INTRODUCTION

A short way into his adventures, Don Quixote sees two large dust-clouds approaching each other and in his mind they become two armies gathering for battle. He imagines that they belong to a heathen emperor of 'the great Ínsula Taprobane' – a legendary island often identified with Sri Lanka – on the one side and a Christian king on the other.[1] The emperor had asked for the hand of his opponent's daughter, but she was refused to him unless he renounced his false prophet and turned to Christ. Don Quixote decides to join the campaign to defend this point of principle. The knight's perceptions are the least reliable in literature, and his creator a very remote observer.[2] But his ravings were at least fortuitous. Cervantes was writing just as the sixteenth century expired, a century which had indeed seen Iberians going into battle in Sri Lanka in the name of baptized kings against 'heathen' rulers who styled themselves emperors. A few years before, a Sinhalese Christian princess had even been forced to wed the apostate king Vimaladharmasūriya I (1591–1604). The banners of religious identity had come to be flown above political struggles.

Two features of the sixteenth-century Portuguese maritime expansion in Asia are worth emphasizing for those familiar with other kinds of empire. First, territorial conquest was often eschewed. The preferred means of protecting their mercantile strongholds was typically to make vassals or allies of the surrounding rulers. Second, the pursuit of commercial and political power was intimately associated with religious ideals and missionary concerns. This book examines what happened when this wave of expansion reached the Sinhalese kingdoms of Sri Lanka.[3]

[1] Cervantes 2005: 126–30.

[2] Sri Lanka was commonly identified with that ancient island in Portugal (see the letter of King Manuel to the Pope, 25 September 1507, announcing the discovery of Ceylon as Taprobane, VP: 5; and, writing in the 1590s, Couto: 80), but there was a long-running debate in Europe over its identification. Don Quixote lived through classical and chivalric texts, and he is drawing on their exotic image of 'Taprobane' rather than on contemporary realities to fuel his imagination. The hapless knight imagines the heathen emperor to be a Muslim and accords all the protagonists absurd and bombastic names. However, Cervantes had served as a spy in Portugal during the early 1580s, so it is plausible that he knew something of Lankan affairs.

[3] Since this book is primarily concerned with the Sinhalese kingdoms, we shall not reflect on the controversial issue of the origins of the Jaffna kingdom in the north of the island.

The first two parts are rooted in the mid century. Many broader themes are broached there – such as the nature of state power in Sri Lanka – but they are used to provide the context for a fine-grained analysis of the reign of King Bhuvanekabāhu VII of Kōṭṭe (1521–51). This is where those readers should turn who want a case-study of how early Portuguese imperialism worked and how an Asian ruler responded to it, or of what kind of impact the arrival of a small Christian mission could have in a Buddhist land. The third and largest part is quite different, taking in the latter half of the sixteenth century and a decade or two beyond in order to reflect on themes of identity. The central argument concerns the religious identity of kings, but we shall also explore how dynastic loyalties and ethnic and cultural antagonisms were played out over the whole of the century.

Some characters and controversies

Bhuvanekabāhu VII's reign is where the long history of European imperial involvement in Sri Lanka's history has its origins. At least one previous king had sworn some sort of vassalage to the Portuguese, but it was only under Bhuvanekabāhu that the Portuguese came to acquire real power on the island and it was at his personal invitation that the first Christian mission arrived on its shores. One might expect then that he would have been eulogized by a writer such as Fernão de Queirós, the Portuguese Jesuit whose massive chronicle, 'The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon' narrated the whole 'Portuguese period' of Lankan history (1506–1658).[4] But for Queirós, Bhuvanekabāhu presented a dilemma: this king had also resisted all attempts to procure his baptism. He turned out to be the very symbol of resolute paganism. In Queirós' text, Bhuvanekabāhu's characterization is therefore ambiguous; he is blessed with the qualities of gentleness and kindness and even honour, but he is no great man, he is weak and timorous, afraid to convert for fear of alienating his subjects.

