



ANAIS DE HISTÓRIA DE ALÉM-MAR

Vol. XIII (2012)

ISSN 0874-9671 (impresso/print)

ISSN 2795-4455 (electrónico/online)

Homepage: <https://revistas.rcaap.pt/aham>

In praise of the Portuguese: Images of power and religion in seventeenth-century Ceilão

Stephen C. Berkwitz 

Como Citar | How to Cite

Berkwitz, Stephen C. 2012. «In praise of the Portuguese: Images of power and religion in seventeenth-century Ceilão». *Anais de História de Além-Mar* XIII: 433-454.
<https://doi.org/10.57759/aham2012.37184>.

Editor | Publisher

CHAM – Centro de Humanidades | CHAM – Centre for the Humanities
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa | Universidade dos Açores
Av.^a de Berna, 26-C | 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
<http://www.cham.fcsh.unl.pt>

Copyright

© O(s) Autor(es), 2012. Esta é uma publicação de acesso aberto, distribuída nos termos da Licença Internacional Creative Commons Atribuição 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.pt>), que permite o uso, distribuição e reprodução sem restrições em qualquer meio, desde que o trabalho original seja devidamente citado.

© The Author(s), 2012. This is a work distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



As afirmações proferidas e os direitos de utilização das imagens são da inteira responsabilidade do(s) autor(es).
The statements made and the rights to use the images are the sole responsibility of the author(s).

IN PRAISE OF THE PORTUGUESE: IMAGES OF POWER AND RELIGION IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CEILÃO

by
STEPHEN C. BERKWITZ *

Sometime around 1619 in Sri Lanka – known then as Ceilão by Portuguese colonialists –, a Sinhala poet called Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi composed a lengthy poem in praise of Constantino de Sá de Noronha, the newly-appointed *capitão-geral* in the island.¹ The work was called *Kustantīnu Haṭana* (The War of Constantino), and it embodies some of the tensions and contradictions inherent in early modern Buddhist responses to the disruptive effects of colonial power. The work consists of around 189 quatrains in the poetic language of Sinhala, and it employs a style that draws heavily from classical poetic conventions developed in Buddhist literature during previous centuries.² A complex text by any measure, *Kustantīnu Haṭana*

* Professor of Religious Studies at Missouri State University (USA). He has published widely on the religious history of Sri Lanka, including the authored books *Buddhist History in the Vernacular: The Power of the Past in Late Medieval Sri Lanka* (Brill, 2004) and *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism: Alagiyavanna and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka* (Oxford University Press, 2013). E-mail: sberkwitz@missouristate.edu

¹ There has been some scholarly debate over whether Alagiyavanna was in fact the author of *Kustantīnu Haṭana*. In the early twentieth century, S. G. Perera presented a detailed argument supporting the attribution of this text to Alagiyavanna based on numerous stylistic similarities between this work and his earlier compositions. See S. G. PERERA and M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), *Alagiyawanna's Kustantīnu Haṭana (The Campaign of Don Constantine)*, Colombo, Catholic Press, 1932, pp. XIV-XXV. Several other scholars of Sinhala literature have concurred with Perera's assessment. See, for example, Martin WICKREMASINGHE, *Sinhalese Literature*, trans. E. R. Sarathchandra, Colombo, M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1949, p. 197; and Puñci Bandara SANNASGALA, *Sinhala Sāhityavaṃśaya*, 2nd ed., Colombo, Cultural Affairs Department, 1994, p. 354. There are, however, others who dispute this attribution, claiming that *Kustantīnu Haṭana* was written by some other, anonymous, author. See, for instance, Rohini PARANAVITANA, "Sinhalese War Poems and the Portuguese", in Jorge Flores (ed.), *Re-Exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007, p. 53. However, given what is known about Alagiyavanna's close relationships with the Portuguese and the striking stylistic similarities pointed out by Perera, it stands to reason that Alagiyavanna was likely the author of this work.

² Sinhala poetry, like many other forms of premodern South Asian poetic literature, was consciously modeled after the conventions and ideology of Sanskrit court poetry (*kāvya*). The

celebrates the person and acts of Sá de Noronha, who suppressed a large-scale Sinhala rebellion against Portuguese rule around 1618-1619. Alagiavanna's decision to compose a poetic work in Sinhala extolling Sá de Noronha makes sense in the context of the genre called *praśasti* poetry, wherein the rulers of South Asian kingdoms were often made into the subjects of extensive and ornate praise. And yet the poet's use of local literary forms to praise a Portuguese general remains significant for the insights it yields into how a colonial subject depicted the colonizer and his religion in Ceilão.³ The text borrows a variety of Indic cultural tropes while praising certain aspects of Catholicism, resulting in hybrid forms of literary and religious expression. A consideration of *Kustantīnu Haṭana* invites further reflection upon the subjects of hybridity and conversion within the colonial encounter between Portuguese Catholics and Sinhala Buddhists in the early seventeenth century. This work is indicative of a more nuanced native response to colonial power in early modern Sri Lanka.

The events that led up to the composition of this work are fascinating, but too detailed to present fully here.⁴ It will have to suffice to say that Alagiavanna, who was a Buddhist court poet during the latter decades of the sixteenth century, eventually converted to Catholicism around 1612 and went to work for the Portuguese *vedor da fazenda* Antão Vaz Freire on the *tombo*, or register of lands, compiled initially between 1614 and 1615. His conversion coincided with the extension of Portuguese colonial rule and the concurrent spread of Jesuit and Franciscan missionary activities in the island under the *Padroado*.⁵ As the Portuguese brought more of the island under their rule, it became desirable to survey the revenues earned in those lands to assess the dues that they were owed. The efforts to compile a record of land revenues in Ceilão depended heavily on the assistance of local Sinhala officials like Alagiavanna, who could consult local records written in Sinhala and could interpret and evaluate the verbal testimonies of local chieftains. It is likely that Alagiavanna's conversion and service under Portuguese officials allowed him to retain something of his social status and ownership of land that he enjoyed under the previous Sinhala Buddhist king

impact of Sanskrit *kāvya* on vernacular literature is thoroughly examined in Sheldon POLLOCK, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006.

³ A better-known Buddhist figure who converted to Catholicism under Portuguese influence is Fukun Fabian, a Japanese jesuit who eventually abandoned the Christian religion and wrote a polemical tract in 1620 criticizing it. For an overview of Fukun's views, see Monika SCHRIMPF, "The Pro- and Anti-Christian Writings of Fukun Fabian (1565-1621)", *Japanese Religions*, Vol. 33, Nos. 1&2, 2008, pp. 35-54.

⁴ A fuller treatment of Alagiavanna's life and works is found in Stephen C. BERKWITZ, *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism: Alagiavanna and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁵ A fine discussion of this historical period is found in Tikiri ABEYSINGHE, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, 1594-1612*, Colombo, Lake House, 1966.

