

# PORTUGUESE INTERACTIONS WITH SRI LANKA AND THE MALDIVES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: SOME PARALLELS AND DIVERGENCES

## Introduction

Portuguese interactions with Sri Lanka in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been studied extensively.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the Maldivian experience with the Portuguese has attracted virtually no attention.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, almost all the writing has centered on bilateral relations between the Portuguese and each of the two areas.<sup>3</sup> In relation to their contacts with the Portuguese, however, there are some fascinating and instructive parallels between the experiences of these two countries; parallels that could help us better understand the history of each country, the nature of the Portuguese colonial regime and the ways in which economic and political changes in the Indian Ocean region had a bearing on Portuguese relations with both regions.

In both cases, Portuguese interest was initially fuelled by a major indigenous product, coir in the case of the Maldives and cinnamon in Sri Lanka. In the first decade of the sixteenth century internal disputes about succession attracted Portuguese attention to opportunities in these lands and in both cases the authority of the main ruler was constantly under challenge from rivals, though this practice was perhaps more pronounced in the case of the Maldives. In both countries, the indigenous challengers aimed at seizure of the symbolic capital (Male and Kotte respectively) as a means of legitimizing their claims. The first Portuguese visit to Sri Lanka was by a fleet sent to the Maldives. 1518 was the date when the first Portuguese fort was set up at both Male and Colombo. In the mid-sixteenth century, resistance to Portuguese dominance and occupation in both countries led to a rise of religious identity (Islamic in the Maldives and Buddhist/Śaivite in Sri Lanka) and to the militarization of both societies. The Portuguese were more successful in establishing political power over parts of Sri Lanka but in both areas indigenous peoples stubbornly contested Portuguese power.

Of course, there were important differences. In the case of the Maldives, the claim of Cannanore to suzerainty and tribute complicated matters while in Sri Lanka, the existence of several virtually independent kingdoms gave rise to

---

<sup>1</sup> See the listings in Daya de Silva, *The Portuguese in Asia 1498-c.1800*, Zug, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> The best account is still in H. C. P. Bell, *The Maldive Islands. Monograph on the History, Archeology and Epigraphy*, Colombo, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> For an exception see Jorge Flores, *Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão: Trato, Diplomacia e Guerra (1498-1543)*. Lisboa: Edições Cosmos, 1998.

more complex diplomatic maneuvers. The Sultan of the Maldives was head of a state that seems to have depended more on trade for its revenues than the kings of Kotte and Jaffna in Sri Lanka.<sup>4</sup> Sri Lanka was much more diverse in terms of culture and ethnicity than the Maldives. Conversion to Christianity and the penetration of Portuguese cultural influence was much greater in Sri Lanka.

Since the history of Sri Lanka and its encounter with the Portuguese are well known, its history will be presented here with fewer details and source references than that of the Maldives.

### Commercial Attractions

Commercial factors were paramount in the early Portuguese interest in Sri Lanka. For the peoples of the Maldivian Islands and Sri Lanka, the Portuguese were but one more trading group in the Indian Ocean and they therefore had little interest in initiating contact particularly as rumors of Portuguese privateering spread quickly. The Maldivian *gharb*<sup>5</sup> (*gundra* as the Portuguese called it) was quite capable of reaching the Portuguese headquarters of Cochin and Goa,<sup>6</sup> but had no compelling new reason to do so. The Portuguese, on the other hand, sought to get to the sources of desired commercial products to enhance their profits.

Initial Portuguese interest in Sri Lanka was clearly due its reputation as the source for the finest cinnamon. They had information about the other products that were exported from Lanka. The Vespuccio letter to Lourenzo de' Medici in June 1500 after his meeting with Gaspar da Gama, speaks of Zihan: of gems, elephants and spices of the island and of pearls in the Gulf of Mannar. Vespuccio also reported in 1501 that the Portuguese seized a Mappila ship carrying elephants from Ceylon to Cambay.<sup>7</sup> A document of 1504 describes

<sup>4</sup> We do not have statistical data for the Maldives but for the dependence of the Kotte rulers on land revenues see 'The First Portuguese Revenue Register of Kotte 1599 by Jorge Florim de Almeida (translated into English and edited with an introduction by C. R. de Silva),' *The Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, new series, V (1&2), 1975, pp. 71-153. For the argument that all Asian states had some interest in trade and that the difference was one of opportunity and degree see Sanjay Subramanyam, *The Portuguese Empire*, London, 1993, pp. 9-29.

<sup>5</sup> A *gharb* (pl. *aghriba*) was a double ended ship, sewn together by rope with a rope steering system.

<sup>6</sup> In the early years, Cochin was the commercial headquarters.

<sup>7</sup> Letter of Vespuccio to Lorenzo de Medici, 4 June 1501 also mentioned in letter of King Manuel to the Catholic Rulers, 28 August 1501. This incident is mentioned in João de Barros, *Da Asia, Déc. 1/5-6*, Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India pelos Portugueses*, ed. Manuel Lopes de Almeida, Porto: Leilão e

pearl diving.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, early Portuguese accounts of Sri Lanka testify that cinnamon was the focus of their attention. A good example is found in the letters written by Girolamo Sernigi in Lisbon between July and September 1498. They reveal that the Portuguese knew Lanka as the main source of cinnamon and indeed estimated that its price on the island was half that at Calicut.<sup>9</sup> In a letter of 28 August 1499 King Manuel also refers to the cinnamon exports of Sri Lanka.<sup>10</sup> In his account of the second voyage of Vasco da Gama, which ended in 1503, Tomé Lopes reported that “Those in Cochin also recounted that a hundred and fifty leagues from there is Ceilão, which is a rich island and of three hundred leagues in size which has large mountains and produces cinnamon in greater abundance and of better quality than any other place.”<sup>11</sup>

In the case of the Maldives, it is difficult to trace Portuguese perspectives of its economic value in the period before the initial contact but it is clear that coir rope was a vital necessity for the seagoing Portuguese. Valentim Fernandes, a German printer from Moravia, who lived in Lisbon from 1495 until his death in 1518, wrote as follows: “From the fibre with which the coconut is covered, they make ropes for ships, as we do here from hemp. They take these ropes all over India for there are none better than those from these islands because they never rot in the sea. They are an important commodity for each year in these islands they load between twelve and fifteen ships with them, bound for Calicut and Cambay and its coast and their ships carry nothing but these ropes.”<sup>12</sup> Sixteenth century author Gaspar Corrèa confirms that coir rope from the Maldivian Islands had long had a reputation all over Asia.<sup>13</sup> João de Barros reports: “The rope made from this fibre supplies the whole of India, and

---

Irmão, 1979 1/37, and Gaspar Corrèa, *Lendas da Índia*, ed. Rodrigo José de Lima Felner, Lisboa: Academia Real das Ciências, 1858, I pp. 196-198.

<sup>8</sup> *Calcoen*, ed. Oliveira Martins, Portugal nas Mares, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Lisbon, Guimaraes Editores, 1954, p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> Flores, *Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão*, p. 102. For the documents, see Vasco da Gama, *La Prima Circumnavigazione dell’Africa, 1497-1499*, ed. Carmen Radulet, Reggio Emilia, 1994, pp. 171-7, 182-90 and Donald W. Ferguson, ‘The Discovery of Ceylon by the Portuguese in 1506,’ *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XIX, 1907, p. 324.

<sup>10</sup> *Roteiros Portugueses ineditos da carreira da Índia do século XVI*, ed. Abel Fontoura da Costa, Lisboa: Agencia Geral das Colónias, 1940, p. 199.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Navegação as Índias Orientais,’ *Collecção de Notícias para a Historia e Geografia das Nações Ultramarinas que virem nos Domínios Portugueses*, II (2), ed. Sebastião Mendo Trigo, Lisboa: 1867, p. 199.