That is the image that has come down to us today, largely because of the way in which Queirós' text was embodied in the highly influential work of P. E. Pieris in the early twentieth century.[5] Pieris, a pronounced Sinhalese patriot, had his own reasons for affirming Queirós' judgement of Bhuvanekabāhu as a man endowed with 'the more feminine virtues' but not the masculine qualities of leadership: for him, as for many others, Bhuvanekabāhu was at fault for facilitating the establishment of colonial power in Ceylon.[6] In this Pieris was also following the lead of the Sinhalese chronicle, the *Rājāvaliya*, which had already castigated him as a traitor

[4] I have used a modernized version of 'Queirós' in the main text, but the English translation will be cited according to its rendering, 'Queyroz'.

[5] Pieris 1983–92 (first published 1913–14), upon which many popular works continue to rely. It is ironic therefore that some nationalist interpretations have their origins in the idiosyncratic preoccupations of this Portuguese Jesuit, see Malalasekera 1994: 258–61; Weerasooriya 1970; Sankaranarayan 1994: 59; Panabokke 1993: 192–207; Rambukwelle 1996, who explicitly acknowledges his dependence on Pieris and Queirós.

[6] Pieris and Fitzler 1927b: 23; Roberts, Raheem and Colin-Thomé 1989: 5; J. A. Will Perera 1956.

in the late seventeenth century.[7] This image of a feeble, vacillating creature, principally propelled by terror of his ambitious younger brother Māyādunnē (1521–81), of the vigorous Portuguese and of his own subjects has become a cliché of subsequent historical writing.[8]

Of course, if that is the posterity meted out to the last independent king of Kōṭṭe, one would one not expect much of the reputation of his thoroughly dependent successor, his young grandson Dharmapāla (1551–97), who did convert to Christianity early on in his reign and spent decades confined to his capital in an impotent and claustrophobic relationship with the Portuguese. While Dharmapāla is the extension of all that was forlorn or pathetic in his predecessor, so too Rājasiṃha I (1581–93), the terrible lion of the rival kingdom of Sītāvaka, tends to be seen as the epitome of all that was patriotic and warlike in his father Māyādunnē.[9]

In the writing of sixteenth-century history, such character-sketches have been attractive explanatory devices, but they are difficult to establish in contemporary evidence. Take Bhuvanekabāhu: his 'goodness' or friendliness is a theme that one can trace back to the earliest Portuguese chroniclers.[10] It may reflect his actual reputation at the time; it certainly reflects his status as a generally reliable Portuguese ally. But when we turn to the contemporary letters we find that the received characterization dissolves into a slender and ambiguous assemblage of perspectives. To observers at the Kōṭṭe court he is crafty or prone to tears.[11] To a Portuguese governor, wearily intent on maintaining the status quo, he may be 'a man of good disposition', but to an aggrieved Portuguese settler he is a tyrant and sodomite, to a friar pushing Kandyan claims he is an opium and arrack-addict, and to another friar angered by his recalcitrance he is a duplicitous servant of the devil.[12]

The standard characterizations slip easily into the modern imagination.[13] To the man in the street in Sri Lanka, the colonial Portuguese still tend to bear an awful reputation as religious vandals. And for writers with nationalist sympathies that reputation remains a powerful symbol of the evils of foreign interference, as a raft of editorials and comments regarding the recent quincentennial of the Portuguese arrival in Sri Lanka revealed (this was widely held to be 2005, although most professional historians agree that it was more likely that the Portuguese first arrived in 1506 rather than 1505). When one collective wanted to impress on their readership the image of the then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe as a

[7] *Rājāvaliya*: 73–7. [8] See Bourdon 1936; G. G. Perera 1951: 33: Quéré 1988a: 74.
[9] Māyādunnē can sometimes be blamed as a 'causer of disunity' (interview with Douglas Ranasinghe Colombo, Feb. 2000), but more often he is something of a hero.
[10] Correia: 211, 267; Barros: 74; Couto: 140; Castanheda, VI. 296. The letter of Miguel Ferreira reported by Queyroz: 231–3, may be a fictitious creation.
[11] VP: 10, 130. [12] VP: 192, 118, 205, 239.
[13] A local tradition of Church history, carried forward by S. G. Perera, W. L. A. Don Peter, Vito Perniola, and Martin Quéré, has taken issue with the anti-Christian perspectives while developing the critique of Portuguese imperialism that is present in the earliest Portuguese letters and chronicles. In the twentieth century this was transformed into the notion that Catholicism was actually damaged by its association with the Portuguese.