Rājasimha I. Ângela Barreto Xavier's remarks upon how members of the higher social groups in sixteenth-century Goa often converted pragmatically to retain their social supremacy are pertinent to Alagiyavanna as well.⁶ He too stood to gain by embracing the Catholicism of the Portuguese overlords. However, sometime during the tenure of Nuno Álvares Pereira, the capitão-geral in Ceilão from 1616 to 1618, Alagiyavanna was stripped of his lands and his title, leading the old poet to appeal directly to king Phillip III of Portugal asking for their restoration. There are reasons to believe that Alagiyavanna's lands and position were eventually returned to him, due in part to the mention of his name in a 1622 *tombo* and the existence of lands owned by his descendents in the region to this day.⁷

It seems likely that Alagiyavanna composed *Kustantīnu Haṭana* to win the favor of the energetic and effective Sá de Noronha. Praise poetry is usually composed with the expectation of a reward, although it also offers substantial benefits to the recipient of such praise. Composed in the poetic form of the Sinhala language, the work could hardly have been fully understandable or appreciated by Sá de Noronha. However, this praise poem could still have been useful as a gesture of esteem for the Portuguese capitão-geral and as a testimony of the poet's relationship with the colonizers (either real or ideal) to other Sinhala subjects. Despite the apparent self-interest behind the work, it would be improper to dismiss the possibility that Alagiyavanna came to feel some sort of attachment to Portuguese officials and their Catholic faith. The main narrative that forms the structure of the poem concerns the Portuguese-led army's defeat of a rebel force led by António Barreto, a former Sinhala convert who turned against the Portuguese. Having fought a series of skirmishes with Barreto's sizable force, Sá de Noronha's troops led the rebels into a trap, decimating their army and capturing their leaders. Alagiyavanna recounts this battle in the form of a *haṭana*, or "war poem," a colonial-era genre of Sinhala poetry that usually combines lavish praise for a king with a descriptive account of the battle that he won. As such, this genre is often said to be both derivative of other poetic works, while being judged as stylistically inferior due to the turbulent, colonial conditions in which most such works were produced.⁸ *Kustantīnu Haṭana* appears to have been the second such war poem composed in Sinhala, but it remains distinctive for its positive attitude toward the Portuguese in the island.

⁶ Ângela Barreto XAVIER, *A Invenção de Goa: Poder Imperial e Conversões Culturais nos Séculos XVI e XVII*, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008, pp. 24-25.

⁷ Alagiyavanna's descendents in the region are mentioned in a short biographical note appearing in Gonahene JOTIPALA (ed.), *1981 Rājya Sāhitya Utsavaya Kāragala: Siyaṇḍi-Lēkhakayō*, Colombo, Cultural Affairs Ministry, 1981, p. 5. Further, in 2006, I met with a number of his descendents, all of whom retain "Alagiyawanna" as their surname, in the Gampaha region of Sri Lanka. They claim to have inherited lands that were originally owned by Alagiyavanna in the seventeenth century.

⁸ Ambagaspitiye VIMALA, *Sinhala Haṭan (Kavi) Sāhitya Vimarśanaya*, Colombo, S. Godage and Brothers, 1998, pp. 42-44.

One of the most interesting aspects about *Kustantīnu Haṭana* is the fact that it articulates the impressions of a colonial subject within a Buddhist literary framework. The relatively few scholars who have discussed this text have usually cited its “accommodationist” approach to the Portuguese colonial presence, whereby the culture of the colonizer is “harmonized” with local traditions.⁹ Such an interpretation, however, overlooks the work’s politico-aesthetic negotiation of power, as well as its subversive expression of double loyalties to both native and colonial sources of authority.¹⁰ *Kustantīnu Haṭana* extols the glory of Sá de Noronha and the Portuguese in general, but it expresses distinctively hybrid interests and sensibilities in terms of religion and culture. Although the author acknowledges the political and religious authority of the Portuguese, he reasserts the value and potency of local cultural forms by utilizing poetic conventions of the Sinhala language and by appealing to select Buddhist ideas. To this end, I find the concept of “hybridity” popularized by postcolonial theorists like Homi Bhabha to be useful in interpreting this work. Colonized peoples, it has been shown, have often retained some ability to respond to the evangelizing and so-called “civilizing” efforts of European powers by adapting the religions, cultures, and languages of the colonizers to indigenous practices and traditions, resulting in hybrid forms. *Kustantīnu Haṭana* may thus be viewed as an example of religious and cultural hybridity – a literary work that adapts elements of Portuguese hegemony into a local cultural frame, effectively celebrating the culture of the colonizer while still validating the Buddhist tradition.

While some Sinhalese Catholic scholars have argued that the text reveals a “harmonization” of the two religions, this view neglects the fact that Portuguese-sponsored missionaries in early seventeenth-century Ceilão were dedicated to rejecting and replacing the local religion with Catholicism. To the extent that they understood the local Buddhist tradition, Portuguese missionaries and colonial agents tended to dismiss the religion as comprising “fables and nonsense” (*fábulas e disparates*) linked to the influences of the Devil himself.¹¹ Buddhist monks could likewise be described as “teachers

⁹ See, for example, W. L. A. Don PETER, “Portuguese Influence on a Sinhalese Poet”, *Aquinas Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1989, pp. 19-20; Chandra R. de SILVA, “Algumas reflexões sobre o impacto português na religião entre os singaleses durante os séculos XVI e XVII”, *Oceanos*, Vol. 34, 1998, p. 111; Alan STRATHERN, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 199.

¹⁰ Likewise, the accommodationist approaches of some Jesuit missionaries in East Asia were at times seen to have compromised Christian assertions of the unique, universal nature of the “True Faith.” The disputes between Jesuits and Dominicans over the so-called Chinese rites controversy are an important example of this. See, for example, Eugenio MENEGON, “European and Chinese Controversies over Rituals: A Seventeenth-Century Genealogy of Chinese Religion”, in Bruno Boute and Thomas Småberg (ed.), *Devising Order: Socio-religious Models of Rituals and the Performativity of Practice*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, pp. 204-206.

¹¹ António da Silva REGO (ed.), *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1960, pp. 251-254. On the issue of early Portuguese incu-

of cruelty" (*mestres da maldade*) whose ignorance did not prevent them from arrogantly holding fast to their mistaken opinions.¹² Their duty, it was once written, was to teach their superstitions to people and placate the demons with sacrifices and prayers.¹³ Meanwhile, Buddhists were often described as "infidels" (*infiéis*) and "gentiles" (*gentios*) to be blamed and pitied for their adherence to a false doctrine out of blindness and ignorance. Over time, as Portuguese writers gradually developed a clearer understanding of the Buddhist religion, their polemical attacks on its convictions and practices would become even sharper. Seventeenth-century authors like Fernão de Queirós and Constantino de Sá de Miranda left deeply unflattering accounts of the Buddhist religion, describing it as a diabolical corruption of the true religion of God, wherein the diversity of gods, repugnant images, and ridiculous ceremonies are all the work of the Devil.¹⁴ In such an environment, any attempt to retain and affirm Buddhist ideas must be viewed as a direct challenge to the religious authority of the Portuguese Padroado.

Similarly, from the Buddhist side, there is evidence that many Sinhalas possessed and promoted negative views of the Christian religion of the Portuguese. Historical evidence for this hostility appears in accounts of churches being burned and friars being murdered, maimed, or caused to flee.¹⁵ In an *Apology of the Friars Minor* written in 1602 to defend the missionary efforts of the Franciscans in Ceilão, an account is given of the destruction of churches and the killing of friars "in hatred of the Faith."¹⁶ Of course, such violence may have been motivated as much, if not more, by enmity for the Portuguese as colonialists than as Christians *per se*, and at times they may have been committed out of revenge for the destruction of Buddhist temples and the killing of Buddhist monks.¹⁷ Nevertheless, a general resentment and antagonism felt by Sinhala Buddhists toward the Portuguese is seen also in some of the few surviving Sinhala texts from the seventeenth century. Aside from *Kustantīnu Haṭana*, which portrays the Portuguese in praiseworthy

riosity of Buddhism, see Alan STRATHERN, "Re-Reading Queirós: Some Neglected Aspects of the Conquista", *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1-2, 2000, p. 12.