<sup>12</sup> *Código Valentim Fernandes*, with notes by José Pereira da Costa, Lisbon, 1997, pp. 367-8.

<sup>13</sup> Gaspar Corrèa, *Lendas da Índia*, Vol. I p. 299.

chiefly for cables, because it is more secure and stands the sea better than any made from hemp. The reason is that it agrees with the salt water, and becomes so tough that it seems like hide, contracting and expanding with the strength of the sea: so that a good thick cable of this rope, when the ship is standing at her anchor in a heavy gale and straining upon it, draws out so thin that you would think it could not hold a boat; when the vessel is pitching in a mere swell, it keeps its usual thickness. This coir is also used instead of bolts, for such virtue hath it of swelling and shrinking in the sea that they join the timbers of their ships' ribs with it, and consider it quite secure."<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the Maldives had other exports that were lucrative. One of them was the cowrie shell (*Cypraea Moneta*-a small shell found only in the Maldives) that was exported in quantity and used as currency in Bengal and in parts of Africa.<sup>15</sup> Duarte Barbosa, writing in the early sixteenth century confirms this: "... they also carry from here certain small shells, which are much sought after in the kingdom of Gujarat and in Bengal, where they circulate as small change, for they hold it to be cleaner and better than copper." João de Barros agrees: "There is also a kind of shell fish, as small as a snail, but differently shaped, with a hard, white, lustrous shell, some of them, however, being so highly coloured and lustrous that, when made into buttons and set in gold, they look like enamel. With these shells for ballast many ships are laden for Bengal and Siam, where they are used for money just as we use small copper money for buying things of little value. And even to this kingdom of Portugal, in some years as much as two or three thousand *quintals* are brought by way of ballast; they are then exported to Guinea, and the kingdoms of Benin and Congo, where also they are used for money, the gentiles of the interior in those parts making their treasure of it." Evidence from the description by Fernandes indicates that the cowrie shell also played a key role in the domestic economy as well: "The rent the king gets from the islands is all in mussels and oysters"<sup>16</sup> and this only from the natives for the foreign merchants pay their tribute in merchandise or gold or silver. They pay in these shells not only because they are found in greater quantity in these islands than anywhere else, but also because each one pays his dues in so many thousand *bastoes*<sup>17</sup> or so many *cotas* of shells according to how much he earns from his trade."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> João de Barros, *Da Ásia, Déc. III*, Book 3, Chapter 7.

<sup>15</sup> Pires, Tomé, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires and the Book of Francisco Rodriguez*, trans. and ed. by Armando Cortesão, London: Hakluyt Society, 1944, pp 380-381, Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia*, II, p 297.

<sup>16</sup> cowries

<sup>17</sup> A *cota* was 13,000 shells and eight *cotas* made up one *baston*.

<sup>18</sup> *Código Valentim Fernandes*, p. 364.

The dried fish produced in the Maldive Islands was important as well being a staple of the seaman's diet in the Indian Ocean region.<sup>19</sup> Barros points out that, "These islands produce abundance of fish, of which great quantities of *moxama* are made. It is exported as merchandise to many quarters, and gives a good profit. . ." As Fernandes describes it: "This fish has no scales and they simply cut it in four pieces or in half and boil it in half-salt half-sweet water, and after well boiled, they make high platforms of cane where they place the said fish and underneath it, they make a fire and so cure it in the smoke until it becomes hard as rock and inside very red and very well cured. They take this fish all over India – namely to Ceylon, Sumatra, Melaka, Cambay and Calicut etc."<sup>20</sup>

The Maldive Islands were also known for other products. These included cotton cloth woven from imported yarn brought from Cambay and turned into turban cloth and tunics.<sup>21</sup> Barros states that "The fabrics made by these islanders are silk and cotton, and no finer stuffs are made in all those parts. The principal manufactory is at the islands Ceudu and Cudu<sup>22</sup> where there are said to be better weavers than in Bengal or Coromandel. Yet all the silk and cotton, of which those stuffs are made, come to them from abroad, the islands lacking both these commodities. . ." <sup>23</sup> Maldivian craftsmen made tortoiseshells into fine ornaments.<sup>24</sup> Ambergris was another export for which the Maldive Islands were known.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, it was coir rope that the Portuguese sought most from the Maldive Islands. As Barros put it, coir rope was "The commonest and most important merchandise at these islands, indeed, the cause of their being visited, is the coir; without it those seas cannot be navigated."<sup>26</sup>

### Early Contacts

The main argument presented in this section is that while the push for contact and commercial relations came from the Portuguese and while specific local factors did play a role in the way in which political and commercial relations developed in the early years, these developments can be best

<sup>19</sup> Gaspar Corrêa, *Lendas da Índia*, Vol. 1 p. 341. François Pyrard, *Voyage to the East Indies, the Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, trans. and ed. Albert Gray and H. C. P. Bell, London, 1887, Vol. 1, p. 321, Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia*, II, p 927.

<sup>20</sup> *Código Valentim Fernandes*, p. 367.

<sup>21</sup> Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, ed. Mansel Longworth Dames, London, 1921 II, p. 106, Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, Vol. 1, p. 397

<sup>22</sup> Hawadu and Addu ?

<sup>23</sup> See João de Barros, *Da Ásia, Déc. III*, Book 3, Chapter 7.

<sup>24</sup> Barbosa, *The Book*, II, p. 107.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 107-108, Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, Vol. III p. 17, Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia*, II pp. 927-8.

<sup>26</sup> João de Barros, *Da Ásia, Déc. III*, Book 3, Chapter 7.

understood in the context of regional trading rivalries between the Portuguese and indigenous groups.

Let us first deal with the Maldivian Islands. At the time the Portuguese arrived in the East, theoretically, a single Sultan who ruled from Male held sway over all of the Maldivian Islands but despite Pyrard's statement that "The government of the Maldivian state is royal, very ancient and absolute; the king is feared and dreaded and everything depends on him,"<sup>27</sup> royal power was never secure. Descendants of former Sultans constantly challenged the reigning monarch.<sup>28</sup> There were fifteen Sultans in the fifty-seven years from 1466 to 1513 and two of them ruled for a combined 28 years leaving an average of just over 2 years each for the rest. This instability rested partly on the fact that all descendants of former Sultans could compete for succession. Moreover, institutional control over the numerous islands was weak. The Sultan had a group of palace officials or ministers but religious education and the administration of justice was through religious elders who worked under the direction of the Qazi in Male.<sup>29</sup> While the Sultan appointed the Qazi, once appointed the Qazi held office for life. Nor did the Sultan have a standing army but only some guards for the palace. Thus, the Sultan's power depended on the collection of revenue through his revenue officials both from the islands and from visiting ships<sup>30</sup> and using these resources and marriage alliances wisely to keep control of the capital city of Male.

Kalu Muhammad is a major figure in the early years of Portuguese contact and his career illustrates the increasingly dominant role that Cannanore had begun to play in Maldivian politics. He was son of Sultan Umar II (r. 1480-1485) and first came to the throne in 1491 when he reigned for nine months. His brother Yusuf III, replaced him but Yusuf, in turn, lost his throne after 10 weeks to Kalu Muhammad's cousin, Ali IV (r. 1492-95). At this stage, Kalu Muhammad obtained the support of Mam'Ali (Muhammad Ali), the Ali Raja of Cannanore, to regain his throne.<sup>31</sup> Ali Raja was the traditional title of the chief

<sup>27</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, Vol. 1, p. 197.

<sup>28</sup> Bouchon, *Regent of the Sea*, p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, Vol. 1, pp. 197-200. According to Pyrard, by the early seventeenth century each province had a *Naib* who worked under the Qazi at Male. Under each *Naib*, there were *Khatibs* or religious leaders and under them, the *ulamas* who led each mosque.

