For Hannah
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Introduction:

Studying the Portuguese in South Asia and Beyond

This book results from a series of articles and book chapters published between 2005 and 2010. Some have been widely available in journals, some were printed with errors, and some have been virtually impossible to find from the moment of their publication. Only one piece – chapter 5 – is reproduced (almost) in its original state. All others have been revised, expanded, or entirely rewritten to fit the purpose of this volume: to provide an overarching panorama of early Portuguese activities in Sri Lanka and South India based on case studies in diplomatic, political, urban and economic history. The emphasis is on new questions emerging from old materials. Some of the chapters reach out – if timidly – to include Dutch and English materials for what may some day become a comparative history of European expansion in South Asia.

The past two decades have seen the publication of important overview works on the Portuguese Empire. Luís Filipe Thomaz, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Malyn Newitt and Anthony Disney have published valuable general histories complementing the standard works of Charles Boxer and Jaime Cortesão. Kirti Chaudhuri, Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Curto have endeavoured to further enrich the panorama with collective projects.¹ The present assemblage, in contrast, consists of fragmentary, geographically limited incursions into the chosen subject matters. Together these mosaic stones highlight a set of issues emerging as new research questions in Portuguese expansion history. For whilst the 1970s to 1990s produced an abundance of pioneering studies combining the history of Portuguese expansion with the regional histories of various areas of Maritime Asia, the recent past has seen a contraction and, even more disappointingly, a return to imperial history in the traditional sense.

Introduction

We now have, on the one hand, practitioners of a critical cross-cultural positivism standing in the Luso-Indianist tradition established in the 1970s by Jean Aubin and Geneviève Bouchon, first materialized in the extraordinary historical journal *Mare Luso-Indicum*, and then taken up by Luis Filipe Thomaz, Dejanirah Couto and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. This tradition has, in one way or another, informed the scholarship of Catarina Santos, Frederico Antunes, Jorge Flores, Jorge Alves, José Tavim, Manuel Lobato, Maria Ana Guedes and Paulo Pinto, among others, but is finding few younger followers. In some proximity to this school, Ines Županov and Ângela Barreto Xavier have produced crucial works on Catholic missions and conversions in South India. Architectural, urban and art historians including Paulo Varela Gomes and Hélder Carita have expanded the field with innovative studies into Luso-Indian urbanism and visual culture. At the other end of the spectrum, however, we witness the reappearance of methodologically conservative studies exclusively concerned with the internal logics of Portuguese families, networks and institutions. Whilst biographical as such was originally reclaimed as a subfield of Luso-Asian history by Aubin, Thomaz and Subrahmanyam, what we see today is a return to genealogical and prosopographical research as a goal in itself. This historiography is often centred on the study of nobles and, by extension, sometimes slips into a mode where the intricacies of cross-cultural interaction, the inherent violence of expansion and the drama of imperial competition can – although they do not necessarily have to – get overlooked.

The past fifteen years have also produced some vehement criticism directed against both Luso-Asianist and traditional imperial historiography. It has been argued by Francisco Bethencourt and Diogo Curto that most scholars in the field follow an ultimately reactionary agenda which needs to be overthrown. Yet for various reasons – including perhaps the relative unfamiliarity of these authors with Luso-Asian as opposed to Luso-Atlantic materials – the criticism has remained moderately productive in practice. At the end of the day, we are left with a string of charges from which few substantial conclusions have emerged to improve our understanding of the past. The shallowness of what

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2 For all these authors, see references in the following chapters and in the final bibliography.
3 See for example Costa and Rodrigues, *A Alta Nobreza e a Fundação do Estado da Índia* and Pelúcia, *Martim Afonso de Sousa e a sua Linhagem*.
4 With regard to the Portuguese presence in India, Bethencourt and Curto have argued that it was driven by greed and characterized by religious fanaticism, imperial but not messianic, extremely violent and yet ultimately insignificant on the wider political stage of South Asian politics during the early modern period. A particularly muddled critique of Luso-Indianist historiography appears in Bethencourt and Curto, “Introduction”, in *Portuguese*
could have been, around the turn of the millennium, a fundamental debate about the nature of Portuguese imperialism and the pitfalls of imperial historiography marks a wider collective failure in this regard. Fourteen years into the 21st century, we are yet to have a fruitful discussion about the role of Portuguese imperialism in the making of early modernity.\footnote{Oceanic Expansion, pp. 12–14. A more focused formulation appears in Curto, “Portuguese Navigations”.}

Antagonisms within the historiography of Portuguese expansion have regularly involved a rather reductive opposition between the heuristics of materialism and idealism. Greed and profit on the one hand have been invoked to disprove the importance of honour and religion on the other – and vice-versa. It comes as no surprise that conservative historians have tended to emphasize the role of religion in Portuguese expansion. Thomaz’s thesis about ManueLINE messianism can be said to stand in this tradition – though reducing it to such a stance would be deeply incorrect. On the other hand, a number of historians ultimately drawing their inspiration from the critique of imperial expansion formulated in the nineteenth century by the Republican historians Alexandre Herculano and Oliveira Martins have since the early twentieth century sought to prove – and, implicitly or explicitly, criticize – the importance of profit-making for all protagonists of Portuguese expansion, including the high nobility and the Crown. This notionally progressive thesis was developed by the philosopher and historian António Sérgio in the 1920s, fleshed out by Braudel’s disciple Vitorino Magalhães Godinho in the 1950s, and rightly emphasized in the Portuguese public sphere after the 1974 revolution.

Yet not only is its message problematic per se as it slips very easily into a rather uncanny proximity to the anti-expansionist, ruralist traditionalism that it is meant to critique in the first place. It would also be profoundly inaccurate to reduce the Luso-Indianist historiography in the wake of Aubin, against which Bethencourt and Curto voice their concerns, to a mysticizing, reactionary stance against which rational historians cannot but unite. Thomaz’s scholarship stands out precisely because it combines the emphasis on royal authority, millenaristic imperial ideology and individual agency, on the one hand, with the recognition of a profound internal incoherence of Portuguese society, violent social struggles at the heart of the expansionist process, and a complex political economy at

\footnote{The first of these disputes occurred in Anais de História de Além-Mar, 1 and 2 (2000–2001) triggered by a devastating critical review written by Oliveira e Costa on Bethencourt and Chaudhuri’s História da Expansão Portuguesa. The second polemic, closely connected to the first, opposed Bethencourt to Subrahmanyan, who concluded it with an article fittingly titled “Ceci n’est pas un débat...” (2002). In both instances, the wider community failed to get involved in any meaningful way.}
the transition from the medieval to the early modern world, on the other. By introducing the analytical categories of “militarism” versus “commercialism”, Thomaz has been able to engage with the internal contradictions of the Portuguese presence in Asia at an unprecedented level of complexity. It is now difficult to ignore the dialectics of centripetal versus centrifugal forces in the Estado. Of course we also know today that hardly anyone was a pure commercialist or militarist in the early sixteenth century. These are ideal types, and in practice people moved along a continuum of possible attitudes, changing and adapting their positions with regard to free trade or Crown protectionism according to their circumstances. But overall such analytical categories have furthered our understanding of the dynamics of sixteenth-century imperial expansion and allowed the notions of ideology and imagination to take their place in the picture as genuinely political artefacts.

As things stand at present it seems rather vain to continue discussing whether Portuguese expansion was fundamentally militaristic or mercantile, whether it was hegemonic or accommodative, violent or pacific, and what role religion played in it as opposed to other values. Such questions have fraught not only the historiography of the Portuguese Empire, but also comparative approaches to Portuguese and Dutch expansion. While some historians remain busy debating timeworn dogmas, so much work has gone into Portuguese expansion history in Asia that the internal diversity of the system can by now barely be disputed. Without quite taking consciously notice of it, Portuguese expansion history has gone through its own “Cambridge moment”, and a growing number of scholars now acknowledge that it is rather useless to search for an overarching rationale, a single hegemonic principle or a clearly formulated, grand imperial strategy inherent to the empire as a whole without taking into account the multiple logics of interaction on the ground and paying attention to the articulations between Portuguese imperialism and Asian politics.

The Portuguese Estado in Asia was in many ways an improvising empire, the growth of which cannot be explained without taking into account a great variety of local processes entertaining complex relations with the global. This is in no contradiction with the fact that many agents of the Estado attempted to formulate larger imperial discourses on top of those brittle foundations. Nor is it to say that the empire was a bland and ultimately benevolent body of which we should not remain fiercely critical. The Portuguese Estado did, as empires gen-

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6 For a thorough overview and further readings see Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, pp. 1–206. On the fundamental ambiguities of the Portuguese system, also see Thomaz and Bouchon, Voyage, pp. 31–48 and Thomaz, “Factions, interests and messianism”.

7 See, above all, the schematic opposition between Catholic (redistributive) and Protestant (profit-oriented and productive) expansionism in Steensgaard (cf. chapter 6, note 111).
erally do, spread violently repressive practices and institutions, and it had an often profoundly disruptive effect on societies that it interacted with. It is my conviction, however, that acknowledging the complexity of Portuguese expansion can, given all the attention that Portuguese expansion history has received in South Asia in recent years, contribute precisely to a re-politicization of our efforts as historians. Accepting the fissiparousness of the Portuguese Empire allows us to observe the complexity of the interface between “West” and “East” in the sixteenth century and understand the role played by local elites in the making of global power. There is little in the story to make us cheerful, but much to make us think about the interdependence between European expansion and Asian politics – which is what this book is all about.

Faced with the current panorama, the present volume explores niches from which Luso-Asian history may be invigorated. Each of the chapters represents an attempt at innovating without throwing overboard what is most valuable in the existing historiography. Chapter 2 calls for an integrated study of diplomacy as a field of analysis in its own right, standing not on the margins, but at the heart of Portuguese expansion history. This is now very much in line with the emerging new diplomatic history of early modern Europe, but it also raises questions about the workings of imperial diplomacy in situations of transcontinental expansion and cross-cultural contact. Chapter 3 experiments with the possibilities of a connected approach in the specific context of Luso-Lankan relations. It establishes a net of cross-references between Portuguese and Sri Lankan politics and then brings Habsburg Spain into the picture to highlight the complexities of the passage from commerce to conquest – again, an important issue that calls for similar studies in other contexts. Chapter 4 argues for the introduction of the study of cartographical materials into a field traditionally dominated by the use of written sources. It is rather surprising that questions regarding spatial imagination, cognitive mapping and metageography are rarely addressed by the historians of an empire with such an extraordinary configuration and such an intensely transformative approach to space and the geographical imagination as the Portuguese.

Chapter 5 proposes a crossover of Sri Lankan, Portuguese and Spanish history under Philip II and Philip III to revive the discussion on the role of political dialogue in the transition of Asian elites to colonial rule. It connects Portugal’s integration into the Catholic Monarchy with Sri Lanka’s integration into the Portuguese Empire to underline how local negotiations were at the heart of global power building. Chapter 6 shows the need for a detailed comparative history of urban spaces as a precondition for a better understanding of the commonalities and idiosyncrasies of Portuguese and Dutch colonialism in South Asia, and for an evaluation of the cosmopolitan potential of European expa-
sion in connection with the urban cultures of Maritime Asia. Finally, chapter 7 proposes, perhaps in a lighter tone than the others, an integrated study of the social and cultural history of a single, rather likeable commodity – elephants. It combines a minority of quantitative and a majority of qualitative data taken from Portuguese, Dutch, English and German sources into a narrative that spans the entire early modern era and may help to bridge the gap between periods for which serial data is available, and others for which it is not.

It is my hope that, together, these admittedly imperfect pieces of work will prove inspiring to others. None of what I propose is radically new, nor exclusively mine, nor in absolute contradiction with what most of my colleagues do, including those who I may have criticized unjustly further above. As a collection of thoughts and suggestions, this book is intended to stimulate debate in a field that, taken as seriously as it deserves, has the potential to stand at the centre of a new global historiography flowering across the continents, reflecting and participating in our present, globalized condition.
Negotiating Empire:
Portuguese Diplomacy in Asia in the Sixteenth Century

To understand how the Portuguese went from a handful of trading posts on the shores of the Arabian Sea to dominating global maritime trade, creating a transcontinental imperial apparatus, conquering (some) lands and converting substantial populations to Catholicism, it is crucial to take into account their negotiative capabilities.¹ This is not to say that post-reconquista militarism, Catholic universalism and trade capitalism did not stand at the heart of the Portuguese expansionist process. But in order for such hegemonic impulses to be articulated with the political realities of other societies and naval power to be transformed into a sustainable presence on the lands, the Portuguese needed to negotiate. Studying diplomacy thus gives us an angle from which the interactions with Asian societies appear most vivid, and the pitfall of Eurocentrism may – if avoidable at all – be steered away from most effectively.²

This is, then, the wider context in which the Portuguese presence in South India and Sri Lanka becomes intelligible. Scattered over thousands of miles of African and Asian coastline, the Portuguese Empire in the East took on a peculiar shape when compared to the Spanish Empire in the New World. As Rodrigo de Aganduru Móriz, a Basque Augustinian writing in the Philippines in the early seventeenth century put it, “the King our Lord does not possess more than twenty leagues of land in the whole of Asia from Macao to the Cape of Good Hope”.³ In fact, Portugal was a small country with a population of little more than a million, its interests dispersed from Brazil to Japan, and its military ca-

¹ This chapter is a substantially revised version of “Portuguese Diplomacy in Asia: a Preliminary overview” (2005). Permission kindly granted by Itinerario.

² Diplomacy is here taken in the broadest sense of the word, encompassing all negotiative activities between the Portuguese Crown or its officials on the one hand, and any sovereigns or rulers described by the former as “lords”, “princes”, “kings”, “emperors” or “monarchs” on the other.

³ Rodrigo de Aganduru Móriz, Historia general de las Islas Occidentales a la Asia adyacentes, quoted in Valladares, Castilla y Portugal, pp. 6–7.
pabilities in distant waters perennially overstretched. It comes as no surprise that the Portuguese power structures in Asia were more reliant on diplomacy than on conquest. Without an understanding of the mechanisms of Portuguese diplomacy in Asia, the tenacious presence of this nation in South India and Sri Lanka cannot be satisfactorily explained. Although the conquest (conquista) of everything to the East of the line of Tordesillas was perceived as a theoretical right of the Portuguese Crown from the onset, in practice most relations with African and Asian polities rested on a complex set of negotiated bonds of “friendship” (amizade) or “vassalage” (vassalagem). It was on the grounds of diplomatically established arrangements that the Portuguese maintained their official presence in the southernmost parts of India for over a century and a half (the conquest of Goa in 1510 constituted an exception, not the rule). It was also on this type of compromise that they based their activities in Sri Lanka for almost an entire century before embarking on the conquest of the island in the 1590s.

Portuguese diplomacy in the East is an important, but also a strangely underrated subject of study. It is no doubt crucial for our understanding of transcontinental power relations and political interactions in the early modern period. It is documented by a large number of sources including chronicles, geographical works, travel books, letters and reports. Yet it has never been fully valued as an autonomous topic by historians. Whilst almost every monograph on the Portuguese in Asia deals with diplomatic events as a part of the political history of the Estado and its “shadow” satellites, only very rarely are the negotiations as such the subject of enquiry.4 The principal exception to this rule is António Vasconcelos de Saldanha’s ominously titled book Iustum Imperium (1997), which provides a study not so much of negotiative culture but at least of the legal concepts upon which early modern Portuguese imperial policies in

4 Abundant data on diplomatic activities in specific geographic contexts can be found in Flores, Os Portugueses e o Mar and Hindustão e Firangustão; Santos, Goa é a chave; Guedes, Interferência e integração; Pinto, Portugueses e Malaios; Alves, O Domínio do Norte de Samatra; “Natureza do primeiro ciclo”; Guedes, Interferência e integração; Flores, Os Portugueses e o Síão; Costa, A descoberta da civilização japonesa and “A rivalidade luso-espanhola”. There is a particularly rich tradition of diplomatic history in the study of Luso-Persian relations: Gulbenkian, L’ambassade en Perse; Das relações de Portugal; “As embaixadas e as missões”; Smith, The first age of the Portuguese embassies (case studies concerning embassies in Persia and South Asia); Resende, “Ambassadors, Adventurers, Travelers”; and several works by Aubin and Couto. Yet from all this material no coherent engagement with diplomacy as such has emerged. See however more recently Afzal, Indo-Portuguese Diplomacy and Subrahmanyam, Courtly Encounters.
Asia, including diplomacy, rested. Unfortunately, Saldanha’s work is so attached to the – admittedly fascinating – legal coherence it exhumes from the vast archives of Portuguese expansion that one is left with the impression that imperial nostalgia has crept into the picture. Certainly no attention has been paid to the social, cultural and economic impact of the imperial enterprise or to the way legal formalism legitimized atrocities in practice. Such a stance, perhaps understandable in Portugal in the mid-1990s, has become definitely untenable after the polemics surrounding the fifth centenaries of Vasco da Gama’s arrival in India (1998) and of Lourenço de Almeida’s arrival in Sri Lanka (2005). Portuguese expansion history today can simply not afford it any more to turn a blind eye on the violence associated with diplomacy, however coherent and self-contained early modern Iberian universalism may seem.

A balanced, constructively critical approach to the history of Portuguese-Asian diplomacy would be of great significance for the re-evaluation of early European imperialism in Asia. Portuguese expansion in the sixteenth century was in many ways a turning point in Asian and World History, but in a far more complex and often disconcerting manner than is frequently assumed. It rested upon complicated combinations of violence and negotiation, push and pull factors, imperial impulses and improvisation. This complexity is still often not acknowledged by historians, particularly in countries where the imprint left by British scholarship dating back to times of Anglo-Portuguese colonial rivalry retains influence under the surface. The Black Legend of Iberian imperialism, almost as old as the Portuguese Empire itself, survives today in the work of many scholars and in public discourses emphasizing the inherent irrationality of Catholic imperialism. It is thus between paternalistic Anglo-Protestant simplifications on the one hand and outdated Pan-Hispanic and Luso-Tropical manifestations of nostalgia on the other that imperial historians today need to find their ways.

5 Saldanha, Justum Imperium. The title is inspired by Serafim de Freitas’ seventeenth-century work Do Justo Império Asiático Português. Some older studies standing in the tradition of legal and diplomatic history (such as Costa, História das Relações) carry similarly grand titles, but do not deliver what they promise. See Viterbo, “Relações de Português” (a miscellaneous collection of sources and episodes); Macedo, História diplomática portuguesa (nothing significant on Asia); Martínez, História diplomática de Portugal (only one chapter, pp. 95–102); Brandão, Para uma Bibliografia; and the proceedings of A Diplomacia na História de Portugal.

6 The Sri Lankan public follows the date given by the Portuguese chronicler Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, who places the arrival of Almeida to Ceylon in 1505. Donald Ferguson showed a century ago that the events took place in 1506 (“The Discovery of Ceylon”).

The present chapter offers a tentative approach to the main characteristics of Portuguese diplomacy in Asia during its first hundred years. It draws mostly on printed materials such as chronicles and published letters to outline themes and issues that historians may want to follow up. Ideally a wider debate would include contributions by specialists acquainted with other diplomatic traditions, be they Dutch, English, Danish, French, Persian, Mughal or Chinese. There is a general consensus that comparative and connective approaches may, each in its own way, help renew the field of early modern global history. As we await a wider enquiry into the subject matter, the following pages map out some possible routes for us to follow.

Diplomacy, diversity, improvisation

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Portuguese diplomacy is its variety of goals and diversity of means. Portuguese expansion in general reflects the often contradictory anxieties of a deeply heterogeneous society. The conquest of the Moroccan port of Ceuta alone, in 1415, involved such disparate objectives as the revival of reconquista to open up new fields of action for the Portuguese nobility, the hope of expanding Christianity, complex mercantile ambitions, and a desire to gain a better understanding of the geo-political realities of Africa. Apart from never having been a homogeneous or unidirectional process, Portuguese expansion transmuted over time. From the initial impetus driving Portuguese nobles into North Africa, the enterprise shifted to a second surge mobilizing Portuguese seafarers, traders and adventurers, many of them from the lower ranks of the nobility and from the multi-ethnic merchant communities of Lisbon and other cities. The voyages of the mid-fifteenth century took the Portuguese southwards into the Gulf of Guinea. Only later did the project of searching for a sea route to India come up, as a result of which Vasco da Gama was sent to Calicut in 1497.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the Portuguese military impetus was firmly bound up with a legal framework sanctioned by the Vatican and further consolidated by the division of the planet into two spheres of influence estab-

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8 There is Wills, Embassies and Illusions. But the typical piece of Luso-Dutch or Luso-British historiography is confrontational rather than comparative. See Winius, The Fatal History, Van Veen, Decay or Defeat, and Murteira, A Carreira da Índia e o Corso Neerlandês for extensive bibliographies.
9 Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, pp. 1–20. For a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the discussion on this complex matter, see Russell, Prince Henry, pp. 29–45.
10 See Carvalho and Pelúcia, “Os primeiros fidalgos na Costa da Guiné”.
11 On the fundamental discontinuities of this process, see Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor.
lished at Tordesillas in 1494. Violence was conceived of as being for the greater good of the new Iberian world order ("quoad jurisdictionem et protectionem"). The latter legitimized Portuguese actions in the East, including physical violence perpetuated most overtly against Muslims. In many ways, Portuguese attitudes towards polities overseas thus reflected an ideology that stipulated a predisposition for superiority, in close connection with the Universalist notion of a new, global Respublica Christiana. On the other hand, however, the Portuguese encountered societies in West Africa and South Asia that often offered firm resistance to their bullying and were, especially in India, commercially not reliant on Portuguese goods. It has thus been argued quite rightly that diplomatic relations in Africa and Asia, where Portuguese military and commercial superiority was less evident, followed principles of nominal equivalence between local rulers and the Portuguese monarchs. Ivana Elbl suggested quite rightly, in a little-noticed article published in 1992, that the West African diplomatic stage functioned as an extension of the European system rather than as an area of disorderly confrontations with radical Otherness. It may be added that it also served as a field of diplomatic experimentation, although its effects on Portuguese practices in the East remain to be explored.

At the court in Lisbon rival faction had protracted arguments about how to proceed in Asia. Some supported a predominantly (or even purely) commercial presence and, consequently, a low political profile. Their stance did not exclude the use of violence – which was at the heart of the profitable cartaz system allowing the Portuguese to sell safe conduct in the Indian Ocean – but it did question the necessity of a muscular official presence for example in the form of fortresses. Other, more hawkish and centralistically minded decision-makers pushed for a militaristic strategy of empire building, some going to the point of supporting King Manuel I, in his proclaimed plan to conquer Jerusalem with the help of Asian and African allies. It is little wonder that historians of early Portuguese expansion – possibly more so than those of early Dutch, English, and French expansion – have failed to reach an agreement regarding the main characteristics of the process. Any incursion into the source materials produced at the time reveals a multiplicity of objectives and strategies.

In terms of diplomacy, this created a vast potential for internal conflict, most evidently visible in situations where private interests clashed with those of


13 Elbl, “Cross-cultural Trade and Diplomacy”.

14 On this system of “passports” (cartazes) and its pre-Portuguese origins, see Thomaz, “Precedents and Parallels of the Portuguese Cartaz System”.
the Crown during negotiations with Asian potentates. Complicated situations involving competing official and private envoys to Asian courts were frequent. Perhaps this issue was more pervasive in the Portuguese case than any other (though there are some striking parallels in early English expansion). The Crown as such was interested in symbolic and commercial gains alike, but in its pursuit of the latter it often found itself competing with private traders. Hundreds, if not thousands of Portuguese individuals joined regional networks of trade especially in South and Southeast Asia during the early decades of the sixteenth century, where they soon emerged as fierce rivals to their own king.

A paradigmatic instance of internal diplomatic competition occurred in Bengal in 1521. Governor Diogo Lopes de Sequeira (g.v.1518–21) dispatched António de Brito as an official envoy from Goa to Gawr to hand over letters and a present – including an Arab horse and a complete suit of armour – to Sultan Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah (r.1519–33). The goal was to obtain commercial privileges for Portuguese traders with an official mandate. When Brito’s emissary Gonçalo Tavares entered the sultanate coming from Chittagong, however, another Portuguese “ambassador” was already in place. Rafael Perestrello, a man with established commercial interests in the region, had sent his own envoy, Cristóvão Jusarte, to Gawr a few days before the governor’s man arrived. Whilst on the surface Perestrello then ordered Jusarte to respect the authority of the Goan representative, the fact is that his men never ceased going about their own diplomatic business, causing considerable damage to the official mission. Jusarte was strictly determined to become the first Portuguese to obtain privileges on the import of gold, silver, coral, and small beads to Bengal. His flamboyant personality certainly played a significant part in the diplomatic imbroglio that ensued. Jusarte claimed to be a son of the Portuguese governor and paid a substantial bribe to be the first envoy ushered into the presence of the sovereign. He promised to pay a ten per cent tax on all goods that were not at the core of his plan, refused to sleep under one roof with the other envoys who, he maintained, had no legitimacy as ambassadors, and even went to the point of claiming his conversion to Islam.

The conflict was about much more than just personal ambition. Jusarte’s fundamental aim was to discredit an official agent committed to the interests of a distant political centre – his own point of departure – which had been unable to control the spread of private commercial agents in the Bay of Bengal in the earlier years but was now attempting to gain back some of the lost ground.15

15 Thomaz and Bouchon, Voyage, pp. 75–76.
16 I have followed the brief description in Thomaz and Bouchon, Voyage, pp. 77–85. The mission as it appears in the original text (ibid., pp. 215–266) was far more complex, with
Needless to say, the official sphere that men like Jusarte challenged was in itself far from uniform. Different and sometimes contradictory conceptions arose at its very heart within the first decade of the Estado’s existence. In 1506, the viceroy Dom Francisco de Almeida (vr.1505–09) refused to support a commercial agent (feitor) of the Crown, Pero Fernandes Tinoco, who had been ordered by Manuel I to purchase precious stones in Vijayanagar. The Hindu ruler of this South Indian empire was seen by Manuel I as a potential ally in the increasingly global struggle against Islam.17

Francisco de Almeida was hostile to his monarch’s plans because he felt inclined to keep relations with Vijayanagara at a level where private traders could go about their business without official interference. The south of India was at the time a field of action largely controlled by Portuguese private traders established in Cochin in the earliest years of the century, and Almeida was eager to maintain the status quo. Instead of supporting the royal agent Tinoco, he had two men from his own entourage sent to Vijayanagar. Among them was Baltasar da Gama, a son of Gaspar da Gama, the Ashkenazi Jew who had come from India to Portugal with the first fleet of Vasco da Gama in 1499. It is certainly no coincidence that the latter was by this time one of the greatest private traders in precious stones in the region, and that the Almeidas, along with other captains closely related to them, were among the most active buyers of the commodity. In other words, the viceroy who officially served as the alter ego of Manuel I in the East had no qualms about sabotaging a mission set up by his monarch in order to keep his own private interests intact.18

It may be worth emphasizing that the very notion of a public interest clearly separated from private interests was blurry. The monarch acted both as a sovereign and as a private trader. None of this was uncommon in Europe at a time when the main initiators of diplomatic exchanges were not states, but royal houses, and the latter were often unable to maintain a monopoly on the external relations of their polities.19 In the Portuguese case, the enormous distance sepa-
rating Lisbon from Goa, not to mention other outposts further afield such as Malacca or Macao, further aggravated the problem. If sending an envoy to Rome or to Antwerp was a challenge, then keeping a firm grip on negotiations occurring in places at a distance of a year and a half or two years from Lisbon was virtually impossible.