'Betrayer of the Sinhala Nation' for his attempts to come to a political settlement with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), they concluded by comparing him to Dharmapāla – with no further explanation deemed necessary.[14] But it is not a modern idiosyncrasy to draw religious differences into political violence. From the 1560s the Portuguese set out to destroy sacred sites in an attempt to symbolically undermine the authority of Sinhalese states and concretely undermine morale. For Sinhalese today, who have seen Tamil Tigers attack the Srī Mahābōdi and the Temple of the Tooth with very similar aims, the Portuguese policies must feel horribly familiar. But aggression was met with aggression, then as now. As early as the 1550s, the Sinhalese prince Vīdiyē Baṇḍāra led a rebellion intent on destroying Christian targets.

Another tendency is to see the arrival of the Portuguese as the first in a long line of malign and disordering Western influences whose weight can be felt as a burden in this globalized age, and again we can find this prefigured in some texts from the late sixteenth and seventeenth century and their descriptions of the chaos wrought by the Portuguese presence. If the historian arriving from abroad can discern traces of the present in the past, he or she must also be amazed and humbled by how strongly the past lives in the Sri Lankan present, by the capacity of sixteenth-century events to arouse debate in national newspapers or internet sites. But the corollary of this is that the past is often understood in the same terms as the present. (Even this tendency seems ancient in its fashion.) It can appear squashed within the limits of the twentieth- or twenty-first century mind. In this book we shall try to let the sixteenth century breathe for itself, and fill out into perhaps unexpected forms. To that end, extensive quotations from primary sources have been retained.

While Portuguese imperialism still resounds in the popular imagination – much more vibrantly than the more recent experience of Dutch rule, for example – it has barely registered in the minds of recent theorists of Sri Lankan history and society. One important strand of theory, which has been described usefully as 'post-Orientalist', emphasizes how European writings have constructed or fixed the contemporary contours of caste, religion and ethnicity in Asia.[15] These arguments often rely on evidence from eighteenth- to twentieth-century British India. What can our more fragmentary sources tell us about the nature of these phenomena *before* the British or the modern era, when a quite different kind of European first began to make their appraisals?

One aim of this book is to introduce sixteenth-century material into the debates that have acquired such significance over the last twenty years of post-colonial predicament and bitter civil war. There is simply not the space here to do justice to the variety of different positions taken up in these debates, but it can help to isolate intellectual principles from political positions. For our purposes, then, we can imagine a spectrum defined by two opposing approaches to the past.

[14] Singhaputhra-Coalition 2004.
[15] See the overviews by Rogers 1994, 2004a, and Roberts 2001.

The 'traditionalist' view is concerned to emphasize the continuity and idiosyncrasy of Sri Lankan history. It draws on an exceptionally long-lived, if not exactly continuous, indigenous tradition of historical writing. As early as the sixth century AD the Buddhist monks of the Mahāvihāra fraternity were composing the Pāli chronicle known as the *Mahāvaṃsa*, a text that apparently drew on earlier works (such as the *Dīpavaṃsa*) and would receive later additions (sometimes known as the *Cūḷavaṃsa*). These texts are presented as elaborating a distinctive religious and political worldview, sometimes referred to as the '*vaṃsa* ideology', although features of it are discernible in Sinhala works such as the *Rājāvaliya*. According to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, the Buddha had visited the island of Lanka and made it radiant with the *dhamma* (Buddhist teachings), and just before he drew his last breath had requested Śakra, the lord of gods, to give it especial protection as a land destined for the flourishing of his religion.[16] Just as the Buddha had taken possession of Lanka, so it was the destiny of the Sinhalese kings to conquer and rule over the whole island. These rulers would reign over a unified state that was dedicated to the preservation of Buddhist ideals. In the words of one writer, this mythology exhibited a 'constant strain to identify the religion with the state and the Buddhist state in turn with a Buddhist society'.[17] Traditionalism takes this worldview to be representative of a Sinhalese culture that prevailed throughout the island for two millennia.