<sup>30</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, Vol. 1, pp. 227-31 reports the king's revenues as being a fifth of all grain sown, a graduated tax paid in coir rope, cowries and dried fish and the right to first purchase of goods brought by ships from outside.

<sup>31</sup> Hasan Taj al-Din, *Tarikh Islam Diba Mahall*, ed. Hikoichi Yajima, Tokyo, 1982, p. 16. Bouchon, *Regent*, p. 117

of the Mappila Muslim traders of Cannanore and the Mappila Muslim traders had, by this time, gained a major share of the trade with Sri Lanka and the Maldives. We do not know what concessions Kalu Muhammad had to give in return for the aid but Bouchon speculates that it might have involved a monopoly over the export of coir and dried fish.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that Kalu Muhammad's long reign after his second accession (r. 1494-1510) was a result of continuing support from the Ali Raja and Ali Raja Mam'Ali, at least from this time onwards, began to have a major role in trade with the Maldives.<sup>33</sup>

The Portuguese knew about the Maldives from about the time of their arrival in the East. As early as 1502-3, Vicente Sodre's ships had sailed to the Maldives and seized four *gundras*.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Portuguese visits to the Maldives started earlier than to Sri Lanka. Portuguese interest in the Maldives, however, increased towards the middle of the first decade of the sixteenth century. By this time, the Maldives were beginning to have greater strategic importance because the Muslim ships from Southeast Asia were replenishing supplies there, rather than visiting the Malabar Coast. D. Francisco de Almeida had ordered his son, D. Lourenço de Almeida to look for Muslim ships in the Maldives in 1506.<sup>35</sup> There is no evidence that de Almeida made contact with the Maldivians, but on his way back to India, he certainly established first contact with the Sri Lankan chief king in Kotte. In 1508, the Portuguese king, D. Manuel asked Diogo Lopes de Sequeira to go to the area.<sup>36</sup> Sequeira's successor, Governor Afonso de Albuquerque also recognized the importance of the Maldives.<sup>37</sup>

It was at this stage that there arose a complicated struggle for power and influence in which the Portuguese, the Kolathiri (ruler) of Cannanore, the Ali Raja of Cannanore and different factions of Maldivians, all played important roles. In 1510, Hasan VII (r. 1510-11) one of Kalu Muhammad's nephews deposed Kalu Muhammad and became Sultan. After Hasan, Sharif Ahmad (r. 1511-12), an Arab from Mecca and 'Ali V, ruled in succession.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Bouchon, *Regent*, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 113, 117, Barbosa, *The Book*, Vol. II, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Gaspar Corrèa, *Lendas*, I 341-342, 643-58, Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India*, I p. 258, Barros, *Da Asia, Déc.*, III, Book, Ch. 10, and Book II, Ch. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India*, II p. 256.

<sup>36</sup> *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque, Seguidas de Documentos que se Elucidam*, ed. R. A. de Bulhao Pato and H. Lopes de Mendonça, Lisboa: Academia das Ciencias de Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1884-1935, 7 vols. Vol. II pp. 413-414.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, I pp. 88-89.

<sup>38</sup> We know very little about these three rulers and though the Maldivian chronicle, records that they ruled for a total of five and a half years from 1510. (Hasan for 2 years, Ahmad for two years nine months and 'Ali, for nine months), other documents imply that

According to the Maldivian legends, 'Ali's sister, Buraki Rani had also aspired to the throne and sought to marry Kalu Muhammad to strengthen her claims. Denied permission to marry him, she then went to Achin and later to Goa where she promised tribute to the Portuguese. She then sent her retainer to kill the reigning Sultan, took over power, married Kalu Muhammad and set him up as Sultan.<sup>39</sup> Portuguese sources support the theory that Buraki Rani was a key figure in the conflict.<sup>40</sup> However, they also suggest that Kalu Muhammad played a more active part<sup>41</sup> and received aid from Mam'Ali of Cannanore. Clearly, the Ali Raja had exacted a high price for his whatever assistance he gave because, from then on, he received an annual tribute from the Maldives, in addition to his existing control over much of its trade.<sup>42</sup> He also seems to have gained control of some of the islands of the Maldives.<sup>43</sup>

However, the matter was more complicated than that. The *Tarikh* suggests that Kalu Muhammad received support from the Portuguese as well as from the Ali Raja.<sup>44</sup> Kalu Muhammad may have tried using his Portuguese contacts to assert his autonomy, and by mid-1512 Mam'Ali was trying to make his own brother, 'Icapocar' Sultan of the Maldives.<sup>45</sup> The *Kolathiri* seems to have supported Mam'Ali in this venture. Mam'Ali as Ali Raja of Cannanore was clearly becoming a powerful figure in the Cannanore court.

---

Sultan Muhammad had regained power by 1512. Hasan Taj al-Din, *Tarikh*, p. 16. 'Ali's family came from Nellaidhu island on S. Thiladhunmathi atoll.

<sup>39</sup> Bell, *The Maldive Islands*, 25 fn.

<sup>40</sup> *Alguns Documentos*, p. 449 (Alvaro Fernandes to D. Manuel, Cannanore, Dec. 15, 1520)

<sup>41</sup> *Cartas*, I, p. 87.

<sup>42</sup> Bouchon, *Regent*, pp. 113, 119.

<sup>43</sup> Letter of Affonso de Albuquerque to King Manuel, 1 April 1512 in *Cartas*, I, pp. 48-49.

<sup>44</sup> "When he [Sultan 'Ali r. 1512] had ruled for 9 months there arrived from Cannanore the deposed Sultan Muhammad with a force of Malabaris obtained from 'Ali Raja who had made a stipulation that he must hand over to him a specific sum of money every year. When they were leaving the port of Cannanore, they encountered ships [of] foreign Christians who lived at their fortress at Goa. They [the Christians] positioned their *gharbs* for several days in the sea facing Cannanore and blockaded them. They would not let [the Malibaris] pass until they had got them to agree that every year a certain sum of money would be handed over to them too. Then they let them proceed and also gave [Sultan Muhammad] assistance [in that] they arrived [together] at the port of Diba Mahal [enabling the Sultan] to seize power with their help." Hasan Taj al-Din, *Tarikh Islam Diba Mahall*.

<sup>45</sup> Bouchon, *Regent*, pp. 122-125.



The Portuguese, on their part, were seeking to expand their political influence<sup>46</sup> and economic power in the East. Albuquerque's conquest of Goa in 1510 had persuaded some rulers including the *Kolathiri* of Cannanore to become conciliatory towards the Portuguese despite provocations. Governor Albuquerque clearly considered curbing Mam'Ali's power as a prerequisite for Portuguese dominance over the Maldives. Thus, when in August 1512, Baba Abdullah went to Cochin to plead for support for Kalu Muhammad, Albuquerque interpreted this as an offer of vassalage.<sup>47</sup> Coming to Cannanore, he summoned the chief ministers (including Mam'Ali) and put so much pressure on them that Mam'Ali's project to replace Kalu Muhammad was shelved.<sup>48</sup> According to Corrèa, Mam'Ali also agreed to make an annual payment of 3000 *quintals* (750 *bahars*) of coir rope to the Portuguese. On the other hand, Albuquerque had no resources to help Kalu Muhammad gain autonomy and thus, while individual Portuguese ships continued to attack and seize merchant ships in the area, Mam'Ali also continued to derive great profit from the Maldives.<sup>49</sup>

If the early contacts between the Maldivian Islands and the Portuguese were complicated by internal struggles and the power of Cannanore, in Sri Lanka, the situation was much less complex. It was true that the island was politically fragmented. The chief ruler residing in Kotte had direct authority only over the southwest of the country. In the north, the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna refused to acknowledge the authority of the Kotte ruler while in the central highlands, the suzerainty of the chief king had but a shadowy existence. Even within the area under the rule of the chief king, there were principalities autonomously administered by the ruler's brothers.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the Kotte royal family appeared to be united in the face of the Portuguese newcomers. When D. Lourenço de Almeida's fleet entered Colombo harbor in 1506, the king's brother assessed the situation and on his recommendation, the chief ruler decided to invite the Portuguese to be received at the king's court. The reception involved an exchange of gifts<sup>51</sup> that the Portuguese interpreted as

---

<sup>46</sup> Subhramanyam, *The Portuguese Empire*, 78 argues that, at this stage, the Portuguese state wished to have tribute payments rather than take over and change local administrative systems.

