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978-0-521-86009-3 - Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land

Alan Strathern

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### **Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka**

When the Portuguese arrived on the shores of Sri Lanka in 1506, they opened an era in which religious identity became central to struggles for power on the island. During the reign of King Bhuvanekabāhu VII (1521–51), they became the first European empire to dominate Lankan politics. This book sets out to explain the behaviour of the Portuguese and the Sinhalese as their relationship evolved over the century. Topics covered include the nature of Portuguese imperialism and indigenous state power in the earlier decades, the impact of Catholic missions on this Buddhist society and how this was shaped by local principles of caste, land tenure and religious thought, and the issue of identity. It reveals how indigenist, dynastic and religious loyalties shaped the increasingly violent conflicts of the later decades. The principal concern is the sacred legitimization of kingship: why was Christian monarchy never truly established in Sri Lanka?

ALAN STRATHERN is a Research Fellow in History at Clare Hall, Cambridge.

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## PLATES

The following plates are all photographs of ivory caskets produced in Kōtṭe in the sixteenth century. For the sake of consistency and easy orientation, I have referred to them by their dates as suggested by Jaffer and Schwabe 1999. However, as I discuss in the footnotes, these datings are contested and provisional.

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**A note on style**

The conventions followed here are determined by ease of comprehension. I therefore refer to the island as ‘Sri Lanka’, even though that only became its official name in 1972. Strictly speaking, ‘sixteenth-century Sri Lanka’ is anachronistic. It is not entirely inappropriate however, given that the use of the honorific (‘Siri Laka’) was alive and well among Sinhalese in the sixteenth century. While I use ‘Sri Lanka’ and ‘Lanka’ interchangeably, I often use ‘Lankan’ for the adjectival form. The Portuguese referred to the island as ‘Ceilão’, but to use the English equivalent ‘Ceylon’ might insensibly evoke the British period of rule. I use the

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common term ‘Sinhalese’ for the people, and ‘Sinhala’ for the language. I have pluralized Sinhala nouns as if they were English. Sinhala diacritics follow the system used in [www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com), with a couple of adjustments as advised by Charles Hallisey. I have tended not to use diacritics for Indian names and have refrained from allowing Portuguese noblemen their ‘Dom’ and mendicants their ‘Fr’.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AGS-SP	Archivo General Simancas, Secretarías Provinciales, Portugal.
AHU	Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon.
APO	<i>Archivo Portuguez-Oriental</i> , ed. J. H. da Cunha-Rivara (8 vols.). Nova Goa, 1857–77, vol. III.
<i>Alakeśvarayuddhaya</i> Azevedo	A. Suravira (ed.), <i>Alakeśvarayuddhaya</i> . Colombo, 1965. [Agostinho de Azevedo], ‘Estado da India e aonde tem o seu principio’, printed as an anonymous document in <i>Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa</i> 1, 1960, I: 197–263.
BA	Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon.
Barros; Couto	D. Ferguson (ed. and trans.), <i>The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Times to 1600 AD</i> . New Delhi, 1993. (First published by the <i>Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> 1908, this is an annotated English translation of the ‘Decadas’ by João de Barros and Diogo do Couto.)
Biker	J. F. Júdice Biker, <i>Collecção de Tratados e Concertos de Pazes que o Estado da Índia Portuguesa Fez com os Reis e Senhores com Quem Teve Relações nas Partes da Ásia e África Oriental desde o Principio da Conquista até ao Fim do Século XVIII</i> (14 vols.). Lisbon, 1881–7.
BL	British Library, London.
Bocarro	T. B. H. Abeyasinghe (ed. and trans.), ‘António Bocarro’s Ceylon’, introduction by C. R. De Silva, <i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka</i> n.s. 39, 1995 (published 1996).
Bocarro, <i>Decada</i> ,	António Bocarro, <i>Década 13 da História da Índia</i> , ed. Rodrigo José de Lima Felner. Lisbon, 1876.
Bouchon, Doc,	‘Documents’, in Geneviève Bouchon, <i>Regent of the Sea: Cannanore’s Response to Portuguese Expansion, 1507–1528</i> . Delhi, 1988.