The 'historicist' approach is concerned to emphasize discontinuities, to make supposed structures of the very *longue durée* contingent on smaller moments of history. It demands a more critical view of the monastic literature, rendering such works reflections of the particular conditions of their production rather than embodiments of 'Sinhala culture' *per se*, as prescriptive rather than descriptive. There was then no coherent '*vaṃsa* ideology'. The conflation of state, people and religion can be teased apart. One can explore the great transformations in the nature of the state and the changing extent of state dominions across the centuries, undermine the notion that a coherent sense of ethnic identity was a significant factor in Sri Lankan history before the nineteenth century, and question the hegemony of Theravāda Buddhism as the ground of Lankan culture in favour of a more fluid and accommodating mixture of religious forms.[18]

These terms are intended primarily as tools for doing scholarship rather than for describing it.[19] They should not be taken as euphemisms for particular political

[16] *Mahāvaṃsa*, ed. Geiger: 1993: 8–9, 55. This is now often glossed as rendering Sri Lanka *dhammadīpa* (island of the *dhamma*). Collins 1998: 598–9, and Walters 2000: 147, argue that this gloss is recent and carries inappropriate connotations of exclusivity. Nevertheless, the basic symbolism remains that of an island consecrated, reconstituted and enduringly transformed by the Buddha's presence.

[17] Tambiah 1976: 521, qualified and complicated in Tambiah 1992.

[18] See the index for topics where these terms are introduced.

[19] See Strathern 2004 for more. It makes little sense then to describe a given work as either 'traditionalist' or 'historicist'. Such empty terms often attract unintended interpretations. A quite different understanding of historicism is normally employed in Sri Lankan studies (e.g. Hallisey 1995: 36–7). I use the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* definition: the 'theory that social and cultural phenomena are determined by history'. Also see the conceptual dichotomies proposed by Rogers 1994 (primordialist/modernist) or Spencer 1995 (primordialist/constructionalist).

viewpoints, and nor does this book set out to demonstrate the superiority of one over the other.

Some contexts and concepts

The period of Portuguese influence may have remained on the periphery of theoretical developments, but there exist excellent historical accounts of it, such as can be found principally in the work of C. R. de Silva, T. B. H. Abeyasinghe and Jorge Manuel Flores.[20] Rather than provide a comprehensive narrative, then, this book sets out to provide a series of explanatory contexts for the events of this time, to make them more comprehensible and meaningful. In Part One, the political context is at issue: what was the nature of this early wave of European expansion; what kind of imperial pressure did the Portuguese exert? What legal vehicles did it work through, and how much did central policy matter? And with what did it interact: what sort of state was the Kingdom of Kōṭṭe? What real room for manoeuvre was left for vassals such as Bhuvanekabāhu?

Part Two explores the religious developments of the mid century. A comparatively modest conversion movement along the southwest coast seems to have caused disproportionate socio-political disruption. These patterns can best be understood through a consideration of the indigenous institutions of caste and land tenure. Chapter Five also analyses what Bhuvanekabāhu's policies were in dealing with this new threat. Incidentally, it should be pointed out that the term 'conversion' as used in this book is not intended to convey any assumptions about the interior lives of individuals. It is analytically more helpful to see converts as simply those who accepted their identification as such.[21] However porous the boundaries of religious belief and practice, we shall see that crossing the boundaries of religious *identity* was highly significant. But Chapter Six asks how the missionaries thought about such matters: what did they think they were doing in Sri Lanka? How did they accommodate their consciences to the business of 'theological diplomacy'? Chapter Seven, which relies on secondary sources much more than other chapters, is intended to provide the context of local religiosity, enquiring into the state of Buddhism in the island at that time, and how the Sinhalese may have interpreted the Christian message.

