

## TOWARDS THE SOURCE-CRITICISM OF SITAVAKA- PERIOD HEROIC LITERATURE, PART TWO: THE SITAVAKA HATANA: NOTES ON A GROUNDED TEXT<sup>1</sup>

'Part One' of this paper considered the sixteenth-century prose chronicle *Alakesvarayuddhaya*; here we shall examine the other text of major historical importance to survive from that century, the *Sitavaka Hatana*.<sup>2</sup> It is of literary importance too – if not, I am informed, of vast literary merit – in that it is the first of its genre, forming the template for other *hatan*s or *hatan kavi* (war poems) that reappeared a generation or so later.<sup>3</sup> If the latter portion of the *Alakesvarayuddhaya* (AY) appears to be floating high above the antagonisms playing out on the ground below, the *Sitavaka Hatana* (SH) seems firmly planted in the soil. It is a poem fiercely of its time and place, 'grounded' in more ways than one: trenchantly territorial in its sentiments, earthy in its topoi both sexual and martial, and given to bringing any poetic flights of fancy bumping back down to the ground with banausic lists of military-administrative concern such as the dispensation of land or payments

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express very great thanks to Nilmini Dissanayake who read the whole text to me and discussed many points of details. The second, thematic, part of this essay is largely a reproduction of part of chapter nine of a pre-publication draft of my book, *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth Century Sri Lanka* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), although it is expanded in one or two areas. I would like to thank CUP for permission to reproduce. For the verses quoted in this section, I also took translation advice from Rohini Paranavitana, Nihal Kiriella, K. M. P. Kulasekera and Sandadas Coperahewa. My thanks to them all and to Kitsiri Malalgoda for a general discussion regarding the 'authenticity' of Sinhala texts, and to Risiman Amarasinghe who introduced me to the SRRK, and to Stephen C. Berkwitz for his useful comments.

<sup>2</sup> The AY used here is Suraweera 1964, the *Rajavaliya* is Suraweera 2000, and the SH, is Paranavitana 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Although Dharmadasa 1995: 475, is surely right to place these *hatan kavi* within a broader, older tradition of panegyric. He describes them as 'a remnant of the classical tradition, albeit in a degenerate form' that had their forerunner in *Parakumba Sirita*, written in praise of Parakramabahu VI (1411-66).

to men after battle.<sup>4</sup> It revels in the sheer pleasure of going to war and tearing apart the enemy. And it is explicit regarding its origination – the poet Attan Hari Abhaya Alahapperuma Vijayavardhana regularly makes his presence felt in his verses and announces a composition date of 1585.<sup>5</sup> This ‘heroic’ sensibility stands in contrast to Alagiyavanna’s *Savul Sandesa*, which was composed around the same time, but instead presents a more tranquil vision of the land.<sup>6</sup>

Grounded it may be, but simple it is not. We shall have to uproot it a little and peer about at its muddy foundations before we can employ it as evidence of the Sitavakan sensibility. Therefore the first section of this essay will consider some technical issues relating to its date and authenticity. Rohini Paranavitana has performed a great service to scholarship in bringing our attention to the *Sitavaka Hatana* and editing it in an accessible form, but several question marks continue to hover over the text. For its narrative seems to conflict with the accepted chronology of Sitavakan history, in particular the order in which the Battle of Mulleriyava and the death of King Mayadunne took place. As with Part One, since I have worked with the aid of translators on the published edition only, my attempts to clear the ground here must be seen as subject to revision by Sinhala experts.<sup>7</sup> I have left a reasonably full record of my reasoning in this paper – as the historiographical equivalent of the mathematical injunction to ‘show your workings’ – so that the reader is not left with a misleading image of completion, or a whole series of puzzles neatly solved. The intention is to open up a field of enquiry not fence it off.

---

<sup>4</sup> Regarding the ‘earthy’ tone, not a woman is mentioned but her breasts receive comment, not a pregnancy is referred to but its physical symptoms dwelt upon, not an individual combat evoked but the grossest details of wounding and maiming are gleefully divulged.

<sup>5</sup> He announces his name in verses 448, 1117.

<sup>6</sup> That is to say, while the *Savul Sandesa* has a number of references eulogizing Rajasinha’s military prowess and victories over enemies (e.g. verse 25), these are confined to very general terms, with no reference to actual battles or struggles. Thanks to Stephen Berkwitz for this (personal comm. 15 July 2007, and Berkwitz 2007). Verse 37 refers to Rajasinha ‘dispelling the thick darkness of enemies who are without limit’, which may refer to the internal opponents who were beginning to rouse opposition to Rajasinha (on which see Strathern 2007, Chapter Nine) as well as the Portuguese and Kandyans. It is intriguing that the *Savul Sandesa* makes no explicit reference to the Portuguese in its presentation of a serene cultural geography and an idealized vision of an ordered state.

<sup>7</sup> These two papers might appear to constitute an unusual project in that they are textual analyses dependent on the use of translators. So it should be explained that they result from the need to solve various problems of source-criticism – which no-one else seemed likely to address – before I could use them as evidence for Strathern 2007. That book is otherwise reliant on the Portuguese sources which form the overwhelming majority of available evidence for sixteenth-century history.

One point which must be noted straight away is the intriguing relationship between the SH and the AY, which goes well beyond their common thematic concern with the battlefield, or their chronological focus on the decades of the mid-century. Both are most interested in the early phase of Sitavakan history, its foundation and rise to the pre-eminent Sinhala state. The similarity extends to the concentration of focus on the campaigns against Vidiye Bandara; indeed the SH expends more verses describing the vanquishing of this Kotte rebel than it does on the battles with the Portuguese.<sup>8</sup> It seems to have been through his victories against Vidiye Bandara that the young prince Rajasinha announced his heroic credentials to rulership.<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, this might require us to nuance the notion that it was the great struggle against the Portuguese which gave rise to this new war poem genre. For it is evident that the arrival of the Portuguese intensified internecine conflict as well as aroused direct opposition. Having introduced firearms and new strategies to Lankan warfare and thrown into turmoil the accepted means for legitimizing monarchical rule, they elicited a general militiarization of Sinhalese society.

One might almost consider the SH a verse version of the AY, so closely in step do their narratives proceed. The most plausible explanation for this is that the AY was used by the *hatana* poet as his principal source.<sup>10</sup> This may be because the AY was adopted as something like an official chronicle in Sitavaka. The SH author seems to have supplemented this sparse narrative with information drawn from other official records and, if we can take the author's claims at face value, by his own memories of many of the key battles and events of the time. Yet literary and mythological motifs, poetic reconstructions and conceits supply a good deal of the content. For all that the author brandishes his personal involvement in the events he describes, this epic poem is much more of a text-bound literary concoction than it makes out.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Vidiye Bandara was a powerful member of Bhuvanekabahu VII's (1521-51) court and subsequently regent of Kotte. However he soon rebelled against his grandson Dharmapala and his Portuguese allies and proved a major threat to both Portuguese and Sitavakan power. The latter thus formed an alliance which finally crushed him in 1555. Note, however, that the foreignness of the Portuguese and the distinctive nature of the threat they represented are important themes of the poem as we shall see.

<sup>9</sup> For example, verse 750, tells us that he won the name Rajasinha during that campaign (which corresponds to AY, p. 39). Compare with Queyroz 1992: 323, which also refers to the great feasts held by Mayadunne in his honour, signaling that he could take his father's place. Incidentally, it is very telling that that AY acknowledges that the anti-Vidiye league included the Portuguese, which the SH could not do twenty years later.

<sup>10</sup> At the very least, their authors were working from a common text.

<sup>11</sup> This presumably arises out of a desire to advertise the service he and his family have rendered the Sitavakan monarchy. The author's self-consciousness here could be seen as

The second section of this essay, which is a slightly amplified version of a passage in chapter nine of my recent book, considers what the poem can tell us about the Sitavakan mentality and sense of identity. The 'ground-level' view of the poem affords us a rare sight of the socio-cultural undergrowth of the Sitavakan kingdom that our Portuguese sources have tended to register as only a distant green blur.<sup>12</sup> Michael Roberts first opened up the *hatana* genre as a source for questions of identity in his recent book on Sinhala consciousness in the Kandyan period – and I owe that book an intellectual debt.<sup>13</sup> So it is worth noting that my reading of the SH did not make use of his translations and attempts to bring a different range of material to the surface.

### Source Criticism: The Problem of the Battle Of Mulleriyava and the Death of Mayadunne

These are both highly significant events of sixteenth-century history. At Mulleriyava, Rajasinha won a famous pitched battle against the Portuguese forces, while upon the death of Mayadunne, Rajasinha could finally claim *de jure* rule of the Sitavakan throne. Our essential problem is this: several indigenous sources, the *Sitavaka Hatana*, the *Rajavaliya*, and the *Sitavaka Rajasinha Rajja Kalaya* (SRRK), narrate the battle of Mulleriyava as *following* the death of Mayadunne. But the conventional date for the battle of Mulleriyava is the early 1560s, and the conventional date for the death of Mayadunne is 1581!