<sup>47</sup> *Cartas*, Vol. I pp. 48-49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 87-88.

<sup>49</sup> Bouchon, *Regent*, p. 133, *Cartas*, V pp. 336-7, 345. Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India*, III p. 292

<sup>50</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in the Early Sixteenth Century: Political Conditions,' *University of Peradeniya, History of Sri Lanka*, Vol. II, ed. by K. M. de Silva, Peradeniya, 1995, pp. 11-36

<sup>51</sup> A. W. A. Alahapperuma, *Sitawaka Hatana*, ed. Rohini Paranavithana, *stanzas* 38-41, *Rajavaliya*, ed. A. V. Suraweera, Colombo, 1976 pp. 213-4.

an offer of tribute,<sup>52</sup> but in effect the meeting did not have major consequences. The Portuguese continued to purchase their cinnamon at Cochin from the Mappila traders of Calicut who virtually monopolized its export from Sri Lanka.<sup>53</sup>

### Portuguese attempts at dominance

In 1518, the Portuguese began a new attempt to use their naval and military power to gain commercial dominance in the Maldive Islands and in Sri Lanka. Due to a number of factors, this effort was more successful in Sri Lanka than in the Maldive Islands, although even in Sri Lanka, the success was limited.

Once again, let us examine the Maldive Islands first. In 1518, Portuguese Governor Lopo Soares de Albergaria in response to repeated requests for aid from Sultan Kalu Muhammed,<sup>54</sup> sent a fleet of four ships under D. João de Silveira to the Maldives.<sup>55</sup> Sultan Kalu Muhammad offered to give Portugal 750 *bahars* of coir and half the ambergris he received<sup>56</sup> annually as well as a site for a factory in return for Portuguese aid. De Albergaria seems to have agreed to this at first but his resources were stretched partly because he was leading a sizeable expedition to Sri Lanka, and when Mam'Ali offered the same tribute if the islands were left to his management, De Albergaria agreed.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Letter of King Manuel to Pope Julius II. Abrantes, 25 September 1507. The Latin original of this can be found in the *Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae Regum Regem in Ecclesis Africae, Asiae atque Oceaniae*, ed. Levy Maria Jordão, Vol. 1, Lisbon, 1868, I, pp. 319-20 and in Donald Ferguson 'The Discovery of Ceylon by the Portuguese in 1506,' *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XIX, 1907, pp. 340-41. The best English translation is in V. Perniola, ed., *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period*, Dehiwala, 1989, I, pp. 4-6.

<sup>53</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'Political and Diplomatic Relations of the Portuguese with the Kings of Kotte During the First Half of the Sixteenth Century,' *Revista da Cultural* (Special Issue on *The Asian Seas 1500-1800: Local Societies, European Expansion and the Portuguese*), Ano V, Vol. 1, Nos.13/14, 1991, pp. 220-232.

<sup>54</sup> Letter of Baba Abdullah to King Manuel circa 1519. *Arquivo Nacional do Torre do Tombo, Cartas Orientais* 9. The original (in Arabic) was published by Jean Aubin in *Mare Luso-Indicum* II, 1972, pp. 201-211. A contemporary Portuguese translation, which is a shorter version of this document was also published in the same issue of the journal on pages 212-214 and in *Cartas* V pp.6-7.

<sup>55</sup> Barros, *Da Asia, Déc.*, III, Book 2, p.72, Castanheda, *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India*, IV pp. 433,435, 438.

<sup>56</sup> Ambergris was a monopoly of the sultan.

<sup>57</sup> *Cartas* V pp.6-7.

At this time, Mam'Ali enjoyed revenues estimated at 10,000 *pardãos* from the Maldives.<sup>58</sup>

De Albergaria's successor, Diogo de Sequeira, however, decided to end the agreement with Mam'Ali and sent D. João Gomes Cheiradinheiro<sup>59</sup> to the Maldivian Islands in November 1518 to establish a Portuguese presence there.<sup>60</sup> The Portuguese requested permission to build a fortification and Kalu Muhammad, evidently hoping to use the Portuguese to reduce the power of Mam'Ali, agreed. Once the fort was built, Gomes demanded the right to a fifth of the rice imports at cost price to be paid for with coir that he had collected. Trade in Male dried up and things became worse when Gomes began ransacking ships in the area. Mam'Ali withdrew his agents from Male and sent them to the southern atolls of Addu and Huvadū to which trade had moved.<sup>61</sup> The Portuguese garrison declined from 20 to 14. One day in 1521, a group of men attacked the fortification at dawn, seized the stronghold, killed the Portuguese and burnt a caravel and a few smaller ships that were there. Although one contemporary source identifies the attackers as Gujeratis, Bouchon points out that the attack on the Portuguese fort in Male might well have been part of a general assault on the Portuguese by Malabar Muslims.<sup>62</sup> The results in Male, however, were decisive. Some Portuguese resettled in Male after 1521 but they were often in danger and had little influence over the Maldives, which returned under protection of Cannanore. Indeed, when in 1525 the Portuguese tried to make an arrangement with the *Kolathiri* by which they recognized Cannanore's control over the Maldives, the ruler of Cannanore was so unwilling to give anything substantial for this recognition that negotiations failed.<sup>63</sup> It was only in 1526 that Luis Martins was received in Male as Portuguese factor.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Alguns Documentos*, p. 449.

<sup>59</sup> Cheiradinheiro is a nickname meaning literally, 'smell of money' or money-sniffer.

<sup>60</sup> Bouchon, *Regent*, p. 158.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-162. *Alguns Documentos*, p. 450.

<sup>62</sup> Bouchon, *Regent*, pp. 163-4.

<sup>63</sup> Barros, *Da Asia, Déc.* III Book 9 Ch. 5, Castanheda, , *Historia do Descobrimento e Conquista da India*, VI, p. 28. Kalu Muhammad continued to rule till he died in 1529 but the contest for power continued. He evidently had differences with the Sultanes Buraki Rani who was exiled to a remote island. Her brother was imprisoned and the Portuguese received requests to set him on the throne in return for tribute but there is no evidence that they were followed up. In fact, we have limited evidence of what happened even during the reigns of Kalu Muhammad's son, Hasan Shirazi VIII (r. 1528-48) and of his grandson, Muhammad (r. 1549-50), nephew of Hasan Shirazi VIII.

<sup>64</sup> Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, Vol. IV. Rome, 1980, pp. 426.