Part Three is the largest and most important, and it is where the twin themes of kingship and conversion come together. As we proceed into the later decades of the century, many of the other contexts fall away. In particular, there is no room to follow in any detail the evolution of the Portuguese state from the mid century into the great Iberian mammoth of the Period of the Two Crowns (1580–1640), or of the transformation of the Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka from lieges to conquerors. Readers interested in these processes, and many others, can consult the

[20] See, principally, C. R. de Silva 1995, Flores 1998, and also now Biedermann 2005a and their further works in the bibliography. Bourdon 1936; Schurhammer 1973–82; and Da Silva Cosme 1990 also have detailed narratives.

[21] See Hefner 1993.

illuminating new research by Zoltán Biedermann.[22] Instead the central concern of Part Three is the implications of conversion for the legitimacy of rulers. What role did Buddhist or Indic conceptions of the relationship between kings and subjects play in determining the decision as to whether to convert or not? And it is for the later decades that the historian can begin to offer insights on such resonant themes as rebellion, patriotism, and religious antagonism.

This book locates the primary grounds for Lankan political activity in the capacity of its state-forms to generate conflict. However grandiose the imagery of kingship, the king himself was vulnerable to a ceaseless jostling for status on the part of his family members and noble factions manoeuvring for succession at the centre, or forming breakaway courts in the regions, and it is these conflicts that sucked the Portuguese into their affairs. This is one reason why it is often misleading to think of sixteenth-century Lanka in terms of the modern understandings of the nation and nationalism. Particularly in the later decades, nobles and officials were apparently ready to switch their allegiances between different dynasties. However, it would be a mistake to reduce Lankan politics to the intrigue of elite factions or the playing out of a heroic warrior ethos. In the later chapters, I have tried to discern how much broader – even popular – sentiments helped to determine the nature and success of factions and pretenders. One of these, which gained some influence in the latter half of the century, could be described as 'indigenism'. At its simplest, this means a favouring of indigenous or traditional peoples, political forms, customs and religious practices over their foreign equivalents. At its weakest, it functions simply as an undefined flip side of anti-Portuguese, anti-Christian sentiment. An associated term used here is patriotism, which assumes a natural association between a territory and a society. This sentiment need not depend on any political mediation – it may ignore state boundaries entirely – but it does have political implications, rendering foreign claims to dominion illegitimate.

What both terms leave open is the extent to which these sentiments are merely aspects of a strong sense of Sinhalaness. This is because if the Portuguese are the 'them', the evidence is often not rich enough to clarify whether the 'us' were imagined to be the Sinhalese or simply the traditional communities of Sri Lanka. However, some sources do suggest that Sinhalaness was significant, and this is entirely plausible.[23] Whether we refer to this as an 'ethnic' consciousness turns on one's definitions. A narrow definition of ethnicity renders it an axiomatic identity rooted in beliefs of shared blood or ancestry.[24] In Sri Lanka, the strongest primordial or lineage-based identities may have been based on caste.[25] Yet, cultural features can be constructed as markers of a felt community without fixed beliefs in ancestry. Nor need a group conform to state boundaries to feel that its interests are opposed to those of another group. One of the most powerful forces here is

[22] Biedermann 2005a. This also has a great deal on the early decades, but I decided not to use that material here, so that it can speak for itself: a dialogue rather than a synthesis.
[23] See Conclusion. [24] On this issue, Obeyesekere 1995a and b; Pollock 1998.
[25] Rogers, 1994:17, 1995.

the experience of war.[26] Evoked as they are by particular contexts, the salience of such identities waxes and wanes: they are, in this sense, 'soft', sometimes more germane to elites than to the masses, and co-existing with all manner of other loyalties and categorizations.[27] But they could acquire very hard edges. And it would be wrong to imagine that the forms of communication and mobilization in pre-modern societies were inherently too weak to sustain any such ties of solidarity.[28] Michael Roberts has argued this case powerfully, and his work displays the most fully developed appreciation of the way in which group boundaries can be subtle, messy, contradictory and shifting, and yet of deep significance at the same time. If one had to characterize the conjuncture of the later sixteenth century in a word, one might eventually settle for militiarization. If this served to strengthen the hand of indigenist or ethnic sentiments, it also threatened to pull apart the long-term norms of rulership – threatened to, but eventually did not.