¹² Fr. Paulo da TRINDADE, *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*, Vol. III, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1962, p. 31.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 33.

¹⁴ See Alan STRATHERN, "Representations of Eastern Religion: Queyroz and Gonzaga on the First Catholic-Buddhist Disputation in Sri Lanka", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, new series, Vol. 43, 1998, p. 56; and Jorge Manuel FLORES, *Os Olhos do Rei: Desenhos e Descrições Portuguesas da Ilha de Ceilão (1624, 1638)*, Lisboa, Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 2001, p. 53.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Fernando Félix LOPES, *A Evangelização de Ceilão desde 1552 a 1602*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1967, p. 52.

¹⁶ V. PERNIOLA (ed.), *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period*, Vol. II ("1566 to 1619"), Dehiwala, Sri Lanka, Tisara Prakasakayo, 1991, p. 212.

¹⁷ A Jesuit annual letter from 1617 observes that two Fathers were killed in revenge for the execution of three Buddhist monks by the Portuguese for agitating the people against the Jesuits and criticizing conversions to Christianity. See V. PERNIOLA, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

terms, the other Sinhala War poems from this era typically denigrate the Portuguese. These poems describe the Portuguese as “carrion-eating jackals” and “demons,” disparaging the foreigners in overwhelmingly negative terms.¹⁸ Portuguese missionaries would have thus been closely associated with these negative portrayals, and the religion that they promoted, supplanting Buddhism in terms ranging from individual conversions, the granting of temple lands to Christian orders, and the building of churches over the ruins of destroyed temples, must have made an attractive target for Sinhala hostility. The enduring enmity of at least some Sinhala Buddhists toward the Christianity of the Portuguese is witnessed in an eighteenth-century text that describes Jesus as a “Carpenter-Heretic” who was expelled from Portugal as a thief and charlatan, who eventually settled in India, where he and his disciples pretended to be monks, stealing cows and goats to slaughter and eat, before he was arrested and hung for his crimes.¹⁹ These expressions of anti-Christian sentiments would have made it difficult for anyone but a convert to Catholicism to find anything praiseworthy about the religion of the Portuguese.

Poetic images of power

In this context of mutual enmity and interreligious polemics, Alagiya-vanna’s *Kustantīnu Haṭṭana* offered a conventional depiction of political power while articulating a new approach to religious identity in seventeenth-century Ceilão. This poetic work presents a distinctly Sinhala vision of Portuguese expressions of power and religion. Since these two spheres are intimately related and mutually constitutive, it makes sense to focus on how Alagiavanna praises and effectively undermines Portuguese authority therein. The text, once again, is heavily informed by the eulogistic conventions linked to the *praśasti* genre of poetry, which typically extols certain leading men in expressive verse. The use of poetry to describe and enhance the fame of kings has a long history in South Asian literary cultures, as seen in the numerous examples of acclaim and hyperbole used to extol rulers in panegyric verses composed in Sanskrit, Tamil, and other Indic languages.²⁰ Alagiavanna extends these older traditions of panegyric verse to celebrate Portuguese leaders at home and abroad. This work transforms Sá de

¹⁸ Michael ROBERTS, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815*, Colombo, Vijitha Yapa, 2004, p. 125.

¹⁹ R. F. YOUNG and G. S. B. SENANAYAKA, *The Carpenter-Heretic: A Collection of Buddhist Stories about Christianity from 18th-Century Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Karunaratne & Sons, 1998, pp. 88-91.

²⁰ Daniel H. H. INGALLS (trans.), *Sanskrit Poetry: From Vidyākara’s Treasury*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 211; A. K. RAMANUJAN (trans.), *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 287-89. One should note, however, that patterns of poetic patronage could be complex and subject to competition over position and influence. On the symmetrical and, at

Noronha into a kingly, quasi-divine figure comparable to previous Buddhist rulers who were likewise celebrated in Sinhala verse. “Righteous Lord” (*himi dāhām-in*), “Lord of Men” (*naraniñdu*), and “king” (*raju*) are among the titles with which Sá de Noronha is described and praised.²¹ Elsewhere in the work he is said to possess glory, splendor, and an extensive retinue, which are just a few of the traditional attributes of kingship expressed in Sinhala poetry.

The poetic praise of Sá de Noronha imitates eulogies to kings found in earlier Sinhala poems, such as the fifteenth-century *praśasti* poem called *Pārakumbā Sirita* (The Account of King Parākramabāhu VI). Written by an unknown courtier, this poetic work reflects a Sinhala version of the type of Sanskrit panegyric poetry that combined power and aesthetics to form a political consciousness for ruling elites across premodern Southern Asia.²² A verse from this work may suffice to illustrate the superlative qualities attributed to this ruler, whose greatness is repeatedly compared to deities and other Indic mythological imagery.

Like Natha, Ananta, and Śakra in terms of supporting the earth and clouds,
Having beauty and fame like the faultless moon that has risen in autumn,
Stirring the ocean of battle with the Mandarā Mountain of the arrogant enemy kings,
And like Śakra in terms of devotion to the Buddha, may noble King Parākrama live
long!²³

The associations drawn between the Sinhala Buddhist king and various Indic deities serve to aggrandize the qualities of the former, making him appear more powerful and praiseworthy than any other human ruler. The power he is said to possess borders upon the divine, as he even imitates the gods who in Hindu lore are said to have taken the Mandarā Mountain and stirred the ocean to create the nectar of immortality. Possessing extraordinary fame, beauty, might, and piety, this king is fashioned into a deserving recipient of praise and loyalty.

One finds in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* many of the same virtues of might, fame, beauty, merit, and wealth, which are conceptually linked in Buddhist thought, associated here with Portuguese leaders. One’s fitness to rule, whether one is a Sinhala Buddhist or a Portuguese Catholic, is tradition-

times, uneasy relationship between poets and their royal patrons, see David SHULMAN, “Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend”, in Barbara Stoler Miller (ed.), *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 89-92.

²¹ Cf. M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), *Alagiavanna Mukaveṭitumā visin viracita Kustantīnu Haṭana*, Galle, Sri Lanka, St. Aloysius’ College, 1933, vv. 102, 127, 141.

²² S. POLLOCK, op. cit., p. 14.

²³ D. G. ABHAYAGUNARATNA (ed.), *Pārakumbā Sirita*, Colombo, Madhyama Saṅskṛtika Aramudala, 1997, v. 119:

<i>sabaṇḍa</i>	<i>deraṇa gana dārumehi nata paṇipati pun</i>	<i>darā</i>
<i>sa ra da</i>	<i>samaya uḍita nimala himakara yasāti sun</i>	<i>darā</i>
<i>sa mada</i>	<i>vayiri raja samara jalanidi matana man</i>	<i>darā</i>
<i>sā ra da</i>	<i>pavara pārakumbuja raja munipuda puran</i>	<i>darā.</i>

ally measured in Sinhala society by the good fortune and good qualities that one possesses. Moral greatness is typically rewarded with enhanced beauty, health and power through the workings of *karma*. Good conduct is seen to produce its own rewards, and thus attractive and powerful kings embody the virtues that are held to have earned them their elevated position. Accordingly, after setting the backdrop of the rebellion, the narrator of *Kustantīnu Haṭana* portrays the Portuguese viceroy in Goa as inviting and praising Sá de Noronha before sending him off to Ceilão to subdue the rebels.