It is more than possible that Governor Lopo Soares de Albergaria postponed his attempt to dominate the Maldives because he was, by late 1517, occupied with a major effort to establish Portuguese power at Colombo. The Governor's fleet is said to have included 27 vessels, large and small and had on board a large proportion of the fighting strength of the Portuguese in India as well as many mercenaries from the Malabar coast. Arriving in Colombo in late 1517, all the Portuguese Governor asked for was permission to build a fort to protect Portuguese trading interests. Faced with an overwhelming display of force, Vijayabahu, chief King of Kotte, agreed. However, once the walls of the new fort had reached a defensible height, de Albergaria sent an envoy to the ruler with a gift of cloth and horses requesting that all the cinnamon in the royal storehouses should be delivered to the Portuguese at the current price. The ruler sought assistance from Mam'Ali and attacked the Portuguese fort. The Portuguese firearms and cannon inflicted heavy casualties on the Kotte forces and eventually, the Sri Lankan king agreed to accept vassalage and pay an annual tribute.<sup>65</sup>

This did not settle the issue. In June 1518, a force of Muslims from the Malabar coast attacked the Portuguese fort and though this attack was repulsed, trade at Colombo port, as at Male, dried up. With most of the Portuguese gone, the Kotte ruler delayed the tribute and delivered cinnamon of bad quality. We need to view these events in the context of a contest between the Mappila traders of Cannanore and Calicut and the Maraikkayars of the Coromandel coast on the one hand, against the Portuguese *casados* of the Malabar coast backed by the Portuguese state on the other, for control of trade in the Maldives, Sri Lanka and the Palk Straits. The efforts to set up forts in Colombo and Male in 1518 and to seize control of the pearl fishery in the Gulf of Mannar were initial moves in a struggle in which fortunes fluctuated in the 1520s. The Portuguese court in Lisbon was convinced that this struggle was important for the state as well, and in 1519 the Portuguese ruler sent a message requesting Governor Diogo Lopes de Sequeiria to secure a monopoly of the cinnamon exports of Sri Lanka and enforce a tax on every elephant exported. The Portuguese strengthened their fort in 1519 but barely held on when the ruler of Kotte launched a full-scale attack in October 1521. The ruler's failure to resist the Portuguese, however, led to his overthrow in the same year and the enthronement of his son, Bhuvanekabahu (r.1521-51) as ruler of Kotte<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in the Early Sixteenth Century: Political Conditions,' *University of Peradeniya. History of Sri Lanka*, Vol. II, ed. by K. M. de Silva, Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 1995, pp.19-20.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 20-24.

From the Portuguese point of view the fort in Colombo was proving to be a liability. It generated no revenue worth mention and caused tensions with the local ruler. Thus in 1524, the fort was demolished and a trading post (factory) with twenty soldiers to guard it was put in its place. This was however, not totally a loss for the Portuguese. Bhuvanekabahu had agreed to extend his protection to the Portuguese. Thus, when a force of Mappila Muslims attacked the Portuguese factory in February and May 1525, Kotte forces helped to repulse them. Indeed, in 1526, the ruler of Kotte expelled all foreign Muslim merchants from his kingdom. There was another factor that aided the Portuguese. Bhuvanekabahu's brother, Mayadunne (r.1521-81), became increasingly powerful as sub-ruler at Sitawaka. In the 1520s, the two brothers drifted apart. One of the causes for this might have been the pro-Portuguese policy of Bhuvanekabahu, although Portuguese chroniclers argued that the root cause was Mayadunne's ambition to replace his brother as chief king. In 1527, Mayadunne, with the assistance of 2500 men sent by the Samudri of Calicut attacked his brother who was saved only by the arrival of a Portuguese expedition in early 1528.<sup>67</sup> Bhuvanekabahu retained his position as chief king but in reality, Mayadunne of Sitawaka was virtually independent. Given Bhuvanekabahu's dependence on Portuguese support, their position in Kotte became gradually stronger. In 1533, he gave the Portuguese a monopoly of the purchase of cinnamon for export.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, in contrast to their failure to obtain commercial dominance off the Maldives, the Portuguese were beginning to be a political as well as a commercial factor in Sri Lanka. Some thirty Portuguese settlers had moved into Kotte and lived through trade. When Mayadunne who had welcomed the foreign Muslims into his kingdom and obtained military aid from the Kunjali (Mappila) admirals of Calicut attacked his brother in 1536 and in 1538, Portuguese forces came in from India to successfully defend Bhuvanekabahu.<sup>69</sup> The Portuguese position in Sri Lanka was also strengthened by their success in the pearl fishery in South India. In the early 1520s Portuguese who had been appointed Captains of the Fishery Coast extracted tribute (protection money) from the rulers of Kayal and Kilakkarai and set up a small fort at Vedalai near the island of

---

<sup>67</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of Sitawaka,' *University of Peradeniya, History of Sri Lanka*, Vol. II, ed. by K. M. de Silva, Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 1995, pp. 62-66.

<sup>68</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'Colonialism and Trade: The Cinnamon Contract of 1533 Between Bhuvanekabahu, King of Kotte and António Pessoa, Portuguese Factor in Sri Lanka,' *University of Colombo Review (Special Issue: Tikiri Abeyasinghe Commemoration Volume)*, Vol.10, Dec.1991, pp. 27-34. Muslim traders continued to smuggle cinnamon from ports outside Colombo.

<sup>69</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of Sitawaka,' pp. 67-71.

Rameswaram.<sup>70</sup> However, it was the conversion of the *parava* pearl fishermen to Christianity in 1532 that gave the Portuguese a strong base of support in that area.<sup>71</sup> The situation further improved for them after the crushing defeat of the naval forces of Calicut in the battle of Vedalai in 1538. From then on, the Portuguese in Sri Lanka had prospects of assistance from the nearby South Indian coast whenever they were threatened.

### **Religion and the mid-century crisis**

In the mid-sixteenth century there arose a crisis in relations between the Portuguese and the states in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. This crisis had two new dimensions. The first of these was political. In the early years of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese state in Asia had been primarily concerned about securing supplies of trading goods to be exported to Europe. By the 1530s and 1540s, however, not only had individual Portuguese settlers and traders integrated themselves into the commercial network of the Indian Ocean but they also began to favor the establishment of client regimes that would give them an edge. While the interests of the Portuguese king and his officials were by no means identical to those of the settlers and traders, by the 1540s, the Portuguese settlers in the East were becoming an important factor in policy formulation at Goa and Portuguese policy tended to view political expansion with more favor.

The second dimension was in the field of religion. The early years of the reign of King João III had seen elements of Renaissance Europe flowering in the court but this changed by the late 1530s. Religious orthodoxy became emphasized in the wake of the Reformation that was sweeping Europe and religious conversion (always a consideration) now became a more important factor in the formulation of colonial policy. Asian princes were not slow to see this either and in the 1540s and 1550s, there were a number of local rulers or pretenders to the throne who offered to be converted to Christianity in return for Portuguese military aid.

This latter dimension proved to be important in both the Maldives and in Sri Lanka. The Maldives continued to have problems with Portuguese freebooters in 1543 and in 1547. In 1548, after complaints from Kalu Muhammad's son and successor, Hasan Shirazi VIII (r. 1528-48), the Portuguese Governor forbade private voyages to the Maldives and sent a fleet under Jerónimo Butuqua to enforce this regulation.<sup>72</sup> However, the mid-century

---

<sup>70</sup> S. Jayaseelan Stephen, *Portuguese on the Tamil Coast: Historical Explorations in Commerce and Culture (1507-1749)*. Pondicherry, Navajothi Press, 1998, pp 60-68.

<sup>71</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Portuguese and Pearl Fishing off South India and Sri Lanka,' *South Asia*, new series, Vol. I (1), 1978, pp. 14-28.