**Learning to behave in Asia: from Gama to Albuquerque**

Diversity of interests and strategic inconsistency were characteristics of Portuguese diplomacy in Asia to an extent that may never have been matched by other European nations – though the English certainly came close, and some critical historiography of the VOC also undermines the old topos of Dutch efficiency. How, then, may we bring clarity into the picture? Identifying patterns of diplomatic behaviour and observing whether negotiative practices grew more efficient as a result of a prolonged exposure to Asian customs is a first possible pathway of enquiry. Before the Portuguese could even think of undertaking military conquests in Asia, they needed to learn how to behave diplomatically. This proved to be a particularly knotty task in the early years. It must not be forgotten how uniquely difficult the point of departure was for the Portuguese

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20 It is tempting to say that, whilst the geographical distances were the same in all three cases, the VOC had a clearer set of objectives (above all, the priority of being profitable) making it easier for its representatives to follow a coherent course of action. Yet it would be risky to ignore the shifting and often contradictory strategies that did appear even within supposedly monolithic organisations such as the VOC. One important aspect is the manipulation of information by Dutch officials such as Rijckloff van Goens in the case of Ceylon (see Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power*). Often the personal agendas of such leaders differed very much from those of Batavia and Amsterdam. The parallels in the Estado’s and the VOC’s long-term evolution from maritime to terrestrial power, including the role played therein by peripheral agents, are particularly striking. The other aspect that emerges from more recent research is that the VOC, too, saw substantial parts of its human basis go native and escape the centralistic logics of the organisation (see Singh, *Fort Kochin in Kerala*).

21 On the developments of the royal agenda (messianic tendencies under Manuel I, a more pragmatic and cost-conscious approach under John III in the 1520s and 1530s, a growing religious zeal in the 1540s, the military crisis after the downfall of Vijayanagar in 1565) and the permanent disruptions caused to it by the interests of others (court factions, peripheral dynamics, privateering) see Costa and Rodrigues, *El Proyecto Indiano* and Thomas, *De Ceuta a Timor*.
in the late fifteenth century, as opposed to the Dutch in the late sixteenth century, when a much larger amount of geographical, political and ethnographical data on the East was available in maps and books. In 1498, Vasco da Gama had very little reliable information on what he was going to encounter in Asia. The notion that by papal decree everything to the east of the line of Tordesillas was potentially a domain of the Portuguese Crown was certainly not helpful either in building trust among his Asian counterparts. It is little wonder that Gama’s behaviour in Calicut oscillated between the most ineffective, because uncompromising assertiveness on the one hand, and intense doubt about how to behave on the other hand, precisely because the Portuguese monarchy’s Universalist claims seemed so utterly out of touch with Asian realities.

Whilst some modern commentators have maintained that the first Lusitanian mission to India was carried out fully in accordance with the monarch’s plan, the surviving textual evidence suggests otherwise. Gama quite simply did not know how to behave in Calicut. He may have had the preparation in theory, but in practice he feared the food, loathed the prospect of physical contact (refusing for example to let his face be touched during a visit to a temple), and even expressed his profound annoyance at the heavy rainfall. More than once, Gama became uneasy about details that he interpreted as premeditated humiliations: for example, the long walk from the royal palace to the house where he was to sleep, or the fact that a local Muslim trader offered him to ride a horse that had no proper saddle. The diary mentions that Gama grew angry (menencorico) repeatedly in reaction to his interlocutors’ unfamiliar manners and to what the Portuguese described as their phlegmatic nature (freuma). After some days in the city, he fell ill.

Vasco da Gama’s principal dilemma was that he needed to represent a monarch holding a universal mandate of conquest, but did not possess the most basic means necessary to even be considered a trustworthy interlocutor in Calicut. To begin with, Gama did not carry appropriate gifts for an audience with the Samudri Raja (the Samorim of the Portuguese sources). Whatever he had brought from Portugal – including things such as olive oil and honey – was of little value in India. Having a suitable set of gifts in the tradition of the nazr was indispensible for the success of even the most modest mercantile lobbying mission. It is no surprise, then, that a lack of such gifts constituted a major hindrance in the establishment of the first European-Asian diplomatic contact of the period. In addition to this material handicap, the Samorim does not seem to

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22 See above all the anonymous diary attributed to Álvaro Velho: Machado and Campo, Vasco da Gama e a sua viagem.
23 Ibid., pp. 167–185.
have been particularly interested in the symbolic exchange that Gama proposed. Establishing friendship (amizade, a crucial category of Portuguese diplomacy)\textsuperscript{24} had a much greater importance for Gama, an envoy of a king obsessed with the search for anti-Muslim allies, than for the Samorim, a ruler with no clear idea, at the time, of what the Portuguese aimed for. When the Samorim began to realize his visitors’ lack of resources in comparison with what other merchants had to offer, and when Gama began to sense the inappropriateness of his gifts, a strange dialogue unfolded in which the Portuguese envoy proved to be simply unable to make any clear statement about his objectives. Not even the letters brought from Lisbon, written in Portuguese and in Arabic, offered relief. Muslim courtiers could, so Gama feared, falsify their contents during the act of translation. According to Gaspar Correia, a mid-sixteenth-century chronicler of Portuguese expansion in Asia, things came to a point where Gama was tempted to introduce himself to the Samorim with a lie, proclaiming that the King of Portugal had in fact sent a vast fleet of fifty ships to India under the command of a captain major much more powerful than Gama himself. Presumably, forty-seven of the ships, among them the ones carrying the most precious gifts, would have been said to have gone missing.\textsuperscript{25} True or not, this episode is significant in that it reflects the perceived challenges posed by Asian diplomatic culture to the Portuguese at the beginning of their presence in the East.

During the following years, an evolution occurred towards more effective and sustainable diplomatic practices. Of great importance in this process was undoubtedly the governor Afonso de Albuquerque (gv.1509–15). Acquainted with the Indian Ocean region since 1503, Albuquerque revealed a remarkable capability to adopt Asian diplomatic customs especially after he received his mandate to represent the king in the East. Trained as a soldier and a courtier, he soon sensed that there could be no conquest without negotiation, on the one hand, and no diplomacy without palpable military pressure, on the other. Portuguese diplomacy under Albuquerque, who devised a larger plan for the control of strategic ports across Maritime Asia, was by its very nature linked with the governor’s extraordinary military activism. In fact, Albuquerque tended to overstretch his mandate rather than restraining himself. His aim was the foundation of a permanent Portuguese network based on the control of a string of major port cities including Goa, Malacca, Aden and Hormuz.\textsuperscript{26} When he chal-


\textsuperscript{25} Correia, \textit{Lendas da Índia}, vol. I, p. 85. On Correia as a source for these events see Kriegel and Subrahmanyan, “The Unity of Opposites”. For further readings on the expedition of Vasco da Gama see Subrahmanyan, \textit{Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama}.

\textsuperscript{26} For a bibliographical overview see Bouchon, \textit{Albuquerque}. On the tensions between Albuquerque and the Crown see Costa and Rodrigues, \textit{El proyecto indiano}, pp. 87–108.
challenged the Crown, it was not to avoid building strongholds, but to create more of them than originally planned.

In its earliest phase, much of Albuquerque’s activity in Asia was based on extreme violence, exercised indiscriminately against local rulers and populations especially in the Arabian Peninsula. After the conquest of Suq in the island of Soqotra in 1507, the Omani coast was hit by a wave of massacres and lootings. In fact, the Portuguese only established themselves in these areas much later. But once places such as Hormuz or Goa were under Portuguese control – and there were different ways of achieving this – Albuquerque also proved to be highly conscious of the importance of securing the position through diplomacy. After – and indeed even immediately before – conquering Malacca in August 1511, the first steps taken by Albuquerque were of a diplomatic nature. On the one hand, the governor made a micro-diplomatic attempt at gaining the sympathy of non-Muslim merchant leaders of South Indian, Mon, and Chinese origin who were traditional commercial rivals of the powerful Gujarati community in Malacca. On the other hand, once the city was taken, he dispatched embassies from Malacca to rulers with a strategic interest in the Straits, most notably in Pegu and Siam. This was crucial in order to secure the strategically well positioned but agriculturally deficient emporium’s food supply. It was also fundamental for the acquisition of legitimacy: Albuquerque had been able to take Malacca, but the former sultan continued to rule over his other territories and remained diplomatically active himself. Nor did Albuquerque hesitate to receive ambassadors from Kampar in northern Sumatra and from Java, thus taking over parts of Malacca’s existing network of allegiances and accepting the symbolic submission of vassals originally paying tribute to the sultan. These initiatives were instrumental for the stabilisation of Portuguese rule in Malacca, and certainly contributed to its relative longevity, until the Dutch took over in 1641.

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27 Before the attack Albuquerque had established diplomatic relations with the sultan in order to make him surrender “peacefully” and found a crucial connection with a Keling merchant, Nina Chatu (Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, pp. 494–496).

28 The first Portuguese embassy to Siam was also launched before the final attack against Malacca. Soon, the Siamese king responded with letters (Castanheda, História, vol. II, pp. 648–651). Cf. Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, pp. 298–305 and pp. 496–497.

29 Castanheda, História, vol. I, pp. 651–652. To keep notes intelligible I quote from Castanheda only, but Barros, Correia, Góis (see bibliography) and other contemporary authors also describe most episodes mentioned.
Simultaneous attempts at the creation of diplomatic contacts with China were less successful, but a comparable move to adopt and adapt existing diplomatic networks did occur in Hormuz after the Portuguese takeover in April 1515. Although the King of Hormuz remained in power, Albuquerque dispatched ambassadors to Shah Ismail of Persia (r.1501–24) and approached local rulers who had traditionally acknowledged the authority of the city state in the Persian Gulf. He soon received ambassadors from al-Hasa, Lar, and Rayshahr, who originally came to pay homage to the deposed king. Above all, however, there was Goa, where Albuquerque took up residence in the grandest possible manner, retaining large parts of the representative apparatus left behind by the Muslim governors in 1510. Thus Albuquerque maintained a magnificent and rather costly corps of twenty state elephants. The animals were paraded in front of his palace every evening while, according to one chronicler, Hindu temple dancers (bailadeiras) performed dances under his porch. Whatever the precise extent to which this information is accurate, it seems that Albuquerque, who had been a member of the Portuguese royal guard in younger years, felt drawn rather instinctively to such practices. The public display of power and good taste seems to have been in tune with the expectations of the Goan elite and of many visitors to the city, including merchants and diplomatic envoys from other parts of India. Albuquerque’s official receptions stood in line, to some extent at least, with the darbar practised in the Deccan sultanates. There is scope to argue that there was continuity in Goa between the diplomatic folklore of the pre and post-conquest periods. But it might also be argued, in addition to this, that Portuguese courtly habits were not radically different from Indian court culture in this context: once the initial obstacles were overcome, things were set to go relatively smoothly.

This, of course, is a rather general rule of thumb to which there were exceptions. What Albuquerque did rather intuitively, his commercialist successor, Lopo Soares de Albergaria (gv.1515–18), was less inclined to follow. Soares

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30 The Portuguese eventually obtained this through Macao, but the relationship was fraught by deep intercultural misunderstandings. On Luso-Chinese relations see Alves, “Natureza do primeiro ciclo” and Flores, “China e Macau” and “Macau: os eventos políticos”.


33 Santos, Goa é a chave, p. 232.

34 See on the wider picture Subrahmanyam, Courly Encounters.
sold off the Goan state elephants to Vijayanagar, arguing that their maintenance was too costly for the Estado. Only a few pachyderms were kept – to work on the shipyards. After Soares, Portuguese court ceremonial in Goa does not seem to have reached a high level of sophistication again until the governorship of Nuno da Cunha (r. 1529–38). It is certainly no coincidence that this man, again, was well acquainted with European – and especially Mediterranean – court culture and diplomatic practices. As a young man, Nuno da Cunha had accompanied his faster Tristan on the legendary Portuguese embassy to Rome in 1514, where the elephant Hanno and many other exotic animals and objects had been sumptuously displayed. In Goa, a process of urban re-invention and capital formation with classicist undertones began precisely under Nuno da Cunha, and diplomacy played an important role in the reshuffling of the Estado’s centre. Later charismatic viceroy such as Dom João de Castro (r. 1545–48) or Dom Constantino de Bragança (r. 1558–61), who gained fame by destroying the Sri Lankan Tooth Relic despite great diplomatic (and financial) pressure from Buddhist powers in Southeast Asia, were chosen from the highest ranks of the Portuguese nobility. Thus aristocratic formalities and an increasingly ritualized culture of pomp and circumstance tended to become characteristic features of official, Goa-based diplomacy.

Diplomatic apprenticeship was not, it is important to underline, necessarily unidirectional. From the late 1530s, religious matters became a concern of growing importance in the policies of the Estado, and hence also in its diplomatic exchanges. The prospect of furthering Catholicism was invoked more and more often to legitimize certain actions or projects especially when the Crown was involved. Within a very short period of time, news of this change of policy spread. Rulers and throne pretenders in Sri Lanka were particularly quick to exploit the newly found religious eagerness of their Portuguese counterparts. Around 1542, promises of conversion began to appear in various kingdoms of the island. For decades, Lankan rulers had failed to catch the Estado’s full attention in their efforts to obtain significant military support. Now, in contrast, the mere promise of baptism became an argument powerful enough to mobilise

36 On the embassy, see Ciuitis, Une embassade portugaise à Rome; on the history of the Cunha family, crucial and highly significant to early Portuguese diplomatic action both in Italy and Asia, see Andrade, História de um fidalgo, pp. 119–131 and Carvalho, “Tristão da Cunha”.
37 On the “capitalization” of Goa see Santos, Goa é a chave, pp. 153–278.
38 On this crucial aspect, which has only recently been brought to the forefront of historical analysis, see Xavier, “Aparejo y disposición”, Strathern, “Os Piedosos” and Biedermann, “De regresso ao Quarto Império”.
substantial resources. Lankan kings also used the new discursive space to feed their own notions of kingship and authority into the Portuguese system, allowing the cakravarti ideology to blend with Catholic Universalism. The suggestion was, invariably, that soon “the entire island” of Lanka would become Christian.\(^{39}\)

**Common backgrounds and the commensurability of diplomatic idioms**

The sixteenth century saw a remarkable growth of negotiative activities around Goa and the other possessions of the Estado. By the end of the century ambassadors and envoys arrived in Goa almost daily, at a pace comparable to that of any great political centre in the early modern world. Every three (or occasionally six) years, the arrival of a new governor appointed by the Portuguese Crown triggered additional visits by envoys from polities surrounding the Estado.\(^{40}\) Although we have no statistics at hand, it seems that the number of diplomatic episodes in Goa kept increasing even in the seventeenth century. But was there a diplomatic language transversal to European and Asian societies? It is quite clear that diplomatic communication was often enhanced by the fact that, as Sanjay Subrahmanyam has recently put it, “the encounters usually did not take place between societies or cultural systems as such, but between particular subcultures or segments of societies”.\(^{41}\) Much diplomatic activity unfolded in courtly environments congregating cultural and political elites that could understand each other relatively easily.

The question could then be asked to what extent the perception of similarity was in accordance with “real” cultural commonalities – but obviously enough, it is difficult to find solid ground on which to base an objective answer. Subrahmanyam has remarked that “the societal agents involved in the encounter saw each other’s societies as possessing somewhat similar political systems”,\(^{42}\) and in fact, as we shall see in chapter 3, the perceived commonalities did not necessarily have to be entirely factual to work – the emphasis in the quoted sentence can be placed on the verb saw. Be that as it may, we can still ask ourselves whether, for example, the expansion of Islam prepared the ground for the Portuguese in Asia not only in terms of trade,\(^{43}\) but also at the level of political culture. The aesthetics of political life in the Muslim states of the Deccan stood closer to Mediterranean traditions than those of the Hindu states further south –

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39 See chapter 3.
42 Ibid, p. xvi.
though the history of the perception of such similarities and differences is yet to be written. Portugal itself had been under Muslim rule for five centuries. The south of the Iberian Peninsula had served as a school for Christian powers with regard to Islamic political and diplomatic practices, especially the negotiating of hierarchies between competing small polities known as taifas. It is in this context that the word páreas entered the Portuguese language to signify tribute. Tributary overlordship was a widespread reality in Africa and Asia and did not, as we shall see in the next chapter, require much adaptation to function as a tool of Portuguese power building in South India and Sri Lanka.

It could further be pointed out that between parts of India, Sri Lanka, Persia, and Europe there were broader commonalities linked to the Indo-European heritage. This possibility calls for further assessment, but it makes sense to assume that the shared heritage may have improved the translatability of notions of kingship, vassalage and social function. Distinctions between oratores and bellatores or Brahmins and Kshatriyas, though being far from identical, may have operated in mutually translatable ways among Europeans and Indians: a noble background certainly helped diplomats in creating trust across cultural borders, and an ecclesiastic affiliation could at times do the same. Whilst misunderstandings were in no way ruled out, the possibility of communication was also given. And even if anthropologists today would be wary of sweeping generalizations such as the trifunctional theory of Georges Dumézil, communication was, as we shall see in the next chapter, dynamized by the existence of perceived parallels. A reading of sixteenth-century accounts of diplomatic missions suggests that they reduced the danger of absolute misbehaviour. Full diplomatic tragedies only really occurred in China, where infractions of court ceremonial could be read as sacrileges, leading to the incarceration or execution of envoys.

The existence of connectable political cultures across the continents favoured, indirectly at least, the development of the notion of jus inter gentium among sixteenth-century Iberian authors. Some fundamental principles, it may be added, transcended cultural borders across much of Eurasia. Beyond the general notion that pacts are made to be mutually respected – for some time at least (pacta sunt servanda) –, certain signs and gestures proved easily readable even in the most far-flung corners of the world. The waving of a flag of truce

44 See Biedermann, “Imagining Asia from the Margins”.
45 See Dumézil, Mythe et épopée and, for a critique, Belier, Decayed Gods.
46 On the particular position of China among the so-called “Axial Age Civilizations”, see Eisenstadt, The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilisations.
47 See Saldanha, Iustum Imperium.
(bandeira da paz) worked almost universally. The same applies to gestures such as playing a game of chess as a warm-up for diplomatic negotiations, or acts of commensality – eating and drinking together – which helped build mutual trust and frame conversations that may otherwise have been difficult to establish. In contrast, the Portuguese habit of firing a salvo of cannons as a greeting when arriving in African and Asian ports was often misunderstood and interpreted as a sign of aggression.

If there was one thing that all societies involved in early modern diplomacy had in common, it was the desire to astound whoever stood on the other side and create an impression of magnificence and power. The Portuguese took this duty very seriously in South Asia. They needed to convince potent monarchs of their capabilities whilst rarely commanding more than a few dozen ships, a dozen forts and a few thousand men. Under such conditions, it was absolutely essential for the Estado to build up a larger-than-life image, show political prominence and display military muscle. One way of doing this was to present the distant Kingdom of Portugal as something it was not: the most important state in Europe. Its sovereign was often styled as “King of Kings”, more potent and magnificent than any of his confreres in Spain, England or elsewhere in the West. This worked as long as no one from another European country interfered to reveal the true limitations of Portuguese power beyond its border with Castile. As a matter of fact, questions were asked increasingly by Asian rulers as European politics began to gain relevance in the East towards the end of the sixteenth century. Once the Dutch and the English entered the Indian Ocean, convincing Asian rulers that Portugal was Europe’s chief political power became increasingly difficult – unless the Portuguese acquiesced in the recognition that their kingdom had been annexed to form part of the Catholic Monarchy of Philip II in 1580–81, a matter which they usually preferred not to dwell upon.

There were some other ways of impressing a diplomatic interlocutor that never lost their attraction. At sea, Asian visitors would often be taken to a ship on which the crews and materials of the entire fleet were assembled so that the meagre number of men at the disposal of the captains would not be too evident. It also became commonplace for the authorities in Goa to skilfully display large numbers of horses, well-dressed noblemen and well-armed soldiers when foreign ambassadors arrived, only to disguise the true extent to which such resources always remained scarce in the Estado. This does not mean that

48 See for example Castanheda, História, vol. I, p. 350 (Afonso de Albuquerque in Hormuz, 1507) and p. 459 (Diogo Lopes de Sequeira in Pedir, Sumatra, 1509).

49 See for instance Castanheda, História, vol. I, p. 351, with Afonso de Albuquerque staying on board to dissimulate the scarcity of his troops on his first visit to Hormuz in 1507.
envoys necessarily believed in what they saw, but it would certainly have been considered a sign of weakness if no efforts to deceive were made at all.

The art of receiving envoys especially in palatine spaces was understood and appreciated by Europeans and Asian alike. Despite many European accounts stressing the differences between Western and Eastern court ceremonial (the excessive demands of submission being connoted with Asian despotism, a topos popularized by Machiavelli), ⁵⁰ most encounters in the South Asian context seem to indicate that it was not exceedingly difficult for Portuguese – and in fact other Western envoys – to understand behavioural guidelines and apply them in their own way when receiving Asian visitors to Goa or other official possessions. The culture of receiving envoys tended more or less everywhere to rely on complex choreographies built around the channelling of bodily movements and the theatrical construction of encounters conveying notions of hierarchy, enmity or friendship. Naturally enough, many details of this reception culture would remain a mystery to Portuguese envoys – and certainly vice versa for Asian ambassadors visiting Portuguese fortresses – but the general logics of the proceedings seem to have been grasped by the various sides involved with relative familiarity. ⁵¹

**Diplomatic contrasts: maritime versus continental Asia**

Generalisations of this kind are evidently problematic, especially if one takes into account the geographical and cultural diversity and complexity of Asia’s political landscapes – we are, of course, using a metageographical concept that suggests a continental unity which may not be of much relevance at all in terms of diplomatic culture. The Portuguese Estado maintained diplomatic ties with dozens of polities – empires, kingdoms and city-states, not to speak of virtual territories and lords with ambitions for the future – scattered along the shores of the Indian and Pacific Oceans from Mozambique to Japan. A cautious estimate based on the reading of the main chronicles suggests that there may have been something like a dozen major embassies dispatched from Goa and other points of the Estado to Asian and African potentates every single year, and perhaps another dozen coming in – not to speak of envoys of lesser significance who kept going to and fro most of the time without necessarily leaving a written record of their activities.

How complex and rigid diplomatic practices were in different regions is a matter that, if carefully considered, may help us better understand the relative efficacy of Portuguese, but also Dutch, English and French diplomacy in vari-

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⁵⁰ See Randles, “Peuples sauvages et états despotiques”, p. 300.
⁵¹ See Senos, *O Paço da Ribeira* on Renaissance receptions in the royal palace of Lisbon.
ous Asian contexts. At the lower end of the imaginary scale of diplomatic complexity, one finds many city states in East Africa and Arabia, Hormuz in the Persian Gulf, the smaller kingdoms of South India and insular Southeast Asia, and tiny polities such as the semi-independent chiefdoms of eastern Sri Lanka. In most of these places, the fundamental objectives of Portuguese diplomacy were pragmatically tied up with immediate commercial and military interests. They included the establishment and maintenance of relations of friendship (amizade) or tributary submission involving payments (páreas) to the Portuguese monarch, or trading privileges and facilities such as depots protected by law (feitorias). These formed the framework for the trading of cinnamon and precious stones in southwest Sri Lanka, elephants in Jaffna, pepper and ginger on the Malabar Coast, nutmeg in the Moluccas, horses in Hormuz, or ivory and slaves in East Africa.

These were places where diplomacy was a relatively easy going business. The Portuguese felt generally rather comfortable in smaller ports such as Cochin, Cannanore or Quilon when approaching the shore in richly decorated boats, dressed up in flamboyant costumes often made of Asian fabrics, and accompanied by the sound of trumpets and drums. The Raja of Cochin would have no qualms about coming to the seaside in person, riding an elephant (as later depicted in Linschoten’s Itinerario), and greeting the Portuguese envoys without insisting on exceedingly complicated rules. Agreements would be made in temporary buildings constructed on the beach, such as tents (Vasco da Gama, Cochin, 1502) or slightly more elaborate wooden structures decorated with textiles of all sorts (Lopo Soares, Cannanore, 1504–05). The case of Lopo Soares’ visit to Cannanore is particularly telling in this regard. The Portuguese governor presented the local king with a bed. Once it was handed over, the king dropped into the cushions and began to converse with his counterpart about state affairs.  

A comparable willingness to adapt emerges from the accounts of the Portuguese captain Diogo Lopes de Sequeira’s first entry into Malacca. When led into the presence of the local sultan, Sequeira rode to the ruler’s palace on the back of an elephant. This was a rare feat, and one that might well have been frowned upon in Portugal – but the fact that it occurred and that it made it into a chronicle is significant in itself. The overall impression is that adaptation was often mutual in places such as Cochin, Cannanore and Malacca. Reciprocal curiosity and a certain propensity in South Asia for cosmopolitan exchanges are further exemplified by the adoption of European fashion and manners at Asian

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25 courts. When Joris van Spilbergen first arrived in Kandy in central Sri Lanka in 1602, he was received with bursts of gunfire and offered a Portuguese-style reception including the serving of red wine. It would certainly be fascinating to enumerate cases of this sort as well as reverse ones, where Portuguese envoys accepted and appreciated the characteristics of local hospitality, thereby serving not only as political ambassadors, but also as cultural mediators.

As a contrast to such open practices, the more firmly ritualized courts of China, Siam, Mughal India, Vijayanagar and Persia could be placed at the upper end of our imaginary scale of complexity in Asian diplomatic culture. China was certainly the most bewildering scenario for foreign diplomats, a highly ritualized playground where inexperienced foreigners would easily be victims of intercultural pitfalls. Needless to say, any attempt at aggressively affirming the superiority of Western culture and proselytising in China would, much in contrast to Sri Lanka and South India, have had catastrophic consequences. But other great courts also stipulated complicated rules for the conduction of negotiations, including carefully planned delays, a complicated culture of bribing, highly elaborate court entries, and extremely formal, frequently humiliating exchanges of words and gestures with monarchs. It may be true that the Portuguese Crown never agreed to submit to any Asian ruler, as some historians underline, but in reality many ambassadors were obliged to accept their counterparts’ superiority – certainly more often than our sources admit.

During diplomatic receptions at the larger courts of Asia, the Portuguese were often little more than a drop in the ocean, neglected envoys pretending to be of some importance whilst desperate to keep afloat financially. The Mughal emperors were used to receiving vast tributary embassies including hundreds of war elephants and lavish treasures. Only the Mughals’ interest in securing their increasingly important seafaring activities, on the one hand, and their ideology of embracing and protecting a diversity of religions and minorities as a symbol of their universal authority, on the other hand, provided Portuguese envoys, namely Jesuits from Goa, with the possibility of residing near the imperial court as permanent diplomats of the Estado with some political and cultural influence. Much depended on the abilities of such Portuguese envoys to read the codes of local court etiquette efficiently – that is, with attention to detail but

54 Spilbergen, De reis naar Ceylon, chapter on “Aldea”.
55 See Loureiro and Gruzinski, Passar as fronteiras. Many of the descriptions of Asian cultures in the great Portuguese chronicles of the mid-sixteenth century, written at a time when missionary accounts were still relatively rare, may owe their origins to accounts by members of embassies.
56 Saldanha, Iustum Imperium.
57 See Flores, Hindustão e Firanguistão and Flores and Silva, Goa e o Grão-Mogol.
also with a sense of pragmatism – and to give a touch of majesty to their presence even if the means were manifestly insufficient.

Roughly speaking, it could be said that, in contrast with the smaller kingdoms mentioned above, diplomacy with the great, land-based empires of Asia had a more strategic, formal and symbolic character. Commercial issues such as those discussed in most South Indian ports tended to be kept on the margins of diplomatic discourse and representation in Tabriz or Beijing. For almost a century, negotiations in Persia concerning a rather abstract Christian-Shi’ite alliance against the Ottomans legitimized diplomatic interactions that permitted, in practice, the maintenance of a military balance in the Persian Gulf region. At the Mughal court, Portuguese diplomacy aimed for the maintenance of a complex political balance in North and Central India, essential to the survival of Goa, Diu, Daman, Chaul, Bassein, and Mumbai as Portuguese possessions. Diplomacy was much more of a great game here than, say, in Cochin or Cannanore, where envoys would sometimes do little more than counting bags of pepper.