If one considered your strength,
The tall Meru Mountain is like an anthill.
The great ocean is like a pond.
And this Dambadiva [*i.e.* India] is like a courtyard for your door.

If one were to compare you with something else,
You are like the Meru Mountain to the ocean of battle.
And a very strong diamond rampart,
Protecting our many great armies.²⁴

Putting such words into the mouth of the viceroy, Alagiyavanna begins the process of refashioning Sá de Noronha into a powerful ruler reminiscent of a Sinhala Buddhist king. This portrayal of the Portuguese *capitão-geral* as a figure that mimics a Buddhist king makes him more respectable and remarkable, as he comes to resemble what Sinhalas expect to see in a ruler. Poetry transforms the Portuguese general into a ruler worthy of esteem, but it also changes the terms by which he can rule and receive the support of the local populace. Alagiyavanna attributes divine-like qualities to Sá de Noronha, comparing him to powerful gods like Śakra and Viṣṇu. The comparisons drawn between kings and gods was not new to the seventeenth century, as numerous Sinhala and Pāli texts dating back several centuries often asserted or implied that a given Sri Lankan king possessed godlike powers and attributes.²⁵ In *Kustantīnu Haṭana*, Alagiyavanna extends the same courtesy and respect to Sá de Noronha, eulogizing him in terms of deities worshipped by the local inhabitants of the island.

²⁴ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., vv. 48-49:

<i>me topa situvot vā</i>	<i>ra</i>
<i>tumbaseka tuṅgu sunera gi</i>	<i>ra</i>
<i>kiṇdaleka mahasayu</i>	<i>ra</i>
<i>medambadiva miduleka taman do</i>	<i>ra</i>

<i>me topa sari kaḷasa</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>raṇa samuduraṭa sunera</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>apa mahasen no ye</i>	<i>ka</i>
<i>rakina tarasara viduru pavure</i>	<i>ka.</i>

²⁵ M. ROBERTS, op. cit., pp. 44-45. Note also comparisons made between king Parākramabāhu VI and the gods Rāma, Viṣṇu, and Anaṅga, among others, in *Pārakumbā Sirita*. For example, see D. G. ABHAYAGUNARATNA (ed.), op. cit., vv. 41, 42, 70, 81, 83, 99, 123, 124.

Entering the middle of the battle without fear,
 Displaying strength and courage,
 Like Skandakumara and Viṣṇu,
 I will display my might before you.²⁶

Despite the unlikelihood of the Portuguese captain-general styling himself after the gods Skandakumara – the warrior son of Śiva, and Viṣṇu – the heroic king of Hindu dharma, this verse illustrates how the new ruler was associated with gods who were recognizable symbols of martial and royal power. Such use of mythological metaphors should not be simply explained away in terms of the author's formulaic adherence to poetic conventions.²⁷ The literary trope of the king embodying a quasi-divine identity speaks to a broader conviction that the king truly is a powerful figure that is more capable of asserting his will in the world than any other human being.

There are many other verses that serve to cast Portuguese power in a Sinhala idiom. One exemplary model of local kingship revolves around the ruler's erotic interests and appeal. Sinhala poetry has a long tradition of associating great kings with erotic exploits and the voyeuristic gaze upon beautiful female forms.²⁸ Accordingly, Alagiavanna transfers such erotic associations over to the Portuguese ruler in order to complete his transformation into the image of a Sinhala king. Some verses deal with eroticized descriptions of female bathers, who are watched by Sá de Noronha and his army on the way to battle.

Because the young women play [in the water] while facing upward,
 Being endowed with brilliant eyebrows, eyes, faces, and full breasts,
 Although there are no [actual] rows of bees, blue lotuses, lotuses or swans,
 It was as if there were rivers [containing these] everywhere.

Exhibiting the manner of lusty youth desiring love-play,
 The women were splashing each other with very cold water,
 Making their lips white and their blue eyes red,
 And water lilies fell from their ears while they rubbed their large breasts.²⁹

²⁶ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., v. 80:

<i>pā vikum di</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>yē</i>
<i>raṇamāda vāda nobi</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>yē</i>
<i>kaṇḍa uviṇḍu sa</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>yē</i>
<i>vikum pāneṁ top idi</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>yē.</i>

²⁷ For an example of how the images of Indic deities represent merely the local "literary and cultural heritage" overlaid upon sincere Christian convictions, see W. L. A. D. PETER, art. cit., pp. 22-24.

²⁸ S. C. BERKWITZ, "An Ugly King and the Mother Tongue: Notes on Kusa Jātaka in Sinhala Language and Culture", *parallax*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2012, pp. 60-61.

²⁹ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., vv. 114-115:

<i>pā hā na da</i>	<i>bāma net vuvanat pirita</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>yu tu ḷa ṇḍa</i>	<i>uḍukuru vemin keḷinu ye</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>bi ṇḡu roda</i>	<i>nilupul siyapat tisarū</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>nā ti va da</i>	<i>ātimen viya gaṅga hāmātā</i>	<i>na</i>

More generally, however, such a portrayal also served to represent Portuguese power in terms consistent with the Sinhala Buddhist virtue of generosity, which is foremost in the traditional list of “Ten Kingly Virtues” (*dasarājādhammā*) as found in Sri Lankan Buddhist texts.³² Although generosity is one of the most respected moral virtues in Buddhist thought, its association with rulers in particular signifies the prosperity that is believed to come as a result of one’s moral righteousness and fitness to rule. The willingness to part with some of one’s wealth illustrates a wholesome regard for the welfare of others, gratitude for their actions done for one’s own sake, and a realization that one is wealthy enough to afford to give an abundance of gifts away to others.³³ Depicting Sá de Noronha as a generous ruler may also be seen as an attempt to coax him to be similarly generous with his Sinhala subjects and, particularly, the poet who enhances his fame and power with skillfully composed, eulogistic verse.

Hybrid images of religion

When it comes to the issue of religion, we see that *Kustantīnu Haṭana* similarly renders the Portuguese faith into a hybrid Catholic-Buddhist formation. Rather than discarding concepts and practices associated with the Buddha that had been recognized and formative for the culture in Sri Lanka for over 1500 years, Alagiyavanna retained at least some of them in his depiction of the religion that he adopted and adapted from the Portuguese. In doing so, he effectively, if also unintentionally, destabilized the hegemonic Portuguese Christian culture by recasting it in Sinhala Buddhist terms. Although there is little evidence that he directly sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Christian religion, Alagiyavanna refused to denounce or devalue the Buddhist religion of his upbringing. The resulting hybrid religious formation that appears in his work appears to pattern Christian concepts after more familiar Buddhist ones. His *Kustantīnu Haṭana* alters the Sinhala poetic convention of opening a literary work by dedicating

<i>ununun tarātarama</i>	<i>ṭa</i>
<i>gambim paveṇi ko</i>	<i>ṭa</i>
<i>duniya baṇḍavā garu āmatipa</i>	<i>ṭa.</i>

³² For a list of all ten virtues, see V. FAUSBØLL (ed.), *The Jātaka: Together with Its Commentary*, Vol. III, Oxford, Pali Text Society, 1990 [1st ed., 1883], p. 274. An English translation of this passage is found in E. B. COWELL (ed.), *The Jātaka: Or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births*, Vols. III-IV, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994 [1st ed., 1895], p. 174. Reference to the Ten Kingly Virtues is also made in *Pārakumbā Sirita*, wherein king Parākramabāhu VI is praised for embodying them and giving rise to royal splendor that delights all beings. See D. G. ABHAYAGUNARATNA, op. cit., v. 55.