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- Caração Geneviève Bouchon (ed.), 'A Letter: Cristóvão Lourenço Caração, to D. Manuel, Cochin 13 Jan 1522', *Mare Luso-Indicum* 1, 1971.
- Castanheda Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *História do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses* (9 vols.). Coimbra, 1924–33.
- Conquista* Fernão de Queiros, *Conquista Temporal e Espiritual de Ceylão*, ed. P. E. Pieris. Colombo, 1916.
- Correia 'The Portuguese in Ceylon in the First Half of the Sixteenth Century. Gaspar Correia's Account', trans. D. Ferguson, *Ceylon Literary Register* 4, 1935–6.
- Correia, *Lendas* Gaspar Correia, *Lendas da Índia*, ed. Rodrigo José de Lima Felner (4 vols.). Lisbon, 1858–64.
- Couto See Barros above for D. Ferguson translation (1993).
- CS Luís de Albuquerque e José Pereira da Costa, 'Cartas de Serviços da Índia (1500–1550)', *Mare Liberum* 1, 1990.
- Cūlavamsa* Geiger, W. (ed. and trans.) *Culavamsa, Being the More Recent Part of the Mahavamsa*, trans. from the German into English by C. M. Rickmers, part II. Colombo, 1953.
- DI* J. Wicki (ed.), *Documenta Indica* (18 vols.). Rome, 1948–88.
- DPM* *Documentos sobre os Portugueses em Moçambique e na África Central, 1497–1840* (9 vols.). Lisbon, 1962–.
- EZ* *Epigraphia Zeylanica, Being Lithic and other Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Ceylon Archaeological Survey (4 vols.), vols. I–III, ed. Don Martino de Zilva Wickremasinghe, vol. IV, ed. H. W. Codrington and S. Paranavitana. London, 1904–43.
- Flores, Doc 'Documentos', in Jorge Manuel Flores, *Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão: Trato, Diplomacia e Guerra (1498–1543)*. Lisbon, 1988.
- IAN/TT Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo.
- Knox Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon*, ed. J. H. O. Paulusz (2nd edn. including interleaved notes) (2 vols.), vol. II. Dehiwala, 1989.
- Linschoten J. H. van Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies from the Old English Translation of 1598*, ed. A. C. Burnell and P. A. Thiele, vol. I. London, 1885.
- Miranda Jorge Manuel Flores (ed.), *Os Olhos do Rei: Desenhos e Descrições Portuguesas da Ilha de Ceilão (1624, 1638)*. Lisbon, 2001. (Contains Constantino de Sá de Miranda's text of 1638.)

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- Nevill K. D. Somadasa, *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library* (7 vols.). London, 1987–95.
- Queyroz Fernão de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, trans. with introduction by S. G. Perera, 3 vols. First published 1930; reprint, New Delhi, 1992.
- Rājaratnākaraya* *Rājaratnākaraya*, ed. S. de Silva. Colombo, 1930.
- Rājāvaliya* *Rājāvaliya*, trans. A. Suraweera. Sri Lanka, 2000.
- Ribeiro João Ribeiro, *The Historic Tragedy of the Island of Ceilão*, ed. and trans. P. E. Pieris. Colombo, 1948.
- SH* *Sītāvaka Haṭana*, ed. Rohini Paranavitana. Colombo, 1999.
- Spilbergen Spilbergen, Joris van, *Journal of Spilbergen, The First Dutch Envoy to Ceylon, 1602*, ed. and trans. K. D. Paranavitana. Colombo, 1997.
- SR A. da Silva Rego (ed.), *Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente* (12 vols.). Lisbon, 1947–58.
- SV Georg Schurhamer and E. A. Voretzsch (eds.), *Ceylon zur Zeit des Königs Bhuvaneka Bahu und Franz Xavers, 1539–1552* (2 vols.). Leipzig, 1928.
- Trindade Paulo da Trindade, *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*, ed. Fernando Félix Lopes (3 parts). Lisbon, 1962–7.
- VP Vito Perniola (ed.), *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, The Portuguese Period*, vol. I, 1505–1565. Dehiwala, 1989. vol. II, 1566–1619. Dehiwala, 1991. Vol. III, 1620–1658. Dehiwala, 1991. Where no volume number is given, vol. I is referred to.

