972, 381), does not, however, seem to be the horse that was sought after for use in battle. Warhorses from West Asia, particularly Balkh and Herat (*AM* II.39), were constantly being imported into South Asia, first over land via the north-west passages into the subcontinent, and later by sea when maritime trade had blossomed. As Richard Eaton explains:



**Figure 6.1** Map of sixteenth-century horse trade ecumene. Map by Zachary Culbreth and Srinivas Reddy, 2018.

large warhorses ... had constantly to be imported from outside. Moreover, regular trade between the Deccan and north India had virtually ceased ever since the Bahmanis revolted against their former Tughluq overlords a century earlier. As a result, horses could no longer be brought to the Deccan overland from Central Asia and north India, but had to be shipped across the Arabian Sea.

(Eaton 2005, 60)

This raises an interesting point about how regions connect. In the Deccan scenario, it was decreased permeability on the Deccan–North India land border that promoted maritime trade in the Indian Ocean along channels that were becoming increasingly permeable. By the medieval period, then, when the importation of warhorses had developed into a lucrative trade system, the horse, which was now synonymous with military might, also determined the fate of empires. Throughout this long history, one element has remained constant: the horse in India has served as both a symbolic and a physical manifestation of political power. It was never a common labour animal like the ox or water buffalo; rather it was a rare and prized animal commodity confined to elite and royal circles. Or, as Giovanni da Montecorvino, the fourteenth-century Italian missionary, succinctly tells us, in India ‘horses are scarce, reserved for the king and lords’ (Rubiés 2000, 60).

There are several examples from medieval European travel literature that support the thesis that Indians were not well versed in horse care, particularly in regard to their diets. Marco Polo, for example, remarked that Indian horses were poorly fed with ‘boiled rice and boiled meat, and various other kinds of cooked food’, and that, with no proper fodder, ‘they all die off’ (Polo 1903, 345). Later, the Russian traveller Athanasius Nikitin commented that ‘horses are fed on peas; also on kichiris [rice with lentils] boiled with sugar and oil’ (Major 1857, III/10). Perhaps it was the great respect that Indians had for horses that prompted them to feed them with cooked food, that is, food good enough for humans. As the fourteenth-century Persian historian Wassaf comments, ‘It is a strange thing that when these horses arrive there, instead of giving them raw barley, they give them roasted barley and grain dressed with butter, and boiled cow’s milk to drink’ (Polo 1903, 351, note 17). From the court annals of the great Mughal emperor Akbar, we learn that imperial horses were fed two pounds of flour daily, one and a half pounds of sugar, and an additional half a pound of ghee in winter (Polo 1903, 351, note 17). This practice does not seem to have changed over the years, for much later the civil servant Dr Caldwell noted that ‘Rice is frequently given

by natives to their horses to fatten them up, and a sheep's head occasionally to strengthen them' (Polo 1903, 351, note 17). By all accounts, the prescribed Indian horse diet seems to have been the same as, if not better than, that of their human handlers. Here then is another form of permeability, one in which human food items and habits were passing into the diet and care of horses. With regard to this aspect of the human–animal interface, it is clear that a heightened reverence for the horse and its consequently prescribed royal diet led to an extreme and unconventional form of equine care that sadly curbed the very health, growth and fertility of the horse in India.

This lack of dietetic expertise, however, seems to have been counter-balanced by a kind of intuitive bond developed in India between man and horse, something that Portuguese explorer Pedro Cabral suggests when he writes, 'In this kingdom there are many horses and elephants because they wage war, and they have them so taught and trained that the only thing which they lack is speech, and they understand everything like human beings' (Rubiés 2000, 183–4). Here we also get an indication that once the horses were bought and placed under local trainers, they moved from an exploitative commercial relationship to a more typically domesticated one, and perhaps even one marked by intimate care and concern. But even this congenial atmosphere does not seem to have been enough for fruitful breeding to take place. Therefore, it appears that a lack of proper fodder, or perhaps the incorrect understanding of the best type of fodder, was the key reason for the perpetual need for the importation of horses into the subcontinent. In addition, the harsh Indian summers and the quickly following monsoons seem to have caused environmental troubles for the horses. Here, Joan-Pau Rubiés summarises the situation that Marco Polo witnessed first-hand: 'revenue is spent buying horses, which do not breed in India and must be continuously imported. They do not know how to keep them, and the merchants exploit the situation' (Rubiés 2000, 60).