Our first step is to recognize that the SRRK has not yet been properly examined as to its authenticity; indeed it seems to have received very little scholarly attention at all, and its history of construction and redaction remains to be established. In fact, I would like to issue a general plea to scholars to attend to this work and other sources recently brought to our attention by Risiman Amarasinghe to see if they withstand critical scrutiny. So we must put this on one side for the time

---

registering an esteem for the status of eyewitness experience – an esteem that some have seen as characteristic of modern or at least early modern writers elsewhere in the world. However, Berkwitz (personal comm. 15 July 2007) has suggested that we should not take these claims at face value. The SH author's contemporary Alagiyavanna also makes these sorts of claims – dubiously.

<sup>12</sup> There is much material here on matters such as the caste system and sacred kingship, some of which is used in Strathern 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Roberts 2004. I have relied on or repeated Roberts' translations in other publications (Strathern 2004, 2006*b*) so this essay is partly by way of correcting or superseding those usages.

being – we shall return to it later. Meanwhile, the *Rajavaliya* is also a late source. It was last edited in the late seventeenth-century, by a writer who was clearly prepared to interpolate into and massage his material. For the period in question, the *Rajavaliya* has drawn principally on the AY, and, as I argued in ‘Part One’ of this project, supplemented this with material and a sensibility drawn from the SH.<sup>14</sup>

And in the SH, we are told that after Vidiye Bandara has been disposed of, Mayadunne solemnly requests Rajasinha to take on the burdens of kingship, and when his son has been crowned,

[the son] was shown to the appointed ministers,<sup>15</sup>  
 the father-king firmly gave the word [of transfer]  
 And having enjoyed 70 years of life.  
 the king lying in his bed went to Marya [i.e died]<sup>16</sup>

We are then told that the Portuguese became arrogant at learning of Mayadunne’s death and mounted a new offensive, which led to the battle at Mulleriyava. At this point the *Rajavaliya* author seems simply to have followed the chronology of the SH. Therefore, the SH is the root of the entire problem, for it is left standing as the only authenticated contemporary source to place the battle of Mulleriyava and the death of Mayadunne in this order. It is important to note that the AY, generally seen as the most authoritative and reliable Sinhala source for the sixteenth century, *does not mention Mayadunne’s death at all*.

I have been able to think of four possible explanations:

1) *The SH was written much later than its advertised date*

It is possible that the SH is inauthentic, that it was written well after these events and manufactured a bogus antiquity for political or personal purposes. I have not come across doubts regarding the authenticity of the SH anywhere else, but we have to ask ourselves whether it is feasible that any poet writing in 1585 could have displaced such an important event as the death of Mayadunne from four years ago to twenty years before that? So it is worth considering whether the poem was written by someone who was not writing about an event in living memory at all but was simply

<sup>14</sup> See Strathern 2006a: 24-5, on the *Rajavaliya*’s criticisms (pp. 73-7) of Bhuvanekabahu. Incidentally, the mention of caste in SH verses 369-74 and around 417 is probably what gives rise to the references to caste in the *Rajavaliya*, pp. 76-7.

<sup>15</sup> Shown, *dakvamine*.

<sup>16</sup> Verse 1007.

following the AY and supplementing it with documents from a vanished Sitavakan era. With what end in view? Perhaps to produce an antiquity for the *hatan kavi* genre, or to amplify precedent for the heroic resistance against the Portuguese pursued by the Kandyan kings, or simply to exalt the name of the Alahapperuma family. This might explain why its tone and worldview seem so close to the mid-seventeenth century *hatanas* and so distant from the AY.

For all that, I accept the date of 1585 and use it as the basis for my thematic explorations in the second part of this essay. The most important reason for doing so is a textual clue. As we reach verse 1000, we find Mayadunne on his deathbed passing on the throne of Sitavaka to Rajasinha, bidding his ministers transfer their allegiance and calling on divine protection for his son. Mayadunne asks

Our Muni [Buddha] who came to Maiyangana [Mahiyangana]  
Tamed the demons and broke their power.  
Rid Maiyangana of them and banished them to demon island  
The Muni who tamed and broke their power  
Watch over our king

Sakramayesvara. Isvara Devindu Pera. Brahma Kratesrava. Mahikut Devindu  
Pura Kisiralli Upulvan. Nanayut Ganindu  
Will protect this powerful Rajasinha king of this Siri Laka<sup>17</sup>

The clue lies in the invocation of ‘Mahikut Devindu Pura Kisiralli Upulvan’. This refers to the cult of Upulvan at Devinuvara (that is Devindupura, ‘celestial city on earth’). And we know that the cultic centre of Devinuvara was deliberately destroyed by the Portuguese in 1587, and by 1638 Devinuvara was dedicated to Visnu, who seems to have thus incorporated his predecessor.<sup>18</sup> Upulvan’s main centre of cult by this point was located at Alutnuvara.

It is difficult to imagine someone writing say in the late seventeenth century possessing such a fine (even modern) sense of historical accuracy and anachronism – not to mention the relevant information to hand – allowing them to deliberately plant that authentic detail in the text. Moreover, if this was a poem designed to

<sup>17</sup> Verse 1002-3. It is interesting to compare this list of gods to those asked to protect Vijaya in *Rajavaliya*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> See Holt 2007. While Holt gives Queyroz 1992: 35, as the earliest source to record this transformation from Upulvan to Visnu, we know that it must have happened before 1638, for it is referred to by Constantino de Sá de Miranda in Flores 2001: 165. (I refer to the modernized version of his name ‘Queirós’ in the main text, but use ‘Queyroz’ to refer to his cited works).

anticipate Kandyan glories, it discharges its function in an extremely subtle manner. When the SH is not preoccupied with the vision of Lanka entire, it is overwhelmingly concerned with Sitavaka, its origins and legitimacy, its warriors and kings, and there is almost nothing to suggest a foreshadowing of Kandy. The accounts of who participated in the battles and what rewards they received look very much like crowd-pleasers for Sitavakans and tedious lists for Kandyans.<sup>19</sup>

2) *There were two "battles of Mulleriyava", an encounter in the early 1560s described by the AY, and one in the early 1580s described by the SH.*

On this hypothesis, the poet simply misses out the first battle located at Mulleriyava and skips over some twenty years to describe Mayadunne's death followed by an altogether different battle of Mulleriyava that took place in the early 1580s. Indeed, that there were two battles there has been proposed by Risiman Amarasinghe who gives us November 1561 and October 1583 as the two dates.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, matching up the great battle of Mulleriyava with the narratives presented in the Portuguese sources is not straightforward – a salutary reminder of the way in which the divergent perspectives of contemporary actors can so profoundly shape our evidence today. For the Portuguese, this was not such a major event, or at least an embarrassment worth forgetting; for the Sitavakan forces it became a great symbolic act of resistance and martial endeavour, a morale-boosting proof that victory in set-piece battle was possible against Portuguese firepower and training, and confirmation that their young king Rajasinha was auspicious, skilful, brave as a lion, and a worthy heir to the overlordship.

The Portuguese sources present us with two occasions in the early 1560s that could be identified as the battle of Mulleriyava. Both are engagements in which the Portuguese were embarrassed in the field by Rajasinha and routed by an onslaught in which the use of elephants was decisive.<sup>21</sup> I don't want to descend too far into the detail here, but Donald Ferguson and C. R. Boxer have identified a

<sup>19</sup> Another possibility is worth at least a cursory mention given the general lack of integrity of such sources, repeatedly copied and edited as they pass from generation to generation. That is, it is possible that the death of Mayadunne was inserted into the SH at a much later date. However, this seems unlikely when we consider that interpolations into verse are so much the more difficult and that there are at least two verses dealing with the matter. See Malalgoda 1999: 14, on the relative difficulty of fabricating verse.

<sup>20</sup> Amarasinghe 1998: 128, footnote 49, following the SRRK.

<sup>21</sup> Jorge Meneses de Baroche, was captain of Ceylon 1559-1561/2, and had won his title 'Baroche' for the capture of that city (Broach) in 1547, see Couto in Ferguson 1993: 179; Queyroz 1992: 344.

defeat for the then Captain of Ceylon Dom Jorge de Meneses Baroche in October 1560, described by Diogo do Couto as the culprit.<sup>22</sup> Fernão de Queirós also relates this event, following Couto as his principal source and supplementing with other accounts, probably that of the casado Antonio Dias de Lomba.<sup>23</sup> However, C. R. de Silva, implicitly identifies another passage in Queirós' *Conquista* corresponding to a later defeat for Balthazar Guedes de Souza in 1562 as the occasion of the battle of Mulleriyava.<sup>24</sup> The principal reason for this identification appears to be that only in the latter narrative is the place name of Mulleriyava mentioned at all: the Portuguese army was raised in order to 'go to the assistance of the people of Moleria and Pelonava.'<sup>25</sup>

The main advantage of the 1560 candidate is that it occurs in a context of action that seems very similar to that provided by the Sinhalese sources.<sup>26</sup> In particular, we have a description of a distinctive engagement in which Baroche decided to attack a fortification erected at Mapiitigama on the Kelaniya by means of an attack using the Kelaniya river. Couto tells us (and Queirós of course follows him) that Baroche erected two siege-towers on the top of some boats (*padas*), and placed men in the towers with fire-bombs to attack the fort's walls.<sup>27</sup> These contraptions were towed up the river by the foists. But the Sitvakan forces fired a cannon (a *camello*) which struck the front foist so that it caused a good deal of damage and killed more than twenty soldiers. Baroche, sensing the damage this would do to morale ordered the boats to turn about and retreat.