³³ Similarly, the captains of Sá de Noronha’s army, Filipe de Oliveira and Luís Teixeira, are also portrayed in the work as giving various kinds of wealth and honors to their respective soldiers. See M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., vv. 182-183.

verses honoring the Buddha, his Teaching, and the Monkhood – the so-called “Triple Gem” of Buddhism – by substituting verses of praise for the Trinity, Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Mary.

I venerate with reverence the one God who is of three kinds,
Namely the Father, Son, and Spirit,
Who exists without expression and division,
Like the word, the letter, and the meaning.

I venerate the noble Lord Jesus Christ,
Who is a treasure full with the virtue of loving-kindness,
And who bestowed the lotuses of his resplendent feet,
To the heads of the beings of the entire world.

I venerate with devotion the noble lord who issued forth,
From the womb of the Virgin Mary,
In the manner of the fiery flames that issue forth,
From the sunlight stone.³⁴

By opening his work with verses of praise for the Christian God, Alagiya-vanna signals a different focus for veneration than what is found in his earlier Buddhist-themed poetry. Whereas his older works were dedicated to the Buddhist Triple Gem, he now attributes his literary endeavors to his devotion to the holy figures of the Portuguese religion.

However, this substitution does not mean that Alagiya-vanna wholly abandoned his previous attachment to Buddhism, nor does it mean that the poet internalized the Catholic faith solely in Portuguese terms. It would be equally inaccurate to interpret these verses simply as a sign of the poet’s “accommodationist” stance to assimilate the faith of the colonial overlords. Alagiya-vanna, in fact, challenges and undermines the Christian religion by

³⁴ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., vv. 1-3:

<i>basakara aruta me</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>venasa noma pā pavati</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>piti put vīdi ya</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>tevak eksura vañḍim adari</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>sav lev sat mu</i>	<i>du n</i>
<i>siya siripā kamala</i>	<i>du n</i>
<i>met guṇa piri na</i>	<i>du n</i>
<i>vañḍim yēsus kristu suriṇḍun</i>	
<i>rivikān pahanaki</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>nikut nalaṣiḷu vilasi</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>kanni mari kusaye</i>	<i>na</i>
<i>pahaḷa suriṇḍun vañḍiṇi bātiye</i>	<i>na.</i>

W. L. A. Don Peter explains the mythological symbolism of the “sun-stone” as an example of an Indic symbol used as a simile to portray Christ’s virgin birth in W. L. A. D. PETER, art. cit., p. 21.

reinterpreting some of its basic beliefs in broadly Buddhist terms. This claim is not meant to question the validity of his conversion to Catholicism. Other scholars have taken this stance, suggesting that Alagiyavanna's conversion and service under the Portuguese was done solely out of practical motives, such as his need to obtain food to eat.³⁵ It seems more reasonable, however, to posit that Alagiyavanna's conversion did not follow the model of a complete, unilateral process whereby the old religion is wholly replaced by a new one, but was instead more consistent with what Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton describe as the intended messages of the missionaries either failing to be transmitted or being effectively transformed by those who received them.³⁶ It is likely that Alagiyavanna embraced the Catholicism of the Portuguese in a partial and qualified manner, viewing its tenets and practices more as extensions of more familiar Buddhist ones than as a distinctly superior and uniquely true religion. Indeed, it would seem that from the poet's point of view, the Portuguese religion would be enriched and improved by its association with Buddhism.

For example, *Kustantīnu Haṭana* makes several references to the Christian God and to expressions of Christian piety in stock poetic ways, evoking Buddhist ideas and imagery in the process. The figure of Christ is extolled in verse two for his virtue of loving-kindness and his lotus-like feet, qualities that mirror those of the Buddha. Such a description evokes the praise for the Buddha in the opening verse in one of Alagiyavanna's earlier works, *Subhāṣitaya* (Well-Spoken Words). In that verse, the audience is told to "venerate the lotus-feet of the Buddha," who "has loving-kindness that has arrived for all beings."³⁷ Another verse in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* credits Lord Jesus (*yēsu devi*) with helping Sá de Noronha travel safely to Ceilão, although it also notes the positive effects of the general's own merit (*piṇ*) in this instance.³⁸ Given that Sri Lankan Buddhist culture incorporated various *bodhisattvas* and Hindu deities beginning from around the fourteenth century, the previous description of Jesus resembles these divine figures that were venerated by Buddhists to satisfy human needs in the current world.³⁹ Such deities and *bodhisattvas* borrowed from the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition became popular figures of veneration in the fifteenth century, and Nātha (or Avalokiteśvara) became especially prominent as a being that offered pro-

³⁵ Cf. C. E. GODAKUMBURA, *Sinhalese Literature*, Colombo, Colombo Apothecaries Co., 1955, p. 226.

³⁶ Kenneth MILLS and Anthony GRAFTON (ed.), *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*, Rochester, New York, University of Rochester Press, 2003, pp. XI-XII.

³⁷ Kumaratunga MUNIDASA (ed.), *Subhāṣitaya*, Colombo, M. D. Gunasena, 2001 [1st ed., 1952], v. 1.

³⁸ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., v. 60.

³⁹ For more on the historical appropriation of *bodhisattvas* and deities in late medieval Sri Lanka, see John Clifford HOLT, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991.

tection and compassion to his devotees.⁴⁰ It should be noted that in the Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhist tradition, the Buddha is normally seen to have passed away into the blissful, otherworldly state of nirvana, and thus he is no longer able to intervene and assist the beings of this world. However, *bodhisattvas* and deities could represent powerful, divine beings to whom Buddhists could appeal for blessings and protection in the present, while still venerating and following the Buddha to achieve higher, otherworldly goals of positive rebirths and liberation from *saṃsāra*.

This separation of duties, whereby Buddhas help people to obtain good rebirths and liberation, while *bodhisattvas* and other heavenly beings offer assistance with this-worldly goals is instructive for reading Alagiyavanna's work. Indeed, the picture of Jesus in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* appears much like a heavenly *bodhisattva* who looks after people's needs in the world of repeated births and deaths, or *saṃsāra*. If the Buddha was viewed as having transcended *saṃsāra*, then *bodhisattvas* like Nātha who remained within this cycle could offer direct, supernatural aid to people who sought it out. It is in this context that the figure of Jesus should be viewed in this seventeenth-century poem. In addition to the text's assertion of the safe passage he provided in the voyage from Goa to Ceilão, Jesus is portrayed as a compassionate being who looks after people in the world.

Who is great in terms of virtue,
Who is engaged in the protection of the world,
And who possesses wondrous, supernatural powers,
May the Lord Jesus Christ protect us!⁴¹

The image of Jesus in this work thus fits nicely within the framework of a *bodhisattva* in the Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition. Alagiyavanna makes no mention of Jesus's sacrifice and consequent removal of sin, nor is he praised for being the way to heaven and eternal life. Instead, Jesus is said to offer protection and prosperity to his devotees. He is called the "eye of the three worlds" (*tun lova äsa*), which is an epithet commonly used with reference to the Buddha.⁴² In a Buddhist context, the Buddha, as the Fully Awakened One, is said to possess unobstructed knowledge of the world of desire (*kāma-loka*), the world of form (*rūpa-loka*), and the formless world (*arūpa-loka*),

⁴⁰ H. B. M. ILANGASINHA, *Buddhism in Medieval Sri Lanka*, Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 1992, pp. 190-193. For more general observations about the cults of *bodhisattvas* and deities in medieval Sri Lanka, see S. C. BERKWITZ, *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey*, London, Routledge, 2009, pp. 151-153.