Polo's remark about the mercantile exploitation of the Indian scenario is critical here, for in the early sixteenth century the Portuguese would capitalise on India's disproportionate equation of high demand and low supply. For example, Afonso Albuquerque, the celebrated admiral and governor of Goa, strategically pitted the Deccani empires of Bijapur and Vijayanagara against each other, for he knew that both empires would do whatever was necessary, that is, pay whatever exorbitant price was asked of them, because the acquisition of warhorses was such a crucial factor for both parties' claim to military might. Or, as recorded in his *Commentários*:



Afonso d'Albuquerque always laboured to make each one of these lords understand that he desired to have peace and friendship and the trade in horses with him, which was what they claimed; for, whereas he held the key of their position at Goa, he desired by means of this artifice to sow dissensions among them.

(Albuquerque 2010, III, 38)

This artifice would be launched from various locales, but Albuquerque's seizure of Goa in 1510 would make this critical port city the Portuguese empire's central base in India. In a letter to King Manuel dated 1 April 1512, he wrote: 'Goa in your power will make both the kings of Narsinga and Deccan pay tribute ... because the king of Narsinga, in order to secure ... the supply of horses to his lands, will have to do whatever you request' (Rubiés 2000, 191–2, fn 64). And a year and a half later, in a letter dated 4 December 1513, Albuquerque wrote to his king again, this time with an unabashedly explicit description of his imperialist intentions:

I have determined that the horses from Arabia and Persia should all be in your hand ... first, in order to favour the port of Goa with the high duties paid by the horses ... and also because the king of Narsinga and those of the Deccan will desire and strive for peace with you, seeing that it is in your power to give them victory over each other, because without doubt whoever has the horses from Arabia and Persia will win.

(Rubiés 2000, 191–2, fn 64)

If Krishnadevaraya was going to be forced into Albuquerque's trade game, he was determined to win. Indeed, the rapid rise of the Vijayanagara empire, its veritable becoming, was inextricably connected to the acquisition and deployment of foreign warhorses. Sometime around 1519, Krishnadevaraya laid siege to the hotly contested fort of Raichur, a key stronghold in the Krishna-Tungabhadra doab that was constantly changing hands between Bijapur and Vijayanagara. Unable to penetrate the high ramparts guarded by skilled archers, Krishnadevaraya camped outside the fort walls and was settled in for a long siege when, seemingly out of the blue, a Portuguese horse trader named Cristovão Figueiredo appeared with several musketeers in tow. Figueiredo proclaimed 'that the whole business of the Portuguese was war' (Nuniz in Sewell, 1972, 343) and duly aided Krishnadevaraya in his victory. In return for this great service, Krishnadevaraya invited Figueiredo and his men (including Domingo

Paes) to join him as his guests at the imperial capital. It was likely that the experience in Raichur made Krishnadevaraya believe that the Portuguese were his allies, and since he already knew of their conquests in and around Goa he made many efforts to treat his guests well and secure their support in supplying him with warhorses. He also knew that he had to display the power and wealth of the Vijayanagara state in order to outshine the Bijapuris. Paes describes their lavish reception at court:

here he [Krishnadevaraya] commanded us to be lodged in some very good houses; and Figueiredo was visited by many lords and captains. . . . The king said many kind and pleasant things to him, and asked him concerning the kind of state which the king of Portugal kept up; and having been told about it all he seemed much pleased.

(Paes in Sewell 1972, 252–3)

A passage from Krishnadevaraya's *Āmuktamālyada* appears to capture the very same moment, as the king describes imperial protocol with regard to foreign visitors:

Merchants from distant lands,  
who import elephants and warhorses,  
should be kept in imperial service at the capital.  
Treat them with prestige  
and provide them with towns and mansions.

(*Āmuktamālyada* IV.258)

The similarities between Paes's travelogue and Krishnadevaraya's poem are striking, and reveal but one of many fascinating parallels between European chronicles and Indian literary sources. Juxtaposing native and foreign accounts strengthens the case that both parties were well aware of the importance of this burgeoning trade relationship.