Compare that with the description given of an engagement in the AY:

.....the Kotte army and the Pratkan army, to come for war by river and land, built something called *kasteluwa*, mounted canon on it and came by river;

<sup>22</sup> Decade VII, Book IX, Chapter vii, or Couto in Ferguson 1993: 209-11.

<sup>23</sup> Given that Lomba is mentioned for his 'presence of mind', Queyroz 1992: 346-7.

<sup>24</sup> C. R. de Silva 1995: 90-1; Queyroz 1992: 406-9. The actual date given here is the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1563, which seems to be a mistake. This 1562 encounter seems to be what the SRRK takes as the first battle of Mulleriyava, given that Amarasinghe 1998: 29, 88, refers to this as involving De Sousa. Amarasinghe 1998: 130 argues that the 1560 encounter was instead part of the Denipitiya action.

<sup>25</sup> Queyroz 1992: 406, which the editor, S. G. Perera, identifies as Mulleriyava and Kolonnava. Whereas, in the 1560 encounter there is no mention of Mulleriyava.

<sup>26</sup> See also the reasoning of Boxer 1960: 92-5, who refers us to a letter in his personal collection by Baroche himself referring to a defeat involving elephants. Queyroz 1992: 396, 400, tells us that Baroche was replaced because the viceroy disapproved of his risk-taking military approach.

<sup>27</sup> Couto in Ferguson 1993: 207-8, and Queyroz 1992: 347.



Rajasinha maharaja got a canon, filled it with ammunition and iron bullets and he himself took aim and fired; the bullets hit the *kasteluwa* and the coconut tree trunks, several boatmen and Pratikans [Portuguese]; and the boat broke and capsized<sup>28</sup>

The *Rajavaliya* expands on this and locates the action in Ragghavatta:

King Dharmapala sent word to the Pratikal Captain Major and Goa, and got down large reinforcements. Joining two boats together, and ensuring protection by fixing coconut trunks all round, they remained in Modara for three months, having collected an army from either side of the land, sailed the boat to Ragghavatta in another three months. Thereupon, king Rajasinha, having arrived at Ragghavatta, got the two cannon drawn (towards the river) after cutting the bank and had them mounted. When the boat by the name of Kottala drew near, two cannon balls were fixed. The cannon-balls hit the boat and also several boatsmen, and the boat turned itself backward and went down the river.<sup>29</sup>

There can be no doubt that our two Sinhala sources are describing the same event as described in the Portuguese accounts. In the former, this is described as taking place after the battle of Mulleriyava, and as if it was part of the same general campaign: the AY has it that it happened 'several days' afterwards. In Couto and Queirós, the riverine engagement takes place a few days before the battle of 1560. This fact does not entirely rule out the 1562 proposition: the narrative of the AY is so patchy that it is conceivable that its author followed an event in 1560 with one in 1562, or even conflated the two. What is very difficult to imagine, however, is that the author of the AY followed an event in 1559 with one in circa 1583. This is the single most important reason for keeping the date of the battle of Mulleriyava in the early 1560s.<sup>30</sup>

It is certainly true that when one sits the account of the battle in the AY alongside that in the SH, they do not share many points of common ground. The SH does not mention the Ragghavatta/Mapitigama encounter, and emphasizes

<sup>28</sup> This sentence is ambiguous and could also mean that the boatmen and the 'pratikans' also drowned. *Kasteluwa* clearly refers to the Portuguese *castelo*, or castle, i.e. the siege towers. Couto in Ferguson 1993: 202, refers to an ocean-going ship called the *castello*, which is probably not what is being referred to here.

<sup>29</sup> *Rajavaliya*, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> To re-state the matter: the battle as described in the AY is clearly associated chronologically with the events of 1560-2 in Couto and Queirós; and the battle in SH is clearly the same as that in the AY. Hence all are describing the events of 1560-2.

Rajasinha's successful deployment of an encirclement stratagem, which the brief and hardly exultant narrative of the AY does not refer to.<sup>31</sup> However, both are clearly located in the same context of military campaigns. In all the Sinhala sources the battle of Mulleriyava is described as the next field of action after Matota and Denipitiya, that is, once the Kotte-Portuguese armies have advanced to Medanda.<sup>32</sup> Both the *Rajavaliya* and the SH add that the latter then advanced to Veragoda, while the Sitavakan forces moved to Hewagama before battle commenced.<sup>33</sup> There is, finally, one conclusive piece of evidence that the glorious battle relayed by the SH took place before 1565.<sup>34</sup> It tells us that after Mayadune died, the Portuguese became angry and then:

From Kolontota [Colombo] without delay came the pratikals [Portuguese] to Jayavardanapura and were granted audience with the king (*naranindu*) with pleasure and asked about news of the war and were given the information.<sup>35</sup>

But Kotte, aka Jayavardanapura, was abandoned in 1565 as the court of king Dharmapala was moved to Colombo!<sup>36</sup> Amarasinghe appeals to the fact the SH refers to Rajasinha drawing on troops from the hill country to support the 1583 date, because Kandy was only conquered in 1581. Yet, we shall see that it is a central poetic concern of the text to reiterate the Lankan-wide popularity of Rajasinha at every stage of his career. Thus the context in which this statement occurs is no literal record of troop origins for specific campaigns, but another opportunity to demonstrate just how far Rajasinha's appeal extended.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, this reminds us that Rajasinha's conquest of Kandy was one of his most triumphant successes, greatly enlarging his dominion: why would a panegyric ignore it then? Indeed, if we persist in dating the battle of Mulleriyava to circa 1583, we have to ask ourselves why the SH would ignore all the other heroic

<sup>31</sup> There are other points of contrast, for example, the SH places the encounter around a lake. The role of elephants, which is important to both Portuguese candidates and the AY, is not emphasized in the SH, although elephants are at least mentioned in verse 1054. Both do mention a prior defeat (SH verse 1029-30, which could perhaps correspond to Queyroz 1992: 407?), before Rajasinha leads a victorious offensive.

<sup>32</sup> SH, verse 1022; AY, pp. 41-2.

<sup>33</sup> *Rajavaliya*, p. 83; SH, verse 1024, 1027.

<sup>34</sup> Or, at least, the SH author has drawn from source material which is describing a battle pre-1565.

<sup>35</sup> Verse 1019. They then proceeded to Maedanda.

<sup>36</sup> Couto 241-1; *Rajavaliya*, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Amarasinghe 1998: 130, which uses different verse numbers for the SH. In Paranavitana's edition, the relevant verse is number 1042.

achievements of 1560-1582, when Rajasinha's power was at its zenith, and pass immediately from a skirmish in 1559 before his de facto power had eclipsed Mayadunne's to a single battle in 1583?<sup>38</sup> Why ignore, for example, the fact that Rajasinha forced his foes to abandon the ancestral capital of Kotte, or all the subsequent sieges of Colombo? There is a case to be made that the years from 1565-79 were a little less spectacular in terms of military prowess, largely because of the entente that had grown up between the Christian rulers of Colombo and Kandy which kept two fronts of war permanently open.<sup>39</sup> But the Kotte-Portuguese forces were only free to surge out into Sitavakan territory because the actual extent of the dominion which they sought to protect was very small: the truth is that Rajasinha had kept them pinned back to the area around Colombo. There is, in short, more than enough here for the eulogistic imagination to set to work on – but none of it appears.<sup>40</sup>

Now we can return to a problem we have put on hold thus far: what to do with the evidence from the SRRK, another source which seems to follow the AY, expanding and interpolating on occasion, but which has yet to receive scholarly scrutiny. Often it interpolates in order to provide dates for events – indeed, this routine proclamation of dates, even down to the month, is highly unusual for Sinhala sources of this era.<sup>41</sup> And the SRRK states clearly that there were two battles of Mulleriyava, one in November 1561, and another in October 1583.<sup>42</sup> According to our reasoning thus far, this would make the SRRK the only source – either Sinhala or Portuguese – to provide evidence a second battle at that location. The latter remains a possibility, but remember that there is a question mark over the authenticity of the SRRK... If we consider the SRRK a fraud the problem appears suddenly explicable. For the bifurcation of Mulleriyava is best explained as an attempt by a much later writer to solve precisely the problems we have been wrestling with here. That is to say, how did an author intending to simulate a lucid contemporary narrative resolve the inconsistency between (a) the sources that

<sup>38</sup> Rajasinha would have been in his teens or twenties in the 1550s.

