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Nota di contenuto	List of illustrations -- Preface -- Acknowledgements -- A note on spelling and vocabulary -- 1. In search of India: the empire of Vijayanagara through European eyes -- 2. Marco Polo's India and the Latin Christian tradition -- 3. Establishing lay science: the merchant and the humanist -- 4. Ludovico de Varthema: the curious traveller at the time of Vasco da Gama and Columbus -- 5. The Portuguese and Vijayanagara: politics, religion and classification -- 6. The practice of ethnography: Indian customs and castes -- 7. The social and political order: Vijayanagara decoded -- 8. The historical dimension: from native traditions to European orientalism -- 9. The missionary discovery of South Indian religion: opening the doors of idolatry -- 10. From humanism to scepticism: the independent traveller in the seventeenth century -- Conclusion: Before orientalism -- Appendix -- Bibliography -- Index.

This book, first published in 2000, offers a wide-ranging and ambitious analysis of how European travellers in India developed their perceptions of ethnic, political and religious diversity over three hundred years. It analyses the growth of novel historical and philosophical concerns, from the early and rare examples of medieval travellers such as Marco Polo, through to the more sophisticated narratives of seventeenth-century observers - religious writers such as Jesuit missionaries, or independent antiquarians such as Pietro della Valle. The book's approach combines the detailed contextual analysis of individual narratives with an original long-term interpretation of the role of cross-cultural encounters in the European Renaissance. An extremely wide range of European sources is discussed, including the often neglected but extremely important Iberian and Italian sources. However, the book also discusses a number of non-European sources, Muslim and Hindu, thereby challenging simplistic interpretations of western 'orientalism'.