Some comparisons

Sixteenth-century Sri Lanka is presented here as a case-study for a comparative argument as to why rulers do or do not convert to new religions. Conversion is always potentially a dilemma for monarchs: by attempting to redefine what a legitimate king should be, they risk bringing the whole edifice of kingship crashing to the ground. Move too far beyond the norms of their subjects – which they are, after all, supposed to embody and represent, affording a society a vision of who it is and what it holds dear – then they may cease to be a king. But I have argued that in those societies which were heirs to the religious transcendentalist traditions of the Axial Age, these considerations were particularly highly charged and thus their rulers more impervious to pressures to convert.[29]

At first sight, 'transcendentalism' refers to a bewildering variety of philosophies and religions that have their roots in the societal convulsions of first-millennium BC Greece, Israel, China and India.[30] These convulsions were not the birth-pangs of

[26] E.g. the mobilization of a pre-existing 'Greek' identity based on a common culture during the Persian wars (fifth century BC), at a time when the Greeks were divided into tiny and fiercely competitive city-states.

[27] See Lieberman 2003: 41, following Prasenjit Duara. Compare with Gunawardana's 'archaic' ethnicity (1995: 4), which, however, confines ethnic consciousness to the literate elite. The general approach to ethnicity in Sabaratnam 2001 is sensible (e.g. 9–10) but its comments on the decline in ethnic salience in the Portuguese period (e.g. 40) must be revised in the light of the material here.

[28] Roberts 2004, and Strathern 2005 on the problems with modernization theory.

[29] See Strathern (2007b) for a much more comprehensive theoretical defence of the proposition: 'When faced with the dilemma of whether to undergo a wholesale conversion to a religion introduced from an external source, a ruler of a society shaped by established transcendentalist religion is more likely to resist conversion than a ruler of a society in which transcendentalist religion has had a superficial or negligible impact.' Strathern 2007a, summarizes elements of this book to act as a short case-study.

[30] See Eisenstadt 1986; Eisenstadt and Schluchter 1998; Eisenstadt, Kahane and Shulman 1984; Schwarz 1975. Collins 1998: 20–9, finds 'transcendentalism' a useful tool, but not the language of this- and other-worldly realms, which is deemed Christocentric. But the 'other world' may be a transcendentalist state of being.

civilization *per se* but the challenges to pre-existing Eurasian civilizations caused by rapid social change and conflict. Powerful modes of second-order thinking and a new consciousness of epistemological plight developed as a result. This was alleviated by recourse to a vision of a transcendental order of reality that existed in a state of tension with the mundane. Where that vision was expressed within a religious framework, this generated a new set of 'otherworldly' norms that must be abided by in order to attain the newly distant divine state of being – to achieve salvation from a mundane existence which was now seen as irredeemably unsatisfactory. Such teachings were codified and set down in writing, and those writings were interpreted and represented by an institutionalized priesthood or clerisy. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism were 'secondary breakthroughs', reviving the initial spirit of challenge and questioning the established mediation of the transcendental order expressed by Judaic and Upanishadic teachings.

In the societies that established themselves upon these great traditions, the sacred and secular realms were now separated according to a firm conceptual dichotomy. It was a hierarchical dichotomy, too: the sacred was superior because it represented the ultimate fortunes and purposes of men as opposed to merely their current concerns. This allowed its priestly representatives to call secular power to account. They could mould the consciousness of whole populations and establish standards of behaviour that applied no less to kings than to subjects. One sees this very clearly in the continuing moral and epistemological authority of the *saṃgha* in contemporary Sri Lanka. Where the institutions of transcendentalist religion became deeply rooted and widespread in a society, they could shape popular sentiments necessitating the religious fidelity of the king. Missionaries hoping to replicate in parts of Asia the top-down conversion movements of first-millennium Europe or the recent successes in Africa would often be doomed to fail.