<sup>72</sup> Schurhammer, Francis Xavier, Vol. IV, p. 426.

crisis the Maldivian Islands arose after Muhammad (r. 1548-50). Kalu Muhammad's grandson, was killed by his brother, who subsequently ascended the throne as Hasan IX (r. 1550-51). Hasan sought to legitimize his rule by marrying his brother's widow but she fled to the Portuguese at Cochin in February 1550. Hasan followed her to Cochin and tried to gain support among the Portuguese there by granting several of them the right to a voyage to the Maldives. A letter of the Portuguese Governor of India to the King of Portugal dated February 21, 1550 also suggests that the ruler of the Maldives had also agreed to annually deliver 600 *bahars* of coconut rope to the Portuguese. Hasan returned to Male but could not keep power for long. Portuguese documents describe him as a young man of eighteen or twenty years.<sup>73</sup> Having ruled a little over two years he fled to Cochin where he sought Portuguese aid and was converted to Christianity as D. Manoel on January 1, 1552.<sup>74</sup> From there, he sent a Portuguese ship (commanded by Eitor de Souza de Ataide, whose daughter became D. Manoel's spouse) to Male, to bring other leaders to Cochin for conversion but the Maldivians under Abu Bakr and Ali seized the ship and killed all on board. Abu Bakr was then proclaimed Sultan, but lost his life soon after in a battle against a second Portuguese expedition from Cochin led by Pedro de Ataide. However, this expedition too failed to establish Portuguese power in the Maldives. Meanwhile, D. Manoel continued to plead with the Portuguese for assistance and more financial privileges.<sup>75</sup> A third Portuguese expedition in 1558 led to the death of Abu Bakr's successor 'Ali. 'Ali had reigned only for a few months.

Local Maldivian tradition as recorded by Bell recounts that the leader of this successful Portuguese expedition, Adiri Adiri (Andre Andrade) was a Portuguese who had grown up in the Maldives.<sup>76</sup> The story is that a ship in which his pregnant mother was sailing had been captured in one of the atolls during the reign of Kalu Muhammad and that the young boy was brought up as a Muslim while his widowed mother married a Maldivian chief. Later, Adiri Adiri had killed his half brother and fled to Goa and (later) returned as commander of a Portuguese expedition. Sultan Ali was killed in the fighting and Adiri Adiri

<sup>73</sup> *Documenta Indica*, ed. Josef Wicki, Roma: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1949, II, pp. 286, 292.

<sup>74</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, I p. 245. The *Tarikh Islam Diba Mahall* suggests that he was inclined towards Christianity even before he left Male: "After 2 years and 5 months he openly displayed to the people what he had secretly entertained regarding his apostasy changing his religion [and] going to Cochin, to the foreign despicable Christians." However, it is possible that Hasan's conversion followed his exile because there is no report of Christian missionaries in the Maldivian Islands.

<sup>75</sup> Hasan Taj al-Din, *Tarikh Islam Diba Mahall*.

<sup>76</sup> Bell, *The Maldivian Islands*, p. 26.

established himself in power for the next fifteen years and ruled on behalf of Hasan IX (D. Manoel). Portuguese accounts record that the fleet itself was commanded by D. Manuel da Silveira de Araujo. De Araujo returned with the fleet after the victory and was rewarded by D. Manoel with three voyages to the Maldives.<sup>77</sup>

The *Tarikh* records this period as one of Portuguese oppression: "They wrought havoc on land and sea by their shedding of life, seizing of property, and their widespread adulterous conduct with Muslim women, both unmarried and married, and all the Muslims were subject to their insults." Resistance arose after a while and was led by Khatib Muhammad, his two brothers and Ali and Hasan, two brothers who had just returned from Mecca. The five leaders organized hit and run attacks from an inaccessible base in the Maluku atoll and although one of Muhammad's brothers was killed, the other four gradually gained control over all of the outlying atolls. Eventually they also received assistance from the Ali Raja of Cannanore.<sup>78</sup> The *Tarikh* gives a dramatic story of the final attack on Male, on the day before all Muslims were to be forcibly converted:

"They set out [together] from the port of Cannanore and arrived near Male just before the night on which the Nasranis decided to summon the Muslims of Male on the following day to [embrace] their Christian religion and order them to prostrate themselves with them before the idol. Whosoever refused to do so would be killed. . . [The Muslims] met together in the house of the judge, namely, Qadi Abu Bakr, son of Qadi D-nn-k-r-l, son of Qadi Sharaf al-Din Isma'il al-Famdar, son of Ibrahim, and agreed that they would not apostasize from their Islamic faith and that they would refuse to go to [the Christians] if they were bidden to prostrate themselves before the idol. If, however, they came to them summoning them by force, [then] they would fight as Muslims until they were killed. They got ready what they could in the way of swords, lances, knives, staves and darts. Then they vowed that they would make a *Mawlad* (Celebration of the Birthday of Prophet Muhammad) for the Prophet, upon whom be blessings and greetings, every year in the enclosure of the tomb of Sheik Yusuf Shams al-Din al-Tabrizi, if Khatib Muhammad al-Utimi and his men arrived before the dawn [prayer] of this night to come to their aid and to the aid of the religion of God, [which is] Islam. Whereupon they recited the first chapter (*sura*) of the Qu'ran and prayed to God the All-Hearing and the

<sup>77</sup> *Archivo Portuguez Oriental*, V, pp. 455-6.

<sup>78</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, 1, pp. 247-8. Pyrard's version of the revolt states that the final assault was with the aid of a Malabar force but that after the victory the Maldivians turned on the Malabars and destroyed them. The *Tarikh* suggests that the Malabaris arrived late (after the victory was won).



Omniscient that He would keep them fast to His true religion and to the community of His beloved Prophet.

Then that night, after two-thirds of it had passed, there arrived at the port of Mahal the *gharbs* of Khatib Muhammad and his men. They descended at Mahal while the unbelievers were heedless and distracted wandering around in their drunkenness. They looked around [the town] until they drew near to the courtyard of the house of their [the Christians'] commander, where they saw him sitting on his chair in front of the reception room. Around him in candlelight were standing some of his retainers. Khatib Muhammad al-Akbar fired at him with his musket and hit him with a bullet. [The commander] fired with his musket in the direction of the bullet [which had hit] him and then fell to the ground. The Khatib moved a little from the spot where he had fired to behind a coconut palm and thus escaped from the unbeliever's bullet, [which had hit] the front of the tree. [The commander's] men, the unbelievers, came outside with their muskets and fired at the spot where the Muslims were, who in turn returned the fire.

The unbelievers were hit but could not hit [their target]. The two sides then joined together in combat) and the weapons of the Muslims struck the bodies [of the Christians], whereas God protected the bodies of his slaves from their weapons. . . .So their power came to an end and their rule passed from the Maldives and their sovereignty died out and faded away.”

The leader of the revolt became ruler and was known as Muhammad Bodu Takurufanu (r. 1573-1585). The *Tarikh* records that he was the first Maldivian ruler to form a standing military force with regular allowances.<sup>79</sup> While the *Tarikh* records the campaign as a final victory, Pyrard's early seventeenth century account suggests that the Portuguese sent more forces to regain the Maldives and that the struggle went on for three years more. In the end, there was an agreement in 1576 by which the Maldivians acknowledged the right of Hasan IX to collect specified revenues (as tribute) through his factor in the Maldives. Maldivian vessels agreed to apply for Portuguese *cartazes* in order to trade and secured complete freedom from interference in internal affairs. The Maldivian ruler, (Muhammad Bodu Takurufanu) also agreed not to use the title of Sultan. There is no record of this agreement in Portuguese archives but in a letter of King Phillip of Portugal dated January 10, 1587 there is reference to the payment of 500 *bahars* of coir by Hasan to the Portuguese as tribute. If Pyrard is correct in that Hasan handed over a third of his revenues as

---

<sup>79</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, 1, pp. 215-7. Pyrard reports that by the seventeenth century the king's guard consisted of 600 men.

tribute to the Portuguese, his revenues would have been 1,500 *bahars* of coir.<sup>80</sup> Thus the mid-sixteenth century crisis in the Maldives was resolved with Portuguese commercial ascendancy but with the Maldivian Islands essentially retaining their political autonomy and their religion.