This was a paradox of sorts in the external relations of the Estado: on the one hand, much of its diplomacy with core allies faithful from the beginning of the sixteenth century – Malindi, Cochin, Kotte or Hormuz, among others – tended to be run on a pragmatic level that one could brand as a “Little Tradition” of diplomatic exchanges. Diplomatic activity in such contexts tended to be more improvised, less complicated, and less ritualized than in the great capitals of the mainland. On the other hand, the larger centres of political and diplomatic activity, mostly situated in terrestrial empires that held pivotal positions in the cultural networks of continental Asia and cultivated the most complex forms of diplomacy, were contacted only a little later by the Portuguese. In those places the Estado with its mixture of essentially naval power and improvised imperial grandness had a much more reduced importance. Here it was inevitable to follow established court rituals and abide by the existing rules of the game. Whilst the material effects of such negotiations were less palpable, the investment needed to keep them going was considerable.

Viceroy and renegades: the personal factor in Portuguese diplomacy

Last, but not least among the factors deserving attention in the study of Portuguese diplomacy in Asia, there are the agents who conducted it. In a time of experimentation, when contacts were still fresh and unstable, the success of dip-

58 As opposed to a “Great Tradition” – on the analytical validity of this problematic pair of concepts coined in the field of Buddhist studies see Gellner, *The Anthropology of Buddhism*, pp. 5–6.
lomatic activity depended in large measure on the personal skills and character of the envoys. An early mishap in Dutch diplomacy illustrates how much a single man could achieve and destroy in the field of European-Asian relations within less than a day. Shortly after Joris van Spilbergen had left Sri Lanka in 1602 armed with friendly letters from King Vimaladharmasuriya of Kandy for Prince Maurits, Sebald de Weert, another Dutchman representing a different trading company, drank too lavishly at a reception, got involved in a discussion and ended up insulting the Sinhalese ruler. He and forty-seven of his men were killed on the spot.\(^59\) I am aware of no similarly disastrous instance in Portuguese diplomatic history, but many other, less dramatic failures did occur and can ultimately be read as resulting from combinations of political and personal factors.

At the top of the political and military hierarchy of the Estado, a governor (sometimes carrying the symbolically more prestigious, but legally equivalent title of viceroy) served as the chief diplomat of the Portuguese Crown overseas. Governors were representatives of the king at the highest level. Their legal status was complex, permitting a range of political behaviours and varying perceptions by Asian rulers.\(^60\) Some Asian princes accepted the notion that the viceroys in Goa and even other envoys sent from there served as\textit{ alter egos or images} of the distant monarch – or so the Portuguese chronicles suggest. According to Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, when Albuquerque visited Hormuz in 1507, two years before he became governor (but just after having looted the Omani coast), he was received as if he were the sovereign in person:

\begin{quote}
"When the king [of Hormuz] was told that the captain-major [Albuquerque] had disembarked, he went out to receive him, standing on a balcony […] When [Albuquerque] came in, the king immediately moved towards him and lowered his head, this being the greatest courtesy he could show. No king in that land will do this if not in the presence of another king. The captain-major approached the king with the greatest reverence and took his hands into his, this being a sign of friendship among the Moors […] They made the captain-major sit on a bench […] and the king, Cojeatar and
\end{quote}

\(^{59}\) Baldaeus,\textit{ Description of Ceylon}, pp. 677–678.

\(^{60}\) On the legal status of the governors see Santos,\textit{ Goa é a chave} and Saldanha,\textit{ Iustum Imperium}, pp. 333–341. The criteria for the attribution of the title of viceroy are not entirely clear. Although social status played a role, other aspects had some importance, too. Whilst Francisco de Almeida went to the East as vice-rei, Afonso de Albuquerque, chosen by the king against the wishes of a powerful lobby close to Almeida, was governorado. In the East, Albuquerque then behaved much more like a sovereign than Almeida.
Raix Noradim sat on a carpet, because it is their custom to sit like women do: and thus they stayed [and talked] for two hours […]61

Needless to say, the promises made on this occasion – and much of what Albuquerque was doing was not quite in tune with the orders he had from the Portuguese Crown – were soon forgotten. The essential aspect to note, however, is how much liberty both Albuquerque and the King of Hormuz took in approaching their counterpart as if they were negotiating inter pares, attempting to talk things through on the spot rather than delaying matters any further.

On the downside of it, the ambiguous status of the viceroys was often a problem for the Estado’s diplomacy. When Tristão de Gá went to meet the Sultan of Cambay in 1520 on behalf of the governor Diogo Lopes de Sequeira, he faced serious reluctance on the local side to negotiate because the governor’s triennium was reaching an end and, predictably, policy would change as soon as the next governor arrived in Goa. Eventually, the sultan responded with letters to the outgoing governor and with gifts for King Manuel I, but it took much effort to convince him to do so.62 Many other Asian rulers insisted, at one moment or another, and with varying degrees of success, on establishing direct contacts with the Portuguese court rather than relying on Goa. This occurred most notably when Portuguese agents behaved disruptively in the local context, as was the case in Sri Lanka.63 The King of Kotte Bhuvanekabahu VII (r.1521–51) thus had his own alter ego, the purohita Sri Ramaraksa, sent to Lisbon on a mission lasting from 1541 to 1543.64 There John III (r. 1521–57) crowned an effigy of the Sinhalese ruler’s grandson Dharmapala as the future cakravarti of Lanka.65 Obtaining direct contacts with Lisbon in such a manner could mean a significant advantage to Asian rulers both symbolically and in terms of political and commercial leverage. In contrast with prince Dharmapala, many other can-

62 Castanheda, História, vol. I, p. 775–776. Notice that Gá had already been the first Portuguese ambassador to be received in Cambay, in 1513.
63 There was of course a long tradition of Asian and African embassies to the West from Antiquity through the medieval period, for example from Ethiopia.
64 See chapter 3.
65 The effigy is said to have been transported in or along with a magnificent ivory casket later handed over to Catherine of Habsburg, the wife of John III. Gifts were often offered by Asian sovereigns not only to humble envoys (who regularly came back from their missions with textiles, precious stones, or small pieces of jewellery) but also directly to the Portuguese monarchs. The ivory caskets sent from Ceylon as state presents, keenly collected by Catherine, are still among the most precious examples of Asian art in European museums. See Seipel, Exotica and Jordan Gschwend, Elfenbeine aus Ceylon.
didates to the throne of Kotte were contented with baptismal and coronation ceremonies held in Goa, only to be dismissed soon after and left to drown in the agitated waters of Lankan politics.  

Predictably, there were many layers of Portuguese diplomacy in the East, much depending on the power of the rulers involved, the status of the negotiating agents, and the importance of the matters discussed. Official Portuguese ambassadors were preferrably recruited from the middle and upper strata of the nobility, from among *fidalgos* who had already served in courtly environments at home or gained a comparable experience elsewhere. But it is important to take into account the large number of apparently minor agents who, given the general tendency of the apparatus to improvisation, could at times gain considerable importance. One such *ad hoc* diplomat was Nuno Álvares Pereira, a man of obscure origins who heard a rumour in Negombo in 1542 that the King of Kandy was looking for someone to put him in contact with the Portuguese authorities. By July 1542, Pereira was in the mountain kingdom serving as the personal secretary of the king, writing letters to Goa and Lisbon that effectively triggered the official Portuguese involvement in the central highlands of the island. In Kandy, Pereira became something of a resident counselor-cum-ambassador to the Sinhalese ruler, like many Franciscans and Jesuits later did in other places. He did so on the sole basis of being a foreigner who could put words on a piece of paper. In practice, however, he often acted as a Kandyan diplomat more than a Portuguese one. But the truly significant aspect of his career is that, ultimately, he was a little of both things at the same time.

Embassies often consisted of more than just one chief ambassador. When Diogo Fernandes de Beja visited Cambay in 1514, he took with him a deputy ambassador (*sota-embajador*), a scribe (*escrivão*), an interpreter (*língua*), and several knights (*cavaleiros criados d’el-rei*). In order to travel safely, a Brahmin had to be hired, with whom one of the Portuguese went ahead negotiating free passage. Wherever they met with representatives of a political authority – a local prince, a governor, or any other official – the men would have to negotiate, pay bribes, and often deal with hostile reactions. At any given moment, a particular member of the group could prove essential to the survival of the others, or cause their disgrace.

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66 See chapter 3.

67 Hence the importance of a biographical approach to diplomacy. Cf. Subrahmanyam and McPherson, *From Biography to History*, with outstanding articles by Anthony Disney, Jorge Flores, Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, Luís Filipe Thomaz and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, originally published in *Mare Liberum*, 5 (1993).


Intercultural apprenticeship and diplomatic behaviour in the widest sense of the word could, in such contexts, serve to counterbalance natural tendencies to over-react in culturally stressful situations. Personal charisma, intelligence, experience and adaptability were put to test on a daily basis during such journeys, and of course most prominently when an envoy was finally led into the presence of a sovereign. When Fernão Gomes de Lemos reached the court of Shah Ismail near Tabriz in 1515, there were already dozens of other envoys from surrounding countries competing for the monarch’s attention. Lemos himself tells us that, at one moment, it looked as if the Portuguese would be left to sit with a delegation of Georgians in what seemed to be one of the more marginal corners of the gathering. Lemos had – according to his own narrative of course – to act in breach of the established rules and refuse to kiss the ground during a reception to attract the ruler’s attention. Shah Ismail then agreed to let his host sit in a more prominent location.\(^{70}\)

It is impossible to understand Portuguese diplomacy in Asia without taking into account the diversity of protagonists, the variety of political and cultural contexts, and the vast range of different objectives that drove diplomatic encounters. Many humble nobles and commoners kept moving across the borders, often beginning their diplomatic careers by carrying letters – much like Brahmans traditionally did in India and Sri Lanka – or working as freelance interpreters. Hundreds disappeared from the Portuguese sphere every single year, leaving traces in the archives only if they wrote letters, returned to the \textit{Estado} at some point, or met other travellers who would mention them as living somewhere among the “heathens” as “renegades”.\(^{71}\) Needless to say, theirs is an often scarcely documented universe of cultural mediators and adventurers who, by seizing the opportunities of informal diplomacy, gained influence over the development of early Portuguese activities in Asia.

In a way, official diplomatic activity was just the tip of the iceberg of a much larger social and cultural process that saw Portuguese men, cultural practices and ideas move across early modern Asia – and vice-versa, Asian culture infiltrating Portuguese ports, networks and families. The peculiar blend of formality and improvisation characteristic of Portuguese expansion in general – and perhaps early European presence in Asia as a whole – permitted a profound and multifaceted interaction with Asian polities and peoples. These aspects are essential for an understanding of the Portuguese presence in the south of India and in Sri Lanka, on which the following chapters place their focus.

\(^{71}\) See Couto, “Quelques observations sur les renégats portugais en Asie” and “The role of interpreters”. 
Conclusion

From 1498 to 1580 at least, Portugal did not have a monolithic imperial project in the East and relied heavily on diplomatic negotiations to complement its military might. The Portuguese Empire in Asia in the sixteenth century was a discontinuous and heterogeneous set of possessions dependent upon the tolerational politics of Asian rulers as much as on their own military assets. Much of the human substance of the Estado was permanently on the move, not to mention the thousands of Portuguese men — and some women — who chose to live their lives beyond the borders of the Crown’s official realms. Many different ideas of expansion co-existed in Lisbon, Goa, Colombo, Hormuz, or Macao. Many diplomatic or quasi-diplomatic agents with diverse cultural backgrounds and varying degrees of legitimacy learned to interact with Asian authorities in different ways. Portuguese diplomacy in Asia in the sixteenth century lacked consistency both in theory and in practice. But it was precisely this aspect that made it successful at the time — and a promising subject of study for us today.

Whether Portuguese diplomacy in Asia was inherently more open to dissent and to improvisation than that of other European nations remains an open question. On the one hand, even a superficial look at, for example, the mid-seventeenth-century Dutch-Portuguese diplomatic dispute over the cinnamon lands of Galle in the south of Sri Lanka suggests that the VOC was well-prepared to defeat the Estado not only militarily, but also legally thanks to the coherence and focus of its discourse. Whether such instances are sufficient to prove the point of Portuguese exceptionalism, however, is very much to be doubted. We simply cannot rely on a rigid framework of contrasting national cultures because so many other factors need to be considered first, regional variations and change over time being the foremost aspects to complicate the picture. Even if we were to turn a blind eye on the regional specificities that the Portuguese adapted to, we would still have to confront the fact that Portuguese diplomacy, like that of any other nation, evolved over time. It was not only characterized by a multitude of agents driven by many different goals and operating in a wide variety of political and cultural contexts. It also went through a significant process of apprenticeship and adaptation from the time of Vasco da Gama, when Europeans had little practical information about the East (and vice-versa), to the Habsburg era (beginning for Portugal in 1580), when Maritime Asia became a stage for the first global war between Iberia and the Netherlands.

This is not just a matter of relative, but also of absolute chronology. Perhaps the most distinctive trait of our subject of study derives not so much from being an Iberian or a Catholic venture – as opposed to the later, predominantly Protestant endeavours of the seventeenth century – but from the fact that it started to develop a hundred years before the Dutch and the English made it to Asia. This all too easily overlooked chronological factor is decisive for the comparative history of European expansion in Asia and for early modern global history in general. The Portuguese expansionist process began at a time when no other European nation was yet active in Maritime Asia. For an entire century, the Portuguese monopoly on the Cape route went virtually unchallenged. This was a crucial period during which the nation-state, the idea of bureaucracy, and global capitalism were all very much in the making. Any comparison of Portuguese and Dutch diplomacy will need to come to grips with the fact that the political, administrative and financial tools of the early 1600s were different from those of the early 1500s. All these caveats together should take us rather inevitably beyond the age-old thesis of contrasting national cultures in European expansion. They should also alert us to the multiple challenges of studying European diplomatic practices whilst taking into account the vast variety of possible connections with Asian political cultures.
3

From Diplomacy to Conquest:
The “Matrioshka Principle” and How it was Overcome in Sri Lanka

How did the Portuguese move from diplomacy to conquest, and what exactly was the relationship between império and conquista in Portuguese expansion in South Asia?\(^1\) The answer to this question will naturally depend on how we define “empire” and to what extent we are willing to accept that the word has more than a single unambiguous meaning. It is certainly possible to see an imperial impulse at work from the very beginning of the Portuguese presence in Asia. Gama’s posture carried the seeds of aggression, and little more than a decade later the Portuguese proceeded to their single most important conquest in India, Goa. Such a historiographical approach only makes full sense, however, if we also accept that the diplomatic activities described in chapter 2 were part of the imperial stance. This may leave some critics with the impression that “empire” is being watered down to appear as an ultimately harmless, because permanently negotiating entity. But the point to make here is precisely this: negotiations were conducted against the backdrop of Portugal’s hegemonic stance; and hegemony needed negotiations to work. A straightforward conquest like that of Goa remained exceptional. Perhaps large-scale conquests were programmed into the (cultural, military, political) DNA of the Estado to take effect somewhere further down the line. But in most places decades passed before such tendencies manifested themselves, if at all. Thanks to the interdependence between imperialism and diplomacy, not to mention all that went on beyond the borders of the tiny possessions of the Lusitanian Crown, the Portuguese Empire

\(^1\) This chapter reproduces with minor changes “The Matrioshka Principle and How it was Overcome” (2009). Originally based on a paper presented at the 35th Annual South Asia Conference at Madison, Wisconsin, in October 2006, the text was expanded for the Imperial Models conference at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, in February 2007, and revised in London in 2008–09. Permission kindly granted by the Journal of Early Modern History.
in Asia carries in itself a superb principle of uncertainty. We can never quite know where the empire stood on any particular matter at any moment, by what means it hoped to achieve its goals (if ever it could agree on what they were), and what would happen when its projects were confronted with the realities of South Asian politics.

If we are to embrace this uncertainty, it is crucial that we allow the words “empire” and “imperial” sufficient space to breathe. Early modern empires in general are perhaps more resistant than others to straightforward definitions, and the Portuguese Estado in Asia is a particularly telling case. The imperial formations of the sixteenth century embody the ambiguities of a transitional period marked by a sudden intensification of contacts across the globe. Historians of the modern world may define their empires as “structures of political and economic interference which organize their component parts hierarchically”\(^2\), presuming that these parts, in turn, are states. Replacing the word “states” by “peoples” may also produce a fairly satisfactory description of some empires of Antiquity. But what if – as was the case during much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the elementary units of empires were rapidly changing or otherwise hard-to-grasp entities rooted in distant cultural traditions, their confrontation occurring much too rapidly for a truly coherent hierarchization to take shape? What if the imperial models of the parties involved were partly commensurable, and yet not fully translatable into each other’s political languages, the subdued societies cultivating their own ideas of empire and following rules of imperial integration that were not those of the conquering center? What if even two neighbouring nations such as Portugal and Castile developed imperial ambitions that materialized in such contrasting entities as New Spain and Peru on the one hand, and the Estado da Índia on the other?

This chapter makes a case for a balanced evaluation of the similarities and the discrepancies that shaped the interaction of empires in the sixteenth century by looking into the peculiarities of early Luso-Lankan interactions. The model bears relevance for South Asia as a whole, and also for some other areas of Portuguese expansion. In the first part, I suggest that communication and cooperation were possible even between two such distinct entities as the Portuguese Empire and the smaller Empire of Kotte in Sri Lanka, much in accordance with Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s suggestion that we go back to considering inter-imperial commensurability instead of placing all the emphasis on incommensurability.\(^3\) Thus the following pages describe how the Estado da Índia and

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2 Working definition brought to the discussion at the first Imperial Models conference on Translatio Imperii by David Armitage, based on Charles S. Maier, “Empires or Nations?”

3 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Par-delà l’incommensurabilité”.
Kotte, two polities differing in size and shape but also sharing analogous mechanisms of imperial power building, met in the early 1500s, and how their relationship evolved as a result of quasi-commensurable political imaginations. Yet it is also important to ask what happened when a third, substantially more heavyweight player, Habsburg Spain, came into the picture after 1580 as a consequence of the Iberian Union of Crowns. The latter part of this chapter thus examines how the conceptual frameworks of the three empires collided and how the original search for an inter-imperial platform was made irrelevant by the Catholic Monarchy’s practices of incorporation.

Put briefly, I argue that there was a shift from early Portuguese-Sri Lankan interactions based on divergent, but ultimately analogous, concepts defining empires as realms of suzerainty or indirect control towards a more hard-hitting policy of conquest aiming at the establishment of an extended sovereignty during the Estado’s Habsburg period (1580–1640). The latter was in accordance with an increasingly rigid imperial model based on direct territorial rule, an ideal that was diametrically opposed to the Lankan tradition and also in contrast with much of what the Portuguese did between 1498 and 1580. Although this does not necessarily mean that Portuguese imperialism was transformed under Spanish pressure – any direct influence of this sort is difficult to prove, and possibly overall less relevant than is often assumed – it does throw light on the complexity of the process that contributed to the growth of Iberian power east of the Cape, driving parts of South Asia into the sphere of European influence before the arrival of the British.

**The Portuguese in Sri Lanka: early (dis)agreements, 1506–1524**

It was, as we have already seen, in the early Portuguese Empire’s nature to explore vast stretches of Maritime Asia without necessarily getting involved in local affairs beyond relations of trade and – often purely commercial – diplomacy. Though the Portuguese Empire held, by papal decree, a right of conquest in all countries to the east of the line of Tordesillas (1494), this inherently imperial mandate – comparable to that of Castile in the western hemisphere – was only rarely exercised by the Portuguese in Asia before 1600. It represented a *ius ad rem* rather than a *ius in re*, a potential right to lay claims on territories. While a full-fledged occupation was not feasible, this would still make it legitimate in

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4 I will avoid using strict definitions of suzerainty and sovereignty at this point as both concepts are most useful in the present context as ideal types corresponding broadly to ideas and practices of indirect (tributary, often symbolic) as opposed to direct (integrative, fiscal) rule or control. For some additional detail, see notes 16, 39 and 41.
the eyes of the Portuguese Crown to demand tribute (páreas) from local rulers. Violence and threats of violence were thus used to compel numerous Asian rulers into acknowledging Portuguese suzerainty, while few places were subjected to direct rule. Fissiparous and subject to substantial change over the course of time, the Portuguese Empire developed a remarkable variety of solutions in its dealings with the complex political landscapes of Asia. In a way, the original system was more of a network than an empire, its appetite for territorial possessions growing only gradually over the course of the sixteenth century in a process that has not yet been studied sufficiently in depth to allow for any generalizations.

At the time of their arrival in Sri Lanka in 1506 the Portuguese showed a very limited interest in the island as such. No fort was built there, and no trade depot (feitoria) established. Ceylonese cinnamon, it was hoped, could be had at a low cost and without a deeper involvement in local affairs by imposing a tributary relationship on Kotte, the principal political centre in the southwest of the island. Although our sources are sketchy, it seems that some sort of request (requerimento) was read out to Dharma Parakramabahu IX, King of Kotte (r.1489–1513) in 1506 to make him a “friend” (amigo) of the nascent Estado da Índia. The request was not ill-received, and the precise contours of the

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5 Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, p. 219. The word páreas is evidence for the medieval Iberian-Islamic roots of these tributary payments made by one state to another as an expression of the latter’s superiority.
6 Saldanha, Iustum Imperium and Thomaz, “L’idée impériale manuéline”.
7 Thomaz, De Ceuta a Timor, p. 210. On the empire in general, also see Subrahmanyam, The Portuguese Empire in Asia, as well as Costa and Rodrigues, Portugal y Oriente.
8 Most of the factual history of the Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka has been established by Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule in Ceylon 1594–1612; De Silva, The Portuguese in Ceylon 1617–1638; Winius, The Fatal History of Portuguese Ceylon; Bouchon, “Les rois de Kotte au début du XVIe siècle”; Flores, Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão, 1498–1543. There is little to be added to the picture thus traced, except for a short period of time – the 1550s to 1590s – which I have explored in “A aprendizagem de Ceilão”, pp. 331–477. Two titles with strong theoretical implications have brought new insights, however, from which my work has benefited greatly: Roberts, Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period and Strathern, Kingship and Conversion.
9 See Bouchon, “Les rois de Kotte” and Flores, Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão.
10 For a general, though partly outdated, overview of the Portuguese cinnamon trade, see Godinho, Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial, vol. II, pp. 206–213.
11 Saldanha, Iustum Imperium, p. 527. The reign of Dharma Parakramabahu IX is examined in Bouchon, “Les rois de Kotte”. The requerimento is not to be mistaken for a legally binding requerimiento in the Spanish sense. The latter type of text only appeared in 1510.
“friendship” in relation to the hierarchically clearer notion of “vassalage” remained healthily blurry for many years.

There was more than one reason for the Crown of Kotte to take the proposal seriously, and indeed to take the lead in the negotiations. Most importantly perhaps, the military capabilities of the Portuguese had become evident in southwestern India before their arrival in Sri Lanka. Hindu kings in Cochin and in Cannanore – and even, for a brief moment in 1503/4, in Calicut – entered agreements of “friendship” (amizade) or “brotherhood” (irmandade) with the Portuguese as a direct consequence of the latter’s demonstrations of power. Moreover, tributary arrangements of this sort were no novelty in the region. They had been an integral part of interstate relations in and around Sri Lanka for centuries, making it relatively straightforward for a number of small polities to accommodate Portuguese expansionism and sometimes use the newcomers’ might to subvert existing hierarchies. In Sri Lanka, the Kings of Kotte allowed themselves from the late medieval period to claim the much-coveted titles of maharajadhirajan and, exceptionally, cakravarti even if their influence remained limited to the island and their position depended on paying allegiance

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13 On Cochin and Cannanore see Costa and Rodrigues, El proyecto indiano. On Calicut see Biedermann, “A última carta de Francisco de Albuquerque”.
15 Originally meaning “Turner of the Wheel” or “World Conqueror” in the ancient Buddhist ideology of kingship – see Tambiah, World Conqueror and World Renouncer – this term was increasingly used again in Sri Lanka from the thirteenth century, reflecting an influx of more markedly Hinduized South Indian conceptions where the military might of the ruler gained importance, thus connoting a “supreme overlord” ruling primarily by power (danda) rather than through claims to the virtuous path (dhamma); see Holt, The Buddhist Visnu, p. 42.
16 Walters, “Buddhist History: the Sri Lankan Pali Vamsas and their Commentary”; Goonwardena, “Kingship in XVIIth Century Sri Lanka”; Strathern, “Sri Lanka in the long Early Modern Period”. There is, I believe, sufficient evidence for the use of that title in Lanka during at least parts of the period under consideration, even though its precise meaning may have been subject to shifts (see notes 15 and 61). For a convincing analysis of Kottean and Kandyan kingship, see Goonwardena, “Kingship”, esp. pp. 7–10. It may be noted that European terms such as rei, monarca or imperador were under discussion during the same period, yet without affecting the fundamental logic involved. At the very
to foreign powers. Far from contradictory, these two aspects of the Lankan imperial imagination went hand in hand. The maintenance of external tributary relations by the symbolic overlords of Sri Lanka, the Kings of Kotte, prevented lesser rulers in the island from obtaining foreign support. Parakramabahu VI (r. c1411–1466\(^{18}\)), the last medieval *cakravarti* of Sri Lanka, united the island under his symbolic overlordship while paying tribute to Ming China after the troops of Zheng He had intervened decisively in Kotte in the early 1400s.\(^{19}\) Around 1500, the Kings of Kotte were paying allegiance to a smaller, only regionally influential polity, the Kingdom of Kollam or Venad in the south of Kerala, obtaining regiments of Karava soldiers in exchange.\(^{20}\) According to the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires, the “principal king” (rey principal) of Ceylon – that is, the ruler of Kotte – paid an annual tribute of 40 elephants to the King of Kollam (Coulão) at that time.\(^{21}\)

It comes as no surprise, then, that Dharma Parakramabahu IX agreed to hand over a large amount of cinnamon to the Portuguese in 1506.\(^{22}\) Though his-

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\(^{18}\) Dates taken from Somaratne, “Rules of succession to the Throne of Kotte”.

\(^{19}\) Werake, “A re-examination of Chinese Relations with Sri Lanka”. There are records of tributary missions in 1416, 1432, 1433, 1435, 1436, 1445 and 1459.

\(^{20}\) According to the *Mukkara Hatana* Kotte received a platoon of Karava warriors in 1508, precisely at the time when Parakramabahu refused to make a tributary payment to the Portuguese: Raghavan, *The Karava of Ceylon*, pp. 5–14; also see Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion*, p. 22.

\(^{21}\) Pires, *Suma Oriental*, p. 188. John Rogers has alerted me that it may be useful to distinguish here between deals that brought prestige (ultimately in the conceptual wake of Sinhala-Maurya relations), with great and distant powers such as China (and perhaps the Portuguese), whilst deals with minor powers such as Kollam may have brought little more than practical benefits. In both cases, there may have been “a recognition in Sinhalese political theory that being a vassal could be negative, and that when this was the case the objective of the king was to throw off vassalage. For example, the economic exploitation of the Gampola kingdom by Jaffna in the fourteenth century must have been resented – it was imposed by military force, and involved having tax collectors at various places in order to collect ‘tribute’”. I wish to thank John Rogers for this remark, which fits well with the swiftness of Kottean distantiation from Kollam in favour of the Portuguese. Possibly the Portuguese took a position somewhere halfway between the aforementioned Asian empires and the Little Kingdom of Kollam.