⁴¹ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., v. 186:

<i>ḡaṇayen maha</i>	<i>t tu</i>
<i>lova rākumehi niyu</i>	<i>t tu</i>
<i>asiri iduma</i>	<i>t tu</i>
<i>rakī sura yesus kiri</i>	<i>s tu.</i>

⁴² *Idem*, v. 188.

which together comprise the Buddhist universe. Indeed, Alagiyavanna uses the same epithet in some of his earlier works to praise the *bodhisattva* who is destined to become the Buddha.⁴³ Collectively these remarks show how the poet goes beyond simply using local figures of speech to express Christian sentiments. The view favoring Alagiyavanna's harmonization of Christian faith with the local Sinhala culture fails to recognize his transformation of that faith into a form that differs markedly from what Portuguese missionaries promoted.⁴⁴ Alagiyavanna re-envisioned Jesus Christ as a kind of *bodhisattva* who can assist his devotees while they are subject to suffering and death in *samsāra*. He answers the needs of people in this world, but there are scant signs in this work of how Jesus can help them in the next world. Envisioned more as a protector and one who bestows blessings and wealth than as a personal savior who redeems sinners from sin and hell, Jesus is praised in largely Buddhist terms as a supernatural force who is able to assist people with their immediate concerns and needs.

This blending of Christian and Buddhist notions of divine power represents one crucial expression of the hybrid religious vision of *Kustantīnu Haṭana*. One need not question the sincerity of Alagiyavanna's conversion to posit that he was either unable or unwilling to part with select Buddhist ideas and values when he composed this work in the later years of his life. The religiosity he promotes is transgressive in that it undermines more orthodox formulations of both Catholicism and Buddhism. To paraphrase Homi Bhabha, the hybrid representation of religion in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* disturbs the hegemonic, discriminatory forms of knowledge belonging to the colonial authorities, making it dependent on local or "native" forms of knowledge for their expression.⁴⁵ In other words, the authority and status attributed to Christianity by the Portuguese cannot be justified on its own terms. Alagiyavanna's text embraces certain features of Christian thought and symbolism but recasts such features in terms of Buddhist notions, a move that actually subverts the authority and integrity of the Portuguese faith. The "religion of the Lord" (*devi samaya*), which was already undermined by the apostasy of the rebel António Barreto, is again – albeit unwittingly – compromised by Alagiyavanna's poetically inflected depiction of Christianity from the perspective of local Sinhala Buddhist culture.⁴⁶ The Catholicism celebrated by in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* appears more hybrid and heterodox next to the faith generally promoted by Portuguese missionaries in Ceilão. Indeed, writing in an annual letter from 1610, the Jesuit author describes how one of the

⁴³ Vālivīṭiyē, SORATA (ed.), *Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭituman visin viracita Dahamsoṇḍa Kava*, Colombo, Jinālaṅkāra Yantrālaya, 1934, v. 57. In his *Kusa Jātaka Kāvya*, Alagiyavanna refers to the Buddha with the epithet of the "Sage who is the Eye of the World". See D. M. SAMARASINGHE (ed.), *Sitiyaṃ sahita Kusajātaka Kāvya*, Colombo, Śrī Laṅkā Prakāśaka Samāgama, 1964, v. 69.

⁴⁴ See, for instance, W. L. A. D. PETER, art. cit., p. 20.

⁴⁵ Homi K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994, p. 164.

⁴⁶ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., vv. 11-12.

Fathers in the island occupies himself with the study of the “Chingala” language in order to converse with the local monks and to refute their “errors and figments” so as to bring some of them to “abandon their false religion” and accept the truth of the Gospel.⁴⁷ Even though Alagiyavanna was converted by these same Jesuits, he shows little sign in his last poetic work of having abandoned his affiliations with Buddhism.

Aside from his reinterpretation of Christian divinity in terms of a compassionate *bodhisattva*, Alagiyavanna also employs specifically Buddhist concepts in the narrative of his work. The Buddhist idea of merit (*piṇ*) appears in several places in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* and is presented as an uncontroversial fact. Buddhist traditions have long extolled merit as a kind of positive force likened to the un-ripened effects of good deeds, which condition a more enjoyable and pleasurable existence in the future. Earning merit thus represents a valued Buddhist goal that may be likened to building up a store of intangible seeds that will one day bear pleasant and fortunate fruits in this life or in a subsequent rebirth.⁴⁸ Engaging in morally wholesome deeds such as giving alms to monks or showing reverence to the Buddha have long been identified as practices that may generate merit, which will in turn lead to good effects for the practitioner later on. The notion of merit has been central to Sri Lankan Buddhist practice and Buddhist literature for as long as the tradition has been found in the island.

This same concept appears early on in *Kustantīnu Haṭana*, when Alagiyavanna explains how the king of the Kandyan Kingdom in the upcountry escaped from the rebel Barreto’s treachery “by the power of the Triple Gem, by the influence of the great gods, and by the power of the merit of that king.”⁴⁹ The implication of this assertion is that the good deeds performed by that Buddhist king earned him merit that allowed him to escape from Barreto’s offensive against Kandy. In other words, for Alagiyavanna the convert to Catholicism and servant of the Portuguese Crown, merit engenders real, beneficial effects in the world. Such a position runs counter to typical Portuguese claims from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Buddhist beliefs are simply nonsense and diabolically inspired superstitions.⁵⁰ Alagiyavanna, in contrast, recognizes the validity and efficacy of the

⁴⁷ V. PERNIOLA, op. cit., p. 303.

⁴⁸ Rupert GETHIN, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 101. For remarks on the contemporary relevance of merit in Buddhism, see S. C. BERKWITZ, *South Asian Buddhism*, cit., p. 202.

⁴⁹ M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), op. cit., v. 22:

<i>teruvan mahimenu</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>suravaran anuhasinu</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>e raju pin belenu</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>uvadurak noma vemin maṇḍaku</i>	<i>t.</i>

⁵⁰ João de BARROS and Diogo do COUTO, *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Times to 1600 AD*, trans. Donald Ferguson, New Delhi, Navrang, 1993 [1st ed., 1909], pp. 110-113. For additional examples of Portuguese critiques of Buddhism in the seventeenth century, see

Buddha's teachings in this work, even after his conversion. Furthermore, the idea of merit is presented in a matter-of-fact way, suggesting that the author felt no need to explain or defend the idea to its potential detractors.⁵¹ We have already noted how the work attributes Sá de Noronha's safe journey to Sri Lanka to merit along with the divine assistance of Jesus. The assertion of Sá de Noronha's merit is noteworthy since it not only demonstrates the validity of the concept itself, but it also reinforces the idea that the *capitão-geral* is worthy of reverence and respect like other beings who have earned merit by performing good deeds.⁵² Such an idea reflects a conviction widespread in Sinhala Buddhist culture that held that powerful rulers enjoyed great majesty and fame as a result of having performed many good deeds in the past. Their current stature and success would thus be viewed as evidence of the great amount of merit they have previously earned and currently enjoy.