<sup>39</sup> 1558-65 was a period of great offensive action for Rajasinha; from 1565-73 Rajasinha was more often on the defensive against Portuguese raiding parties; from 1573-79 Kandy was a source of trouble.

<sup>40</sup> One should also consider the fact that the poet claims to have been involved in all the major engagements from 1557 to the Battle of Mulleriyava. If we take the 1583 date for the latter it is certainly possible that he was fighting thus for 25 years, but more likely that we have here a poet looking back to the military campaigns of his youth in the 1550s and early 1560s.

<sup>41</sup> There are very few in the *Rajavaliya*, for example. When dates are given it is usually for births, deaths, and coronations.

<sup>42</sup> Here I am relying on the discussion in Amarasinghe 1998.

clearly located the battle in the context of the 1560s with (b) the explicit testimony of the SH that the battle occurred after the death of Mayadunne? By imagining two such battles...

The SRRK is a curious source in other ways too, apart from its unusual consciousness of dates. It is also strikingly informed about the names of Portuguese actors. And it claims that Jorge de Meneses Baroche was the captain of the Portuguese in both the 1561 and 1583 encounters. This is just about within the realm of possibility at least, given that Baroche could have been in his early 60s by this time and may still have been in India serving part of his triennial term as Captain of Cochin (1581-3).<sup>43</sup> But there is no record at all of a subsequent return to the field in Colombo for this venerable old soldier, and it is unlikely that any such endeavour would have gone un-remarked.<sup>44</sup> And the fact that the SRRK meticulously notes that Baroche was returning to the island for a second time, seems a rather irrelevant detail for a chronicler in the 1590s to note – but not for a much later writer intent on producing a source that will clarify such matters.<sup>45</sup> The case against the SRRK is hardly conclusive, but it needs to be explored. I would just say that if the SRRK is a fraud of some sort, it is a clever and well-informed one.<sup>46</sup>

3) *It is the conventional date of the death of Mayadunne that is wrong: he really did die before the battle of Mulleriyava in the early 1560s.*

This might be a tempting solution given how emphatically Mayadunne's career falls into silence after this point. And perhaps the Portuguese sources were seriously misled by misinformation emanating from Sitavaka? But this is possibly the worst solution of them all. If Mayadunne had died circa 1560, it is difficult to see why the AY would not have recorded it. The various contemporary European sources are

<sup>43</sup> We know he had been in India for 39 years in 1575, see Wicki (1948-88), Vol. x: 1058-62.

<sup>44</sup> In Couto's narrative, Joao Correa de Brito appears as Captain of Colombo through most of the 1580s.

<sup>45</sup> Amarasinghe 1998: 128-9.

<sup>46</sup> The final judgemental flourish to the SRRK is also suspicious – although this could be a later interpolation into an earlier text. I should clarify that it is entirely possible that the SRRK is authentic, and that thus there were indeed two battles of Mulleriyava. However, even if that were so, our arguments thus far would retain their force: the SH and AY would both be describing the first battle. In June 2007, I visited the Maniyangama temple close to Avisawella, from where the SRRK emerged, and spoke to the head bhikkhu there, Ambanwala Hemalankana. He said that the documents had been passed to Risiman Amerasinghe in the late 1970s by the previous head bhikkhu, who had since passed away.

very clear that the death happened in or around 1581.<sup>47</sup> The Dutch traveller Linschoten, who stayed in Goa 1583- January 1589 reported that 'not long since' Rajasinha had murdered Mayadunne.<sup>48</sup> Diogo do Couto, who was writing circa 1600, but had been gathering material in Goa in the 1580s, placed that event just after the siege of Colombo 1579-80.<sup>49</sup> (Incidentally, this contemporary testimony to the parricide of Mayadunne deserves to be taken more seriously by historians today. Naturally, the rumour might well represent Portuguese black propaganda but, equally, the Sinhala reports of a natural death might represent Sitavakan white propaganda...).<sup>50</sup> Couto reported Mayadunne's involvement in the 1560 encounter which seems to be the battle of Mulleriyava.<sup>51</sup> In 1566, a letter from Cochin still referred to Sitavaka as 'the kingdom of Madune'.<sup>52</sup>

4) *The SH deliberately misrepresents – or creatively transforms – the chronology of Mayadunne's death and the succession for political or poetic reasons*

<sup>47</sup> We cannot assess the plausibility of this by considering the age of Mayadunne, as our sources conflict on this point. They often seem to confuse the length of reign with the length of life. SH, verse 1007, says that he had passed the age of 70 when he died; the *Rajavaliya*, p. 82 gives a reign of 70 years; Couto in Ferguson 1993: 272 says that he was 80 when he died, making his life 1501-1581 – this seems to be the most widely accepted estimate today. Queyroz 1992: 438, gives a life of 85 years and a reign of 50.

<sup>48</sup> Van Linschoten 1885, vol. 1: 78.

<sup>49</sup> Couto in Ferguson 1993 270-2. Queyroz 1992: 438, is also explicit that Mayadunne died (a natural death) in 1581 on return from siege. Cesare Federici (cited in Ferguson 1993: 242-3), who visited the island at some point in 1565-78, reports that Rajasinha usurped the kingdom to himself, and been master of the island for the last 13 years, but does not mention Mayadunne's death.

<sup>50</sup> Van Spilbergen 1997: 36, writing in the first years of the seventeenth century, also reports that Rajasinha murdered his father. What motive would there be for Mayadunne's murder? It is easy to imagine Mayadunne as handing over real authority to his son while retaining the status and insignia of lordship – only to discover that the two could not be so easily separated, that his status too was now demeaned and that his choice of heir was flawed. Now he works behind the throne to secure another's advancement into the full trappings of kingship – and is discovered and killed.

<sup>51</sup> Couto in Ferguson 1993: 210, and see 214-6. Queirós also reports Mayadunne as active in this period. Incidentally, Queyroz 1992: 397, reports that during the battles of 1560, the Portuguese captain Baroche had spread a rumour that Mayadunne had been killed in battle as a way of throwing the enemy's forces into confusion. Is it possible that this fact was recorded in the Sinhala tradition, and that a later copyist or editor misunderstood the text to be actually reporting Mayadunne's death at this time? This hypothesis only works if we accept option (1), a late date for the SH.

<sup>52</sup> Perniola ii: 6.

In the context of the 1580s, the SH could not but have been seen as a political intervention. We know that Rajasinha first began to lose popularity and authority among some quarters in the 1580s, and it was about this time that his religious proclivities seem to have become an issue. The fact that the SH concentrates on the early period before the 1560s may result from a desire to glorify the past in order to distract attention away from troubling aspects of the present. And it is plausible that the poem expends so much energy on destroying the reputation of Vidiye Bandara in order to remind Rajasinha's internal enemies of the dishonour attached to any such infidelity as they may have in mind.<sup>53</sup>

But essaying possible political reasons for its particular manipulations of chronology takes us well into the realm of speculation. Was the poem intended to have what one might call historical force, that is to say to offer a persuasive account of what happened in the past, one that could compete with and transform even personal memories of past events? If so, could it be trying to downplay some ugly scenes surrounding the coronation in 1581 by creating a fantasy version of events?<sup>54</sup> Or had something sinister occurred to elicit a genuine ambiguity over his death, Mayadunne having been horribly silenced or imprisoned by Rajasinha? Or perhaps Mayadunne had descended into an inoperable senile state, and it was simply much more seemly to pass over the shadow years of the great founder of Sitavaka in silence.

In any event it is more plausible to see the SH as aiming at poetic rather than historical force; it aims to provide an idealized vision of Rajasinha's ascent rather than an accurate record of it.<sup>55</sup> If the battle of Mulleriyava was considered to be Rajasinha's finest hour then it would have formed a natural climax for the poem. In one sense, of course, the narrative logic of the SH is extremely apt, for the early 1560s and perhaps the battle of Mulleriyava itself do seem to be the point at which *de facto* power transferred from Mayadunne to Rajasinha. There may even have been some sort of ceremonial or formal acknowledgement of this. It is likely that for his last two decades Mayadunne's 'rule' was an entirely nominal affair while an extended old age played itself out.

Yet, the poet's decision in 1585, to transfer a great sovereign's death from 1581 to 1560ish still retains a certain breathtaking quality. Perhaps we should see

<sup>53</sup> See below and also *SH*, verse 847, on the disgust for the treacherous Irugul lineage.

<sup>54</sup> This may be why the verses surrounding the transfer of sovereignty are so emphatic on the love between father and son, e.g. verse 1005.

<sup>55</sup> I solicited the advice of C. R. De Silva on the chronological problem of the SH, and he also considered that it was best explained by the panegyric function of the poem (personal comm. 28 March 2006).

this as contributing an intriguing dimension to our understanding of the historical consciousness of the early modern Sinhalese: it suggests that in some genres they explored the emotional resonances of the past unencumbered by the constraints of chronological exactitude that the Portuguese historians of the time were at least aiming at. (Note, *in some genre*: the Sinhala chronicle tradition might be analyzed to reveal a corresponding concern with the order of events and the flow of cause-and-effect. A better comparative foil might perhaps be Camões' late sixteenth-century *Os Lusíadas*: comparing verse with verse, panegyric with panegyric, and two recognizable forms of early modern patriotism...)