Historians have tended to interpret this gesture as a rather naïve sign of sporadic friendliness, it is quite clear that Dharma Parakramabahu acted with a strategic objective. The present – whatever its precise ceremonial circumstances, which remain unclear due to the nature of our sources – was made to create a bond between the King of Kotte and the Portuguese, excluding others from becoming their “friends”, and securing an option for military assistance in the future. As Sinhalese kings had been importing mercenaries from Kollam, it is plausible to assume that thoughts about a similar arrangement with the Portuguese would cross Parakramabahu’s mind.\(^\text{23}\) The widely known fact that Cochin had used the Portuguese presence to free itself from Calicut’s overlordship must have shed additional favourable light on the possibility of having Lusitanian troops on the island. In fact, by 1510, Kotte rejected Kollam’s overlordship and minted coins of its own, in what was then seen as a direct consequence of its good relations with the Portuguese.\(^\text{24}\) It is reasonable to conclude from all this that the relatively peaceful start of Portuguese-Sri Lankan interactions is best explained on grounds of the non-invasive nature of early Portuguese imperialism, on the one hand, and the political experience of Sinhalese rulers in handling external hegemonic powers as a means of consolidating the internal imperial project of Kotte, on the other hand.

At some point during these years, the Portuguese received their first demands from Kotte for the establishment of a permanent garrison at Colombo, including a proposal to build a fort. A request of this sort was made in 1513 by one of the factions competing for the throne in Kotte after the death of Dharma Parakramabahu IX. Yet Afonso de Albuquerque, the governor of the Estado da Índia, refused to cooperate.\(^\text{25}\) This rejection, it may be added, was in overt opposition to the Portuguese Crown’s policy of those years.\(^\text{26}\) Manuel I (r.1495–1521) nurtured hopes of building an anti-Islamic alliance with the help of Asian and African rulers.\(^\text{27}\) Stationing troops in the old island of Taprobane would have been an especially prestigious sign of his expanding power in the East.\(^\text{28}\) Thus the positions of the Portuguese Crown and parts of the political elite in

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23 Cf. Flores, Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão, p. 89 and “Portuguese entrepreneurs in the Sea of Ceylon”, pp. 140–141; Strathern, Kingship and Conversion, pp. 32–33. On the importance of foreign troops in Sri Lanka, see Geiger, “Army and War in Mediaeval Ceylon” and Codrington, “Medieval Mercenary Forces in Ceylon”.


27 Cf. Thomaz, “L’idée impériale manuéline”.

28 Flores, “A imagem do Oriente no Ocidente europeu”. 

Kotte coincided in the 1510s, even though ideas about the precise meaning and purpose of a garrison were rather blurry on both sides.29

This convergence of interests eventually led to the construction of a Portuguese fort adjacent to Colombo in 1518. According to the Portuguese chronicler Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, permission was granted by the King of Kotte Vijayabahu VI (r.1513–21) for the building of a fort “so that there could be a trading depot [...] and [...] people who would help [the king] when he should be in need of them”.30 It was at this point that the “vassalage” (vassalagem) of Kotte was formally established. The newcomers imposed themselves militarily after meeting with an unexpected Mappila-inspired opposition to their disembarkment and an attack a few days later due to what seems to have been a courtly intrigue mounted by Sakalakalavallaba, a rival brother of Vijayabahu, as a response to inflated Portuguese demands for cinnamon. Consequently, Vijayabahu was forced into signing an agreement of submission to the Estado that involved regular payments of tribute as an expression of a formally sanctioned hierarchical inferiority.31

Yet the half-heartedness of the Portuguese enterprise soon became evident. Whilst Vijayabahu VI – shortly to be assassinated by his three sons – needed the involvement of Portuguese troops in his political games, the governor and his captains kept their men at a clear distance from local realities, demanding tributary payments without offering anything substantial in return. The fort – serving essentially as a fortified trading depot – was built on an isolated peninsula in the vicinity of Colombo. It was separated from the mainland by a moat, and deserters were punished severely. This insularity, to be further explored in chapter 6, became a powerful metaphor for early Portuguese thalassocracy around Ceylon. With the exception of the aging king and some of his advisors, no one in the Portuguese network was willing to invest military resources in Lanka. After the deaths of Manuel I and Vijayabahu in 1521, John III (r.1521–57) and Bhuvanekabahu VII, King of Kotte (r.1521–51), tacitly agreed upon the abandonment of the fort. Bhuvanekabahu was first in refusing payments, using his relatively secure position in the early 1520s to take a hostile stance against the garrison at Colombo. Lisbon soon decided to abandon the outpost, the royal order being carried out in 1524. Only a Portuguese factor (feitor), a scribe and a

29 Albuquerque was not alone among the Portuguese to oppose the construction of a fortress in Ceylon. The same position was advocated by the Portuguese traders of Cochin who saw the royal plans as a menace to their activities; see Subrahmanyam, A carreira e lenda, p. 313 and Flores, Os Portugueses, pp. 138–139.
handful or two of soldiers were left behind, so that commercial — and, shortly thereafter, again tributary — relations with Bhuvanekabahu would not be entirely disrupted.\footnote{Castanheda, \textit{História}, vol. II, p. 299. Further details of this transition are discussed in Biedermann, “A aprendizagem de Ceilão”, pp. 146–156.}

Ironically enough, the earliest attempt at a sustained Luso-Lankan interaction was a failure not so much due to an excess of imperial interventionism on the Portuguese side, but rather to a lack of it between 1518 and 1521.\footnote{After 1521, Bhuvanekabahu perceived the fortress as an excess of Portuguese presence, but mostly because — in my interpretation — it was useless to him due to its lack of commitment to local affairs.} The reluctance of the \textit{Estado} to provide troops for local wars was at the core of Vijayabahu’s disappointment, and perhaps one of the reasons for his premature demise. Although it must have been a good augur from a Sri Lankan point of view that the Portuguese respected the integrity of Kottean sovereignty by not invading the island, the inability of the \textit{Estado} to supply troops in correspondence with the Lankan tradition, while still demanding tribute, posed obvious problems. As we shall see, this remained a central and largely unsettled issue in the practical management of Luso-Lankan relations during the following decades. Nevertheless, the ways in which the Crown of Kotte attempted to solve it are clear evidence of its self-confidence as a sovereign player in the game, and of the Lankan imperial model involved. Concurrently, the handling of the issue by the Portuguese reveals a great deal about the imperial strategies of the \textit{Estado} and its relative functionality in the Asian context.

\textbf{The Matrioshka Principle: Kottean and Portuguese ideas about vassalage, 1525–28}

After the assassination of Vijayabahu in 1521, Bhuvanekabahu took control of the sacred capital of Kotte as a maharaja whose symbolic and economic superiority over his two younger brothers, the rajas of Sitawaka and Rayigama, seemed relatively secure.\footnote{De Silva, “Sri Lanka in the Early Sixteenth Century: Political Conditions”, pp. 23–24 and 64; cf. Strathern, \textit{Kinship and Conversion}, p. 30.} This may explain his early stance, between 1521 and 1524, of dismantling the Portuguese fort. Although the deal reached among the three brothers was an unusual one, Kotte retained its imperial mandate, namely its right to aspire to an overall control of Sri Lanka under the \textit{cakravarti} principle. This peculiar arrangement was in tune with earlier practices of imperial expansion in the island. Much of the power exerted even by the above-mentioned Parakramabahu VI in his heyday in the mid-1400s was of a nature
than can be translated – though certainly not comprehensively rendered – as imperial in the largely non-intrusive sense of *Imperium* practiced most paradigmatically in the Holy Roman Empire under Frederick III.\(^{35}\) In this sense, Bhuvanekebahu could aspire to style himself as a successor to Parakramabahu VI, even if he ceded the direct control over parts of the southwestern territories to his brothers. Moreover, being the *imperador* or, more modestly, *rei grande* of Kotte was, as mentioned, not contradictory to maintaining a tributary relationship with a larger empire outside of Sri Lanka and drawing resources from it.\(^{36}\) Even if Bhuvanekebahu VII contributed to the abandonment of the Colombo fort, this does not mean that he was against a Portuguese presence on the island – as long as it made sense within the Lankan conception of imperial interaction.

In fact, the Sri Lankan way of handling foreign imperial powers in general was in no contradiction with the Portuguese imperial idea: the two systems were, to some extent at least, conceptually and also practically compatible. John III, a man with a strong sense for the material limitations of the *Estado*, was partial to the idea of maintaining the ambiguous vassalatic status of Bhuvanekebahu VII while making only minimum efforts on the ground. Although this implied a breach of the principle of vassalatic mutuality from a Lankan perspective, it was not entirely against the interests of Bhuvanekebahu VII either, as long as there would be space for further negotiations. Ideally, from a Kottean point of view, a non-invasive imperial project could indeed unfold outside of the island, whilst another smaller one would then be free to thrive inside. This means that the two empires could live and deal with each other peacefully as a pair of nesting dolls: there would be an intact Little Empire pursuing its policies in Lanka placed within another, equally intact, but larger empire wrapped around it and going about its own business outside, most notably on the seas.\(^{37}\) Kotte would pursue its theoretically undamaged (though in practice problematic, as we shall see) imperial project within Sri Lanka as if the island were a


\(^{37}\) The idea of a “Little Empire” obviously draws on the concept of “Little Kingdom” developed by Bernard Cohn’s for North India, adopted by Nicholas Dircks for South India and more recently readapted in a very dynamic setting by Margret Frenz for eighteenth-Century Kerala; see Cohn, “Political Systems in Eighteenth-Century India: The Banaras Region”, Dircks, “The Structure and Meaning of Political Relations in a South Indian Little Kingdom” and Margret Frenz, *Vom Herrscher zum Untertan*. 
bubble protected on the outside by a mightier empire, the Estado. This is probably the idea that had already been at the core of what Parakramabahu IX attempted to convey to the Portuguese in 1506. According to a document written slightly later in Lisbon, the king had declared that “whilst the Christians would be Lords of the sea, he would be Lord of the land”\(^{38}\). Whilst this paraphrase provides no direct evidence – it is merely a part of a conversation between two cultured Central Europeans interested in Portuguese affairs – it does render indirectly the principle of layered imperialism by which the Sinhalese King was willing to negotiate with the Portuguese.

Furthermore, the Kottean imperial project involved forcing lesser rulers into a symbolic submission that was analogous to the one that Kotte entertained with the Estado. The King of Kotte was not only a sovereign in his own Little Kingdom – in a way comparable, at first glance, to the position of John III in mainland Portugal\(^{39}\) – but also a suzerain of sorts in other parts of Sri Lanka, receiving tribute from lesser kings following a logic that historians describe as “tributary overlordship”.\(^{40}\) He was therefore a “King of Kings” (rajadirajan) in a way that is analogous to the Portuguese King’s imperial stance as “Rei de Reis” overseas\(^{41}\). In both cases – the Portuguese Empire and the Kottean Empire – the overlord defined his authority according to a principle of non-intrusive suzerainty rather than one of expanding sovereignty. Power relations were, in both cases, based on the logic of indirect control, materialized in relations of vassalage implying periodic acts of ritualized submission and tributary payments, rather than an extensive involvement of the overlord in his vassals’ internal affairs. Within the theoretical realm of the Empire of Kotte, yet outside the boundaries of the kingdom *stricto sensu*, a number of smaller polities remained intact with “kings” (rajas, reis) of their own. These were the smallest

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\(^{38}\) “Und sprach weren die Cristen herren von dem mer so wer her herr von dem land”, Valentinus Moravus to Stephan Gabler, paraphrasing Dharma Parakramabahu IX, King of Kotte, Lisbon, 26.VI.1510, publ. in Brásio, “Uma carta inédita de Valentim Fernandes”, p. 344. The quote shows that this idea was talked about in Lisbon at that time. It is also in tune though with the more direct evidence on Sri Lanka from later years and may thus reflect more than just an empty topic of cultured European conversation.

\(^{39}\) Sovereignty, a concept that was under transformation during the sixteenth century, lacks an in-depth study for Renaissance Portugal. Generally speaking, it may be associated with the topos of “preeminent power” and the idea of the king as supreme judge in his kingdom (a notion very much alive in Sri Lanka), preceding the thoughts developed by Bodin about the king as supreme legislator – though applied with more conviction in France than in Iberia; see Fernández-Albaladejo, *Fragmentos de Monarquía*, pp. 73–75.

\(^{40}\) This is the term used by Roberts, *Sinhala Consciousness*.

\(^{41}\) On the Portuguese concept of “Rei de Reis” see Saldanha, *Iustum Imperium*, pp. 321–331.
units of the *Matrioshka* set: the ones that can not be opened to reveal anything smaller inside.\footnote{42}{Some of these smaller *reinos* may be best described as chiefdoms, most evidently in the cases of Wellassa, Bintenna, Batticaloa and Trincomalee in the eastern half of Ceylon. Smaller subunits are not detectable in the surviving source material.}

Though having contributed to the abandonment of the Colombo fort in 1524 by suspending his tributary payments, Bhuvanekabahu needed Portuguese military support to maintain his status in the island and exert pressure on his rivals. His brother Mayadunne, King of Sitawaka (r.1521–78), challenged him with the help of South Indian Muslim allies, as soon as the Portuguese fortress disappeared. In 1525, Mappila troops called in by Mayadunne invaded the Kingdom of Kotte. A group of about 20 Portuguese soldiers who had remained in the area then proved decisive in coordinating the defense of the sacred capital and the Mappilas’ expulsion from the kingdom.\footnote{43}{Correia, *Lendas*, vol. II, pp. 521–522 (events erroneously situated in 1517); Queiroz, *Conquista*, p. 163.}

For a moment, Bhuvanekabahu held in his hands what he and his predecessors had longed for so dearly: a Portuguese elite platoon serving him in a way comparable to that of the South Indian mercenaries imported during previous decades. It is not clear whether he realized that the disruption of the ties linking these men to the Portuguese Crown was accidental – it was essentially a consequence of the hasty abandonment of the Colombo fort – and in contradiction with the system as it was imagined in Lisbon and in Goa. Yet the fact that, in 1525, things worked out in practice according to the Lankan model seems to have served as an incentive to Bhuvanekabahu and others in Sri Lanka to make further investments in vassalatic relations with the *Estado*.\footnote{44}{Cf. Strathern, *Kingship and Conversion*, p. 49.}

The hope remained to obtain more mercenaries for the conduction of local wars.

Guided by a genuine faith in inter-imperial vassalage and encouraged by the weakness of his rivals between 1525 and 1527, Bhuvanekabahu VII felt confident enough to make his own audacious proposal to John III. The Portuguese King, he argued, should retrieve his *feitor* and even some of the remaining *soldados* from Sri Lanka because there was no need for them in the context of a relationship that was, after all, based on the immediate personal bonds established between the two sovereigns. The annual tributary payments could be handled without the *Estado’s* officers who, for obvious reasons, tended to cause disruptions rather than being of assistance. It must be underlined that this request had little to do with xenophobia or anti-Portuguese resistance in the sense sometimes conveyed by modern Sri Lankan historians. Whilst demanding the retrieval of the *feitoria* staff, Bhuvanekabahu also requested that “seven or...
eight” other Portuguese soldiers should be sent each year to serve him – little groups of men who, he probably hoped, would become integrated into Lankan society more easily than larger ones led by institutional figures related to the Estado. The Sinhalese request is explicit in stating repeatedly that the fundamental condition for a successful presence of these men would be their direct submission to Bhuvanekabahu and the removal of their legal ties to the Estado: they should neither receive nor invoke orders from the governor in Goa. 45

This was the Matrioshka principle at its purest: the only link between the Little Empire of Kotte and the larger empire of the Portuguese would be the Sinhalese King himself. Any other forms of Portuguese authority within the realm of Kotte were rejected. Bhuvanekabahu VII, King of Kotte, attempted to maintain his status in the island untouched whilst paying tribute to John III. The King of Portugal, however, could hardly ignore that this might pose a threat to his own interests. Interestingly enough, the idea of reducing Portuguese royal authority in the island to a shell of symbolic suzerainty was advocated during the 1520s not only by the King of Kotte, but also by some Portuguese nobles involved in South Indian trade through their agents, most notably the Duke of Bragança. 46 Their motivation, of course, was to neutralize royal competition and leave the field open to private trade. 47 One of the reasons for the Portuguese Crown’s refusal to accept the terms proposed in 1527 by Bhuvanekabahu may thus have had to do with the internal dynamics of the empire, John III attempting to resist the free trading lobby that wanted to rid Colombo of Crown officials. Be that as it may, John III felt that he needed to maintain an official presence in Colombo in order to keep at least partial control over the cinnamon trade, a major (though not necessarily always reliable) source of income. 48

45 Nuno Álvares Pereira to John III, Goa, 15.XI.1527, publ. in Albuquerque and Costa, “Cartas de ‘serviços’ da Índia (1500–1530)”, p. 315. The author mentions that the same request was made by Bhuvanekabahu to the governor previously in charge, Dom Henrique de Meneses (1524–1526).


47 Nuno Álvares Pereira, who wrote down Bhuvanekabahu’s request in the Portuguese idiom, seems to have been part of the Bragança network. This suggests a convergence of the positions of Kotte and of the commercialists in the Portuguese sphere. On the latter, see Guerreiro and Rodrigues, “O ‘grupo de Cochim’ e a oposição a Afonso de Albuquerque”. On Pereira, see Schurhammer, Ceylon, p. 148, note 1.

48 On the repeated attempts at imposing a royal monopoly on the Lankan cinnamon trade, see Godinho, Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial, vol. II, pp. 209–210. Prices for this commodity doubled between 1518 and 1521, then remained stable and even weakened in the 1540s, only to increase dramatically during the third quarter of the century.
Hence the Portuguese Crown refused to accept the terms proposed by Kotte, much to the distress of Bhuvanekabahu VII.

One of the fundamental problems posed by the idealized interaction with Portugal in Sri Lanka was a paradoxical one. Whilst it was desirable for both sides to maintain a clear distinction between the two Matrioshka dolls, that is, the two spheres of imperial suzerainty, the alliance (be it one of friendship or one of vassalage) also implied the stationing of Portuguese troops and Crown officials in or near Kotte. In crucial contrast with earlier Lankan practices surrounding the import of South Indian mercenaries, however, the Portuguese soldiers never ceased to be subjects of the Portuguese King. Even when deprived of their little fortified piece of land adjacent to Colombo, they could and did break local laws and claim not to be liable to the Lankan system of justice, the head of which was the Sinhalese monarch. Although this was not exactly a matter of extra-territoriality, but rather one of personal law (each Portuguese soldier being an inalienable subject of the King of Portugal in person), the result was essentially an impingement on the Lankan king’s sphere of sovereignty, defined as the realm in which he was the supreme judge. The existence of Portuguese soldiers who were legally untouchable in the Kingdom of Kotte contradicted the Sinhalese conception of vassalage deeply. Though the latter traditionally involved the presence of foreign-born troops on Lankan soil, these were expected to serve the local ruler only and be entirely committed to him. However non-intrusive Portuguese overlordship was in theory, it thus ended up becoming severely invasive of the bubble that it was expected to protect, precisely due to the locally requested presence of men that it would ideally have avoided to deploy.

These were, of course, relatively subtle signs of dysfunction in the early years. It was the hard reality of local power relations that undermined the ideas formulated in 1527 more dramatically. Bhuvanekabahu’s position in the southwestern lowlands was substantially weakened by Mayadunne, King of Sitawaka, who established his own tributary alliance with Calicut in 1528 and soon laid his first major siege on Kotte. Bhuvanekabahu felt compelled to request aid from the Estado that was much more substantial than a handful of mercenaries. The arrival of an armada brought relief, but the shock was con-

50 Cf. Strathern, Kingship and Conversion, pp. 99–101; also see note 39.
51 Cf. De Silva, “The Rise and Fall of the Kingdom of Sitawaka (1521–1593)”.
52 Couto, Da Ásia, Decade V, book I, p. 61.
53 On the armada (which was heading to Sunda) see Luís Filipe Thomaz, “O malogrado estabelecimento oficial dos portugueses em Sunda e a islamização de Java”, pp. 463–466.
The Matrioshka Principle and How it was Overcome

considerable. In a document dated 1528 Bhuvanekabahu is reported to have “handed himself over with all his treasure [...] to the factor”.\(^{54}\) The same letter conveys a request by the Sinhalese King for the construction of a Portuguese “tower” at the site of the first fort, and a very substantial tributary payment of 800 bahars of cinnamon.\(^{55}\) Over the next few years, Kotte’s conjunctural weakness swiftly became structural. Though no new fort was built yet, the Estado’s fleets became a regular and potentially disruptive presence in Colombo. By 1533, the King of Kotte was ready to sign a formal agreement allowing the Portuguese to purchase large amounts of cinnamon beyond his tributary obligations, obviously under conditions that were most profitable to them.\(^{56}\) In exchange, he obtained further naval support from the Estado. However, his demands for contractually binding military support involving armed ground forces remained in limbo.

The illusion of high diplomacy, 1541–51

One of the most significant aspects of the dilemma faced by Bhuvanekabahu VII may well be the fact that the Sinhalese King attempted to solve it not by expelling all Portuguese subjects, but by demanding insistently their integration into his own sphere of jurisdiction. For this he made a number of requests, proposing increasingly sophisticated mechanisms to achieve his ideal.

In the early 1540s, the Crowns of Kotte and Portugal worked harder than at any other time to reach a mutually acceptable agreement settling their ambitions. By 1541, only two years after Bhuvanekabahu had experienced the advantages and disadvantages of Portuguese troops marching up the Kelani Valley to Sitawaka for the first time, the King of Kotte decided to make a bold step forward on the platform of diplomatic interaction that he still believed he shared with John III. Certainly the moment was one of relative optimism in Kotte. Mayadunne, King of Sitawaka, had been blocked from marrying Bhuvanekabahu’s eldest daughter Samudradevi, who instead wedded a general from the king’s entourage, Vidiye Bandara. A child, Dharmapala, was born from this marriage in 1538 and soon chosen to become Bhuvanekabahu’s heir to the throne of Kotte. Mayadunne, although able to take control of a vast stretch of territory in

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\(^{54}\) Afonso Mexia to John III, Cochin, 30.XII.1528, publ. Flores, Os Portugueses, pp. 347–349.

\(^{55}\) Over 200 tons, at least twice and possibly five times the amount handed over in 1506, and about half of the total production of the southwestern lowlands in the early seventeenth century (cf. Souza, “Cinnamon, the Salagama, the Mahabadda, and the Portuguese”).

\(^{56}\) See Chandra Richard De Silva, “Colonialism and Trade: the Cinnamon Contract of 1533”; the original text of the treaty is available in Flores, Os Portugueses, pp. 350–351.
Rayigama that same year, was officially excluded from the succession.\(^{57}\) In an unprecedented move, Bhuvanekabahu then sent his *purohita* Sri Ramaraksa Pandita on an embassy to Lisbon. In the Portuguese capital, the Brahmin envoy, a central legitimizing figure in Lankan rituals of kingship, had John III crown an effigy of Dharmapala, taken from Kotte to Lisbon for this purpose.\(^ {58}\) On the same occasion, the *purohita* presented a number of requests that, properly analyzed, reflect a great deal of the Lankan imagination concerning vassalatic contracts with foreign powers.\(^ {59}\)

It is possible to see the symbolic coronation of Dharmapala in Lisbon as a major diplomatic victory for Bhuvanekabahu. By captivating the centre of the empire with the glitter of an embassy (and this at a moment when it was publicly known that John III also owed him a huge sum of money for additional cinnamon taken from Sri Lanka\(^ {60}\)), he succeeded in rendering approximations between his rival Mayadunne and the *Estado* very difficult. Portuguese suzerainty over Sri Lanka was indeed to be based on an exclusive vassalatic bond with the King of Kotte, and no other local ruler.\(^ {61}\) It is remarkable how this idea then established itself in Lisbon for decades to come, resisting even when it came under systematic fire from many observers based in Asia after 1543.

Bhuvanekabahu VII also took advantage of the occasion to make it clear that his vassalage was a matter of mutuality. To quote from a later work by the

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57 De Silva, “The rise and fall”, p. 9.
60 *Lendas*, vol. IV, p. 307.
61 Bhuvanekabahu referred to himself as *cakravarti* at least once in an undated *sannasa* (copper plate donation). The translated title reads “His Majesty the sovereign Lord Sri Bhuvanaika Bahu… sovereign Lord of Tri Simhala and Lord of the nine gems” (Wickremasinghe et al., *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, vol. III, pp. 244–247). The wording in Portuguese sources is sparser and more ambiguous, thus calling for further exploration. A letter from 1552 signed by the Portuguese viceroy Dom Afonso de Noronha states that Bhuvanekabahu’s successor Dharmapala presented himself as “Rey grande como seu avoo” (“great king as is grandfather” Bhuvanekabahu), which may be a translation of *maharaja* rather than *cakravarti* (Noronha to John III, Cochin, 27.I.1552, in Schurhammer, *Ceylon*, vol. II, p. 587). Indeed, a few years earlier, already, a Franciscan friar had noted that the King of Kotte used to be “Emperador” (“*amitigamente era Emperador*”, Simão de Coimbra to John III, Goa, 25.XII.1546, *ibid.*, p. 420). On the other hand, Dom Filipe Botelho, a Sinhalese Catholic noble, wrote in the 1630s about the role of Kotte in terms that seem to confirm the cakravartistic theory: see Flores and Cruz, “A ‘Tale of two Cities’”. My thanks to Jorge Flores for drawing my attention to the latter source.
chronicler Fernão de Queiroz, Bhuwanekabahu, “Imperador da Taprobana”, would pay tribute to John III, “Rey dos Reys”; “as a payment for the honour [of being a vassal of Portugal]”, the chronicler’s paraphrase goes on, “I promise you the said tribute, with great punctuality, and the said places [of my kingdom] […] under the condition that you [the Portuguese King] defend them against the actions of Fortune; of which Fortune [Bhuwanekabahu] is thus a Lord [Senhor] whilst you [John III] are his [Lord]”. The syntax here appears of course laden with the literary conventions of the seventeenth century. Yet the message taken to Lisbon in 1542 was in essence very similar to the one given by Queiroz. In fact, the core meaning of the quote fits almost perfectly into the context of the royal decrees issued by John III as a direct response to Sri Ramaraksa’s pleads.