The growing significance of the religious factor and the increased readiness to acquire territory were also seen in Portuguese relations with Sri Lanka. With respect to the kingdom of Kotte, the key factor was the interdependence of king Bhuvanekabahu and the Portuguese in a context when each was trying to use the other. The Portuguese were concerned about the succession to the aging chief king of Kotte. Bhuvanekabahu did not have a legitimate son and thus his brother, Mayadunne, was the strongest claimant to the throne. Both the Portuguese and the local court officials identified with Bhuvanekabahu viewed this prospect with some dismay. Thus, when Bhuvanekabahu's daughter gave birth to a son in 1538, there soon began an effort to designate this infant as heir apparent.<sup>81</sup> This step had the support of the Portuguese Viceroy D. Estevão da Gama who wrote to King João III on November 11, 1539 that "everything must be done to prevent it being his brother, who for a long time has been ill-disposed towards Your Highness and your people and it is possible that the grandson should be the one to succeed him. . ."<sup>82</sup> Bhuvanekabahu was persuaded to send, in 1541, two envoys with a gold statue of his infant grandson to Portugal to gain formal support for this plan from the ruler of Portugal. The request of the Kotte envoys for missionaries and a strong hint, if not a promise, that the ruler himself would convert, was received with great favour and, the envoys returned with their mission successfully accomplished.<sup>83</sup>

However, problems arose for Bhuvanekabahu when four Franciscan missionaries arrived in 1545. Led by Friar João de Villa do Conde they represented the aggressive face of the Counter-Reformation in Europe and

<sup>80</sup> Pyrard, *Voyage to the East*, II, pp. 498-502.

<sup>81</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of Sitawaka,' 62-71.

<sup>82</sup> *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Chronologico*, 1-9-99. The English translation is from *Ceylon and Portugal: Kings and Christians, 1539-1552*, ed. P. E. Pieris and M. A. Hedwig Fitzler, Leipzig: Verlag der Asia Major, 1927, pp. 47-8.

<sup>83</sup> Documents of the 1540s suggest that King Bhuvanekabahu himself might not have authorized this. See *Arquivo Nacional do Torre do Tombo, Collecção de S. Lourenço III ff 345-7*. Letter of King Bhuvanekabahu to the Viceroy of India, Kotte, 12 November 1545. This Portuguese document was published *Ceylon sur Zeit des Königs Bhuvaneka Bahu und Franz Xavers, 1539-1552*, ed. G. Schurhammer and E. A. Voretzsch, Leipzig: Verlag der Asia Major, 1928, pp. 194-8 and in English in *Ceylon and Portugal*, pp. 86-90 *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period, Vol. I*, ed. V. Perniola, Dehiwala: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1989, pp. 94-8.

insisted on the king's conversion.<sup>84</sup> The Viceroy, D. João de Castro counselled caution<sup>85</sup> but by now there was a Portuguese community in Colombo that had also become hostile to and often contemptuous of the authority of Bhuvanekabahu.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Bhuvanekabahu found his subjects deserting in large numbers and his brother gaining power every year. Portuguese adventurers were seen aiding the ruler of Kandy to throw off the yoke of Kotte's suzerainty. He tried various tactics to keep in power. An alliance was forged with Mayadunne in 1546-8 to bring Kandy to heel. When Mayadunne subsequently, tried to wean the Portuguese away from the Kotte alliance, Bhuvanekabahu sent his own envoys to Goa and the king had to walk a tightrope between refusing personal conversion and trying to accommodate the aggressive Christian missionaries.<sup>87</sup>

The Portuguese state had its own dilemmas. Here was a monarch whom faithfully paid tribute and indeed, had given several loans to the Portuguese state in India. This was why the Portuguese in early 1550 supported Bhuvanekabahu once more, when Mayadunne attacked him.<sup>88</sup> Unless they propped up Bhuvanekabahu's power Kotte would fall to the less reliable Mayadunne. On the other hand, both the Franciscans and the increasingly influential settlers were campaigning for his removal. When in 1550, a Portuguese expeditionary force, marching to Kandy against the advise of Bhuvanekabahu met with disaster, it was Bhuvanekabahu who was blamed. Thus it was in the midst of a great deal of mutual recrimination that the new Portuguese viceroy D. Afonso de Noronha arrived in Colombo on 17 October 1550 due to an error in navigation. Being influenced by critical reports by his nephews and Friar João de Villa do Conde the viceroy spoke strongly to the king who was so angered that he ordered the viceroy out of his kingdom. De Noronha left "keeping this insult in mind to avenge it for a better occasion."<sup>89</sup> Five months later king Bhuvanekabahu was dead, shot by a slave left behind by

<sup>84</sup> See documents published in *Ceylon sur Zeit des Königs Bhuvaneka Bahu und Franz Xavers, 1539-1552*, ed. G. Schurhammer and E. A. Voretzsch, Leipzig: Verlag der Asia Major, 1928, pp. 194-8, 223-5, 399-402 and English translations in *Ceylon and Portugal*, pp. 86-90, 110-112, 167-170 and *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese Period, Vol. 1 1505-1565*, edited by V. Perniola, Dehiwala, 1989, pp. 94-8, 117-119, 181-185.

<sup>85</sup> *Ceylon sur Zeit*, pp. 406-415, and an English translation in *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese Period, Vol. 1*, pp. 191-5.

<sup>86</sup> *Ceylon sur Zeit*, pp. 494-7, 520-523, 524-525 and an English translation in *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese Period, Vol. 1*, pp. 238-40, 248-251, 252-253.

<sup>87</sup> *Ceylon sur Zeit*, pp. 559-568 and English translations in *Ceylon and Portugal*, pp. 245-254 and *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese Period, Vol. 1*, pp. 272-280.

<sup>88</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of Sitawaka,' pp. 80-81.

<sup>89</sup> Fernão de Queyroz., *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, trans., S. G. Perera, Colombo, 1930, pp. 238-240.

the viceroy. His grandson, educated by Portuguese, perhaps seen as a more pliant tool was set up as king of Kotte. Conversion to Christianity boomed with eight churches and 25,000 converts claimed by Franciscan missionaries in the early 1550s. When Vidiye Bandara, Bhyuvanekabahu's son-in-law revolted, the Portuguese were able to defeat him by making an opportunistic alliance with Mayadunne purchased with the cession of a large extent of the territory of Kotte.<sup>90</sup> By 1556, churches were rebuilt and conversion begun again. A new fort was built at Colombo and at last in 1557, Bhuvanekabahu's grandson publicly accepted Christianity and took the name of D. João.<sup>91</sup> The Portuguese seemed to have gained political dominance and religious influence over Kotte.

Portuguese successes in Sri Lanka in the 1550s were not confined to Kotte. The highland kingdom of Kandy had sought for years to shake off the dominance of Kotte and in the 1540s its ruler had tried to gain Portuguese aid for his plans by offering to be converted to Christianity. Portuguese assistance arrived in driplets and the king of Kandy was forced to submit to Kotte in 1548 but there arose an internal struggle between the king and one of his sons, Karaliyadde Bandara. In 1551, Karaliyadde Bandara revolted against his father, seized power and converted to Christianity. We do not know exactly when he officially announced his conversion but he had offered to convert as early as the late 1540s. Thus, by the early 1560s, the Portuguese had a second kingdom with a Christian ruler.<sup>92</sup>

Portuguese triumphs in the sixth decade of the century in Sri Lanka also extended to the northern kingdom of Jaffna. The kingdom of Jaffna was a small kingdom with limited resources. Seventeenth century evidence suggests that the Jaffna ruler's income was, at best, one fourth that of the Kotte king.<sup>93</sup> Both Travancore and Vijayanagara seem to have claimed overlordship over Jaffna at this time though the evidence on this is fragmentary.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, in terms of commanding the waterway through the Palk Strait between the eastern and

<sup>90</sup> The new king and his Portuguese Protectors seem to have conceded all but the coastal belt south of Colombo. Ibid. pp. 318-319.

<sup>91</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of Sitawaka,' pp. 81-87.