This truncated version of the argument requires many qualifications and clarifications which cannot be addressed here. Clearly, religions based on transcendentalist traditions also accommodate large areas of non-transcendentalist practice, as the popularity of deity-worship among Sri Lankans testifies.[31] Naturally, monotheistic and Indic traditions conceptualized the breach between the transcendent and the mundane in contrasting ways.[32] One result was a much less exclusivist understanding of religious identity in Indic societies, and we shall see in Chapters Seven and Eight how the royal courts in particular played host to a creative interweaving of Indian traditions (that would later be – and is hereafter – referred to as Hinduism) with Buddhism. Indeed, some observers may even want to describe the 'identity' that rulers were loath to forgo as Hindu-Buddhist.

[31] The new science of religion (e.g. Atran 2002) would emphasize this of course.

[32] Eisenstadt 1986: 16, refers to the distinction 'between the monotheistic religions in which there is a concept of God standing outside the universe and potentially guiding it and those systems, like Hinduism and Buddhism, in which the transcendental, cosmic system was conceived in impersonal almost metaphysical terms, and in a state of continuous existential tension with the mundane system'. The implications of this are mainly important for Chapter Seven.

Syncretism flourished; so too did cosmopolitanism. Rulers in early modern Asia often claimed sovereignty over diverse religious groups, and the Lankan kings were no exception. But, however many different moral communities the royal cult must respond to, the principle of transcendentalist intransigence remains in place. The king's collective ritual and particularly ethical responsibilities will stand in the way of the kind of wholesale conversion demanded by monotheism. Ultimately, then, the intransigence of Sinhalese kings does not depend on the particular balance in their public life between *vaṃsa*-esque Buddhist norms and divinizing Hindu forms. Nevertheless, one could describe the Buddhist subjects of the king as constituting his 'primary moral community', which would always present certain limits to the eclecticism and innovation of the royal cult.

None of this is to suggest that religious propriety was the sole determinant of legitimacy. It was one of a number of principles to which Sinhalese kings appealed, thus: (1) ritual and ethical conduct; (2) their proclaimed ancestry and that of their queens, which should be of *kṣatriya* origin and include a host of illustrious forebears; (3) their right of inheritance according to principles of succession; (4) their military prowess, success and popularity;[33] (5) their possession of a capital city, the Tooth Relic and other sacra and regalia. In this book, we shall see each one rise in and out of prominence as the decades wear on.

The above constitutes one of three comparative aims of this book. The second is to begin to compare and contrast the Portuguese and the Sinhalese. This is not pursued in a systematic manner, but any analysis of their interactions has to reflect a little on the different ways the Portuguese and the Sinhalese drew conceptual boundaries in the areas of politics (around the state, sovereignty, jurisdiction) and religion (around religious identity and belief).[34] It is not always a question of contrast.[35] Christianity and Buddhism were both transcendentalist traditions that produced religious virtuosi (whose function is to act as exemplary embodiments of otherworldliness) and organized them into established monastic traditions. When the Portuguese friars met the Sinhalese *bhikkhus*, they would have found themselves face-to-face with men who performed eerily similar social roles to their own.

This third aim takes in both comparative and connective history, by placing the kingdom of Kōṭṭe in the context of the principalities of the Malabar Coast of southwest India (see Map 3), with a particular focus on Cochin. A number of key issues – geopolitical pressures, the legal implications of vassalage to the Portuguese, the way that principles of caste and land-tenure shaped conversion patterns – are best explored in the light of this comparative perspective. Flores' work has already

[33] This might include the accumulation and dispensation of wealth, although here we shift into the grey area between legitimacy and power. Consider Queyroz: 517: 'but any Chingalâ, when he sees himself with a few Larins, at once presumes that he has the means to become a King and to carve a little [kingdom] for himself.'

[34] See Silber 1995 for a systematic comparative sociology of medieval Lanka and Catholic Europe.

[35] Broad similarities can enable rough-and-ready communication or working misunderstandings. See e.g. Lockhart 1994: 218–19.