The deal was concurrently put on display in one of the finest pieces of Lankan art ever produced for export to Europe, the coronation casket now preserved in Munich. On the left end of the casket, Bhuwanekabahu is represented as “sitting on a lion throne wearing the multi-tiered crown of Lanka and holding a lotus flower, one of the five emblems of Buddha”. On his two sides are, so it seems, his two brothers, the Kings of Sitawaka and Rayigama, both acknowledging his overlordship. The opposite end has the king riding an elephant amidst other royal emblems such as fly whisks and a parasol. But most importantly, the front panel shows the coronation of the effigy by John III as he was imagined in Kotte, and the swearing of an oath of allegiance. Whilst it is still a matter of debate whom exactly some of the figures represent, it is clear

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62 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 185.
63 The first plead, paraphrased by Queiroz, is lost in the original document but was probably written on the missing first sheet of the apontamentos, the content of which can be induced from the wording of the corresponding first decree issued by the Portuguese King (see alvarà by John III for Bhuwanekabahu VII, Almeirim, 12.III.1543, in Schurhammer, Ceylon, pp. 110–111). Note that Dom Estêvão da Gama had recommended supporting Dharmapala in a letter sent from Goa, 11.XI.1540, ibid., pp. 94–95.
64 Ivory casket, Kotte, c. 1543, 18 x 30 x 16 cm, Schatzkammer der Residenz, Munich, inv. nr. 1241, reproduced in Strathern, Kingship, pp. 28 and 67–69, and below in figure 1. The designation as “coronation casket” serves to distinguish this casket from another one in the Munich collection. On this and other Sinhalo-Portuguese caskets, see Jaffer and Schwabe, “A Group of Sixteenth-Century Ivory Caskets from Ceylon”. The casket is very likely to have been produced in Ceylon before the embassy was dispatched, and used for transporting the effigy of Dharmapala to Lisbon. Also see Jordan Gschwend, Elfenbeine aus Ceylon.
65 Description by Jaffer and Schwabe, “A Group of Sixteenth-Century Ivory Caskets.”
66 Strathern, Kingship and Conversion, p. 27.
that the Lankan character handing over the effigy to the Portuguese King, arguably Bhuvanekabahu or his alter ego, the purohita Sri Ramaraksa, is seen as a partner equal in size and status.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

Figure 1: Scenes from the front panel of the “Coronation casket”, c. 1541
(Courtesy of Schatzkammer der Residenz, Munich)

Unfortunately we have very few clues about how the coronation was actually performed in Portugal. According to the chronicle of Fernão de Queiroz, the event took place in a “public hall” (sala publica) in Lisbon, and recent research suggests that this was most plausibly the sala grande of the royal palace (Paço da Ribeira) on the riverfront in the centre of the city. This hall had been refurbished after an earthquake damaged the building in 1531, and decorated with a series of Flemish tapestries depicting the “Conquest of India”, resulting from the most important artistic commission of Manuel I. No contemporary descriptions of the ceremony are extant, and we are thus left guessing whether the iconography of the casket reflects anything other than the Kottean imagination of the event – but the latter, of course, is highly significant in itself. A coronation in the presence of a purohita, such as it was represented by the artists commissioned by Bhuvanekabahu, would have been an essentially Sri Lankan ritual that did not even have a direct counterpart in Portugal, where kings were acclaimed, not crowned. One might speculate about whether the coronation ceremony, popular in other European kingdoms as well as in South Asia, was familiar enough to the Portuguese imagination to be performed in Lisbon for the sake of a vassal in distant Ceylon. The Portuguese court was used to dealing

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68 My thanks to Annemarie Jordan for providing her view of this setting.

with high-ranking visitors from Africa since the days of King John II (r.1481–95) and would certainly have had the means to impose certain elements of ritual that were not exactly those imagined by the Sinhalese. On the other hand, this was the first embassy of its kind sent to Lisbon from Asia, and the presence of Sri Ramaraksa at the royal court for over a year was taken very seriously by the Portuguese Crown, most evidently by Queen Catherine. The latter would suggest that Lankan protocol may have been followed during the act.

It seems quite clear that the embassy had a major impact, and yet, whilst some requests submitted by Bhuvanekabahu VII were taken into consideration and dispatched favourably, others were ignored. Among the rejected requests was one of Bhuvanekabahu’s most important wishes. The Sinhalese King had explicitly asked, once again, for Portuguese troops to be sent to Kotte and placed under his personal command. He had wanted them to be considered as his own subjects, not as subjects of the Portuguese Crown. Fifty armed men would, per his request, be sent to Kotte every three years. They would be paid by the Portuguese royal treasury (maybe as a settlement of John’s debts). But they would nevertheless obey Bhuvanekabahu without any interference from the Estado’s officials: “those men [the soldiers] will not be obliged to do what your factor commands them, but only what I command them with regard to the service of Your Highness”. The request was now presented as a logical consequence of the fact that Bhuvanekabahu stood for the King of Portugal’s interests in Sri Lanka better and more legitimately than anyone else, including the empire’s officials. If a direct personal link between vassal and overlord was at the heart of Kotte’s alliance with Portugal, there was to be no interference from the military and administrative hierarchy of the Estado. In a way, Bhuvanekabahu demanded to be treated as a person standing on at least the same hierarchical level as the viceroy in Goa.

The hope of obtaining a regular supply of soldados remained a vital and central element of Kottean foreign policy throughout the 1540s. John III, however, failed to address this question in any of his letters sent to Sri Lanka. Partly, this may have been due to a lack of resources, since the Estado struggled perennially with a shortage of men, material and money. Another reason may have been unease about the fact that the Sinhalese King remained a Buddhist, and that Christian soldiers should not, in principle, serve a heathen lord. Yet, most importantly, there may have been a growing inability to understand the

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70 Queen Catherine seems to have been of key importance for the stability of Luso-Kottean relation in the subsequent decades; cf. Jordan Gschwend, *Elfenbeine aus Ceylon*.

inter-imperial stance of Bhuwanekabahu in Portugal. By 1542, the Portuguese may have lacked the ability to understand Bhuwanekabahu’s fragile situation in Ceylon. Arguably John III, enamored of the elegant solution of being “King of Kings” without interfering in local matters, did not quite realize what it meant to be a king (and indeed another “King of Kings”, a rajadirajan) in Kotte, adhering to a system in which authority and status were continually renegotiated with an intensity not familiar in Portugal.

In this sense, a fundamental misunderstanding undermined John III’s dealings with Kotte. The position of the Portuguese Kings in their own country had changed substantially since the late 1400s. Perhaps John II, a ruler who had had to force his way through a phalanx of hostile aristocrats to the point of personally assassinating one of them, would have possessed the mental tools to understand Sri Lankan politics better than his successors. But, during the reign of Manuel I, Portugal had entered a phase of consolidation as a territorial state placed under the authority of a symbolically unchallenged sovereign. It was becoming too different from Sri Lanka to allow for the building of further mental bridges between Lisbon and Kotte. The problem was thus, to some extent, one of political systems drifting apart as they evolved. From the letters written by Bhuwanekabahu during the later 1540s, it becomes increasingly clear that the Sinhalese King felt misunderstood. At one point, he exposed his dilemma to the Portuguese King’s younger sibling, the Infant Dom Luís, in the following terms: “I beg Your Highness to send me support because I assure you that I only live as a fearful man, and I do not know who might guard my person, my brother being my worst enemy and traitor, always conspiring against me”.

This was in the most striking contrast with the peaceful relations that prevailed between John III and Luis despite some inevitable tensions. The latter was never married and remained politically largely inoffensive until his death in 1555.

Though Portuguese imperial overlordship matched the Lankan political imagination well in enough in theory, in practice it failed to provide an element of vital importance: troops to be placed under Sinhalese command. On this particular point, the Portuguese imperial imagination, supple and unorthodox as it may have been in comparison with that of Spain, remained attached to a principle that was ultimately dysfunctional in the Lankan context: the principle of non-alienation of Portuguese subjects. Had John III been capable of renouncing his personal ties with a few dozen of his subjects, sending them to Ceylon and

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72 Magalhães, “O enquadramento do espaço nacional”, pp. 41–50. Any emphasis on the relativity of Portuguese centralism in the sixteenth century, namely under the deconstructivist logic inherent to Hespanha’s As vésperas do Leviathan, fades into insignificance once the comparison with Sri Lanka is made.

73 Bhuwanekabahu VII to Dom Luis, Kotte, 28.XI.1543, in Schurhammer, Ceylon, p. 123.
placing them under the command of his personal vassal Bhuvanekabahu as a number of South Indian rulers had done before, events would probably have taken a different direction. But the two countries were too far apart on this for their sovereigns to find common ground, and the overall imbalance of power too pronounced by now. In Sri Lanka, the political realm, though ideally protected from the outside along a natural border provided by the sea, was internally porous and discontinuous, the relations between territory, authority and ethnicity flexible enough to allow for the integration of people of foreign birth into the ranks of the local military elite as a part of inter-imperial deals. Most probably, the Portuguese soldiers would not even have been forced to abandon their religion in order to find a place in Lankan society, as South Indian troops seem to have remained attached to Hindu practices without problems. Portuguese society, by contrast, could not conceive of having Portuguese-born Catholic men living overseas as subjects of a non-Christian king, even if it were in the context of a political deal reached in an elaborate ceremony such as that of 1542.

In this, the Portuguese imperial imagination reached the limit of its flexibility. The dilemma that had arisen in the 1520s remained unsolved, and perhaps unsolvable. There would be soldados in the island, but they would never become Lankan military specialists in the sense expected by the Sinhalese. There would be a large empire protecting a smaller one, but without leaving the latter’s integrity entirely intact. There would also be an increasing pressure from other polities in the island interested in obtaining Portuguese resources, thus challenging Kottean supremacy by continuously launching diplomatic offensives to charm the officials of the Estado. The Matrioshka principle continued to make sense in theory but it could not be put satisfactorily into practice. This being said, it took another four decades for the Portuguese Empire to develop a truly new strategy for its presence in Sri Lanka. In fact, the final transformation came about only when the system itself was overthrown.

Transition to high-cost intervention, 1551–1580

After 1550, a number of critical changes took place in Sri Lanka, of which a very brief account should suffice here. The viceroy nominee Dom Afonso de Noronha landed unexpectedly in Colombo on his voyage from Lisbon to Goa in October 1551. Diplomatically untalented and ill-prepared for the exceedingly confusing situation then reigning in Kotte (a Portuguese platoon had suffered its first great defeat in the mountains near Kandy a few months earlier), Noronha attempted to renegotiate terms with Bhuvanekabahu VII, whom some local Por-

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tuguese merchants and missionaries accused of treason. He went so far as to receive envoys from Mayadunne and, apparently, he accepted the Sitawakan King’s vassalage to the Portuguese Crown. This was a fundamental breach of the Lisbon agreement of 1542 concerning the exclusivity of Luso-Kotteen relations. Enticed by rumours about the vastness of Bhuvanekabahu’s royal treasure, Noronha also stationed a garrison of 400 men in Colombo. In a letter to John III, he claimed that the people of Sri Lanka would be easily subdued if there were orders from Lisbon to do so. Shortly after Noronha’s departure, a Portuguese soldier killed Bhuvanekabahu VII, allegedly by accident. Not much after this, Noronha returned to Lanka to seize the Kottean treasure, and war broke out. The disorderly agency of the Portuguese reached a dramatic climax with the desecration of the Temple of the Buddha’s Tooth in Kotte, the single most important sacred place associated with Sinhalese kingship. For the Kingdom of Kotte, this event signified a major disruption.

The acclaimed successor of Bhuvanekabahu, Dharmapala (r.1551–97), was still a child, his position undermined by the circumstances of his grandfather’s death combined with the Portuguese viceroy’s presence in the island. True, there is no evidence that John III ever attempted to impose conversion as a condition for the maintenance of the alliance with Kotte through the figure of Dharmapala, whose effigy he had personally crowned in Lisbon fifteen years earlier. However, Bhuvanekabahu’s heathenness had been perceived as a problem, and thus the young prince must have suffered considerable pressure locally to convert. He was eventually baptized by the Franciscans in 1556 or 1557, being renamed Dom João. The conversion posed fundamental problems of legitimacy in terms of Sinhalese traditions of kingship. By abandoning his role as a protector of the Buddhist Sangha, the monastic institution traditionally associated with Lankan kingship, the young ruler alienated many of his subjects, perhaps even the majority.

Nevertheless, Dom João Dharmapala’s long reign is of key importance in the history of Sri Lanka. Despite a difficult start, the King of Kotte maintained his position as a potential, though militarily weak, all-Lankan overlord. While other rulers in Sitawaka and Kandy vigorously challenged such claims, Kotte did secure its alliance with Goa for another four decades, and remained a symbolically significant center of Sri Lankan politics throughout this period. After 1557, the Portuguese were drawn deeper and deeper into local wars, mostly

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75 Afonso de Noronha to John III, Cochin, 16.I.1551, in Schurhammer, Ceylon, pp. 552–553.
77 Strathern, Kingship and Conversion, pp. 132 and 150–152.
79 This is one of the central arguments in Strathern, Kingship and Conversion, pp. 167–169.
against the will of the Estado and under circumstances that go well beyond the scope of this chapter. The fundamental logic of these campaigns was to combine the interests of Dharmapala’s admittedly fragile entourage with those of a number of Portuguese residents (casados), mavericks and other subaltern agents residing in Colombo, usually acting without waiting for orders to be given in Goa or Lisbon.\(^8^0\) These were largely peripheral initiatives when looked at from the centre of the empire. With Kotte surrounded by Sitawakan troops in 1565, the Portuguese transferred the royal court to Colombo, thus creating a new Luso-Sinhalese capital that remains the political and economic centre of the country today.\(^8^1\) During the following two decades, the number of foreign troops in Colombo kept increasing, and soon it was felt in Lisbon and Goa that expenses in Ceylon were out of control. Continuously threatened by the new King of Sitawaka, Rajasinha I (r.1578–93), Colombo became a costly enclave for the Estado with benefits that went mostly into the pockets of private traders dealing in cinnamon and precious stones. Yet the Portuguese authorities in Lisbon and Goa remained incapable of elaborating a coherent new imperial policy for Ceylon.

**Translatio imperii, the Lankan way: the donation of 1580**

The most dramatic step taken by the Sinhalese King Dom João (Dharmapala) and his entourage to secure Portuguese protection in a moment of military distress came in 1580 and had an exceptional array of consequences. On the 12\(^{\text{th}}\) of August of that year, amidst the longest of the sieges laid on Colombo by Sitawakan forces, the heirless and physically weakened Dom João signed a donation mortis causa allowing his crown to transit to the King of Portugal upon his death.\(^8^2\) This document was set up by someone familiar with Iberian law, possibly one of the Franciscans residing at the Sinhalese court, but it was clearly backed by the Kottean elite still attached to Bhuvanekabahu’s grandson.\(^8^3\) Again, the document is explicit in stating the central role of Portuguese military assistance to Dom João, or rather to Kotte as a more abstract repository of Lankan imperial legitimacy. The dismembered Lankan empire was to be rebuilt from almost nothing by Portuguese arms, now on the grounds that it would

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80 This is one of my arguments in “A aprendizagem de Ceilão”, pp. 363–390.
81 See chapter 6. The recent revival of Kotte as the seat of the Sri Lankan parliament is of course reversely a by-product of Colombo’s unchallenged position in the country.
83 The size of this group is unclear, yet a number of local nobles, who converted (or not) to Catholicism and fought along with the Portuguese in defense of Kotte emerge from the accounts of the campaigns of the 1580s–90s.
sooner or later belong to them by inheritance. The traditional concept of having Portuguese troops placed under the command of a Sinhalese king, as discussed above, was thus discarded for the future. Yet, in a way, the old idea was still at the basis of the new deal: the king himself would cease to be a Sinhalese figure one day, but Kotte/Colombo with its courtly elite that supported the process would finally have at their disposal the full force of the Estado. In other words, Kotte would cease to be the predominantly Sinhala and Buddhist polity it had once been, but it would carry on its imperial heritage.

True, other kingdoms in the island retained the traditional attributes of Lankan kingship (protection of the Buddhist Sangha, possession of a Tooth relic in Kandy, etc.) as well or even better, and some of them drew considerable legitimacy from this in their struggle against Kotte and the Portuguese, coming up with their own imperial projects for Sri Lanka (most notably Sitawaka until 1593, and Kandy after 1600). This would later lead to a situation where two imperial traditions – those of Kotte/Colombo and of Kandy – competed with each other for military and symbolic supremacy in an increasingly complex context also involving other European powers. However, the most striking aspect in the late 1500s is that the transformations in the Kottean realm, namely the rampant takeover of effective power by Portuguese forces, did not signal its symbolic annihilation. The imperial throne of Kotte retained at least some of its prestige and proved capable of carrying it over into the seventeenth century, when the Lankan southwest became a Portuguese colony. The transition initiated in 1580 may thus be read as a sign that Lankan statehood, though largely linked to a Hindu/Buddhist concept of sacred kingship, was not entirely dependent on it.

The donation of 1580 tightened the relationship between Kotte and the Crown of Portugal to the point of formally identifying the two entities with each other. As heirs to the throne of Kotte, the Portuguese Crown and its representative in Asia, the Estado, could do nothing from now on but defend it.

Crucially as well, Dom João handed over two things, not just one: firstly, the right of taking possession of his devastated lands generally known as the “Kingdom” (reino) of Kotte. This was an area of Kottean sovereignty contained by a set of (admittedly unstable) borders that had existed in the early sixteenth century, before being divided as a consequence of the regicide in 1521 and almost entirely dismantled under Sitawaka’s pressure during the 1550s to

85 For a view that differs from mine on this point, see Strathern, Kingship and Conversion, where the possibilities of non-Buddhist kingship in Sri Lanka are systematically explored.
Secondly, however, Dom João also transmitted Kotte’s imperial mandate, the mandate to place all the other kingdoms in the island of Lanka under what we may call its suzerainty. This was a full-fledged *translatio imperii* to a foreign power that had not until then been willing to take part whole-heartedly in Lankan warfare, but would now be obliged to do so:

“[the king’s heirs, the Portuguese Crown] shall be entitled to legitimately wage war on the land and on the sea until they become Lords [*senhores*] of all the said kingdoms [*reinos*] along their ancient demarcations and [of the] lordships [or overlordships; *senhorios*] that they have, as the Kings of Kotte had them before over the other kings of this island, [an island] which is and has always been due to them”.

The latter part of the sentence is particularly difficult to translate into English, and looks very much like a subtly elaborated formula rendering in Portuguese the fact that it was a part of Kotte’s exclusive historical heritage to lay claim to overlordship over the rest of the island, that is, over polities that were outside its historical borders as a kingdom, but intrinsically “due” or “obliged” (*devido/a*) to it as tributaries. Thus, the smaller of the “Matrioshka dolls” would become an integral part of the larger, the conceptual void between the two eliminated by a formal union of the Portuguese Crown with that of Kotte. Any possibility of the latter cutting the former out of its own body was thus rendered impossible. The Matrioshka principle, if not entirely suppressed (Dharmapala would remain the King of Kotte and nominate the commanders of local troops until his death in 1597), was transformed into something that neither the Portuguese nor the Lankan Crowns had originally intended to create. Although we do not know exactly who stood behind this transformation, it seems to have been driven by an ethnically heterogeneous elite residing in Colombo, which developed an interest in attracting the full might of the *Estado* to the island in order to fight off the might of Sitawaka. As a matter of fact, peripheral voices had been claiming for intervention ever since the 1540s. And whilst they had traditionally met with very little success in convincing Goa and Lisbon of the necessity of a more hawkish approach to Ceylon, things were now set to change.

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86 Whether the realm referred to in the donation included the territories of Sitawaka and Rayigama created after the partition of 1521 is not clear, though it seems plausible.
87 Donation in *Gavetas*, vol. III, p. 609.
From Diplomacy to Conquest

Translatio imperii, the Habsburg way: the 1580–98 integration

The 1580 donation is a decisive document for the history of Sri Lanka, but also one that goes well beyond the limits of Luso-Lankan interaction. By a fatal coincidence, Portugal itself ceased to be an independent kingdom when the contract was set up. Between 1580 and 1581, the Portuguese Crown passed to the hands of Philip II of Spain (r.1556–98), thus becoming a part of the Catholic Monarchy until 1640. Philip, so it was often said, “conquered, inherited and bought” the country in a process that involved invasion, negotiations with the Portuguese parliaments (cortes), and subornment on a large scale, including not just bribes, but also a considerable increase in privileges granted to the higher nobility.⁸⁹ Although the Spanish and the Portuguese halves of the Catholic Monarchy remained formally separate, things started to change in the Estado, and Ceylon is in many ways an example of these transformations.⁹⁰

Once the donation of Kotte reached the newly established court of Philip II in Lisbon (the king remained in that city through 1583), the text was examined by a learned council of letrados in order to establish its legality.⁹¹ It was found

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⁸⁹ Cf. Cunha, “A questão jurídica na crise dinástica”; Magalhães, “Filipe II (I de Portugal)”, ibid., pp. 563–566; Serrão, História de Portugal, vol. III, p. 80. Whereas the Portuguese and Spanish historiography of the past twenty years has emphasized the negotiated dimension of the transition, Rafael Valladares has recently reclaimed some ground for the acknowledgment of conquest as a crucial factor. Among other aspects, Valladares argues in La conquista de Lisboa that each element had its preponderance at a specific moment of the transition.

⁹⁰ I should underline at this point that it is not clear to what extent these transformations were due to contrasting national cultures of imperial expansion, which remain to be examined in a comparative perspective. Numerous plans of territorial conquest were made by the Portuguese during the sixteenth century, and proposals of total submission often co-existed with ideas of vassalage. The donation mortis causa of Ternate (Moluccas) in 1537 could be quoted as an argument for the existence of transmissions of sovereignty well before 1580 (it was in fact the only one of this kind until 1580, cf. Saldanha, Iustum Imperium, pp. 500–501). However, we know very little about the reactions to this specific donation in Portugal, as it was made in Malacca and immediately reinforced in the Moluccas without any further consultations with Goa or Lisbon. It may thus be argued that the Portuguese Crown was generally more reluctant to take such plans seriously before 1580 than after that date, when it came under direct Habsburg control. It seems that after the creation of the Financial Council (Conselho da Fazenda) in 1591, the doors stood wide open for a more decidedly Castilian intervention in Portugal’s Asian sphere of interest, but this does not mean that all changes were Castilian, nor even Castilian-inspired, in origin. See “A aprendizagem de Ceilão”, pp. 447–503 and “Ruptura imperial ou realização”.

⁹¹ On comparable councils for instance after the first submission of Hormuz in 1507, or in Goa concerning Jaffna see Saldanha, Iustum Imperium, pp. 183–184.
to be valid and worthy of being archived in the repository of state papers, the Torre do Tombo, though requiring some further legitimation on the ground: “although the said document came in a convenient form […] in order to make this inheritance more firm it should be demanded from the King of Ceylon that, his relatives being against him [and] at war [with him], he should disinherit them expressly: because this will by law be right and sufficient to deprive them of the succession to the kingdom […]”. Additionally, the “natural people of Ceylon” were expected to elect Philip II and his successors “as the king of that kingdom, based on the said document and donation of the King of Ceylon”.

At last the empire bit the bait thrown out by Colombo’s elite. Obtaining a kingdom by inheritance was not a novelty for Philip II, let alone for the House of Habsburg. The parallels between the foreseeable takeover of Ceylon and the takeover of Portugal at the cortes of Almeirim and Tomar in 1580/81 must have been striking. The power of legal rhetoric achieved at the Habsburg court what decades of a less formally elaborate epistolography and diplomacy had not been able to bring about. The Iberian overlord accepted the heritage of Kottean cakravartism without quite knowing what it was. Of course, the Sinhalese elite that remained in Colombo also failed to realize what it was getting itself, and the population of the island’s southwest, into. The ceremony that was required to reinforce the donation in loco took place in Colombo in 1583 involving Christian and non-Christian rites. Whilst the Catholic nobles swore their oath on the Bible, others performed the act in the presence of “suas manilhas e pagodes”, a reference to sacred objects of the Buddhist/Hindu tradition, including perhaps some of the regalia usually on display around the Sinhalese King. On the same day, a public acclamation was staged during which the surviving aristocracy of Kotte recognized the donation of Dharmapala in the name of their peo-

92 Philip II to governor Dom Duarte de Meneses, Lisbon, 10.III.1584, British Library, Add. Ms. 20,861, “Collecçam authentica de todas as Leys, Regimentos Alvaras, e mais ordens que se expediram para a India desde o estabelecimento destas Conquistas; ordenada por Provizam de 28 de Março de 1754. India Tomo 1”, fols. 2v–3.
93 Exactly who constituted this elite remains, as mentioned already, subject to further study. It is clear, however, that we are dealing with Christian and non-Christian elements of the remainders of the royal court settled in Colombo in 1565, nobles of Portuguese, mixed or Sinhalese blood closely associated with Dom João Dharmapala. The pages of Queiroz’ and Couto’s chronicles mention a number of such protagonists for the 1580s and the following decades, many of whom had complex careers and crossed the boundaries between various polities and factions more than once.
ple, swearing that they would, after his death, accept the King of Portugal “as their own natural king” (“como a seu propio rey natural”).

It is quite remarkable how the new Spanish-Portuguese imperial administration managed such a problematic translatio in what it saw as an orderly process of incorporation. Although there is little material to evaluate how Dom João and his entourage thought and felt about all this, it may be allowable at this point to speculate about the correspondences that made the integration of Kotte into the Catholic Monarchy possible before we proceed to those that made it impossible. The Monarchy, like a number of other early modern composite states, was a complex body of which a number of kingdoms (Castile, Aragon, Naples, Portugal, etc.) formed juridically separate parts. Their union was conceived of as aequa principaliter, allowing for a prolonged and regular treatment as distinct entities. The system had a number of different roots contributing to its complexity. Charles V was as much imperator or unus princeps in the tradition of Roman law as rex regum or princeps principum in the Ecclesiastic corporatist tradition, which had experienced its own medieval developments in Iberia. Indeed, the Holy Empire’s Universalism always left considerable space for local particularities. Similarly, Castile included a multitude of distinct territories, ranging from Asturias to Andalusia and the Canary Islands, which only became adapted to each other slowly, if at all. Logically, the composite monarchy presided by Charles V and his successors favoured the incorporation of polities – both contiguous and distant – without necessarily imposing immediate and radical changes to their internal structures. Aragon had annexed Valencia, Majorca, Catalonia and Naples during the late medieval period, but each of these territories was still run separately in the 1500s. There remained much space for local autonomy, institutions and political folklore, to which the monarchs often had to bow due to physical distance and other factors (the cortes of Navarre for example, and of course those of Portugal, retained considerable importance even though both kingdoms had their own councils or consejos in Madrid). Even the juridical incorporation of the Spanish Indies

96 Despite recent trends in Spanish historiography to criticize the concept of “composite monarchy” (derived from H. G. Koenigsberger’s “composite state”) for its rigid nature – a number of voices have risen against it at the conference on El Mundo de los Virreyes, Universitat de Barcelona, 30.V.2008 – its fundamental logic remains valid for the present purpose; see Elliott, “A Europe of Composite Monarchies”.
99 On the multi-council system see Tomás y Valiente, “El sistema polisinodial”.

into the Crown of Castile could not circumvent the fact that these territories needed to be administered by viceroys, figures defined as *alter egos* of the monarch, in an institution that ended up reinforcing certain aspects of local distinctness or, in other words, a number of full-fledged political centres outside the actual centre of the empire.

Already problematic in certain European contexts (such as Portugal, where the selection of governors remained an issue from 1581 to 1640), this principle brought along the greatest challenges when applied east of the line of Tordesillas. One of the most significant problems arising from the annexation of the Portuguese Empire by the Catholic Monarchy may indeed have been the way in which the different parts of the body were conceived to be held together. Before any polity such as the Kingdom of Kotte could be integrated into the Monarchy, it needed to be beheaded and rid of any figures that might compete with the new monarch for access to the throne. Only then could Philip, King of Spain (the imperial title having gone back to Austria after the renunciation of Charles V in 1556), take his place at the top of the polity and become its new sovereign. Philip was a sovereign simultaneously in each of his kingdoms. In contrast with the above-discussed John III of Portugal, it may be said that he was a “King of Kingdoms” rather than a “King of Kings”. Surely one is struck by the relative ease with which he agreed to become the sovereign of yet another realm, regardless of the fact that this was a rather hard-to-define entity in a distant island only vaguely known to him as Ceilán. To use a current expression of the day, “whilst there cannot be a King without a Kingdom, there can well be a Kingdom without a King” (“*no pudiendo haver Rey sin Reyno, bien puede haver Reyno sin Rey*”). Once a throne was vacant, it could be occupied by the Catholic Monarch even at a distance of half a hemisphere. In almost any of his realms except Castile, the monarch was an absentee most of the time. Hence the importance of staging a ceremony of disinheriance in Colombo to make sure that no local candidates could challenge Philip’s legitimacy and claim the heritage of Dom João.

The transition, one is compelled to note, was a drastic departure from the indirect, suzerainty-driven imperialism of the Portuguese dynasty of Avis (1386–1580). Instead, we see a model in which, Philip II being an absentee king, local matters needed to be dealt with by an officer of the empire rather than a local ruler, a captain-general instead of a Sinhalese vassal king.