### **Thematic Exploration: The Sitavakan Political Imagination**

It would be crude and reductive to refer to the SH as propaganda – it is surely much more than that – but the term at least serves to remind us that we cannot simply read it as a neutral reflection of a Sitavakan or Sinhala mentality. It is a text with work to do, and we lack any kind of knowledge of its reception or prevalence or influence. It is always worth holding it alongside the portion of the AY written in the early years of Rajasinha's preeminence: there one finds little expression of affiliations or patriotism; the authors had restricted themselves to the recording of martial feats and pertinent genealogical details; the constant struggle between different princes is its reality.<sup>56</sup> Obviously, in its evocation of universal assent to the Sitavakan claim to *cakravarti*-ship and its projection of that assent back in time, the Sitavaka Hatana cannot be taken at face value. But, we shall see that of the importance of the *ideal* of *cakravarti* overlordship, the poem leaves us in little doubt. The poem clearly takes in a sense of the guardianship of the Sinhalese cultural heritage. It is important too that the poem conveys very little sense of such a community as 'the people of Sitavaka'.<sup>57</sup>

Before we proceed any further in using the poem as evidence of identity construction, we should pause briefly to consider the name of the poet, Vijayavardhana Attan Hari Abhaya Alahapperuma. Rohini Paranavitana has indicated that the last part of the name has an Indian influence.<sup>58</sup> However, the author claims to hail from a 'pure' and ancient lineage going back to the time of

<sup>56</sup> Strathern 2006a.

<sup>57</sup> There is no mention of the 'Sitavaka *sena*'.

<sup>58</sup> C. R. De Silva (personal comm. 24 Sept. 2007) has indicated that 'Perumal is a name that is more common in Kerala than in Tamil Nadu. The name might suggest that his near ancestors moved from the west coast of India to western Sri Lanka and there are many Sinhala sources that suggest such a movement between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries'.

Dutugamunu – indeed the family won their name after fighting for the king against the ‘savage Tamils’ (*sadi demalun*, a phrase with modern currency too).<sup>59</sup> Thus the author makes an implicit comparison between the way his ancestors served the king against foreign enemies in the very distant past and his own service of Rajasinha in the present). In fact, the poet tells us that his forefather who won this *mudali* title was a *vaddun*. Paranavitana’s glossary suggests that the term here refers to the *vandi bhatta*, that is those whose function was to sing eulogies at court. But the military context seems to argue in favour of the simpler notion that the *Vaddas* we know today are intended.<sup>60</sup> Naturally, Tamil-influenced names abound in the poem, indicating long-standing influence of Tamils and their culture. Yet, this no more rules out a sensation of Sinhala-ness than Robert the Bruce’s name, still expressing its French Norman origins (*de bruis*), ruled out his sensation of Scottishness.

So what about the term ‘Sinhala’ itself? It is used by the poet, but hardly as a touchstone.<sup>61</sup> It is possible that this is because Rajasinha’s court was so oriented to drawing in diverse cultural groups that it sought to emphasize a more Lankan or indigenist sentiment. But it is usually unhelpful to slot group identities into exclusive dichotomies of resistance or integration. It is more likely that Sinhala-ness is simply taken for granted; is not explicitly exalted because it is implicitly acknowledged. Sometimes it is explicitly acknowledged. The occasional differentiation between the Sinhalas and the Tamils is effected by recourse to ancient wars and insulting epithets.<sup>62</sup> This differentiation is lent a territorial dimension when we are told of the King of Jaffna’s displeasure at hearing of the arrival in this country (*merata*) of Vidiye Bandara – he who had caused so many disturbances in ‘Sinhala country’ (*sinhala rata*). The subsequent verses are particularly revealing. This Vidiye has been the most traduced figure in the poem. And that at this point (both when these events were taking place, and when the poem itself was composed), the Jaffna king was at peace with his southern neighbours and was here obliging them by dispatching this awkward rebel. But there now occurs a

<sup>59</sup> The phrase *sadi* or *hadi demalun* can be found in the letters of Anagarika Dharmapala, for example (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 213), and in the ‘Yahan Kavi’ incantations used by the Kapurala of a shrine to Taniyavallabahu (Edirisinghe n.d.). Incidentally, Taniyavallabahu was a sixteenth century prince ruling from Madampe. See also Roberts 2004: 132-3 for ‘*sadi demalu*’ in Kandyan royal letters from 1811-12.

<sup>60</sup> See also uses of the term in verses: 987, 1042, 1108.

<sup>61</sup> Sinhala *senasena* (people or army): verses 347, 498, 507, 510, 871, 1021. Both the Kotte kings and the Sitavakan kings can call on them. Occasionally, when the Portuguese are the foremost enemies, the Sitavakan forces are equated with the Sinhala *senasena*: Verse 507.

<sup>62</sup> Verse 447. Michael Roberts 2004: 133, suggests ‘fierce’, ‘filthy’ as translations of *sadi*.



curious twist in perspective. We are presented with the enemy uncivilized Tamils (*rupu demalu vanasaru*) advancing upon the beautiful Vidiye and decapitating him. Meanwhile some princes in his retinue, who had complexions like that of Sakra, had been wreaking sexual havoc among the Jaffna women: these potent princes were cornered and killed by the unfavoured Tamils (*novasaru demalu*) – leaving the women mourning.<sup>63</sup>

The representation of the Portuguese also suggests how they could be seen as an antitype to indigenous virtues. The *raison d'être* of Sitavakan power as a scourge of the Portuguese is evident in the vow undertaken by Mayadunne that he will give over Lanka to Kataragama if he is provided with a son who will vanquish them.<sup>64</sup> The epithets awarded to the Portuguese conjure up unethical power: they are cruel, fierce (*napuru, ruduru*), frightening. They are beset by disgusting appetites for arrack, opium, and flesh (*geri mas*, beef, but which carries an untranslatable sense of distaste).<sup>65</sup> The cosmopolitan armies assembled by the Kotte-Portuguese allowed the poet to indulge in a more generic xenophobia:

Accompanied by Vadakkara, Mukkaru, Doluvara, Kavisi and Uruvisi<sup>66</sup>  
 The Portuguese who fought having come with vast foreign armies [*para senaga*]  
 Were, without even a cloth at the waist, felled in the middle of the paddy fields and heads were cut and piled up  
 Half-castes [*tuppahin*] of this country [*merate*] who had joined to swell their bellies were caught and tied up.

The Sinhalese soldiers who were in this country properly were set free in charity without being killed  
 The half-castes who were inseparable in joining for the consumption of beer [*geri mas*]

<sup>63</sup> Verses 937-52. The Tamils may be 'enemies' here only from Vidiye's perspective, not necessarily from the perspective of all Sinhalese. *Novasaru* is presented as the antonym of the *saru* (fertile, potent) princes. The fierceness of the Tamils is emphasized in these verses.

<sup>64</sup> *SH*: verse 238.

<sup>65</sup> Verses 285, 362-4 (a disgusted listing of their provisions), 508-9, 515-7, 1020.

<sup>66</sup> 'Vadakkara' are probably vadugai, Telugu speakers; AY, p. 34, suggests they are Mappilas. 'Mukkaru' are Mukkuvai; Kavisi may mean black Africans, from 'Kaffir', although Paranavitana suggests 'Malays'. Amarasinghe 1998: 204-5, footnotes 13-17, suggests that 'Doluvara' came from Kulu district (?) in South India, and 'Uruvisi' from Ormuz.

And who were deceiving the world by uttering falsehoods and by trickery  
and thereby swelling their bellies,  
All of them were condemned to a humble state by being giving in servitude  
to vadda chiefs.<sup>67</sup>

It is a comment on the typical incoherence of identity-rhetoric that Rajasinha's armies were also stuffed with foreign bodies! For this passage illuminates the different orders of enemy in the Sitavakan imagination, each endowed with a different moral status according to the degree and nature of their foreignness. Portuguese and overseas mercenaries are just slaughtered. The mixed-race of Lanka are evidently troubling to consider, a new sort of being generated by and embodying the Portuguese sins of greed and lust, bearing in their very selves a form of treachery. (The theme of greed here also serves to emphasize the mercenary nature of their allegiance). These have to be humbled, their low status established by being given in servitude to the *vaddas*. Last, we have the Sinhalese who had fought against the Sitavakan kings. These may be enemies but of a different order, being 'rightful residents', they were merely sent away.<sup>68</sup>

The poet is conscious too of the way in which warfare does not only issue from such group sentiments but ushers them into being, thrusting other solidarities momentarily into the background. The following verse is difficult to interpret, partly because of the vagueness of the term *jati* (birth, kind, community etc). Given that the ethnic heterogeneity of the Sitvakan armies is occluded by the poem, *jati* seems to refer to what we would think of today as caste. *Jati* matters and yet can be transcended:

People of different *jati*, statuses, lineages, names,  
Disregarding *jati* divisions, pouncing with relish  
In the name of the *jati* taking up arms, with arms in hand,

<sup>67</sup> Verses 1107-8. *Tuppahin* can mean both those of mixed-race and those of mixed-culture (the Lusitanized). Here I have tried to retain its pejorative flavour. In the first line of 1108, '*merata nisi kota hitiya sinhala senaga*' could also mean 'those Sinhalese who conducted themselves reasonably', although Rohini Paranavitana suggested to me that it means 'the Sinhalese who lived permanently' or 'by descent'. 'Inseparable': *panata pana*: would give their lives for each other. It is clear that *vadda* refers to the 'indigenous' people of that name: see verse 987, in which enemy officers are sent to the '*vadda* country; and imprisoned, and '*vadi* soldiers' referred to at verses 622, 820-1, 1048.