By employing Buddhist ideas and imagery in his praise of the Portuguese, Alagiyavanna reveals how notions of religion and power in early seventeenth-century Ceilão were fashioned in hybrid terms, even in one of the most celebrated Sinhala converts to the faith. The French traveler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier wrote an account of Alagiyavanna's conversion in 1648 based on the reports of Jesuits in Goa, who were familiar with and evidently proud of this particular event. Calling Alagiyavanna a "very accomplished man and good native philosopher," Tavernier explains how the Sinhala poet was converted by Jesuit Fathers, studied and memorized the New Testament, received baptism, and worked zealously for the conversion of other "idolaters."⁵³ Such an account, coming only about one or two generations after the events of which it speaks, surely exaggerates Alagiyavanna's conversion experience. Indeed, even Portuguese writers such as Fernão de Queirós recognized that Sinhalas were not always sincere in their conversions and needed stronger encouragement and incentives to follow the Catholic faith. For example, Queirós's account of the Portuguese experience in Ceilão often stresses the "infidelity" and "blindness" of the Sinhalas, making them difficult targets for conversion to Christianity.

A. STRATHERN, "Representations of Eastern Religion", cit., pp. 56-57. Interesting Portuguese condemnations of Buddhism may also be found in J. M. FLORES, op. cit., pp. 53-54, 181.

⁵¹ Although it seems unlikely that Portuguese observers had a clear understanding of Buddhist notions of *karma* and *merit*, the disdain with which they wrote about native rites would have ensured a skeptical and dismissive attitude toward whatever exposure they had to these ideas. See, for example, Diogo do Couto's description of how pilgrims to "Adam's Peak" in Ceilão would perform ceremonies to make them believe that they have purified themselves. J. BARROS and D. COUTO, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

⁵² Cf. Alagiyavanna's words in *Subhāṣitaya*: "Knowledgeable beings make offerings to one having great merit." The assumption at work in this statement is that meritorious beings have developed great virtue and justifiably enjoy the fruits of their good conduct. Cf. K. MUNIDASA, op. cit., v. 97.

⁵³ V. BALL (trans.), *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier*, Vol. II, London, Macmillan and Co., 1889, pp. 188-189.

The conversion of the Chingalâs was beset with greater difficulties than that of any other nation of the East free from the Mahometan dominion, because left to their natural bent they are proud, presumptuous, variable, and inconstant, and therefore they make religion a matter of convenience. So long as it served their purpose to live with the Portuguese they received the Faith of Christ and either pretended or were in reality Christians; when an occasion offered to throw off the Portuguese domination and they took up arms, with the same facility they abandoned the Faith of Christ (...).⁵⁴

It is not surprising to see a seventeenth-century Portuguese chronicler highlight the gulf between sincere and opportunistic conversions and, by extension, between Christian and Buddhist identity. The numerous rebellions that the Portuguese faced in the island, often by former converts to Christianity like António Barreto, surely bred mistrust and contempt for Sinhala who professed the Catholic faith. Yet Alagiyavanna did not rebel against the Portuguese, nor is there any good evidence that would cast doubt on his affinity for his new faith. Nevertheless, Tavernier's description seems to overplay Alagiyavanna's conversion while maintaining the same strict distinction between Christian and Buddhist identity that Queirós posited. Neither the optimism of Tavernier nor the pessimism of Queirós suffices to explain the religious interests or commitments of a figure like Alagiyavanna. From the standpoint of their antagonistic perspectives on religious identity, Alagiyavanna's hybrid religious views must be explained away either by questioning the sincerity of his conversion or by dismissing the Buddhist elements in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* as merely stereotypical literary conventions. Many modern Sinhala scholars have likewise been constrained by modern views of religion in their assessments of Alagiyavanna as *either* a crypto-Buddhist *or* a sincere Catholic.⁵⁵ The possibility that he borrowed elements from both Buddhism and Christianity in a manner reminiscent of the pluralistic religious culture of medieval Sri Lanka, whereupon Buddhist and Hindu forms were often practiced jointly, has not been adequately recognized.⁵⁶

It would be more accurate to state that *Kustantīnu Haṭana* represents a hybrid approach to religious identity, wherein Portuguese and Sinhala cultural elements co-exist and even inform one another. One does not find

⁵⁴ Fernão de QUEYROZ, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, Vol. II, trans. S. G. Perera, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1992 [1st ed., 1930], p. 699.

⁵⁵ Among those who have considered the question of Alagiyavanna's actual religious identity, one side maintains that he was Christian "only in name," and maintained his true Buddhist orientation privately. See, for example, E. Wimalasuriya GUNAPALA, *Kavindra Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi Caritaya*, Sri Lanka, s.n., 1927, p. 33. The other opinion states that Alagiyavanna became a true Christian believer and that his references to Indic mythology in *Kustantīnu Haṭana* were simply consistent with cultural norms. See W. L. A. D. PETER, art. cit., pp. 22-24.

⁵⁶ It is important to note here that although some notable Jesuits who worked in other parts of Asia – such as Roberto de Nobili and Matteo Ricci – sometimes advocated adapting local cultural expressions for propagating the Christian Gospel, there is scant evidence of such a missionary method undertaken in Portuguese Ceilão.

a wholesale rejection of Buddhism in this work, and yet there seems to be a genuine embrace of certain Catholic ideas and religious piety as well. There is a deep attachment to some Buddhist ideas alongside the pronouncements and descriptions of Christian devotion. Scholars who have contended that the work demonstrates either Christian or Buddhist adherence have allowed themselves to be constrained by modern views of religious identity that typically overemphasize the distinctions and boundaries between traditions. However, this early seventeenth-century poem illustrates the possibilities by which a Buddhist subject of the Portuguese empire could appropriate elements from various religions to produce a hybrid tradition that allowed him to traverse different fields of power in the island. The retention of classical poetic forms and conventions, coupled with appeals to powerful ideas of local kingship and Buddhist morality, would in theory help Alagiyavanna make a case for reclaiming his status as an excellent poet who is entitled to royal patronage and social recognition. Yet it also reflects his efforts to praise the Portuguese *capitão-geral*, enhancing the latter's power and status as a "king" fit for veneration and worthy successor to line of Sinhala Buddhist kings who preceded him in the island.

Hybrid images of power and religion do not necessarily involve the "harmonization" of different traditions. Within the context of early modern Catholicism and Buddhism, there were numerous aspects in both that would have been objectionable to the other. Indeed, the discourse on Buddhism as found in the writings of Portuguese-sponsored missionaries throughout early-modern Asia is overwhelmingly critical and dismissive of the religion's practices and beliefs. And there is sporadic evidence of negative caricatures of the Portuguese and their Christian faith in a handful of Sinhala Buddhist works from the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries.⁵⁷ Alagiyavanna's work celebrating Constantino de Sá de Noronha could have hardly been designed to bring about a rapprochement between these two sides. Instead, by considering *Kustantīnu Haṭana* as a poetic response to Portuguese colonialism in Sri Lanka, we may acknowledge that its hybridity represented a challenge to the notion of fixed religious and cultural identities, as well as the idea of the disparateness of the other.⁵⁸ This work demonstrates that hybridity could be subversive even without the intention of undermining the authority of religious and political elites. Alagiyavanna sought to buttress the power of the Portuguese in Ceilão, and yet his poetic descriptions borrowed heavily from Sinhala Buddhist notions and literary values. Such a vision that appropriated aspects of both religions and cultures could not succeed in reconciling the two traditions, which had already staked out claims to their respective

⁵⁷ See, for example, M. ROBERTS, op. cit., and R. F. YOUNG and G. S. B. SENANAYAKA, op. cit., for traces of some of the negative portrayals of Portuguese colonialists in early-modern Sri Lanka.