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100 Cañéque, *The King’s Living Image*.
102 Though the Portuguese and Spanish concepts of governorship and captaincy incorporated a rich inheritance including very disparate experiences, such as that of Adrian Florisz Böeyens of Utrecht in Castile before the revolt of the *comuneros*, those of Margaret of Parma
the 1590s, the Portuguese never attempted to replace Dom João Dharmapala with a Lusitanian officer. When some Portuguese troops spontaneously considered the possibility of putting a man from their own ranks on the throne of Kandy in 1594, they met with vehement protests from their Sinhalese allies. When some Portuguese troops spontaneously considered the possibility of putting a man from their own ranks on the throne of Kandy in 1594, they met with vehement protests from their Sinhalese allies. The creation of the office of captain-general with its vast array of powers in the same year, three years before Dom João passed away, was equally ill-received. But after Dom João’s death and his replacement by the captain-general Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo in 1597, the treatment of the members of the Sinhalese royal family took radical turn to the worse. Princes and princesses of royal blood were now perceived as a threat, and the imperial authorities did everything they could to neutralize them. Some were assassinated, others were sent into exile to Goa, and still others ended up in Portugal or Spain where they legally resigned their claims. What the Habsburgs did in Portugal to keep the Braganças in check, the empire did much more bluntly in Sri Lanka to deprive the island of its royal family.

Was this then the decisive problem of Habsburg-Portuguese rule in Ceylon? The answer is less straightforward than one might expect. Of course, the practice of holding together the parts of the imperial body by a single head constituted a major challenge in Asia. Yet, in a way, even the policy of governing parts of the empire with the help of Iberian officers rather than vassal kings of local birth was not entirely incompatible with Lankan political ideals. Despite the fact that Lankan kingdoms were structured around a centre embodied by the king, the latter figure was, to a large extent, interchangeable. Most cultures attribute two bodies to the king, and Lanka was no exception. The centre of the idealized realm of Lanka was not so much the king as an individual, but rather the sacred void framed by the regalia of Lankan kingship, in which each king’s body was placed. The “true centre” of Kottean statehood was a strangely un-

\[\text{(1559) and Alexander Farnese (1578) in the Low Countries, or that of Isabel Clara Eugenia and the Archduke Albert residing as largely autonomous quasi-sovereigns in Brussels after 1598. In the New World, the virreinos of New Spain (1535) and Peru (1542) followed an analogous model, although the social standing of the governors there was considerably lower. On a smaller scale, a similar logic also existed in the Portuguese Empire, with governors in Bahia and Goa, and captains in most other possessions; cf. Saldanha, Iustum Imperium, pp. 333–341.}\]

\[\text{103 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 392.}\]

\[\text{104 See Queiroz, Conquista, pp. 388–389 and one of the last messages sent by Dom João to Portugal, where he invokes, once more, the possibility of having Portuguese men at his service without interference from the officers of the Estado: notes for Philip II, Colombo, 10.XII.1594, publ. in Rivara, Archivo Portuguez-Oriental, fasc. 3, p. 736.}\]

\[\text{105 See Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule and De Silva, The Portuguese.}\]
substantial cosmological axis framed and materialized by the lion throne, the imperial umbrella, and the other objects associated with them, rather than the king “himself”. From this perspective, kingship was hollow and open to personal change beyond ethnic barriers. At the very least, it seems that the person of the king in Kotte was as interchangeable as in most European countries at the time. The crucial aspect is that the king, if coming from outside, needed to be accepted as such by the local elite.\footnote{For a detailed analysis of foreigner kingship in Sri Lanka, see Strathern, “The Vijaya Origin Myth of Sri Lanka and the Strangeness of Kingship”.
107 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 430.
109 Queiroz, Conquista, 834; cf. Ribeiro, Fatalidade Histórica, pp. 20–23.}

When Dom João of Kotte died in May 1597, the transition did indeed appear to be rather smooth at the local level. A gathering of the principal nobles was organized in Colombo, the participants being nominated by a larger assembly and then taken to swear an oath accepting Philip II as the “universal heir” (universal herdeiro) of Dom João. According to a document written on the same day, they would from that moment “keep faith and loyalty, obey and be vassals to him and to his successors […] or to his viceroys, governors or captains”.\footnote{Queiroz, Conquista, 834; cf. Ribeiro, Fatalidade Histórica, pp. 20–23.} Then people went into the streets to publicly acclaim the new, absent king.\footnote{Queiroz, Conquista, p. 430.} Another ceremony of succession is reported to have taken place later in the royal palace of Malwana near Colombo, though this gathering has been vigorously called into question by one of the best-informed historians of this period, Tikiri Abeyasinghe.\footnote{Abeyasinghe, “The Myth of the Malvana Convention”.
109 According to the Portuguese chronicler Fernão de Queiroz, “cortes”, a parliament-style gathering like those traditionally held in Iberia, namely those of Tomar in 1580/81, were staged at Malwana, and the Lankan aristocrats received a promise “in the name of His Majesty [Philip II or rather Philip III, r.1598–1621]” that the “Naturals of Ceylon” could keep their own laws, after which they proceeded to vote.\footnote{Couto, Décadas, vol. XII, pp. 45–46.}

This not the place to discuss the “Malwana Convention”, to which we shall turn in chapter 5. The crucial aspect to note at present is that the Colombo acclamation alone would have left a number of fundamental issues unresolved. The donation of 1580 made no mention of what was to happen to the Sinhalese ruler’s non-Christian subjects. The Catholic Monarchy being a confessional polity, there might not have been a clear position on this question before 1597, when the succession became effective. But after Dom João’s death, this particular aspect needed to be negotiated along with other issues (as had been done, for instance, at the occasion of the incorporation of the Kingdom of Granada). The negotiations would, as I shall argue further below, logically have been accom-
plished in an assembly reminiscent of the cortes which, in Portugal, had paved the way for the Habsburg takeover.

We do know that the years after the takeover were marked by a considerable increase in the Kottean nobility’s rights and privileges, much like in Portugal after the negotiations leading to Philip’s acclamation in 1581. It thus makes a great deal of sense to assume that, in exchange for the recognition of the new ruler by the Sinhalese elite, Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo, captain-general of the conquest of Ceylon from 1597 to 1612, promised a righteous and orderly rule in the name of Philip II, but also substantial material incentives and symbolic concessions. Azevedo kept one of his official residences in Malwana and held the annual dākum mangalle ceremony there, during which the Kottean nobles traditionally renewed their allegiance to their king. Although the fundamental elements of Buddhist kingship had been abandoned by then, the institution, as it was used by the Portuguese captain-general, retained forms that made it easier for the Kottean elite to accept the new imperial order, at least for some time – easier than if all local lore had been entirely ignored. However debased of religious legitimacy all this may have seemed from a Buddhist point of view, Azevedo’s dākum ceremonies echoed the Lankan practice of periodically renewing the personal ties between the king and his foremost subjects, ties on which the unity of the polity ultimately rested.

Why, then, is it that things soured so intensely after Dom João’s death, plunging Ceylon into six decades of internecine warfare from the 1590s to the 1650s, and resulting in the Portuguese being ousted by the Dutch in 1658? Although the decades between 1550 and 1590 had been conflictive already, warfare in the later period seems to have gained a new quality, an intensity and systematic destructiveness that was not there before. Part of the explanation may have to do with the fact that the events described so far were limited to a very small area in the southwest of Ceylon, whilst the rest of the island pursued a more complex agenda ranging from conditional cooperation to overt conflict with European powers. Although a group of Kottean nobles went to the point of accepting the Portuguese captain-general as an Ersatz for their own king around 1600, a large part, and perhaps the majority, of the island’s population had little or nothing to do with this transition and tended to attribute an increasing legitimacy to the reinvigorated institutions of Buddhist kingship in Kandy. Once

the *Estado* started to use Colombo as a basis for campaigns of conquest, cooperation became an increasingly problematic alternative for the Sinhalese living outside that area. However, anti-Portuguese sentiment is not in itself sufficient to explain the multifaceted history of Luso-Lankan relations in the seventeenth century.

Two aspects may have contributed to a rupture in Sri Lanka around 1600. First, there was the way in which Habsburg-Portuguese sovereignty was actually imposed in the southwestern territories over the years. It has been noted that the multiplicity of political and institutional practices in the European lands of the Spanish Habsburgs was not matched by a similar diversity overseas, where conquest was commonly “based on the notional implantation and reproduction of imported institutions”.\(^{115}\) Despite what seems to have been an initial promise to maintain much of the internal political and social status quo, the early decades of the seventeenth century brought an increasing Iberianization of Sri Lanka’s southwest, as the Portuguese proceeded to take possession of the lands of Kotte. From the 1590s, new maps were drawn, fortresses planned and built to control territories, borders created, lands listed in order to be taxed and, later on, handed over to Portuguese nobles.\(^{116}\) The spirit of the *relaciones geográficas*, the system of geographical inventorization applied in New Spain from the 1570s, seems to have been transplanted to the paddy fields and forests of Sri Lanka.\(^{117}\) Offices and positions formerly held by Lankans were Lusitanized: whereas in 1597 only one higher office – significantly a military position – had been held by a Portuguese (married to a Sinhalese lady of royal lineage), by 1615, quite shortly after Philip III ordered a systematic “cleansing” of this sphere of power in 1608, a single Sinhalese mudaliyar was left in the entire kingdom. All other military leaders were now of Portuguese origin.\(^{118}\) In a way, an analogous process would begin in Portugal in the 1620s as Habsburg rule became less committed to the deal reached in 1581. At that time, the Count-Duke of Olivares attempted to undermine the legal integrity of Portugal as a separate kingdom – as he did in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula – by integrating it into the political and financial structures of Castile. However, things in Sri Lanka were graver and exerted their impact on a different scale, with much deeper cultural and religious implications than in Habsburg Portugal. Missionary activities were extended as Jesuits, Augustinians and Dominicans moved into the field to compete with the Franciscans for lands and souls. The

\(^{115}\) Subrahmanyam, “A Tale of Three Empires”, pp. 75–76.
\(^{116}\) Cf. Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule* and Biedermann, “Representations”.
\(^{117}\) On the *relaciones* and their maps, see Morales Folguera, *La construcción de la utopia* and Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*.
\(^{118}\) Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule*, p. 78.
process of evangelization proved profoundly disruptive to the social and cultural tissue of the southwest and west of the island. Although much remains to be said about these processes, the early 1600s undoubtedly brought an increase in ethnically and religiously motivated hostilities and unseen levels of violence on both sides.\textsuperscript{119}

The second, perhaps more fundamental problem of Habsburg-Portuguese rule in Ceylon has to do with the island as a whole rather than the Kingdom of Kotte in particular. Its roots extend into the deeper layers of what people in Iberia and Sri Lanka believed empire, kingship and royal authority to mean, and this finally brings us back to the difficulty of defining empire in an era of sudden global interaction and rapid political change. Before 1551, everybody in Sri Lanka had formed a relatively clear idea of what Bhuvanekabahu VII was: a militarily weak, yet symbolically prominent maharaja of a small but prestigious polity in the southwest. As someone sitting on the imperial throne of Kotte and as a vassal of the Portuguese Crown, Bhuvanekabahu could – and did indeed – lay the occasional claim to the cakravarti title in the Lankan tradition.\textsuperscript{120} This was possible because the Lankan imperial model circumscribed the meanings of such a title in a fairly reasonable manner. Even at the height of their power, the Kings of Kotte were seen as – and considered themselves to be – suzerains, not sovereigns over the rest of the island. Their policies focused on forcing other Lankan kings to submit. Yet this submission signalled essentially an overlordship materialized in the periodical presentation of tribute. The extension of Kotte’s imperial mandate across Sri Lanka as a whole was notionally plausible because it did not imply the permanent deployment of military forces.

The Habsburg-Portuguese imperial administration failed to acknowledge this. When Philip II agreed to become the successor to Dom João in Sri Lanka, he seems to have missed a single, but overwhelmingly important, aspect of his duty. Even if he was to fulfil the Lankan imperial mandate bestowed upon him in the donation of 1580, his or his representative’s mission outside the borders of the Kingdom of Kotte was not to re-conquer the entire island as a sovereign, but only to control it as a suzerain. Apparently, Dom João even mentioned Kandy and Jaffna as exceptions to his theoretical imperial realm shortly before he died,\textsuperscript{121} but to no effect. One might wonder how two Iberian royal courts,

\textsuperscript{119} On the missionary history of this period, which deserves further research, see Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule, pp. 192–223 and De Silva, The Portuguese, pp. 236–246.

\textsuperscript{120} See note 61.

\textsuperscript{121} Ribeiro, Fatalidade Histórica, p. 20. The donation of Kandy by Dom Filipe (Yamasinha Bandara) to the Portuguese Crown in Mannar in 1590 had no legal effect before Filipe’s son Dom João personally renounced his heritage on a trip to Madrid in 1609 (cf. Queiroz, Conquista, pp. 576–578).
The Matrioshka Principle and How it was Overcome

several royal councils and one of the greatest monarchs of the day could possibly have made such a mistake. Yet they did. Partly, perhaps, this was due to the illusion that an opportunity for an extensive military takeover had come with the death of Rajasinha I, King of Sitawaka, in 1593. More fundamentally, though, the misunderstanding was rooted in an underestimation of political and cultural difference between Iberia and Sri Lanka. Generally, in the then developing western, essentially Euclidean concept of a globally homogenized geographical space, there was little room left for genuine Otherness. We shall see how this played out in cartography in the next chapter. In the globalized Habsburg Empire’s administration, shaped by sweeping conquests and takeovers in Europe, America and Asia, this blindness to radical difference seems to have been particularly virulent. Nobody in Madrid or at the Escorial seems to have felt the need to reflect upon what the Portuguese Crown’s relation with Kotte had really been about for almost a century, never mind the need to reflect about the profoundly diverse nature of the imperial tradition in Sri Lanka when compared to the practices of Habsburg Spain.

Misled by an excess of self-confidence and a failure to understand the Lankan imperial model, the administrators of the Catholic Monarchy felt capable of dealing with Ceylon as a whole by simply going for its conquest, conquista in the percussive, hard-edged sense of taking effective possession by military means. This may be the moment to emphasize once more that the Spanish “influence” on Portuguese imperial policies has yet to be demonstrated, its mechanisms remaining to be exposed. There had been longstanding claims on the Portuguese side for territorial conquests in Asia from the early sixteenth century. Yet these claims had rarely been taken seriously by the Portuguese Crown. It is thus possible that the Iberian Union brought along a shift in internal power relations that strengthened hawkish positions which had been formerly ignored, leaving Madrid with little more than a catalytic function in the

122 On the years of 1593–95, see Biedermann, “Ruptura imperial ou realização”, pp. 447–476.
123 On the development of this phenomenon in cartography, see Scafi, Mapping Paradise; for an analogous process in Portuguese imperial writing culture, see Biedermann, “De regresso ao Quarto Império”.
transformation here described. To Philip II conquest was something that Castile had dealt with successfully many times before. If Tenochtitlán and Brabant had been subdued by Spanish arms, why should Ceylon be any different? Although the northern Low Countries were virtually lost to Spain by the 1590s, in Asia the Philippines had been easily captured in the 1560s, and many other ambitious plans of conquest had come up in Manila and nearby Malacca during the 1580s. It was all too logical that in Ceylon as well, the empire would effectively proceed to take possession of what it believed to be entitled to.

There may have been a general logic here of Portuguese imperial renewal in connection with – though caused by – the Union of Crowns. It was an oft-repeated *topos* of late-sixteenth-century writings that, in contrast with the Portuguese, the Spanish were great conquerors of lands. Whether this is historiographically tenable is open to discussion – but whilst the Portuguese explored their right of conquest in Asia by imposing little more than relations of tributary overlordship, the Spaniards had indeed, or so it was perceived, been capable of taking over entire empires, renaming them, and administering them directly as viceroyalties (*virreinatos*). They were thus logically believed by many to be able to do the same in the East. The impression on the political imagination caused by this alleged ability became a powerful motor of change. As mentioned earlier, the papacy had bestowed the Portuguese with a *ius ad rem*, a right to conquer, from which the dynasty of Avis had derived a right to impose tributary relations, and only made very few effective conquests in the East. Now, in contrast, the empire would proceed to territorial expansion on a larger scale. This would accompany an effort to create political and institutional homogeneity across the *Estado*.

This being said, the local factor should not be underestimated either. For almost a century, Portuguese activities in and discourses on Ceylon had been heavily dependent on what was going on in the field. The transition of the late sixteenth century is perhaps most interesting when read as a process involving global and local change at the same time. The analogies are disconcertingly evident between the theoretical right of conquest bestowed upon the Portuguese by the papacy, and the duty of war contained in Dharmapala’s donation of 1580. Both mandates were meaningful in terms of extended suzerainty, rather

125 See Biedermann, “Ruptura imperial ou realização”.
126 Boxer, “Portuguese and Spanish Projects for the Conquest of Southeast Asia”.
127 Anthony Disney has recently designated this phenomenon as “late resurgent expansionism” in *A History of Portugal and the Portuguese Empire*, vol. II, p. 165.
129 For a recent reminder on the dangers of reifying the contrasts between Portuguese and Spanish imperialism, see Subrahmanyam, “Holding the World in Balance”.
than sovereignty. Yet both were now to be implemented in a full-fledged war of territorial conquest inspired by other deeds carried out thousands of miles away from Sri Lanka. In this sense, it is possible that the post-1580 disregard for Kotte’s and Portugal’s original imperial strategies was cultivated consciously by some in the empire, that the orders for the conquest of Ceylon were an overt and explicit challenge to a political logic of the past now considered insufficiently imperial. The fact of the matter is that in 1596, the viceroy nominee Dom Francisco da Gama, an outspoken advocate of traditional anti-conquest policy, was summoned to Madrid before he left for India. In the imperial capital he was made to meet Miguel de Moura, the highest-ranking Portuguese representative of Philip II, and given a wholly new set of instructions. Gama was ordered to “go ahead with the conquest [of Ceylon], in case it is not yet accomplished”, even though it was “known to everyone” that he was an opponent of such a project.130

Conclusion

In marked contrast with the first nine decades of Luso-Lankan relations, shaped by the principles of two suzerainty-driven imperialisms, the history of the Portuguese presence in Ceylon between 1597 and 1658 can be summarized as a series of frustrated attempts at incorporating territories through conquest. The cakravarti mandate, developed over the centuries to cope with, and indeed embrace, Lankan political plurality, was transformed by the Catholic Monarchy into yet another conquista – not in the supple, heterogeneous sense used earlier by the Portuguese dynasty of Avis, but in the sense used in Habsburg Spain.131 Emphasis shifted from winning over people (members of the local elites, that is) to imposing power on lands; from exacting royal tribute to levying taxes; and from exploring the circulation of goods to controlling their production as well, though the means would remain rather different from the slave-labour system of the Atlantic World. The new strategy included a systematic elimination of Sinhalese candidates to local thrones and a substitution of Sinhalese nobles by Portuguese men in the roles of local landlords. Whilst some of these aspects might have been acceptable per se to parts of the Lankan elite, taken together they created a fatal brew.


131 And, as already mentioned, among many subjects of the Portuguese Crown, who nevertheless failed to impose their own projects of conquest at an official level.
Arguably, the *Estado* went on to conquer a kingdom that had never before existed as such – something like a *reino*, in the sense that was increasingly in use in Iberia, denoting a territory ruled by a single sovereign, inhabited by a crowd of Catholic subjects to that king, and circumscribed by a clearly defined border. The Matrosnka principle was overcome as the notion of sovereignty replaced the notion of suzerainty at the heart of Portuguese imperial expansion in Sri Lanka. Conquest in the sense of imposing extensive direct rule pervaded an imperial model that had earlier relied on much more diversified and often unorthodox forms of control. As in Iberia, the formal Union of Crowns was to be followed in the seventeenth century by progressive integration and assimilation, marking what may ultimately be interpreted as a move towards a teleocratic state of affairs. The Sri Lankan ideal of the symbolic unity of the island, largely compliant with a vast array of *de facto* internal divisions which it rarely attempted to erase, was replaced by a novel notion of homogenized territorial sovereignty. Although much remains to be said about the evolution of Lankan statehood during the following centuries, there is a strong suggestion here that the combination of Kottean *cakravartism* with Iberian notions of territorial conquest in the late sixteenth century caused a fundamental rupture in the history of the island, in the sense that it inflicted a major blow on traditional strategies of dealing with internal political diversity. The radicalization of the Portuguese Empire’s policy after 1590 may thus have had a deeper impact in Sri Lanka than the first encounter of 1506, the desecration of the Temple of the Tooth in Kotte in 1551, or King Dharmapala’s baptism in 1557.

On a broader scale, the effects of this transformation may be of key importance for our understanding of Iberian imperialism east of the Cape, and more generally of early European expansion in Asia, as they throw light on the changing relationship between practices of maritime hegemony and territorial conquest. The shift from the former towards the latter within the Portuguese sphere may have to do with more general trends in sixteenth-century state formation. All theories of linear progress set aside, it is striking how the two – and later three – entities that we have been observing operated with increasingly divergent notions of territoriality. The shift that occurred around the second

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132 On the making of Portugal’s territory in the sixteenth century see Magalhães, “O enquadramento do espaço nacional” and “As descrições geográficas de Portugal”.

133 From nomocratic to teleocratic, in the sense proposed by Michael Oakeshott; see Pérez-Diaz, “State and public sphere in Spain during the Ancien Régime”, pp. 252–253.

134 Cf. Gunawardana, *Periodization in Sri Lankan History*. The “Portuguese period” is remarkably absent from this work (see especially pp. 47–49).

135 For a theoretical framework that applies partly to Portugal, see Nordman, *Frontières de France*. Note, however, that the French case is not necessarily the most helpful parallel to
quarter of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese Crown revealed a growing incapability of understanding the intricacies of Kottean politics, can be related to the consolidation of royal power in Portugal and the creation of a clearly marked border around the Portuguese Crown’s continental realm – developments that had little or no parallels in Sri Lanka at that time. Yet the gap was still narrow enough to allow for an intense political and diplomatic interaction. More dramatically, the second shift, catalyzed by the incorporation of Portugal’s Empire into the Catholic Monarchy, widened the gap and led to an outright clash of imperial models. This clash was twofold: it opposed one Iberian model of empire to another, and it confronted the new, territorial imperial policy of the Estado with the fissiparous, strongly person-centred political realities of Sri Lanka.

One might of course be tempted to resolve these tensions by affirming that the pre-1590 Estado da Índia and Kotte were no empires at all, being so evidently in contrast with the massive “composite empires” governed by the Spanish Habsburgs, the Ottomans and the Mughals. But such a conclusion would hardly be satisfactory. Not only would it come dangerously near to being tautological, it would also narrow our field of analysis unnecessarily and exclude some of the most interesting processes of sixteenth-century imperial expansion.

Portugal. It is important not to overlook earlier processes of territorialisation in other regions. Cf. Berend, “Défense de la chrétienté et naissance d’une identité”, p. 1023.

On this and other aspects of early modernity in Sri Lanka see Strathern, “Sri Lanka in the long Early Modern Period”, especially pp. 828–30 and 855–60. Note that the natural border of Sri Lanka – its coastline – was far from meaningless in the local political imagination, yet in a much more abstract way than the Portuguese fronteira. It may be compared to the natural border of the Iberian Peninsula as a whole, which served as a more or less remote framework for projects of Iberian Union over the centuries.

One could note here that, whereas in many other instances time brought along mutual apprenticeship and thus an increase of commensurability (this being one of the points of Subrahmanyam, “Au-delà de l’incommensurabilité”), in this case it led to a rupture. Yet this is only one part of the story. In fact, the Crown of Kotte’s trajectory between 1540 and 1580, from diplomacy to donation and incorporation reveals a remarkable capacity for learning the Portuguese political language. Nor are the clashes after 1590 necessarily signs of a total incommensurability – further research will have to show how the parts involved adapted to the new conditions in the early 1600s.

This seems to be the position of John Darwin, who writes that “the Estado was neither a territorial nor a commercial empire. In part it was an attempt to force a monopoly over the trade in pepper” – a generalization that reveals a regrettable but not uncommon lack of engagement with the historiography of the last twenty years: After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, p. 53. On “composite empires”, see Subrahmanyam, “Holding the World in Balance”, p. 1383.
from it. Perhaps it will some day be possible to find a suitable definition of “early modern empires” based on a systematic scrutiny of their similarities. Yet at present there seems to be much more potential for progress in asking how exactly inter-imperial commonalities worked or failed to work. The challenge is to observe how imperial languages served as a basis for meaningful interactions in a time of rapid and intense change, when two countries like Portugal and Spain could suddenly meet in a place like Sri Lanka, and two polities like the Estado da Índia and the Kingdom of Kotte would see their future discussed in Lisbon and Madrid.
Before conquest can happen, space needs to be there to be thought about as something that might be conquered.¹ Disconcertingly enough, though, this aspect, which one would expect to be at the heart of any history of the Portuguese Empire in Asia, has been largely overlooked. Conquest is generally taken for granted as a possibility that people in the sixteenth century either seized or chose not to seize, but not as an idea that has a history in its own right. It is seen—much like space itself—as a naturally given entity, something from which history springs as a consequence rather than vice-versa. Yet as the previous chapters suggest, the idea of territorial conquest was not present during the earliest Luso-Lankan encounters, and only moderately relevant in the diplomatic interactions that shaped the Portuguese presence in South Asia in the early sixteenth century. It struggled for decades to become a relevant *topos* in the Portuguese political discourse in the region. Many Portuguese ports in South Asia never emerged as foci of territorial expansion at all. And even in the case of Sri Lanka, where *conquista* in the most percussive sense of the word became a systematic policy towards the end of the century, it took many decades for projects of conquest to unfold in the minds of people, spread across the hierarchies of Luso-Asian society and reach the imperial centres in Goa, Lisbon and Madrid before it eventually materialized into acts of military aggression.

When the Portuguese reached the port of Colombo in September 1506, they knew almost nothing about the lands extending beyond the narrow stretch of seacoast visible from aboard their ships. Cinnamon, rubies, arecanuts and elephants were goods that could be obtained in South India or, if needed, in the island’s vibrant seaports. The only plausible reason for undertaking a trip to Kotte, a city located twelve kilometres inland from Colombo, but protected by a

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¹ This chapter develops a point made in the article “Notes on a Portuguese Map of Ceylon: Fernão Vaz Dourado, 1568”, originally published in *Oriente* (2007). For a more detailed discussion of sixteenth-century Portuguese maps and texts dealing with *Ceilão*, see “Representations of the Sri Lankan Space”.
dense tropical forest, was the possibility of lowering the price of those commodities. At the time, no one imagined that a century later the Portuguese might engage in the “Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon”.

Portuguese maps drawn around 1500 and well into the 1530s reflect this lack of interest – and may well have contributed to its perpetuation. Whilst they reveal attempts to adapt the medieval image of South Asia, still largely rooted in Hellenistic geographical knowledge, to the realities experienced on the ground by the Portuguese, they also do this by deploying a primarily maritime type of cartography. The old island of Taprobane, described by Pliny as a paradisiac place many times the size of Sri Lanka and represented in late medieval maps as the centrepiece of the Indian Ocean region, was eclipsed in the aftermath of Gama’s voyage by India (figure 2). The new island known as Ceilão became a small and rather amorphous stain on the general map of Asia. This was fully in accordance with its reduced significance in the overall process of Portuguese expansion in the region. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Portuguese remained hesitant to get involved in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka during the early decades of the sixteenth century. Whether this is a cause or a consequence of a mapping practice centred on the seas rather than the lands is a difficult question to answer, but there is, in any case, quite clearly a correlation between the two phenomena. As Denis Cosgrove put it, maps are as much

Figure 2: South India and Ceylon in the Atlas Miller, 1519
(Courtesy of Bibliothèque nationale de France).