<sup>68</sup> The poem concludes (verse 1119) with a verse calling on foreign enemies (*para rupunata*) to be dishonoured. See too Roberts 2004: 120.

The *jati* uttering war-cries and attacking.<sup>69</sup>

It may be more accurate to describe the main concern of the imagery as not the struggle between the Sinhalese and their enemies, but the struggle between Lanka and her enemies. However, this is partly simply because the interests of the Sitavakan kings and Lanka are conflated through the *cakravarti* title, and there seems to be a similar conflation of the Lankan with the Sinhala. All, in the poem's vision, are mustered into the same cause.

If the poem is a panegyric, its subject is Lanka (*Siri Laka* or *Lakdiva*) as much as any king of it. It appears again and again as the most vivid and natural political unit; as an entity to inspire love and devotion; as a bounteous, rich, fertile land of world-renown.<sup>70</sup> The way in which this image out-shines any other political boundaries is revealed by the imprecision of the territorial terminology it leaves in its shadow. All units are lumped under the generic term *rata*, which is perhaps best translated as land(s), but signifies variously regions or places, chieftaincies, princely fiefdoms, Lankan society, or Lanka itself.<sup>71</sup> *Rajas* are based in cities (*nuvara*), not territories. Otherwise it would be puzzling that the Kotte inheritance should have been 'divided' among royal seats which remained so closely huddled together. There was certainly a 'king of the city of Sitavaka', but the 'kingdom of Sitavaka' is more a crutch for our own imaginations than it was a living reality in the minds of its inhabitants. There is no equivalent term in the poem.

The only occasion where Sitavaka itself takes centre stage is the narration of its place-name myth, and it is worthwhile pausing our pursuit of identity to consider where this peculiar little story comes from.<sup>72</sup> In summary, it goes like this: when King Ravana ousted the pre-existing kings of Lanka, one had fled to the forests to become an ascetic (*tapasi*).<sup>73</sup> Ravana sent his men to kill him, demanding a pot of

<sup>69</sup> Verse 826, which is obscure, particularly the first line (*jati tharan kula nam lat aya niti*, which could mean '*jati* chiefs, in possession of lineage names') and third. Stephen Berkwitz (personal comm. 15 July 2007) has commented: '...it may be worth mentioning that the repetition of the word '*jati*' may well be a poetic play on words. It was common for poets to employ homonyms in their verses to adhere to rhyming schemes. It would not surprise me then if the term meant different things in the same verse.'

<sup>70</sup> There are too many mentions to list, but see, for example, verses 5, 27, 165, 187, 238-40, 264, 322, 352, 517, 848, 999, 1005-11, 1117-9 1032.

<sup>71</sup> Indeed the only other territorial division of Lanka is the antique/anachronistic *trisinhalā*, in verses 36, 880-6, 998.

<sup>72</sup> Many thanks to Rohini Paranavitana for drawing my attention to this section and producing a valuable summary of it, verses 124-32.

<sup>73</sup> This indirect founding father is thus endowed with spiritual virtue, but it appears to be of non/pre-Buddhist sort, perhaps because a pre-Vijayan/Buddhist history is imagined here.

blood as proof of his death. But they colluded with the ascetic king who produced it instead from his thigh by spiritual exertion. It was then buried. Later, a farmer's plough turned up the pot and it was opened to reveal a baby girl. She was brought to the ascetic king and named Sītā (plough-line). The fabrication of a new royal seat evidently required ancient royal associations.

The exact relationship between this story and the Ramayana tradition remains rather obscure – does it, for example, represent a literary or propagandist appropriation, or rather an oral process of mythogenesis?<sup>74</sup> And there are so many versions of the Ramayana that one hesitates to connect our story here to any one of them. It is possible that it may have been influenced by Kumaradasa's *Janakiharana* (the Theft of Sita), a sixth-century poem in Sanskrit, which we know had currency among writers of Sinhala poetry in later centuries.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, I would suggest, for the moment, that what we have here appears closest to the Sakta-oriented *Adbhuta Ramayana*.<sup>76</sup> In Valmiki's telling, the story of Sita really starts with how Janaka uncovered her while tilling the earth of the sacrificial ground.<sup>77</sup> Whereas in its concern to glorify, indeed devi-ify Sita as a supreme divine figure, the *Adbhuta Ramayana* lends her a grandiose 'back-story'. And this contains all the distinctive elements we find in our *hatana* version.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> A suggestion that we are dwelling with an authentically local/Lankan mythic figure in Sita, arises in Barnett 1916-7: 99, which tells us under the heading of 'Sita' that 'she is sometimes said to have been born from the blood of an ascetic' and refers us to 'Vali Yaka'. Perhaps Nevill. Or. 6615(432) Vali Yak Kavi, in described in Somadasa 1987-95, may contain something of import here.

<sup>75</sup> I have not yet been able to access this poem, which Berkwitz (2007, and personal comm. 15 July 2007) brought to my attention. The manuscript for this poem is written in Malayalam script and may date from around the sixteenth century, which is suggestive. See also Hallisey 2003: 690.

<sup>76</sup> Raghavan 1998: 19.

<sup>77</sup> Here, I relied on the summary of Shastri 1992: 131-2. My hesitancy here derives from my lack of background in Indian literature.

<sup>78</sup> One summary of this section (Singaravelu 1982: 237) goes like this: 'In the Dandaka forest a sage named Grtsamada in order to fulfill his wife's desire to have a daughter, sprinkles milk into a jar with the kusa grass daily so that it will become inhabited by the goddess Laksmi. Around the same time, Ravana arrives in the Dandaka forest, and in an attempt to make the sages in the forest submit to him, he collects a little blood with the tip of his arrow from each of the sages, placing it in the same jar in which the sage Grtsamada has been sprinkling the milk. Eventually Ravana takes the jar to Lanka and gives it to his wife Mandodari, telling her that, as the blood in the jar is more poisonous than poison itself, she may on no account taste it... [But] Mandodari suspects that Ravana has been unfaithful to her and decides to kill herself by drinking the contents of the jar. Instead of dying, she becomes pregnant with child, who is the reincarnation of the goddess Laksmi in accordance

It has been suggested that the *Adbhuta Ramayana* was composed in North India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but the first sign of its influence appears in the first book of *Ramacaritamanasa* of Tulsidas (1532-1623) – in other words, roughly coincidental with the appearance of the Sita story in the SH!<sup>79</sup> This would suggest fairly close contact with the living literary traditions in India in the mid-sixteenth century; at the very least the choice of Ramayana-derived source material must tell us something of the extent of sub-continental influence in the region. One might also want to draw on it as evidence for the influence of Sakta religiosity reaching Sri Lanka. Clearly, however, in the act of appropriation the function of the story has been altered: it has been re-shaped into an origin myth. Yet, while it may exude the expected whiff of blood and violence, it is structurally very different to the Vijaya story. It does not function as an account of the foundation of the sociopolitical community, of a people under a king. It operates at a different level: the origin of a particular kingdom, or the name of that kingdom, within an already existent civilization. And instead of a foreign prince bringing civilizing power by outwitting the indigenous folk, we have an indigenous king outwitting a powerful overlord...

We should note here that Fernão de Queirós also relates a version of the Ramayana story, and explicitly tells us that ‘Sintavâca’ took its name from the abducted Sita (‘Sinta’). However, the story relayed by Queirós is much more like that in the Ramayana itself, and it is clear that he has taken some or all of his material from Portuguese accounts of the Ramayana from India (he specifically cites Manoel de Faria e Souza), as well as oral accounts from the inhabitants of Goa.<sup>80</sup> His account suggests that a rich mythical topography grounding the Ramayana in the Lankan landscape was shared by islanders and non-islanders alike.<sup>81</sup>

Sitavaka is merely a stepping-stone in the rest of the poem, which has the overriding concern is to show how the Sitavaka kings are the rightful heirs to the *cakravarti* title. How it does this, how it legitimizes the claims of this rebellious

---

with the curse of the sage Narada. However, she feels alarmed over her pregnancy in Ravana’s absence, and therefore she sets out to Kuruksetra under the pretence of making a pilgrimage, frees herself from the foetus, buries it in the ground, and returns home. Subsequently, king Janaka discovers the child while ploughing the ground for a sacrifice and adopts her as his daughter.’ See also Grierson 1926.