Cognisant of this high-demand/low-supply scenario, the Portuguese under Albuquerque's command went to great lengths to ensure their monopoly. The Italian traveller Ludovico di Varthema comments that 'you must know that a horse is worth at least 300, 400, and 500 pardaus, and some are purchased for 800 pardaus, because horses are not produced here, neither are there any mares found there, because those kings who hold the seaports do not allow them to be brought' (Varthema 1863, 126). Thus, not only were the Portuguese charging a handsome



**Figure 6.2** Horses with Portuguese merchants. Panel from Vitthala Temple complex (Hampi, Karnataka, India). Photo taken by the author in 2018.

sum, they were also restricting the import of mares that would allow for local breeding. They were effectively restricting a stallion's materiality – his ability to procreate, his generative potential, and his vital power to continue being. This practice highlights the permeability of the horse trade ecumene and the ways in which the flow of commodities is regulated through strategies of both inclusion and exclusion. As the arbiters of this bio-economic trade permeability, the Portuguese only deepened India's dependence on foreign horses through their ban on the import of mares. And although Indians seem to have tried to breed imported stallions with country-breed mares, Marco Polo observed that this was never very successful:

Another strange thing to be told is that there is no possibility of breeding horses in this country, as hath often been proved by trial. For even when a great blood-mare here has been covered by a great blood-horse, the produce is nothing but a wretched wry-legged weed, not fit to ride.

(Polo 1903, 342)

Apparently, this was another type of biological barrier that could be crossed, albeit with less than favourable results.

Nuniz describes another rather perfidious practice that further exploited the Indian buyers: 'He [the Vijayanagara king Narasimha] caused horses to be brought from Oromuz and Adeem into his kingdom and thereby gave great profit to the merchants, paying them for the horses just as they asked. He took them dead or alive at three for a thousand pardaos, and of those that died at sea they brought him the tail only, and he paid for it just as if it had been alive' (Nuniz in Sewell 1972, 307). The

idea here is that even when the Portuguese were trying to make a quick profit, Vijayanagara kings were willing and financially able to indulge in the inflated offer. As the king clearly states in *AM IV.258*, ‘Purchase their goods at a high price and ensure that your enemies are deprived of such resources.’

Once these prized imported horses were in the king’s possession, he seems to have made every effort to look after their maintenance and care. But in many ways it appears that, like the horses themselves, knowledge about equine care needed to be imported as well. Krishnadevaraya’s chief horse master, for example, was one Madanarque, who appears to have been a skilled horse trainer of Muslim origin (Nuniz in Sewell 1972, 381). Unfortunately, we have no further information about Madanarque’s background or his set of specialist skills, but a corroboratory verse from Krishnadevaraya evidences the king’s insistence on employing such skilled caretakers: ‘Entrust the care of finely bred horses and elephants, only to skilled and loyal servants, never to your lords’ (*AM IV.226*).

Another quote from Marco Polo makes it clear that, like the restrictive ban on mares, the permeable membrane of the horse trade did not allow for the movement of skilled horse trainers, farriers or groomers.

The reason why they want so many horses every year is that by the end of the year there shall not be one hundred of them remaining, for they all die off. And this arises from mismanagement, for those people do not know in the least how to treat a horse; and besides they have no farriers. The horse-merchants not only never bring any farriers with them, but also prevent any farrier from going thither, lest that should in any degree baulk the sale of horses, which brings them in every year such vast gains.

(Polo 1903, 340)

With regard to this kind of knowledge barrier, Arjun Appadurai discusses ‘the peculiarities of knowledge that accompany relatively complex, long-distance, intercultural flows of commodities’, and states that ‘as distances increase, so the negotiation of the tension between knowledge and ignorance becomes itself a critical determinant of the flow of commodities’ (Appadurai 1986, 41).

Even with limited foreign expertise, Krishnadevaraya, with all the resources available to him, seems to have lavished great care on his horses. In *AM IV.226* he declares: ‘Protect your stables at all times, and keep them well stocked with the best fodder.’ Furthermore, Nuniz describes the variety of labour that went into the care of these prized

possessions, and the lengths to which Krishnadevaraya went in order to keep track of their welfare.

This King has ... sixteen hundred grooms who attend to the horses, and has also three hundred horse trainers and two thousand artificers, namely blacksmiths, masons, and carpenters .... To the six thousand horsemen the King gives horses free and gives provision for them every month.

(Nuniz in Sewell 1972, 381)

Clearly, Krishnadevaraya held the horse in great esteem, but its significance for the empire went beyond its role as an instrument of war, for it also served as a powerful symbol of imperial wealth, splendour and might. And so for the king, the significance of a horse's materiality was derived not only from its sheer physicality and deployment in battle, but also from its correspondence with Indic conceptions of power and sovereignty. The paradox that resulted from high esteem coupled with poor care, mitigated as it was by low stocks, the ban on mares and limited expertise in horse care, demonstrates how modalities of inclusion/exclusion created permeable materialities/connectivities, and ultimately engendered the stallion's new becoming in early sixteenth-century South India.