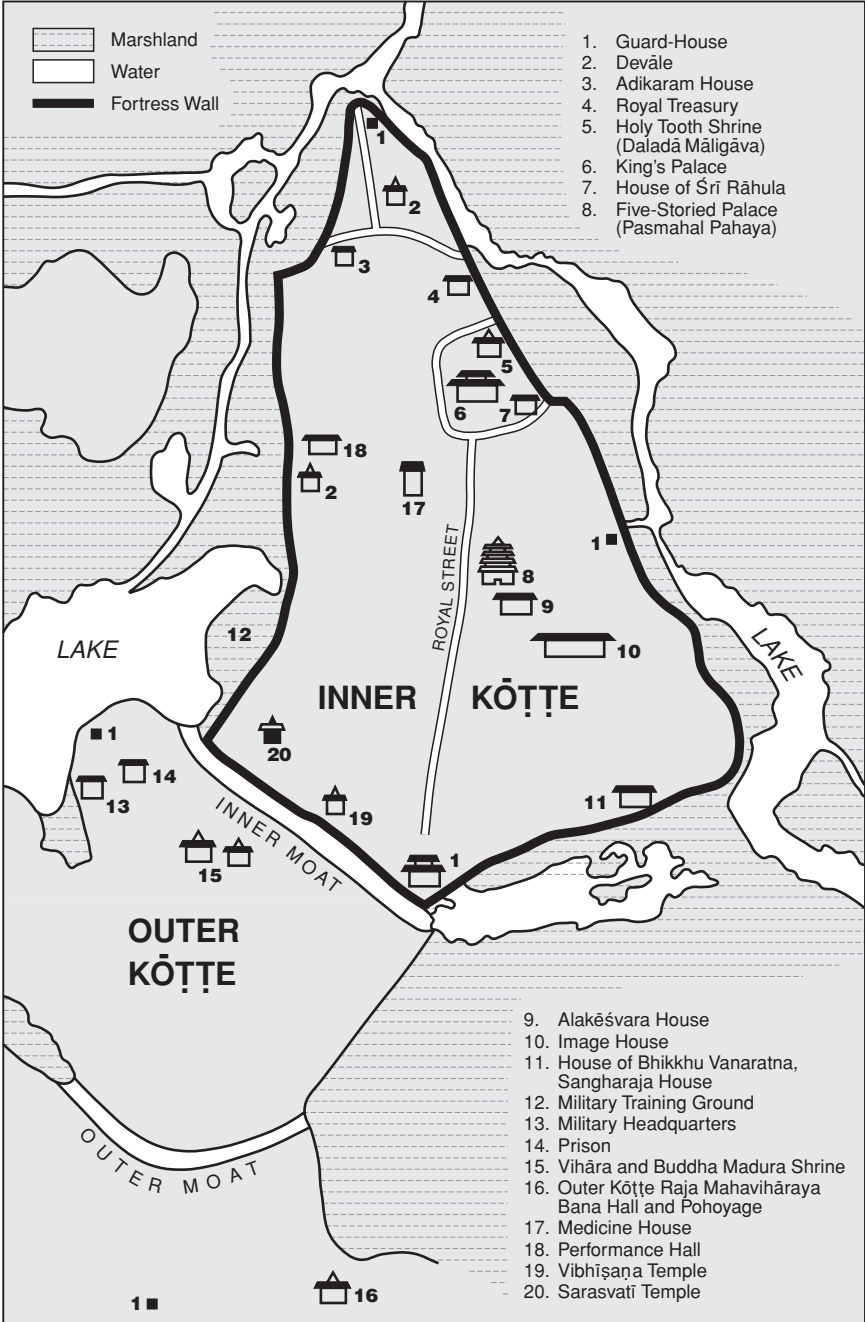
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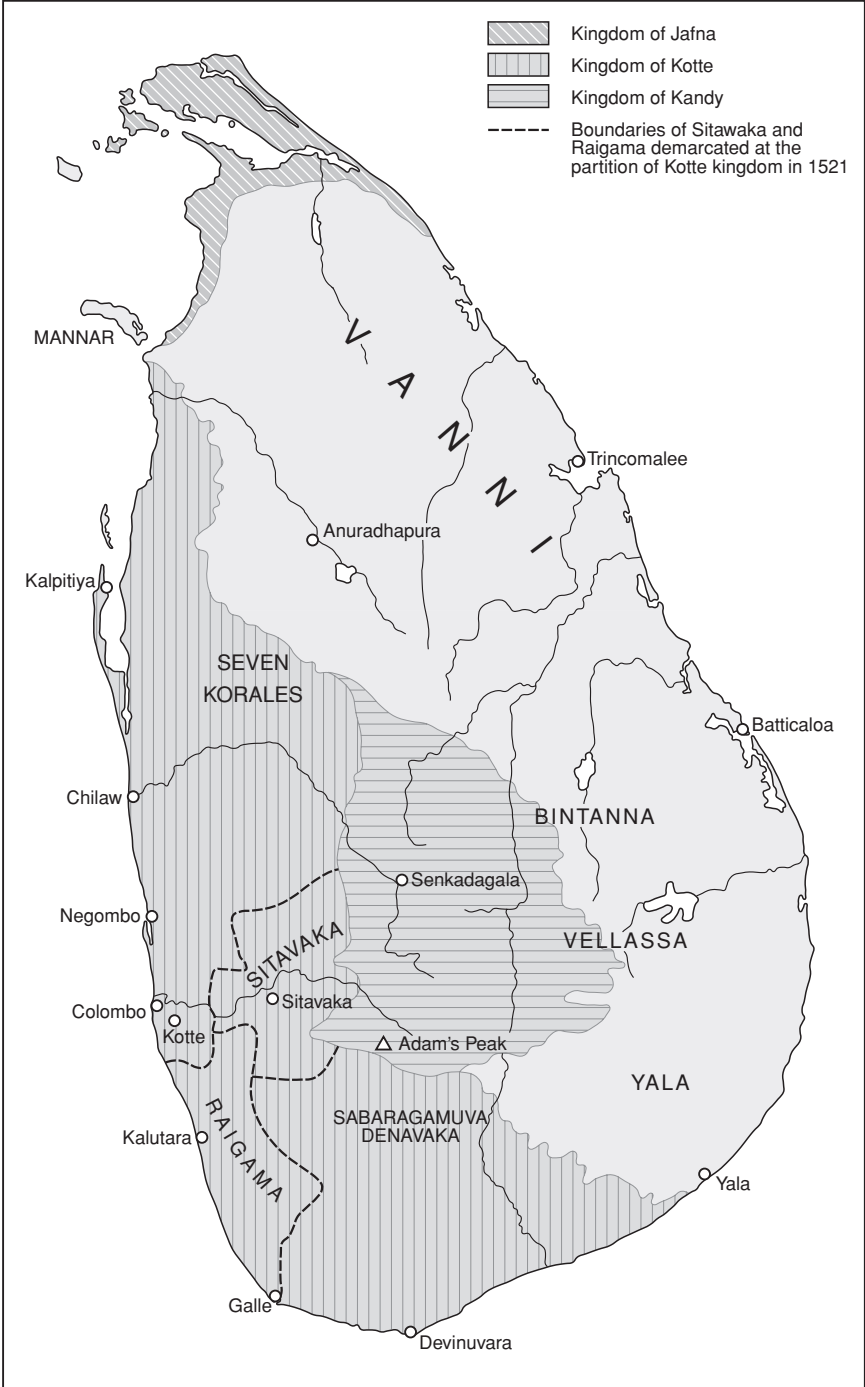
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Map 1: Jayavardhanapura Kōṭṭe. Adapted from the map by Douglas C. Ranasinghe (Survey Department, Columbo, May 1976).



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Map 2: Sri Lanka in the mid-sixteenth century.

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Map 3: South India and Sri Lanka.