<sup>79</sup> See Raghavan 1998: 3 on dates.

<sup>80</sup> He does not rely on Couto here. Constantino de Sá de Miranda in Flores 2001: p. 162 refers briefly and obscurely to the Ramayana story – and this is apparently derived from Lankan sources. Manuel De Faria e Sousa 1665-75, Book 2, Volume, 4, Chapter 2, contains a version of the story without any of the references to specific Lankan locations.

<sup>81</sup> Queyroz 1992: 7-8, 50; And see also p. 120, where Ravana is listed as a god, which derives from Miranda in Flores 2001: 264.

younger brother in his parvenu capital, tells us a great deal about the particularities of sixteenth-century kingship. The poem begins by implicitly acknowledging Kotte's claim to pre-eminence. But it appears titles must be justified through *deeds* as acknowledged by *popular acclaim*, and the Kotte kings prove unworthy of their inheritance while Mayadunne shows his mettle. Royal authority is a succession of steps rather than a throne ascended to once and for all, and there are three principal stages of Mayadunne's ascension. First, he plays the lead role in righting the wrongs of disinheritance by gathering support from various regions before the march on Kotte in 1521.<sup>82</sup> Second, he is the lone leader mounting resistance to the Portuguese in the 1530s and 1540s. His pilgrimage to Kataragama in these years is extended into a tour of the island and its defining sites such as Adam's Peak. Wherever he goes he inspires love and awe: the masses flock to the *narañidu* (king of the people), pay him homage, worship at his feet.<sup>83</sup> If, in the first two stages, Mayadunne tours the country, in the third stage the country comes to him, in the great defection of the 1550s which we considered above.

This attests to Michael Roberts' arguments as to how pilgrimage and travel-by-foot could cultivate a sense of community in a pre-modern society.<sup>84</sup> One can see Mayadunne circumambulating the country as marking out its sacredness in the way a Buddhist encircles a *stupa* – or at least signifying his proclamation of control.<sup>85</sup> In the poem he thus enacts what the Kandyan Asala Perahara would later do symbolically.<sup>86</sup> It may also be that the poet, for all his admissions of being rude and unlettered, has attempted to endow his work with a flavour of the *sandesa* (messenger) poems so popular in the fifteenth century and revived by Alagiyavanna in *Savul Sandesa* around the same time that the SH was written.<sup>87</sup> These also took the reader or listener on an idealized journey of the principal sites of the island.

Rajasinha cannot simply inherit the hard-won authority of his father; he must embark upon his own ascension. His pursuit of Vidiye Bandara across hill and

<sup>82</sup> Verses 102-3. 'To *Lakdiva*, this king, Mayadunne was like the *thilakaya* ('pinnacle', the red spot painted in the middle of forehead).

<sup>83</sup> In particular, verses 224-230. In verse 48, we are told that Vijayabahu had been brought to be a king by the mass of people (*mahasenaga*).

<sup>84</sup> Roberts 2004.

<sup>85</sup> See Holt 1996: 31-3 on the practice of *pradaksina*.

<sup>86</sup> In the Perahara, the tooth relic circumambulated the capital as a means of metaphorically taking possession of the kingdom: Duncan 1990:136.

<sup>87</sup> See Berkwitz 2007. Incidentally, the *Savul Sandesa* (verse 34) and the SH (verse 742) share at least one simile: both compare Rajasinha to a lion jumping into a group of elephants of scattering them. The SH also uses some more poetical *elu* terms in common with the *Savul Sandesa* such as 'siri', 'budu', and 'dahan' ('dhamma', verse 998). More sustained comparison would be worthwhile given their proximate dates of composition.

dale is made the occasion of a royal tour to mirror his father's, winning acclaim in battle and love from the people, and including a pilgrimage to Kataragama, thus completing the cycle and fulfilling the oath sworn by his father.<sup>88</sup> The second stage comes with his victories over the Portuguese and Kotte forces in the late 1550s at Denipitiya and elsewhere. This, according to the poem, is the occasion for the transferal of sovereignty proper: Mayadunne officially hands over the allegiance of his principal vassals to his son.<sup>89</sup> The royal jewellery is laid upon him, the crown is donned, a golden sword placed in his hand and he is seated on the throne.

A systematic analysis of the terms used to describe royal status ought to be revealing here. If they are used with any consistency by the poet, it should indicate whether there were clearly perceived different gradations of kingship lordship at work – or whether they merely reflect a loose poetic evocation of increasing magnificence. For the moment, we can point out that what a European might recognize as a true sovereign (someone with the status of a Dharmapala, Mayadunne and eventually Rajasinha) is usually not referred to as *raja*. That term clearly has a broad semantic range equivalent perhaps to 'prince' or 'lord', so that the Portuguese viceroy and Vidiye Bandara as regent or even rebel, can be *rajas*. The term used more often for higher sovereigns is *nirindu* or *naranindu* (king of the people), which may reflect the particular sense of society-wide accountability that distinguishes them from others of high status. Only high kings consecrated and established in the throne are creatures of the whole society they rule over: connected to everyone and yet set apart from them too. The high point of the ascension occurs when Rajasinha finally becomes Rajasinha *devi*.<sup>90</sup> I should also at least note that although I have referred to the concept of Lankan overlordship with the term *cakravarti*, only in one verse do we find that term itself in the poem<sup>91</sup>.

For the poet, the campaigns in the mid-1550s are significant not only as the occasion in which the young prince won his spurs but in which dynastic authority was re-constituted. Indeed, these verses reveal more eloquently than any Portuguese source the extent of the chaos unleashed by Vidiye Bandara's rebellion. As Rajasinha travels, he is not simply raising troops and revenue and installing garrisons, but dispensing justice and order – insofar as morality in general is identified with the functioning of central authority. He is set on punishing people who had been 'creating disturbances' and 'building forts'.<sup>92</sup> These do not seem to be only supporters of Vidiye Bandara or Kotte, but purely local leaders attempting to

<sup>88</sup> Verses circa. 580-830.

<sup>89</sup> Verses 993-1007.

<sup>90</sup> Verse 1027

<sup>91</sup> Verse 1010.

<sup>92</sup> E.g. verses 600-620.

provide some sort of local security. The political convulsions following Bhuvanekabahu's death had created confusion in the minds of local elites. Who was the most legitimate contender for power? Who was the most powerful contender for legitimacy?

Alternatively, Sitavakan authority was not reconstituted from the chaos but newly built out of it. The assembling of a general league against Vidiye had allowed the establishment of new relations as well as the re-affirmation of old ones.<sup>93</sup> At its conclusion, the poem describes Mayadunne gathering the various parties and enjoining them to come to his son's aid if any other king in Lanka should create disturbances in the future.<sup>94</sup> That this could not be taken for granted indicates the fragility of central authority, as does the role played by the liberal dispersal of the spoils of war. Heroic deeds, or simply loyalty, are rewarded with necklaces, wages, lands. One way, then, in which the military campaign could pacify the regions was by funneling redistributive powers to the centre, a mechanism that Jayavira Bandara would exploit to the full in the 1590s.<sup>95</sup> Unity appears here then almost as a byproduct of war and the economic contingencies it brings in its train. (There is perhaps a certain limited analogy to be drawn with the rise and fall of Anglo-Saxon chiefs in early medieval England. There the cultivation of the kind of heroic sensibility expressed in *Beowulf* arose out of the needs of rulers to keep their retainers happy by providing them with the spoils of war. Of course the Lankan kingdoms are much more 'state-like' – but still strikingly prone to rapid expansion and combustion).

Naturally, the representation of Rajasinha's campaigns is shaped by a poetic concern with the imagery of unity and harmony. The litany of place-names, from the highlands and lowlands, the east and the west, works to knit the country together linguistically.<sup>96</sup> What Rajasinha brings to each of these places, as to Lanka as a whole, is *eksath* or unity.<sup>97</sup> It is as if Lanka were an organism vulnerable to damage and disintegration and in need of healing. *Eksath*'s conceptual opposite is *avul* (disturbance), which is used to describe various phenomena that modern observers would probably seek to distinguish by terms such as rebellion, secession, not paying revenue, invasion, conquest. What all have in common is some sort of affront to the *cakravarti*'s authority.

<sup>93</sup> Compare with Couto in Ferguson 1993: 175 on a general league against Vidiye Bandara.

<sup>94</sup> Verses 893-5.

<sup>95</sup> E.g. verses 1110, 1051.

<sup>96</sup> Verses 580s, including Sabaragamuva, Uva, Badulla, Vellassa, Bintanna etc.