## Closing thoughts

Another way in which we can employ permeability to help us understand the workings of the sixteenth-century horse trade is by using it as a lens to interrogate the materiality of the horse itself. As a living, breathing commodity, the horse defies easy categorisation: it is neither a human nor an inanimate object, neither a manufactured product nor a static marketable commodity. It is a dynamic, organic, living organism that comes into being in the interstices of such categorisations. In that sense, the dynamic materiality of the horse compels us to move through these boundaries and appreciate the permeable nature of the human–animal interface as a fluid field of biosocial becomings.

Even within a framework in which the horse is a mere object of sale, a commodity item, the fact remains that these stallions of war played a critical role in the geopolitical upheavals of medieval South Asia. It may be argued that horses had no agency in this relationship, but I suggest that their very being in the equation of imperial transactions embroils them in the charge of human history. Here I concur with Ingold that 'the domain

in which human persons are involved as social beings with one another cannot be rigidly set apart from the domain of their involvement with non-human components of the environment' (Ingold 2000, 61). Ingold's proposed 'biosocial correspondence' links humans, flora, fauna, land and sea into an interactive field of relationships in which all components are contributing towards a unified simultaneity of becoming. He continues: 'The distinction between the human and the non-human no longer marks the outer limits of the social world, as against that of nature, but rather maps a domain within it whose boundary is both permeable and easily crossed' (Ingold 2000, 76). This permeability is precisely what I believe reveals a being's materiality, as well as its potential to connect to other beings, or, in the parlance of this volume, its *thing~tie*-ness. In this sense, the materiality and the connectivity of a *thing~tie* are dynamic potentialities of an interlinked becoming; changing one changes the other, and they both change because of their own unique permeabilities. Thus, the materiality and connectivity of a *thing~tie* are best seen when states of being permeate into potentialities of becoming.

The early sixteenth century was a time when war, trade, land and sea were all inextricably connected via multiple intersecting pathways, all flowing through their own particular nodes and membranes of permeability with the all-important horse at their centre. As Ingold remarks,

Wherever there is life and habitation, the interfacial separation of substance and medium is disrupted to give way to mutual permeability and binding. For it is in the nature of living beings themselves that ... they bind the medium with substances in forging their own growth and movement through the world.

(Ingold 2008, 8)

This 'mutual permeability and binding' can best be viewed when things are moving, for 'things-in-motion ... illuminate their human and social context' (Appadurai 1986, 5). Indeed, I argue that these multiple layers of permeability are critical factors that engendered, fostered and fuelled the remarkable connectivity of this time. In the Indian Ocean horse trade ecumene of the early sixteenth century, stallions were one of many 'things-in-motion', and their transport, sale and deployment as instruments of war in South Asia provide a unique perspective on the ways in which materials moving through permeable membranes can connect disparate peoples and places.

To conclude, the horse was a critical component of the South Asian eco-political currency of the sixteenth century that demanded constant

material connectivity with distant empires and maritime networks. The dependence on this commodified *thing~tie* spawned important trade relationships between South Asian empires and the Portuguese empire, which in turn brought new people, cultures and systems of knowledge to the subcontinent. Trade practices also kept some knowledge (horse care and maintenance) and some materials (mares) out of the equation, which did nothing but deepen this material dependency. This inextricable link between human and animal returns us to Ingold's notion that

human beings do not so much transform the material world as play their part, along with other creatures, in the world's transformation of itself ... nature is not a surface of materiality upon which human history is inscribed; rather history is the process wherein both people and their environments are continually bringing each other into being.

(Ingold 2000, 87)

This journey to sixteenth-century Vijayanagara via the historical archive has attempted to see this remarkable period of history as a 'bringing into being', much as I believe Krishnadevaraya saw himself and his magnificent realm. He well understood the complex world in which he lived and ruled; he kept a close watch over the politics, military, art and economy of his kingdom; and he reigned with both tact and sagacity. To close, below is one final verse from Krishnadevaraya's sage advice to future kings:

When the king keeps his treasury filled  
and his stables stocked with horses and wild elephants  
he diffuses potential disasters  
by showing both wisdom and strength.

(*Āmuktamālyada* IV.232)

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