<sup>92</sup> T. B. H. Abeysinghe, "The Kingdom of Kandy: Foundations and Foreign Relations to 1638," *University of Peradeniya, History of Sri Lanka*, Vol. II, ed. by K. M. de Silva, Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 1995, pp.144-145. See also documents in *Ceylon sur Zeit*, pp.160-162, 199-201,362-381, 403, 420-434 and the English translation in *The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka. The Portuguese Period, Vol. 1*, pp. 67-9, 98-100, 158-76, 187-188, 199-213.

<sup>93</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'Sri Lanka in the Early Sixteenth Century: Economic and Social Conditions,' *University of Peradeniya, History of Sri Lanka*, Vol. II, ed. by K. M. de Silva, Peradeniya: University of Peradeniya, 1995, p. 60.

<sup>94</sup> C. R. de Silva, and S. Pathmanathan., 'The Kingdom of Jaffna,' Ibid. p. 106.

western coasts of South India, Jaffna was strategically located. Moreover, Jaffna was located close to the pearl fishery on the Gulf of Mannar, at this time, one of the two major pearl fisheries of the world. Çankili I (1619-60), ruler of Jaffna, had laid claims to all wrecks on his coast. In August 1543, a Portuguese fleet led by Governor Martim Affonso de Mello came to Jaffna and demanded compensation for the seizure of cargoes of Portuguese vessels. Çankili settled with the Portuguese by promising to pay compensation and agreeing to pay an annual tribute of two elephants and 5000 *pardãos*. However, he began to perceive the Portuguese as a threat to his power. *Parava* converts to Christianity had begun to regard the king of Portugal rather than the local ruler as their sovereign. Thus, when some of his *parava* subjects in Mannar converted to Christianity, he marched to Mannar in 1544 and put to death all those who refused to give up the new religion.

Missionaries agitated for an expedition against Çankili but he continued to hand over what was recovered from Portuguese ships wrecked on his shores and thus nothing was done. By 1558, however, the situation changed. The *parava* Christians in India had come under increasing attack from Hindu rulers and the fortification of Punnaikayal, the new Portuguese headquarters there, had not proved to be a solution. The new Portuguese Viceroy of India, Dom Constantino de Bragança, had come with instructions to conquer Jaffna and to settle the *parava* Christians there.<sup>95</sup>

Çankili had few supporters among the Portuguese. The Jesuit missionaries remembered his actions of 1544. He had also given refuge to Vidiye Bandara in 1556 after he had fled to Jaffna following his defeat at the hands of the combined forces of Sitawaka and the Portuguese. The Viceroy's fleet reached Jaffna in October 1560. The forces of Jaffna resisted, with the lead taken by the crown prince according to the Portuguese account and the king himself according to the *Yalpana Vaipava Malai*.<sup>96</sup> In the end however, Çankili, though defeated was able to retreat from the Jaffna peninsula and the Portuguese Viceroy, running out of time and supplies agreed to a peace treaty under which the Jaffna ruler retained his kingdom but ceded the coast and the islands to the Portuguese, paid an indemnity, promised to pay tribute of 10 elephants a year and handed over the treasures left by Vidiye Bandara. Conversion was to be permitted but converts were to continue to pay taxes to

---

<sup>95</sup> The expedition became more urgent when in August 1560 the Portuguese fort at Punnaikayal fell to attacks by hostile local forces.

<sup>96</sup> See [Matakal Mayilvakanap Pulavar] *The Yalpana-vaipava-malai, or, The History of the Kingdom of Jaffna*, translated from the Tamil with an appendix and a glossary by C. Brito. New Delhi, 1999 and C. R de Silva, and S. Pathmanathan., 'The Kingdom of Jaffna,' pp. 109-112.

the ruler of Jaffna. Çankili's son, the crown prince, was handed over as one of the hostages.

Thus, in the mid sixteenth century, like in the Maldives, the Portuguese seemed to have obtained a political and military footing in parts of Sri Lanka. But their positions began to crumble quickly. Reverses came quickly in Jaffna. The Portuguese, short of supplies, began slaughtering cows for food and the Śaivites of Jaffna to whom the cow was sacred, were outraged. The people of Jaffna found that those who were reluctant to convert were thrown in prison and that the Portuguese violated the local women. An effort by a missionary to demolish a Hindu temple led to an uprising. The Viceroy was forced to retreat and reluctantly sailed off to the island of Mannar where he built a fort in 1560. The expedition was thus a failure in terms of the Portuguese attempt to conquer and Christianize Jaffna.

Difficulties began even earlier in Kotte. The fragile military alliance with Mayadunne, born of common necessity ended in November 1557 when that ruler attacked the Portuguese. By 1559, the Portuguese and their client ruler were confined to a small area around the cities of Colombo and Kotte. Two years later they were defeated in a pitched battle at Mulleriyawa and in 1565, they abandoned Kotte city. From then on, Mayadunne was to all intents and purposes ruler of Kotte and the Portuguese were confined to holding Colombo fort and raiding the coast for the next twenty-five years. During this period they were confronted with a Sitawaka army that had firearms and a miniature Sitawaka fleet.<sup>97</sup>

Portuguese influence in the highland kingdom of Kandy had better fortune with the Christian king, Karaliyadde Bandara holding on to power in the 1560s and 1570s and occasionally helping to divert the attention of Mayadunne of Sitawaka from his assaults on Colombo. In 1582, however, Mayadunne's forces under his son, Rajasinha conquered Kandy and Karaliyadde was driven to exile.<sup>98</sup>

Eventually, the mid sixteenth century Portuguese effort to conquer and convert Sri Lanka failed. On the other hand, unlike in the Maldives, where all they could hold on to after 1576 was a tribute payment, in Sri Lanka, they continued to possess forts in Colombo and Mannar. In time, Mannar became an important center of Portuguese power in the area and the administrative center of the pearl fishery. It was also a center of Christian missionary activity and a base from which the Portuguese tried to expand their influence within the

---

<sup>97</sup> C. R. de Silva, 'The Rise and Fall of Sitawaka,' pp. 88-101.

<sup>98</sup> T. B. H. Abeysinghe, 'The Kingdom of Kandy,' p. 145.

kingdom of Jaffna. By 1570, a Portuguese nominee was installed on the throne of Jaffna and at least from 1582, the ruler of Jaffna paid regular tribute to the Portuguese and Portuguese influence expanded to Trincomalee. The Portuguese in Colombo were more restricted but when the kingdom of Sitawaka weakened in the 1590s, Colombo would prove to be the base from which the Portuguese conquered the southwestern plains of Sri Lanka.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion

A survey of the Portuguese interactions with Maldives and Sri Lanka makes it abundantly clear that these interactions can be best understood in terms of a complex set of political and commercial relationships that predated their arrival in the East. Local rulers and princes adjusted to the arrival of the new power and tried to use the Portuguese to their advantage. They swiftly recognized the increased emphasis that the Portuguese placed on Christian conversions in the mid-century. The Portuguese, at the outset, used their sea power to assert claims of suzerainty largely to secure tribute and commercial advantages. By mid-century, there was a greater readiness to seek political conquests both in the Maldives and in Sri Lanka but Portuguese resources proved inadequate to achieve these ambitions. In the end, they poured more resources into their Sri Lankan venture. That, together with their success in developing a group of Christian converts among Buddhists and Śaivites (something they failed to do among the Muslims in the Maldivian Islands) proved to be key factors in their relative (though limited) success in Sri Lanka.<sup>100</sup>

CHANDRA R. DE SILVA

---

<sup>99</sup> See T. B. H. Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Regimentos on Sri Lanka*, Colombo: Department of National Archives, [n.d.] passim.

<sup>100</sup> I am grateful for comments by K. W. Goonewardena on earlier drafts of this paper.