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2 See Flores, Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão and Strathern, Kingship and Conversion.
an “embodiment of knowledge” as they are “a stimulus to further cognitive engagements”. Within the same logic, they can also constitute a hindrance to deeper interactions. A Portuguese fortress existed near Colombo between 1518 and 1524, erected at the request of the king of Kotte, Vijayabahu VI, but administered rather half-heartedly by the authorities of the Estado da Índia. The Portuguese maps of that period do indeed show a limited interest in Sri Lanka. Representations of the island by the most important cartographers of the time – Pedro and Jorge Reinel, Diogo Ribeiro and Gaspar Viegas – were schematic. Although one should not entirely discard the possibility that other more detailed maps, lost to us today, may have existed, there is every indication that the cartographers, just as the elites of Portugal and the Estado, knew little or nothing about the island as a territory and made no major effort to improve their knowledge.

It was not until the 1540s that the situation began to change significantly. Around that time, the dependence of the King of Kotte, Bhuvanekabahu VII, on the Estado increased. Simultaneously, some leading figures in the Portuguese Empire began to pay more attention to what was happening across the various kingdoms of the island. This was, on the one hand, an attention prompted by a new wave of classical erudition, which tended to nurture – at least aesthetically and in terms of intellectual discourse – imperial ideas that were more terrestrial and less maritime than those of the previous decades. On the other hand, there was an increase in the influence of religious discourse as a means of legitimizing the overseas enterprise. This drew the attention of the authorities to the possibilities of controlling larger populations than before and, as a result, territories which had previously been ignored. Delighted with the attention they now received from the Estado, numerous Lankan kings and throne candidates lured Portuguese adventurers and missionaries into the field, imbuing them with some of the fundamental elements of the Buddhist political ideas that governed the island. Amongst these, it is important to highlight the image of Sri Lanka as a spatial unit, ideally dominated – although in symbolic terms only – by a single centre, the imperial city of Kotte. During the 1540s, the Portuguese thus came to grasp the existence of a complex political system dominated by a number of foci of political power competing with each other in a complex system of hierarchical submissions.

The earliest Portuguese cartographical representations of Sri Lanka as a land in its own right arose from this context of heightened attention to religious

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3 Cosgrove, Mappings, p. 2.
4 All maps reproduced in Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica.
5 Biedermann, “De regresso ao Quarto Imperio”.
and territorial expansion, several decades after the first contacts took place, but also several decades before the actual conquest of the island began. From 1542 onwards, a growing number of Portuguese individuals became acquainted with the island’s interior by following some of its main rivers, negotiating dangerous mountain trails to the Kingdom of Kandy, crossing the vast arid areas of the north, and making their way through the dense tropical forests of the south, oftentimes without the necessary provisions. By the end of the 1540s, the Portuguese in Colombo could claim to possess a fairly satisfactory general picture of the different landscapes of Sri Lanka, which was passed on to Goa and Lisbon. It was probably around those years that the first cartographic sketches exclusively dedicated to Ceylon came into existence. It is also in the 1540s and 1550s that some textual descriptions of the geography of Sri Lanka came into being in Goa and Lisbon.

The Map of Fernão Vaz Dourado: Goa, c.1568

One particularly interesting item emerging from this context, though formally dated a little later, is a map made in Goa by Fernão Vaz Dourado as part of an atlas concluded in 1568, today preserved in the Library of the Dukes of Alba in Madrid. Of particular notice is its aesthetic quality: the map has been richly decorated with images representing cities, ships and mountainscapes. But its technical and historical aspects are worthy of mention as well, and in fact the two dimensions can hardly be extricated from each other.

Much in contrast with the images produced during the previous decades, this map attributes to the island a rounded form which, in its general orientation, corresponds by and large to the drop-like shape of Sri Lanka as we know it. It is significant that this feature also appears around the same time in another work produced in Goa, the Atlas of Lázaro Luís (1563), now in the library of the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon. Like Lázaro Luís, Fernão Vaz Dourado was a cartographer operating far from the Portuguese capital, in Goa, but profiting from being at the centre of the Portuguese network in Asia. Born around 1520 to a Portuguese father and, most probably, an Indian mother, he had some first-hand sailing experience of South Asian waters, and can therefore be credited with a certain personal interest in their cartographic representation. Despite being one of the most interesting characters in the history of Portuguese cartography in Asia, we still know very little about his life. His craftsmanship is documented by a series of richly illuminated Atlases today preserved in Madrid (1568), in the Huntington Library at San Marino, California (1570), in the

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6 These expeditions are documented in Schurhammer, Ceylon.
7 Biedermann, “Representations of the Sri Lankan Space”. 
Academy of Sciences of Lisbon (1571), in the British Library (1575), in the Portuguese National Library (c. 1576), and in the Bavarian State Library at Munich (1580). \(^8\)

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8 On the life and work of Vaz Dourado, see Cortesão and Mota, *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica*, vol. III, pp. 3–8; on the 1568 atlas, pp. 9–12.
The shape of Sri Lanka in Dourado’s 1568 map is based on a relatively limited but effective set of elements deriving most likely from Portuguese navigational experience: the west coast of the island runs as an almost straight line from south to north, inflected only slightly around a bay-like feature marking the Colombo area; at Mannar, this line ends in a sharp angle and inflects to form a moderately concave stretch leading overall in a northeasterly direction to the Jaffna peninsula; the north and east coast then runs as a wide, almost semicircular arch from Jaffna to an unnamed cape in the southeast. There follows an indentation in the far south of the island, corresponding rather vaguely to what on modern maps is an inflection of the coastline in the region of Dondra or Yala, possibly around the mouth of the Walawe Ganga or the Menik Ganga. The line then becomes convex again until it hits the southwestern coast near Galle at a right angle. Overall, the coastline conveys an impression of abstraction at a general level, but also presents two types of discontinuities alluding to concrete features of the landscape as experienced by navigators: small indentations or undulations, which it would be vain to attempt to identify; and larger openings, bays and rivermouths. On the east coast, one thus discerns the bay of Trincomalee along with other features reflecting an incipient perception of the complex system of lagoons stretching from there to Kalmunai in the southeast.

The island’s two main rivers appear as originating from the centre where, erroneously and perhaps to create an impression of symmetry, the author has also placed Adam’s Peak. In the north, the hydrographical system that separates the Jaffna peninsula from the rest of Lanka has only been grasped in fragments. There are also traces of other, better known rivers, namely the Kelani (rio de callane) flowing into the sea near Colombo – the Portuguese became familiar with the Kelani valley from the later 1530s, when Miguel Ferreira first marched up the river to fight the troops of Sitawaka and their Mappila allies. In accordance with the principles of maritime cartography, the map of Vaz Dourado identifies a series of commercial ports including Chilaw (chillao), Kalutara (calletore), Beruwela (berberim), Galle (gualle) and Negombo, which were in fact frequently used as alternatives to the island’s main port, Colombo. Between these place names, distances are given in red numbers. Significantly, these indications are limited to the west coast. The east coast of the island is left practically blank, and two of the four toponyms that are visible there are derived from Portuguese activities rather than Lankan toponyms: there is a “river of trade” (rio do resgate – possibly a reference to trade in human beings, though no other reference supports this thesis; and rio da crus – referring to a cross planted by Portuguese navigators, not so much as a symbol of missionary activities, but as a
marker in the landscape). In fact, the whole of that region was much less densely populated than the south east, and its only important ports were Batticaloa and Trincomali – but part of our problem as historians is that this emptiness may quite simply result from a lack of detail in the source materials which, for the sixteenth century, are predominantly Portuguese.

So far we have been concerned principally with the maritime features of the Dourado map, the “shell” within which other types of information could be displayed. Perhaps even more significant than the representation of physical features and what may be designated as the commercial geography of the island by Dourado is the emerging sense of a Sri Lankan political landscape. A number of kingdoms (reinos) have been singled out to cover most of the available inland space of the map. We thus see the Kingdoms of Kotte, Sitawaka and Kandy, but also, to the northeast of Adam’s Peak, the Kingdom of the Four Korales, which in reality was located much closer to the west coast. Along the east coast, the cartographer has included kingdoms for Batticaloa and Trincomali. In the north, the Kingdom of Jaffna appears to extend well into what is now known as the Vanni District. Yet none of the kingdoms appears under the territorial form that we usually expect from political maps. Each of the polities is marked by an icon resembling a temple, and also vaguely reminiscent of a crown. These icons follow a Greco-Roman inspiration, but with a noticeably Orientalizing flavour. Their rooftops in the form of rounded domes, topped by golden spheres and surrounded at the base by filigree friezes of perhaps Indian inspiration, appear to invoke a vaguely non-Western aesthetic. Their strangeness is kept in bounds as they remain anchored in what was thought of as a common Eurasian heritage characterized by classical forms.10 Two politically relevant places are marked by icons resembling houses, perhaps indicating a certain lack of legitimacy in Dourado’s eyes: one of these houses stands for Sitawaka; the other – a possible reading of the caption next to it is batiyagale – might correspond to Beligal, an occasional seat of power in the troubled region of the Four Korales. At Colombo and Mannar the cartographer has placed small pink-coloured castles alluding to the official Portuguese presence established there, respectively, in 1551 and 1560. Portuguese banners (outside of the detail reproduced above) reinforce this in a way that aggrandizes the official presence well beyond its real importance in the island.

Vaz Dourado finished his atlas in 1568 (adding a final chart in 1569), but this does not mean that all the information contained in the image originated in the mid to late 1560s. The allusion to Portuguese fortresses with their icons and their flags, for example, may not be more than updates to an older image gener-

10 See Biedermann, “Imagining Asia from the Margins”.

ated two or three decades earlier. Like most cartographical items, the Dourado map contains several layers of knowledge acquired over time, in this case a period extending at least from the 1540s to the 1560s. The positioning of Adam’s Peak to the north of Kandy and the closeness of the temple icons that represent Sitawaka and Kandy to the south coast makes most sense in the context of the early 1540s, when the general configuration of the island’s interior was still rather confusing to the Portuguese. It was the belief in the proximity of Kandy to the south coast that led the adventurer André de Sousa to attempt marching from a beach near the mouth of the Walawe Ganga to Kandy in 1546 – much to his own regret.\footnote{“Cometemos ho qaminho á ventura. Com o fazerem mais perto e menos graue andámos gorenta legoas per serras e matos e tanto asperas, que em minha vida nunca tal ui nem espero ver”: Father António Padrão to Dom João de Castro, Kandy, 29.V.1546, in Schurhammer, Ceylon, p. 372 (more information on the same voyage \textit{ibid.}, pp. 355–358).}

A second peculiarity of the map is the large indentation in the southeast of the island, perhaps inspired by a slightly concave stretch of coast to the east of Dondra. Something similar appears in a general map of Asia dated c.1545, now in Vienna,\footnote{Anonymous planisphere, c.1545, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna (Karten- sammlung, FKB 272/11); cf. Cortesão and Mota, \textit{Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica}, vol. I, pp. 155–157.} which could in its turn have been based on a model, today lost, produced in the early 1540s. This hypothetical prototype would have constituted an alternative to the maps produced by Gaspar Viegas between 1537 and 1540, which are extant in several copies and which, as almost purely nautical charts covering vast areas of the globe, paid no attention whatsoever to Sri Lanka as a territory. From which of the known workshops in Lisbon or Goa this alternative map of Ceylon may have emerged is unclear, but there was a good deal of experimentation in Portuguese cartography at the time, and judging by the appearance of the Dourado map in Goa the latter may well have been the place where this tradition emerged. Finally, the largest river on the eastern side of the island runs from the centre to the region of Batticaloa, instead of Trincomali. It would have been difficult to commit this mistake twenty-five years after the adventurer Nuno Álvares Pereira descended the Mahaweli Ganga in 1543 in the service of the King of Kandy – this, then, suggests a date around 1540–42. Absent from the map are also the small polities or “kingdoms” described by António Moniz Barreto for the eastern part of the island in 1547.

Bringing all these elements together, we may put forward the suggestion that Vaz Dourado based his map, partially at least, on an earlier sketch reflecting what the Portuguese imagined the interior of Sri Lanka to be like in the first half of the 1540s. But accusing Dourado of inaccuracy would be to miss an im-
important point: in fact, it makes sense to argue that Dourado was, with regard to the island’s interior, not primarily interested in the physical landscape (the complicated relief of the island is invoked only vaguely by icons in the form of mountains, and the hydrographic system is largely schematic in what concerns the actual shape of rivers). What the image conveys in the first place is the political geography of the island with its many kingdoms. It was the successive wars opposing these polities to each other and involving a growing amount of Portuguese resources that drew the attention of the elites of the Estado in the middle of the sixteenth century. The Atlas was, nota bene, dedicated to the viceroy Dom Luís de Ataíde (vr.1568–71). The commercial geography of the coastal fringes is of course not neglected, but it could even be argued that it is given on this particular map in connection precisely with the political configuration of the Lankan interior. The accessibility of ports depended, after all, on complex political processes driven by forces in Kotte, Sitawaka, and other centres of power situated inland. The pearl fishery, illustrated in some detail in the sea adjacent to Mannar, was also a highly politicized venture in those years, with successive wars being waged over it by various powers in the island and on the South Indian mainland.

It is therefore in terms of political history that the map of Vaz Dourado carries the greatest significance. Indeed, by representing the various “kingdoms” of Sri Lanka through small temple-like icons symbolizing the centres of royal power in the island, the map conveys a highly revealing image of the complicated political landscape of Sri Lanka. In so doing Dourado recognized, either consciously or subconsciously, a particularly disconcerting characteristic of the Sri Lankan space: the absence of fixed territorial borders. In contrast with Portugal, where the territorial border to Spain was increasingly construed as a fixed line running through the landscape and marked by a series of fortifications and other artificial signs in the landscape aiming to impede the passage of foreign forces, the kingdoms of Sri Lanka in the sixteenth century defined themselves by their capacity to “irradiate” power from central places across an often sparsely populated inland space.14 As Sheldon Pollock put it with regard to Indian empire-building, it was not so much the centre that expanded to establish

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13 See chapter 3. The existence of “boundary books” registering divisions of land has been pointed out as potentially contradicting this idea, but even a cursory reading of these texts suggests that most boundaries were rather vaguely defined, e.g. by four stones at the “four corners” of a realm. It is also important to distinguish between boundaries defining the extension of village lands and those of kingdoms. Nor is there any sign that these boundaries mattered very much in the turbulences of the sixteenth century.

14 On boundary-making in Renaissance Portugal see Magalhães, “O enquadramento do espaço nacional” and “As descrições geográficas de Portugal”.
itself militarily and administratively (i.e. territorially) in increasingly distant regions (as happened with the Roman Empire) but rather those distant places that, at one moment or another, would accept to pay homage to a polity styling itself as a politically and culturally attractive centre.\textsuperscript{15}

Political power in the Sri Lankan space would be palpable primarily on grounds of the allegiance paid by leaders on the periphery to the ruler of one or another centre. These kingdoms pulsed, increasing and decreasing their sphere of influence over populations that changed their allegiance from one lord to another with relative ease. Whilst the existence of “boundary books” registering divisions of land in Sri Lanka may seem to contradict this idea, even a cursory reading of such texts shows that many boundaries were rather vaguely defined and hardly visible in the landscape. For example, there could be a single stone placed at each of the “four corners” of a realm, and in some instances the signs were even hidden, so that only a few people knew about their exact location. Certainly the desire to have clear territorial demarcations was there, but even if some of the boundary descriptions suggest an approach that is not completely different from that of European countries, in the turmoil of the sixteenth century it is very unclear to what extent this could be effectively translated into stable borders.\textsuperscript{16}

The Sri Lankan system of pulsating polities bound together by the dynamic logics of tributary overlordship is sometimes described as a “galaxy” in the sense coined by Stanley Tambiah for Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{17} Alan Strathern and I have argued that it may be even better compared to a “solar” system where various polities competed, but one generally retained pre-eminence as the highest symbolic centre of the realm – this being Kotte, though in the seventeenth century Kandy challenged its status.\textsuperscript{18} What Dourado captured in his map is precisely the pulsating nature of Lankan polities and the consequences of such a system for what to any European observer genuinely interested in understanding local particularities would have appeared as an extremely unstable political space. In the absence of clear borders, Dourado chose to use captions. Each caption designates a kingdom, referring primarily to the centre identified by an icon, and secondarily to a vaguely dominated space surrounding that centre: in fact, some of the captions overlap, leaving it evident that the precise demarca-

\textsuperscript{16} See Abeyawardena, \textit{Boundary Divisions of Medieval Sri Lanka}. It seems important to distinguish between boundaries defining the extension of village or temple lands on the one hand, and those of kingdoms on the other. The articulation between these distinct levels of territoriality is not clear at all in the historical material.
\textsuperscript{17} See, in particular, Tambiah, \textit{Culture, Thought, and Social Action}.
\textsuperscript{18} Strathern, \textit{Kingship and Conversion} and Biedermann, “A aprendizagem”.

tions can not be put on a map. Whether Dourado fully understood the system is uncertain. But in practice he ended up producing a map that was most truthful not to the geographic landscape of Lanka. What Dourado put on the vellum around 1568 testifies to an incipient but remarkably insightful perception of the complexity of the island’s political landscape.

**The Map of Cipriano Sánchez / Jodocus Hondius**

The specificity and value of Dourado’s map becomes particularly evident if we place it side by side with another, slightly later item that has come down to us through a print made in 1606 by Jodocus Hondius for an edition of the Mercator Atlas. It is titled *Insula Ceilan quae incolis Tenarisin dicitur* and, according to the information given in a second cartouche in the lower right hand corner of the sheet, it was drawn based on a map by Cipriano Sánchez Villavicencio. Little is known about Sánchez (or Sanches), whose name adds to the uncertainty rather than dissipating it: Villavicencio may refer to Vila Viçosa, the seat of the Dukes of Bragança, patrons to the Gama family with a long-standing interest in Ceylon and the cinnamon trade – but it may also quite simply be a reference to the town of Villavicencio near Valladolid in Spain, in which case the Castilian form “Sánchez” is probably the correct patronym. What we do know with certainty is that Cipriano Sánchez worked in the Iberian Peninsula and is unlikely to have travelled to Asia. There is not much in the map to suggest that Sánchez had access to the Dourado map discussed above, though the possibility cannot be excluded. The outer shape of the island is overall rather schematic, revealing a tendency to emphasizing a handful of major inflections and keeping the rest of the coastline as straight as possible. This tendency to abstraction could be in connection with the Dourado map, but it takes the logic further and may not have anything to do with the Goan cartographical tradition at all.

In comparison with the Dourado map, the key contrast is that Sánchez has downplayed the importance of the many different political centres and kingdoms of Sri Lanka, and instead created an image that conveys a great deal of order, predictability and manageability. The interior of the island is, despite a relatively large number of mountains, an essentially homogenous and uniformly accessible space where the imaginary traveller can easily plan journeys from any particular point to any other. Naturally, some places are still marked by captions as the centres of kingdoms, and they, like any toponym, bear the po-

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19 On Sánchez, whose other extant maps are technically and visually very unlike the one depicting Ceylon, see Cortesão and Mota, *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica*, vol. III, pp. 111–113.

timetal of disrupting the continuity of cartographic space by “punctuating” it, as the map theoretician Christian Jacob puts it. But in comparison with the Dourado map, the places where Sri Lankan politics unfold most dramatically have been tamed, the spaces surrounding them smoothed. Lanka’s multiple political centres have been subjected to the graphic conventions developed in the Low Countries to represent “towns” anywhere in the world. In a word, they are much less salient than those of Dourado.

Figure 4: Jodocus Hondius, Insula Ceylan, 1606, based on a map by Cipriano Sánchez (Private collection).

Terrestrial physical space as such is here an entity in its own right rather than something subjected to the might of Sri Lanka’s pulsating political centres. Nothing bends the (undrawn) lines of latitude and longitude emanating from the frame of the map to cover Sri Lanka in the same Ptolemaic grid that was applied to any other part of the earth. It is tempting to say that the subject of this map is geographical, not political space, but it is also crucial to add that by insisting on its own geographical character the map makes a strong political

21 Jacob, The Sovereign Map, p. 203.
Two Maps of Sri Lanka

claim. Thanks to its graphical clarity, its grounding in Ptolemaic, mathematically calculable space and its reliance on conventional signs and icons, the Sánchez map neutralizes the complexities of political space and imposes a strong, self-evident and treacherously unproblematic physical space. This is a space that could then easily be imagined anywhere in Europe (including of course the king’s chambers at the Escorial) as being a blank surface on which a new political territory could be construed. Nothing in the landscape of the Sánchez map suggests that there would be any significant obstacle to the establishment of colonial rule.

This new way of representing the island’s interior makes much sense in the conjuncture of the late sixteenth century, especially during the reign of Philip II, who also ruled Portugal from 1581 to 1598. In fact, the map gains particular significance if read in conjunction with the findings of our previous chapter regarding the shift from diplomacy to conquest in the Catholic Monarchy’s policy in Sri Lanka. The continuous, predominantly flat space of the Sánchez map stands much closer to something that the Habsburg administration could consider as a potential territory, and hence as a new colony covering the entire island, than the discontinuous and punctuated, “galactic” space of the Dourado map. Even if we were to assume that the original Sánchez map, presumably a manuscript item, may have looked quite different and that the taming of the Lankan space only really occurred in the version printed by Hondius in 1606, the politics of the Sánchez-Hondius map retains great significance. The project of conquering Ceylon through sheer force was taken very seriously during the reign of Philip III (r.1598–1621), perhaps even more so than previously. The early years of the seventeenth century in particular saw a great increase in the military efforts put into this conquista. Conveying as it did a sense of order and controllability, the Sánchez-Hondius map would certainly have served as an encouragement to anyone thinking about the possibilities of conquering the island.

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22 We are yet to understand the various lines that cross the island in the Sánchez map as well as in some other cartographic representations of the early seventeenth century. There is a possibility that they may derive from attempts made by Portuguese observers to graphically represent the approximate boundaries of various Lankan kingdoms. This might be an entirely artificial move, but it is also possible that the lines translate graphically some information emerging from contemporary “boundary books” (kadaims) or related narratives. If the latter hypothesis could be proven through a meticulous GIS-supported analysis of both Sinhalese documents and Portuguese maps, then this would not only further confirm the appetite of the Habsburg administration for a straightforward territory-based understanding of the Lankan space, but also allow for wider comparisons for example with the Spanish mapping of the New World and its local inputs.
Had Philip II and his successor Philip III been able to contemplate anything similar to the Dourado map of 1568, they might well have asked more questions about the island and the idiosyncrasies of its political space. They might even have refused to embark on the conquest of the island, as John III and the Queen Regent Catherine had done before for several decades.\textsuperscript{23} But at the time of the most intensive discussions around the possibility of engaging in this conquest, in the late 1580s to mid-1590s, what Philip II saw must have resembled the Sánchez map more than the Dourado map. Whether the new, aggressive policy of the late sixteenth century was a result of this emerging cartographical image or one of its causes will be difficult to decide. In any case, it is clear that the significance of both the Dourado map of 1568 and the Sánchez map of 1606 for the historiography of the Portuguese impact in South Asia goes well beyond the realm of traditional cartographical history.

\textsuperscript{23} See chapter 3.
Imperial Incorporation: The “Malwana Convention” and the Lankan Transition to Colonial rule

Conquest is seldom a straightforward affair, even if the invasion of a land is militarily successful. How does one incorporate existing territories or – in the case of South Asia – complex political and social constellations into an expanding empire? How does military victory translate into political and administrative control over populations and land? What are the concessions that a conquering empire is willing to make to local elites in order to extend its realms and, at the same time, save vital resources? Perhaps the most interesting case study in the context of Portuguese expansion in South Asia comes, once again, from Sri Lanka. This chapter engages with the process of imperial incorporation through the lens of the so-called “Malwana Convention”, a gathering held sometime around the turn of the seventeenth century to legitimize the transition to Iberian rule.

The event in question is controversial among historians. In 1964, the Sinhalese scholar Tikiri Abeyasinghe published one of his most enduringly influential articles, “The Myth of the Malvana Convention.” In this short but brilliantly argued piece of scholarship, Abeyasinghe uncovered the inconsistencies underlying the reports of an event long held as an article of faith among historians of the island’s early colonial past ranging from Paul E. Pieris and S. G. Perera to Vito Perniola. The “Malwana Convention” had been seen as a key element in the Kingdom of Kotte’s transition to Portuguese rule after the death of its last Sinhalese king, Dom João Dharmapala, in 1597. It had seemed to offer a good explanation for the relatively peaceful transmission of power to the Portu-

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1 This chapter is a lightly revised version of “The ‘Malvana Convention’ revisited” (2010). Permission kindly granted by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo. My special thanks to Thambirajah Ponnadurai and Harshana Rambukwella for their support in making my work accessible to the Sri Lankan public.

gue in the Kingdom of Kotte after Dharmapala’s death, and even bequeathed a certain amount of legitimacy to the colonial takeover. The latter aspect may well have been one of the reasons why Abeyasinghe attempted a deconstruction so early in his career, less than sixteen years after the end of British rule in Ceylon. Today the “Malwana Convention” may not be as well-known to historians as it was 40 years ago, yet it remains a subject of great significance as it throws light on some of the most paradoxical aspects of the run-up to colonial rule. The “Malwana Convention” such as it was seen originally by many historians of Ceylon is best summarized in Abeyasinghe’s own paraphrase of the traditional historiographical account:

“[in 1597] the Portuguese captain-general summoned to Malwana two deputies from each korale [administrative territorial unit] and suggested to that assembly that the subjects of the kingdom of Kotte should be governed according to the laws of Portugal […]. [Thus] the deputies deliberated […] and declared that […] they would prefer to be governed by their own laws and customs. [Finally] Azevedo consented and took an oath to uphold the laws and customs of the Sinhalese and the deputies thereupon agreed to serve the Portuguese king well and faithfully.”

The present chapter revisits the “Malwana Convention”, not so much as a fact but rather as a working hypothesis that may help us to think about some aspects of the 1597 transition that remained untouched by Abeyasinghe’s critical assessment, and equally unsolved by the later historiography. This is not to prove that the Malwana Convention existed after all, but rather to encourage critical debate about the transition to Portuguese rule and the role played therein by negotiations between the Portuguese and the South Asian elites.

Colonialism and collective memory

Tikiri Abeyasinghe unveiled a number of inconsistencies surrounding the Malwana Convention, starting with the fact that historians like H. W. Codrington and S. G. Perera cited João Ribeiro as their main source for the “convention”, whilst Ribeiro himself has it that the meeting was held at Colombo. The story

3 These aspects include, as we have seen, the Portuguese Crown’s long-standing reluctance to embrace plans for the conquest of the island, its change of attitude under Habsburg rule in the 1590s, the non-linear development of religious and ethnic antagonisms, and the active role played by parts of the Lankan elite in drawing imperial troops to Ceylon.

of the Malwana Convention is based essentially on two sources, the chronicles of Fernão de Queiroz and João Ribeiro, which seem to contradict each other in several points. Queiroz mentions two assemblies, one at Colombo and another at Malwana, whilst Ribeiro seems to have combined the two in a single meeting held at Colombo. What Abeyasinghe sees as historically unsustainable is Queiroz’s second meeting, because the evidence for it is very sketchy: “there is no reference to it in any official correspondence of the time or even later,” and “the story occurs only in Queiroz and a garbled version of it in Ribeiro.” Moreover, the Malwana Convention does not appear in the main section of Queiroz’s historical narrative, but in a separate section of the sixth book of the *Conquista*, dealing with the errors of the Portuguese in Ceylon and thus heavily loaded with ideological and moralistic considerations. The main source used by Queiroz to describe the Malwana Convention is a letter of grievance written by Sinhalese leaders to the captain-general Diogo de Melo de Castro (1636–38), and this is where Abeyasinghe’s argument becomes slightly problematic in its own turn. According to Abeyasinghe, the letter of grievance is an unreliable source because the memories of any meeting held around 1600 would have been blurry and confused four decades later due to the fact that “the transmission of information was necessarily oral” and thus “the chances of the collective memory of a people playing a trick are very great.” This is at the very least questionable. But, more interestingly, Abeyasinghe also suggests that there might have been some more or less conscious “manipulation” of the facts by the Sinhalese petitioners, who might have invented the Malwana Convention to give more weight to their arguments.

