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THE POLITICAL HISTORY

OF

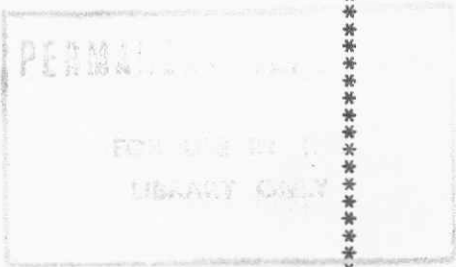
THE KINGDOMS OF

YĀPAHVA,

KURUNĀGALA

AND

GAMPALA.



Being

the Thesis presented for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy of the
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SYNOPSIS.

The subject covered by this Thesis is the political history of Sri Lanka during the period after the death of Parākramabāhu II of Dāmbadeniya, and the rise of Parākramabāhu VI of Kotte in the first decade of the fifteenth century.

This period saw fundamental changes in the nature and structure of the State in Sri Lanka. The kings of Anurādhapura and Polonnaruva claimed and exercised suzerainty over the whole country, ruling the various areas through governors and other officials appointed by them. The large surpluses of food that resulted from a regular cultivation of rice in a tank-based agricultural system enabled the rulers of these kingdoms to maintain a powerful army and a well organised administration. While there were revolts against various kings and dynasties, these were attempts to supplant the rulers rather than attempts to destroy the unitary structure of the State in order to establish provincial centres of power. The one systematic attempt to establish regional autonomy, i.e. the revolt of Rohaṇa during the reign of Parākramabāhu I, was ruthlessly crushed by the central government.

The political structure of the country during the period covered by this study is a complete contrast to this. After the death of Parākramabāhu I of Polonnaruva, there was, except for a brief period under Niśśankamalla, virtual anarchy in the country until the commencement of the reign of Vijayabāhu III, who established himself at Dāmbadeniya. He, his son Parākramabāhu II, and the two sons of the latter, Vijayabāhu IV and Bhuvanakabāhu I, brought the larger portion of the Island under their control, and for a period of nearly fifty years the country enjoyed a degree of stability. But with the death of Bhuvanakabāhu I in 1284 A.D. as a result of an invasion launched by the Pāṇḍyan kingdom, and the destruction of

the kingdom of Yāpahuva, the disintegration of the State commenced,

When the Daṁbadeṇiya dynasty reestablished itself again, in 1296 A.D., its rulers could set up their capital only at Kurunāgala, with the result that they lost control of the northern portion of the kingdom. After the death of Parākramabāhu IV of the Daṁbadeṇiya dynasty, the country gradually broke up into a large number of kingdoms and principalities, until, in 1350 A.D., the effective rule of the consecrated king of the Island was confined only to a small area in and around Gampala. Another feature of this period was the establishment of a separate centre of political power in the Jaffna peninsula, which, in time, became linguistically different from the rest of the Island. At the end of the period of our study there emerges a picture, not of one unified, integrated State covering the whole Island, governed by a universally accepted ruler, but a situation where the consecrated ruler of the Island exercised authority only over the central and south-western portions of the country, (though he claimed nominal authority over the whole Island), depending for his government on the support of powerful noble families, with a weak control over the various regional authorities.

This change in the structure of the State was accompanied by a change in the base of the power of the State from the dry zone section of the Island to the wet zone section, and an analysis of this change suggests that the transformation in the nature of the State occurred precisely because of this change of economic environment. In contrast to the dry zone, the quantum of land available for distribution was much less, and even the land distributed, and the land retained and cultivated by the State, yielded a lesser surplus over and above subsistence needs. As a result, the revenues of the State fell, with the State no longer being able to maintain the powerful military forces that were its ultimate source of

authority, and its ultimate **sanction** against revolt and separatism by its regional authorities.

Along with these developments within the Island arose a situation in the outside world where a great upsurge of trade was taking place. The Crusades, in West Asia, led to a great demand for eastern goods, including products of Sri Lanka such as spices and other goods, to be sold in Europe, and this was accompanied by technical developments in Chinese nautical science, which enabled Chinese mariners to sail directly into the Indian Ocean for purposes of trade. South India, Sri Lanka and other south-east Asian countries formed part of a trade net-work operated by South Indian guilds. With this expansion of trade, the demand for agricultural and other products found in the south-western and central regions of Sri Lanka increased, with the result that the hereditary land-owning class, which formed the official hierarchy of the State, greatly increased its economic wealth. This in turn resulted in the rise of powerful noble families, such as the Menavaras, the Ganavasis, the Alagakkonāras, etc. who, on the one hand, set up regional centres of autonomy, and on the other hand, exercised considerable power and influence in the central government.

It is this interaction of forces that forms the subject matter of this study.