<sup>97</sup> Verses 682-5, 927-8. [see references to *eksath* also in verses 557, 586, 592, 597, 903]



The natural order is thus constantly assailed by threat, as the references to the struggle between the *devas* and *asuras* indicate – but note that threats can issue from within as well as without. Thus, at one point Vidiye Bandara is insulted in terms similar to those directed at the Portuguese: he and his men are motivated by greed, ‘devouring the country’ like monitor lizards, dogs, crows and other scavengers.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, this situation elicits the most obviously patriotic phrase in the poem. Men sign up to Rajasinha’s campaign out of ‘constant love for the country’ (*nitara rata ale*) to destroy this internal source of chaos.<sup>99</sup> The phrase reveals a collective sense of entitlement and attachment to Lanka, but in the poem that sense is configured by dynastic devotion. Loyalty to the king and to country are made one and the same: a feature perhaps of all monarchical societies.

‘Loyalty to country’ may seem to rely on a Eurocentric or anachronistic conflation of territory and society, but it is arguably true to the semantic range of *rata*. A Kotte-Portuguese incursion is described thus:

The enemy army having thus arrived and entered the city of Kālaṇīya  
 Attractive noble youths were given royal positions and names  
 The viceroy having come to this country (*merata*) from the pleasant and  
 powerful city of Goa.  
 Destroying this country by converting several beings of beautiful lineage  
 (*rusiru kula noyek satata kulavadda nahapu merata*).

[This viceroy] having become the ally of an attractive king of exalted  
 character and unsullied noble lineage, intent on destroying the country  
 [*rata*],

He brought over fierce Portuguese [*pratikalun*]; not sent back, they remain  
 in this Lanka to this day

Removing the noble pride of children of noble birth, he destroyed pure  
 lineages [*kula*]

This viceroy is a high-born personage; he descended strongly upon this  
 Lanka to destroy *Siri Laka*.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Verse 830.

<sup>99</sup> Verse 865. The men are from the Four Korales, but *raṭa* seems to mean Lanka here. According to our reading here, one would have to correct the impression given of this verse from Roberts 2004: 120, where the ‘internal’ source of the threat is not mentioned. Vidiye Bandara’s followers are not outsiders in the ethnic or cultural sense but those who have placed themselves outside the aegis of the legitimate king.

<sup>100</sup> Verses 516-7. Could ‘given names’ mean conversion? *Siri* could be rendered ‘blessed’ or ‘prosperous’.

In what sense is the 'land' destroyed here? Both verses twin this theme with the conversion of high-born men and the disruption of status, which suggests that the destruction of the 'land' is a metaphor for the destruction of a social system.

Rajasinha, on the other hand, will sustain the land. And in his tour of the regions, he is not just imposing himself on Lanka, but allowing Lanka – its fertile fields and forests teeming with wildlife, its beautiful women overflowing with milk – to seep into him. Incidentally, this eroticization of sovereignty, where the land is feminized and the attractive masculinity of the king is underlined, carries echoes of earlier Okkaka/Cola poetic themes of the monarch as lover of the earth.<sup>101</sup> This concentration on the erotic would reach its height in the panegyrics addressed to the eighteenth-century king of Kandy, Narendrasinha (1707-39).<sup>102</sup> As for Rajasinha, touring the glories of Lanka, perhaps one could say that if he recreates the realm, the realm also creates him as a king: his journey out into the margins and back again is a journey into civilized kingship.

#### REFERENCES

- Ali, Daud (2000) 'Royal Eulogy as World History: Re-thinking Copper-plate Inscriptions in Cola India' in Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, and Daud Ali (eds.) 2000: 165-229.
- Amarasinghe, Risiman (1998) *Sitavaka Rajadhaniye Unnatiyeda Avantiyeda Samahara Amsa Pilibanda Vimarsanayak*. Colombo.
- Barnett, L. D. *Alphabetical Guide to Sinhalese Folklore from Ballad Sources*. The Indian Antiquary vol. 4, 46, Supplement 1916-7.
- Berkwitz, Stephen (2007) 'The Aesthetics of Power and the Cock's Message'. MSS.
- Boxer, C. R. (1976) 'Dom Jorge de Meneses Baroche and the battle of Mulleriyawa, 1560' in *Mare Luso Indicum* 3: 85-97.
- De Silva, C. R. (1995) 'Sri Lanka in the early sixteenth century: political conditions'; 'Sri Lanka in the early sixteenth century: economic and social conditions'; 'The rise and fall of the Kingdom of Sitawaka', in K. M. De Silva 1995: 11-104.
- De Silva K. M. (ed.) (1995), *University of Peradeniya History of Sri Lanka. Volume II, from c.1500 to c. 1800*. Peradeniya.

---

<sup>101</sup> Ali 2000: 210-12. Stephen Berkwitz (personal comm. 15 July 07) has also stressed the way in which poetry maketh the man – the poetic glorification and immortalization of the SH serving to create the royal status of Rajasinha.

<sup>102</sup> Dharmadasa 1995: 476.

- Dharmadasa, K. N. O. (1995). 'Literature in Sri Lanka: The 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries', in K. M. De Silva 1995: 471-90.
- Duncan, James. S. (1990) *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom*. Cambridge.
- Edirisinghe, Daya (n.d.) *Madampe Tanivelle Maha Devalaya*. Tanivelle Maha Devalaya Trust, Madampe
- Faria e Sousa, M. (1665-75) *Asia Portuguesa* (3 vols.). Lisbon.
- Ferguson, D. (1993) (ed. and trans.), *The History of Ceylon from the Earliest Times to 1600 A.D. as related by Joao de Barros and Diogo do Couto*. New Delhi.
- Flores, Jorge (ed.) (2001) *Os Olhos do Rei: Desenhos e Descrições Portuguesas da Ilha de Ceilão (1624, 1638)*. Lisbon. (ed.) (2007) *Re-exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories Between Portugal and Sri Lanka*. Wiesbaden.
- Gombrich, Richard and Gananath Obeyesekere (1988), *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*. Princeton.
- Grierson, George A. 1926. 'On the Adbhuta-Ramayana' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 4: 11-27.
- Hallisey, Charles (2003) 'Works and persons in Sinhala literary culture'. in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock. California: 689-745.
- Holt, John Clifford (1996) *The Religious World of Kirti Sri: Buddhism, Art and Politics in Late Medieval Sri Lanka*. Oxford. (2007) 'Buddhist Rebuttals: The Changing of the Gods and Royal (Re)legitimatization in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Sri Lanka' in Flores 2007.
- Malalgoda, Kitsiri (1999), 'Mandarampura Puvata, an apocryphal chronicle' a paper presented to the Seventh Sri Lanka Studies Conference, Canberra, December 1999.
- Paranavitana, R. (1999) (ed.) *Sitavaka Hatana*. Colombo.
- Perniola, Vito (1989-91) (ed.), *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, The Portuguese Period. Volume I, 1505-1565. Volume II, 1566-1619, Volume III, 1620-1658*. Dehiwala.
- Raghavan, V. 1998. *Sanskrit Ramayanas other than Valmiki's : the Adbhuta, Adhyatma, and Ananda Ramayanas*. Chennai
- Roberts, Michael (2004) *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan period, 1590s - 1815*. Colombo.
- Queyroz, Fernão de (1992), *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, trans., and with introduction by S. G. Perera. 3 vols. New Delhi.
- Suraweera, A. (1964) (ed.) *Alakesvara Yuddhaya*. Colombo. (2000) (trans.) *Rajavaliya* (Sri Lanka).

- Shastri, Hari Prasad (trans.) (1992). *The Ramayana of Valmiki*. 3 vols. London. Vol.1.
- Singaravelu, S. (1982) 'Sita's birth and parentage in the Rama story', *Asian Folklore Studies* 41: 235-43.
- Somadasa, K. D. (1987-95) *Catalogue of the Hugh Nevill Collection of Sinhalese Manuscripts in the British Library*. (7 vols.). London.
- Strathern, Alan (2004) 'Theoretical approaches to Sri Lankan history and the early Portuguese period', *Modern Asian Studies* 38: 189-226.
- (2006a), 'Towards the source-criticism of Sitavakan heroic literature. part one. *The Alakeśvara Yuddhaya*: notes on a floating text' in *Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities* 32: 23-39.
- (2006b), 'The Royal 'We': Sinhala Identity in the Dynastic State', a review of 'Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period 1590s to 1815' by Michael Roberts', reprinted from *Modern Asian Studies* 39 (2005): 1013-1026, as a pamphlet for the Social Scientist's Association, Colombo.
- (2007) *Kingship and Conversion in Sixteenth-Century Sri Lanka*. Cambridge.
- van Linschoten, J. H. (1885) *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the East Indies from the Old English Translation of 1598*. eds. A. C. Burnell and P. A. Thiele. 2 vols. London.
- van Spilbergen, Joris (1997) *Journal of Spilbergen, The First Dutch Envoy to Ceylon, 1602*. ed. and trans. K. D. Paranavitana. Colombo.
- Wicki, J. (ed.) (1948-88) *Documenta Indica*. (18 vols.). Rome.

ALAN STRATHERN