⁵⁸ Robert J. C. YOUNG, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 4.

truth and particularity. When seen in the light of his entire body of work, Alagiyavanna's *Kustantīnu Haṭana* appears as a creative synthesis of rival religious ideals to represent anew the traditional political-aesthetic order and restore the status and privileges of poets in Sri Lankan society. The religion and power of the Portuguese could be deemed worthy of praise, but evidently not on terms that were uniquely their own. The written praise of a laudable Sinhala subject and convert demonstrates that even some of the most celebrated conversions by Portuguese Jesuits remained far from complete and could engender new, hybrid discourses that destabilized colonial and missionary claims of bringing the local population under the control of the Church and the Crown.

Bibliography

- ABEYSINGHE, Tikiri, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, 1594-1612*, Colombo, Lake House, 1966.
- ABHAYAGUNARATNA, D. G. (ed.), *Pārakumbā Sirita*, Colombo, Madhyama Saṅskṛtika Aramudala, 1997.
- BALL, V. (trans.), *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste Tavernier*, Vol. II, London, Macmillan and Co., 1889.
- BARROS, João de and Diogo do COUTO, *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Times to 1600 AD*, trans. Donald Ferguson, New Delhi, Navrang, 1993 [1st ed., 1909].
- BERKWITZ, Stephen C., *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey*, London, Routledge, 2009.
- BERKWITZ, Stephen C., "An Ugly King and the Mother Tongue: Notes on Kusa Jātaka in Sinhala Language and Culture", *parallax*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 2012, pp. 56-70.
- BERKWITZ, Stephen C., *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism: Alagiyavanna and the Portuguese in Sri Lanka*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- BHABHA, Homi K., *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994.
- COWELL, E. B. (ed.), *The Jātaka: Or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, Vols. III-IV, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994 [1st ed., 1895].
- FAUSBØLL, V. (ed.), *The Jātaka: Together with Its Commentary*, Vol. III, Oxford, Pali Text Society, 1990 [1st ed., 1883].
- FERNANDO, M. E. (ed.), *Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭitumā visin viracita Kustantīnu Haṭana*, Galle, Sri Lanka, St. Aloysius' College, 1933.
- FLORES, Jorge Manuel, *Os Olhos do Rei: Desenhos e Descrições Portuguesas da Ilha de Ceilão (1624, 1638)*, Lisboa, Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimientos Portugueses, 2001.
- GETHIN, Rupert, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- GODAKUMBURA, C. E., *Sinhalese Literature*, Colombo, Colombo Apothecaries Co., 1955.

- GUNAPALA, E., Wimalasuriya, *Kavīndra Alagiyavanna Mukaveṭi Caritaya*, Sri Lanka, s.n., 1927.
- HOLT, John Clifford, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991.
- ILANGASINHA, H. B. M., *Buddhism in Medieval Sri Lanka*, Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 1992.
- INGALLS, Daniel H. H. (trans.), *Sanskrit Poetry: From Vidyākara's Treasury*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1965.
- JOTIPALA, Gonahene (ed.), *1981 Rājya Sāhitya Utsavaya Kāragala: Siyaṇē-Lēkhakayō*, Colombo, Cultural Affairs Ministry, 1981.
- LOPES, Fernando Félix, *A Evangelização de Ceilão desde 1552 a 1602*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1967.
- MENEGON, Eugenio, "European and Chinese Controversies over Rituals: A Seventeenth-Century Genealogy of Chinese Religion", in Bruno Boute and Thomas Småberg (ed.), *Devising Order: Socio-religious Models of Rituals and the Performativity of Practice*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, pp. 193-222.
- MILLS, Kenneth and Anthony GRAFTON (ed.), *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*, Rochester, New York, University of Rochester Press, 2003.
- MUNIDASA, Kumaratunga (ed.), *Subhāṣitaya*, Colombo, M. D. Gunasena, 2001 [1st ed., 1952].
- PARANAVITANA, Rohini, "Sinhalese War Poems and the Portuguese", in Jorge Flores (ed.), *Re-Exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007, pp. 49-61.
- PERERA, S. G. and M. E. FERNANDO (ed.), *Alagiyawanna's Kustantinu Haṭana (The Campaign of Don Constantine)*, Colombo, Catholic Press, 1932.
- PERNIOLA, V. (ed.), *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period*, Vol. II ("1566 to 1619"), Dehiwala, Sri Lanka, Tisara Prakasakayo, 1991.
- PETER, W. L. A. Don, "Portuguese Influence on a Sinhalese Poet," *Aquinas Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1989, pp. 9-26.
- POLLOCK, Sheldon, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006.
- QUEYROZ, Fernão de, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, Vol. II, trans. S. G. Perera, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1992 [1st ed., 1930].
- RAFAEL, Vicente L., *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1993.
- RAMANUJAN, A. K. (trans.), *Poems of Love and War: From the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Long Poems of Classical Tamil*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985.
- REGO, António da Silva (ed.), *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1960.

- ROBERTS, Michael, *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s to 1815*, Colombo, Vijitha Yapa, 2004.
- SAMARASINGHE, D. M. (ed.), *Sitiyaṃ sahita Kusajātaka Kāvya*, Colombo, Śrī Laṅkā Prakāśaka Samāgama, 1964.
- SANNASGALA, Puñci Bandara, *Sinhala Sāhityavaṃśaya*, 2nd ed., Colombo, Cultural Affairs Department, 1994.
- SCHRIMPF, Monika, "The Pro- and Anti-Christian Writings of Fukan Fabian (1565-1621)", *Japanese Religions*, Vol. 33, Nos. 1&2, 2008, pp. 35-54.
- SHULMAN, David, "Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend", in Barbara Stoler Miller (ed.), *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 89-119.
- SILVA, Chandra R. de, "Algumas reflexões sobre o impacto português na religião entre os singaleses durante os séculos XVI e XVII", *Oceanos*, Vol. 34, 1998, pp. 104-116.
- SORATA, Vālivīṭṭiyē (ed.), *Alagiyaṇṇa Mukaveṭituman visin viracita Dahamsoṇḍa Kava*, Colombo, Jinālaṅkāra Yantrālaya, 1934.
- STRATHERN, Alan, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka: Portuguese Imperialism in a Buddhist Land*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- STRATHERN, Alan, "Representations of Eastern Religion: Queyroz and Gonzaga on the First Catholic-Buddhist Disputation in Sri Lanka", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, new series, Vol. 43, 1998, pp. 39-70.
- STRATHERN, Alan, "Re-Reading Queirós: Some Neglected Aspects of the *Conquista*", *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 26, Nos. 1-2, 2000, pp. 1-28.
- TRINDADE, Fr. Paulo da, *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente*, Vol. III, Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1962.
- VIMALA, Ambagaspitiye, *Sinhala Haṭṭan (Kavi) Sāhitya Vimarśanaya*, Colombo, S. Godage and Brothers, 1998.
- WICKREMASINGHE, Martin, *Sinhalese Literature*, trans. E. R. Sarathchandra, Colombo, M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1949.
- XAVIER, Ângela Barreto, *A Invenção de Goa: Poder Imperial e Conversões Culturais nos Séculos XVI e XVII*, Lisboa, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008.
- YOUNG, R. F. and G. S. B. SENANAYAKA, *The Carpenter-Heretic: A Collection of Buddhist Stories about Christianity from 18th-Century Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Karunaratne & Sons, 1998.
- YOUNG, Robert J. C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, London, Routledge, 1995.