Indeed, Abeyasinghe’s article becomes most intriguing, I believe, where the author admits that “in the 1630s there was a widespread belief among the Sinhalese inhabitants in the Kotte kingdom that an assembly had been held at which a guarantee of the maintenance of the Sinhalese laws and customs had been given.” This was the story that Ribeiro himself heard while serving as a soldier in the island from 1640 to 1658, but he, for whatever reason, ended up mixing this assembly with the acclamation held in Colombo in 1597. In this sense, Abeyasinghe is right to doubt the reliability of Ribeiro’s account. And yet, the problem that he does not solve satisfactorily is Queiroz’s version of the story. To Abeyasinghe, the Malwana Convention as it appears in the letter of grievance rendered by Queiroz was merely the product of “myth-making”, an

5 Ribeiro, *Fatalidade Histórica* and Queiroz, *Conquista Temporal* – both accounts written in the second half of the seventeenth century.
invention serving as a “protective device” against Portuguese abuses of power. Thus “the simple ceremony at Colombo in 1597 became in the eyes of the Kotte subjects, what the events at Runnymede became to the Parliamentarians in the 17th century England – a sheet anchor of the people’s rights.”

The point that needs to be made here is that there are reasons to believe that the “myth” of the Malwana Convention goes well beyond pure invention and contains an important grain of truth, even though the designation as “Malwana Convention” may not be the most appropriate. To put it in a few words, the events referred to by the letter of grievance of the Sinhalese nobles written around 1636 and reproduced in detail by Queiroz are much more plausible than Abeyasinghe believed. Yet the evidence is mostly circumstantial, and it is thus important to draw a broader picture of what was at play in the late sixteenth century in Kotte. We need to take a look at what happened in Colombo in 1597, right after the death of Dharmapala, and how the transition was managed over the next year and a half by the Portuguese and the local elite. But in order to understand the transition to Portuguese rule, it is also crucial to bear in mind that it was based on a legally binding document set up earlier, during the siege of Colombo of 1580. In this document, Dharmapala bequeathed his kingdom to the Portuguese Crown in a donation that would take effect after his death. In other words, he made a testament and chose the Portuguese King as his heir.

This document has been seen as the last nail in the coffin of the independent Sinhalese Kingdom of Kotte, the final humiliation of a puppet king controlled and bullied by the Portuguese over decades. However, I have argued that Dharmapala’s reign can also be seen as a transitional period during which parts of the Kottean elite – including to a certain extent the king himself – negotiated and thus saved their future in a relatively successful manner. The increasing involvement of the Portuguese in local wars cannot be explained without the interest attached by that elite to their presence in Sri Lanka. Indeed, the Portuguese Crown remained extremely reluctant to investing militarily in Ceylon until the 1590s, and there were no explicit orders of conquest issued in Lisbon at any time before those years. What Dharmapala signed in 1580 was not – or not only – a treaty of submission, but also a deal by which Kotte, reduced by decades of crisis and by the forces of Sitawaka to a shadow of its former self, would benefit from the unreserved military support of the Portuguese Empire to reinvent itself. The price to pay – the transmission of the throne of Kotte to a

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9 Ibid., p. 72.
11 See chapter 3 and “A aprendizagem de Ceilão”, pp. 329–90.
European sovereign – was extremely high, but it seems that it was still seen by many as a more acceptable solution than surrendering to Rajasinha, King of Si-
tawaka. After the massive defections of the 1550s and 1560s, quite clearly re-
lated to a succession of disastrous events including the death of Bhuvanekabahu VII (1551), the desecration of the Temple of the Tooth (1551), the baptism of Dharmapala (1557) and the abandonment of Kotte with the subsequent transfer of the royal court to Colombo (1565), a relatively stable core of families loyal to Dharmapala had remained in the new capital and developed an interest in maintaining the status quo.

The donation of 1580 is interesting not only as a document that legitimized (in the legal sense) a transfer of power, but also as a text that defines the mission of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka well before the Portuguese Crown had formulated its own project for the island. Firstly, the donation handed over to the Portuguese the responsibility of re-conquering the lands of the Kingdom of Kotte, which had been dismembered after the assassination of Vijayabahu in 1521, and then reduced to almost nothing during the wars following the death of Bhuvanekabahu VII in 1551. Secondly, it transmitted the imperial mandate of Kotte, on the basis that Dharmapala, however diminished politically and militarily, was still the potential cakravarti of Sri Lanka, ideally standing at the summit of the complex system of “tributary overlordship” that characterised relations between Lankan polities in the sixteenth century. In the donation, the King of Portugal was, as Dharmapala’s heir, declared

“entitled to legitimately wage war on the land and on the sea until they become Lords [senhores] of all the said kingdoms [reinos] along their ancient demarcations and [of the] lordships [or overlord-
ships; senhorios] that they have, as the Kings of Kotte had them before over the other kings of this island, [an island] which is and has always been due to them.”

It is important to underline that, as I have argued in chapter 3, the donation included two distinct mandates stemming from the Sinhalese tradition: one of sovereignty (direct rule in the Kingdom of Kotte) and one of suzerainty (indirect rule or symbolic hegemony over the rest of the island).

12 All discussed in Strathern, Kingship and Conversion; the latter also in chapter 6.
14 “Tributary overlordship” as used by Michael Roberts, “The Collective Consciousness of the Sinhalese” and Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period.
Colonized by the colonized: Sri Lanka, Portugal and the new Monarchy

It is also rather fascinatingly ironic that Portugal itself was about to cease being an independent kingdom when the contract was set up. In 1580–81, the Portuguese Crown passed to the hands of Philip II of Spain (r.1556–98) and Portugal, together with its empire, became a part of the Catholic Monarchy until it broke away again in 1640. The integration was constructed around the preservation of Portugal as a legally distinct kingdom with its own laws and customs and with an empire clearly separated from Spain’s overseas possessions. In accordance with earlier integrations into the Catholic Monarchy based on the principle of a union *aeque principaliter* (meaning between “equally important” parts), Portugal was admitted as a kingdom that, at least in theory, stood on the same level as the Kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, or Naples within the Monarchy. This kind of aggregation was in fact derived from a late medieval Aragonese tradition of imperial expansion practiced in the Mediterranean.

This chronological coincidence is important in two ways: firstly, because the integration of Portugal into the empire of Philip II brought along some significant changes in Portugal’s imperial policy in Asia, including Sri Lanka, towards a more decidedly territorial type of conquest – this being, however, a matter that calls for much further research because we do not yet understand the precise mechanisms of Castile’s influence in the Portuguese imperial realm. Secondly and perhaps less evidently, but with equal importance, the transition of 1580 is interesting for us because it has (and seems to have had) the potential for providing a model for the integration of Kotte into the realm of the Portuguese Crown. Crucially, the integration of Portugal into the Catholic Monarchy was negotiated in a forum called *cortes*, which represents the Iberian version of the wider medieval and early modern European tradition of “parliaments”, assemblies of the three estates of society (*nobilitas, clericus, populus*) which pre-absolutist monarchs were compelled to consult more or less regularly on many issues ranging from foreign policy to fiscal practice.

In order to take over the Portuguese Crown, Philip II needed to negotiate very tightly with the Portuguese parliaments (*cortes*) whilst also exerting military pressure and suborning members of the aristocracy. The Spanish monarch has indeed been said to have “conquered, inherited and bought” the country in a process that involved invasion, negotiations with the Portuguese *cortes*, and subornment on a large scale including, as mentioned already in chapter 3, a

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16 “*Monarquia Católica*” is the formula now commonly used by Iberian historians to designate the Spanish Habsburg Empire, of which Portugal was a part from 1580 to 1640.
17 For further bibliography on these matters see chapter 3.
18 See Biedermann, “Ruptura imperial ou realização.”
considerable increase in privileges granted to the higher nobility.\textsuperscript{19} The negotiations took place in Portugal at the \textit{Cortes de Almeirim} and the \textit{Cortes de Tomar}, named after Almeirim and Tomar, the two towns where the parliaments gathered.

The \textit{cortes} held their first meeting in Almeirim in May 1580 after the death of the Portuguese King, Cardinal Henry (r.1578–80), who deceased without leaving an heir. This assembly was dominated by three pro-Castilian delegates, Dom João Mascarenhas, Francisco de Sá and Diogo Lopes de Sousa, who all believed that Philip II had the strongest legal claim to the Portuguese throne in detriment of Catherine Duchess of Bragança, Dom António Prior do Crato, and a number of lesser candidates.\textsuperscript{20} The gathering was interrupted by rumors of a Castilian invasion even before it could deliberate, but a portion of the \textit{cortes} took refuge in a fortress at Castro Marim and issued a decree (\textit{cédula}) by which they acknowledged that Philip II had been acclaimed as the new king of Portugal. Given that a Spanish army led by the Duke of Alba did indeed invade Portugal at about the same time, the Bragança family ended up among the first to acknowledge the legitimacy of the acclamation staged in Almeirim and Castro Marim.

However, it was also very clear at that point that more negotiations were needed to clarify a number of aspects of Portugal’s integration into the Monarchy. Hence the \textit{cortes} gathered again, this time in the town of Tomar, in April 1581. This gathering served essentially two purposes: it became a forum where the exact legal framework of the Union of Crowns was discussed and established, and it served to appease the major opponents of the Iberian Union, most prominently the anti-Castilian faction of Portugal’s aristocracy, including the greatest of these families, the Braganças. It was the \textit{Cortes de Tomar} that decided to uphold Portugal’s integrity as a separate kingdom, the separation of the two overseas empires, the maintenance of Portuguese laws and fiscal policy, as well as the need of having a viceroy of royal lineage or Portuguese birth residing in Lisbon. The \textit{cortes} also originated a radical increase in the privileges of many families of the nobility through new administrative posts, honours and land grants. Indeed, the union with Spain opened new doors to many nobles from a country that had been exhausted morally and financially after the military disaster of Ksar-el-Quibir in Morocco (1578).\textsuperscript{21} Thus a process that could have been

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} Philip, Catherine and Anthony were all grandchildren of King Manuel I (r.1495–1521).
\item \textsuperscript{21} King Sebastian was killed in this battle along with a substantial part of the male elite of the country. Many other nobles remained captive in North Africa for years.
\end{itemize}
seen as a plain invasion and imposition of foreign rule took a new direction, one that left considerable space for negotiations between the country’s elite and the new Monarch. Philip, whilst not having been exactly invited to the Portuguese throne initially, ended up being much more than just the head of a foreign occupying force. The key to this success lay in the complexity and duration of the transition: whilst the *Cortes de Almeirim* were legally sufficient to acclaim the new king, the framework in which the latter’s power could be exerted in Portugal with the help or at least the toleration of the local elite was effectively elaborated only a year later in Tomar.

Let us now come back to Sri Lanka and to the events that led to the Portuguese-Habsburg takeover. First of all, it is important to note that the news of the 1580 donation were very well received in Lisbon, where Philip II and his court resided from 1581 to 1583. The Spanish Habsburgs (as their Austrian relatives) were used to donations and inheritances of this kind and thus the seed fell on fertile ground – probably more fertile than it would have been if another candidate had seized the throne in Lisbon. The text was examined by a learned council, as described in chapter 3, and found to be valid. It had, however, to be further reinforced on the ground: Dharmapala was to disinherit his relatives explicitly, and representatives of the Lankan people were to elect Philip II and his successors as successors to the throne of Kotte.”

The ceremony took place in Colombo in 1583 with Christian and non-Christian rites. There was a public acclamation, and the aristocracy of Kotte accepted the donation of Dharmapala in the name of their people, promising that they would one day accept the King of Portugal “as their own natural king”.

In terms of imperial policy in Asia, no significant changes occurred during the 1580s, but after the creation of a new administrative organ, the Portuguese Financial Council (*Conselho da Fazenda*), in 1591, Castilian influence in Portuguese Asia seems to have begun to increase. At the very least, there was a convergence between the plans of conquest that were formulated in the East by subaltern agents of the empire and an increasing willingness to respond positively among defenders of a hawkish imperial stance in Iberia. Although this is not the place to discuss these changes, as they constitute an extremely intricate matter of political, administrative and cultural history, it is worth noting that the post of captain-general of the conquest of Ceylon (*Capitão-geral da conquista*

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24 Acceptance of the donation of Ceylon by Dom João to Philip II, Colombo, 4.XI.1583, published in *Gavetas*, vol. III, pp. 615–18. On all this, also see chapter 3 above.
The Lankan Transition to Colonial Rule

De Ceilão was created in 1594, three years before the death of Dharmapala.25 Thus, Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo, who succeeded Pero Lopes de Sousa in this post after the disaster of Danture that same year, was already in place when the donation of 1580 finally became effective.

Even though he had been married three times, Dharmapala died in May 1597 in Colombo without leaving another heir than Philip II, King of Portugal. A gathering of the principal nobles was organized in Colombo, this event being reasonably well documented. According to a certified copy of the notes taken on 29 May, two days after the death of the king, the captain-general Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo held a meeting at the Misericórdia Church (then used as Sé Matriz) with the captain of the fortress of Colombo Tomé de Sousa d’Arronches, the Father Commissary Francisco do Oriente, the Father Vicar Bernardino da Fonseca, the financial supervisor (vedor) Jorge Frolim de Almeida, the judge (ouvidor) João Homem da Costa and a number of notables from the royal court of Dharmapala.26 According to Queiroz, the participants in the assembly were chosen from and by a larger crowd after Azevedo had called “the principal vassals of that king [Dharmapala]” to Colombo. The list given in the Conquista includes Arronches, but also other names such as the cavaleiros (possibly meaning members of the Sinhalese royal household) Dom António, Dom Constantino, Dom Jorge, Dom João, and Dom Pedro Homem Pereira, as well as Melchior Botelho Modeliar, Domingos da Costa Arache, Tomé Rodrigues Patangatim, and a certain Dom Antão.27

These details are important because they indicate that a significant number of Lankan notables participated, including a mudaliyar (high military official), an aratchi (captain to a company of Lankan soldiers), and a patangatin (a caste headman among the fishermen), among others. The single personal names without a surname (Dom António, Dom Constantino etc.) all seem to refer to non-Portuguese persons as well. If we take this list seriously, we also need to note that all these names refer to Christians, an aspect to which I will come back shortly. In fact, Diogo do Couto refers explicitly that the oath was sworn on a Catholic missal.28 An aratchi then made an announcement in Sinhala to the people about the donation of the kingdom made by the deceased king, and the need to swear and acclaim the King of Portugal as the new monarch. The as-

25 In fact I argue that the most important decisions concerning Ceylon before 1596, including the creation of the captaincy-general, were taken in Colombo and in Goa with no interference from Lisbon or Madrid – yet the latter two were quick to follow the proposals coming from the East, and orders of conquest were soon issued (cf. “Ruptura ou realização”).
26 Couto, Da Ásia, vol. XII, I (6), pp. 45–46.
27 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 430.
28 Couto, Da Ásia, Vol. XII, I (6), p. 45.
sembly swore to “keep faith and loyalty, obey and be vassals to him [Philip II] and to his successors […] or to his viceroys, governors or captains.”

29 A procession finally went through the streets of Colombo with the aforementioned participants, in the traditional Portuguese way, with clamours of “Real, real, real, pelo muito poderoso Senhor el-Rey Dom Filipe Rei de Portugal e de Ceilão.”

30 According to Abeyasinghe, this was it. The political and symbolic transition of the throne of Kotte to the Portuguese Crown would have been dealt with in its entirety during this ad hoc ceremony organized two days after the death of Dharmapala. And yet it becomes rather evident from the existing accounts that what was staged on 29 May 1597, was essentially a ceremony of possession: an acclamation staged to enforce the legal fiction created by the donation of 1580, a first ceremony that was deemed crucial for the legality of the transition from an Iberian point of view, while also serving the goal of creating a de facto situation in which any other candidates to the throne would be discouraged from making claims. This act, proposed and imposed with great urgency by Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo immediately after Dharmapala’s death, was essentially analogous to the acclamation of Philip II as King of Portugal at the Cortes de Almeirim in 1580. It was sufficient to dissipate – or at least so it seemed – doubts about the rightful succession to the throne, and to create a decisive momentum for the Habsburg sovereign’s representatives in the field. Yet it did not address the myriad of practical issues related to the integration of an entire kingdom into the Catholic Monarchy, most pressingly the issue of how to deal with a majority of newly acquired subjects who were not Christians.

There is, of course, little room for doubt concerning the pressure that was later put on the Sinhalese population of the southwestern lowlands to convert. Missionary activities increased significantly after 1602, when the Franciscan monopoly was broken and other religious orders (Jesuits, Augustinian, Dominicans) entered the island. It is also known that, as shown precisely by Tikiri Abeyasinghe, the Kotteen elite would eventually lose most of its military posts and lands to Portuguese (or rather Luso-descendant) nobles, in a process that was almost completed by 1612.31 Yet these facts tell us very little about what happened and what people believed was about to happen in 1597. As a matter of fact, there was no way that Azevedo could assume power without at least addressing the question of how to rule over non-Christian subjects in Ceylon –

29 Ibid., pp. 45–46.
31 Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, p. 78.
and obviously he would have had to do so by discussing the matter precisely with his non-Christian subjects, rather than consulting with Goa or Lisbon. Everything needed to be done locally with a considerable investment of time and energy in negotiations with the Lankan elite. If Portugal’s Cortes de Almeirim had required the subsequent organization of the Cortes de Tomar to make the transition acceptable to a majority of Portuguese leaders, the acclamation held in Colombo called for an analogous development, an assembly of representatives entitled to negotiate the details of the integration.32

**Incorporation and the problem of non-Catholic justice**

Whether this assembly was held at Colombo or Malwana, or in any other place in the southwest of Sri Lanka, we do not know. We even ignore when exactly it was held, because there is no contemporary document to describe or even mention it. And yet it has become sufficiently clear by now that the non-existence of documents is not enough to prove the non-existence of an assembly of Lankan nobles with the captain-general Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo, the Portuguese representative of the new king. An assembly referred to, 40 years later, as the Cortes de Maluana. Let us not forget how fragmentary our sources are in general, even for the years covered by the so-called “Monsoon books”, the most comprehensive collection of official letters exchanged between Lisbon and its Asian possessions, now in the National Archive in Lisbon. Almost everything we possess from the period of 1597–1658 refers to events directly related to the Portuguese, or more generally the Catholic community, or to direct confrontations with other powers in the island. And whilst there is abundant data on military expeditions, on trade and fiscality, on missionary activities and on the conflicts opposing various Portuguese authorities in Colombo to each other, we have virtually no data covering one of the central aspects of life in the colony, justice. Justice – be it royal, seigniorial or municipal, be it Christian or non-Christian – was the most important means of exerting power after military conquest, and yet it is largely off our radar and will probably remain so due to a most unfortunate absence of sources. Thus Abeyasinghe’s central argument, the silence of our sources, becomes much less relevant than it initially seemed to be: in a panorama where so many things are left out, the absence of the Malwana Convention is not so surprising after all.

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32 There is an analogy between the two countries in terms of promises that the rulers needed to make to their subjects at the beginning of their mandates (be just, maintain the order, honour the religious dimension of kingship and government); see Goonewardena, “Kingship”, esp. pp. 10 & 23.
This is especially important as one central aspect not mentioned in the proceedings of the Colombo acclamation of 1597 is precisely justice: the promise made by Azevedo to maintain the laws and customs of the country for those subjects who remained non-Christians could have been made on that day of course, but this was a complex and thorny issue from an Iberian point of view, and it is most probable that it had to talked about and negotiated at some length later on. As shown recently by Ângela Barreto Xavier in *The Invention of Goa*, Portuguese legal practices in the core areas of the empire were quite unambiguous regarding the necessity of general conversion to Christianity, in order to avoid the existence of legally distinct communities. Hindu in late sixteenth-century Goa had only three alternatives: to remain in Goa and convert; to remain in Goa and practice their religion clandestinely; or to leave. Yet no such radical steps seem to have been taken in Ceylon, which implies that some sort of compromise was reached.

It makes sense to assume that the captain-general would not wish this matter to be extensively talked about in Colombo, Goa or Lisbon – although he certainly refrained from making an arrangement that would have been “illegal”. Though Queiroz actually refers that nobody in the Portuguese sphere ever wrote down the matters pertaining to Sinhalese law, it would be hard to imagine that none of this was known to the authorities in Goa, Lisbon or Madrid. Most probably, the arrangement was somehow tied up with the idea that a kingdom could become a part of the Catholic Monarchy without losing its integrity as such, i.e. in the same way as Portugal had been integrated while maintaining its own laws. But there may well have been a tacit agreement of not talking overtly about these matters. This assumption may at least serve as a working hypothesis while we await a more thorough exploration of the Spanish archives, namely the proceedings of the Council of Portugal and other imperial councils located in Madrid, which have never been looked at systematically by historians of the *Estado da Índia*, and which may contain data on discussions concerning these questions.

As a matter of fact, the most explicit reference to the issue of non-Christian justice in Ceylon under the Portuguese comes from a text written by Azevedo himself a decade and a half after the takeover. This is to be found in the now famous instructions that he left for his successor the captain-general Manuel Mascarenhas Homem in 1612, a text that was not intended for wider circulation.

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33 Xavier, *A invenção de Goa: poder imperial e conversões culturais*.
34 Queiroz, *Conquista*, p. 1009.
at that time.\textsuperscript{35} The following lines do, I believe, speak for themselves as far as the matter of the present chapter is concerned. Hidden beneath a thin layer of political, financial and other practical justification appears the clear idea that the non-Christian population needs a functioning legal system of their own, patronized by the captain-general, but free of further Portuguese interference:\textsuperscript{36}

\begin{quote}
\textquote{Beyond [the matter of] Christianity, I would draw your attention to justice, for where this is lacking, God himself is lacking too. What I most urge you is to do justice to the native Sinhalese of the island and in this you ought to exercise great and special care, defending them against coercion and oppression by the \textit{vidanas} and Portuguese lords of villages, for if the people of that island are content and realize that they are masters of their own and that it will not be taken from them, the island will remain permanently secure in obedience to His Majesty, but it will fall out clean contrary if there is none to mete out justice or to defend them. And because the judicial processes of our Crown judges and other justices are dilatory and cost a great deal of money and these people are for the most part very poor, and their plaints of small consequence, I set up in Malwana a tribunal consisting of high-born and experienced Sinhalese who with the \textit{mohottiyars} [officers with secretarial functions] of the king came to the number of eight, or fewer when some were missing, but never less than four, and to these were presented their plaints or \textit{kariyas} (as these were called there). After examining these and hearing the parties, they then proceeded to sentence them with me if the case was a major one, and if not, by themselves. I am of opinion that you ought to proceed in the same manner, and those there in that island will tell you how things have been done.} \textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

This may read as a rather Utopian vision of harmony and justice, but it was not a random one: the above description is an idealized version of what the petition of 1636–38 refers to in its first paragraph as the agreement reached between Azevedo and the non-Christian local elite at “the \textit{cortes} that were held at Mal-

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{35} Copy of the regiment of viceroy Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo for Manuel Mascarenhas Homem, Goa, 23.IV.1614, published in Abeyasinghe, \textit{Portuguese Regimentos}, pp. 42–51.  \\
\textsuperscript{36} Of course this is by no means to say that Azevedo was not a tyrant to many Sinhalese, as he himself admitted in the very same document when explaining how he had thousands of local leaders murdered and replaced by more loyal subjects.  \\
\end{footnotes}
Imperial Incorporation

wana” – as Cortes que em Maluana se celebrarão – sometime after the acclamation of May 1597: the guarantee given by Azevedo that the Lankan judicial system would be maintained for the non-Christian population. Indeed, the petitioners claimed that “in the name of His Majesty we were promised that our laws would be kept.”\(^{38}\) Quite obviously, the tribunal described above was not a new institution created in 1597, but the continuation of the mahanaduwa or great court of the Kotte rulers.\(^{39}\) Significantly as well, the principal complaint of the letter of grievances was that Azevedo, though claiming to have maintained the traditional Sinhala laws, in fact allowed this judicial system to be appropriated, misused and adulterated by a new elite of vidanas and dissauanis who were seen by the petitioners as being of lowly birth. If we try to make sense of the two accounts together, the most plausible explanation is that Azevedo promised to maintain the Sinhalese system of justice for non-Christian subjects, but soon left the administration of this system to people that he hoped would help stabilise his rule in the country, though they had not traditionally run the Kottean royal court of justice.

Conclusion: colonialism and elite competition

Controlling local elites was and is a key feature in empire-building, and Portuguese Ceylon was no exception to this rule. When a local elite proves difficult to control, one solution is to foster its replacement by an ambitious new elite more clearly committed to the new imperial order. This is usually a complex affair. In Goa, converted Brahmims and Kshatriyas competed for primacy under Portuguese rule, often using the very imperial system that forced them to convert to fight each other.\(^{40}\) In Ceylon, similar rivalries may have contributed to a state of affairs where, 40 years after the takeover, a significant group of people would complain not so much about the existence of a new, foreign imperial order, but about the misuse of the non-Christian system in this new imperial order by a locally grown non-Christian elite of lowly birth. It is fascinating how the incorporation of both Portugal and Kotte into the Catholic Monarchy, whilst relying on the acceptance of well-established elites, also opened the gates to what the latter would soon perceive as dangerous social change.

Probably Azevedo had few alternative choices, taking into consideration the limited military resources at his disposal. The Lankan court of justice that he sponsored went hand in hand with the existence, in Malwana, of a sort of royal court (in the political sense) headed by Azevedo himself, which mimicked

\(^{38}\) Queiroz, *Conquista*, p. 834.
\(^{40}\) Xavier, *A invenção de Goa*. 
The Lankan Transition to Colonial Rule

– more or less satisfactorily – certain elements of Sinhalese kingship, namely the annual däkum mangale ceremony. This was held entirely at the margin of the official Portuguese system.\(^{41}\) The existence of such institutions in a place some miles away from Colombo must have been crucial for the consolidation of Portuguese rule after the death of Dharmapala, even though it also brought along a rampant subversion of the status quo. As Abeyasinghe showed convincingly in his monograph on early Portuguese rule, the transition was accompanied by what seems to have been, at least for parts of the Sinhalese elite, an increase in privileges and powers, most notably the possibility of making land grants (an act that had judicial implications as well) which had formerly been reserved to the Kottean Kings.\(^{42}\) Is it a mere coincidence that this pay-off offered by Azevedo to consolidate his rule in the southwest reminds us of the increased privileges offered by Philip II to the Portuguese high nobility at the Cortes de Tomar?

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I do not intend to say that the “Malwana Convention” as it was described by the likes of P. E. Pieris and S. G. Perera should be treated again as a historical fact beyond any doubt. That would mean to undervalue the pathbreaking work of Tikiri Abeyasinghe, and the extremely valuable critical assessment of Portuguese rule by historians ranging from Chandra Richard De Silva to Alan Strathern. What I do intend is to bring the discussion back to a case that has been, I feel, prematurely closed. Whatever we may wish to call it, some kind of representative assembly was held by Azevedo following the acclamation staged in Colombo, and some agreement concerning the modus operandi of government and justice in “Portuguese Ceylon” was reached. Clearly, this event was of crucial importance for the consolidation of Portuguese rule in the lands of Kotte around 1600. Taking this fact seriously does not imply a revival of the idea that Portuguese activities in Sri Lanka such as conquest, mission and colonization were or are in any way justifiable. It does however help us rethink the role of Kotte’s elite in the transition of political power to a foreign ruler, under circumstances that go well beyond the simplistic patterns of ethnic conflict nurtured by some historians today. The Lankan transition to Portuguese rule was a complex process, and one that combines local struggles with global developments. Its military dimension is significant – and perhaps the single most important factor at work with regard to the Portuguese impact on the population of Sri Lanka’s southwestern lowlands – but the political framework surrounding the conquista and creating the

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\(^{41}\) Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, pp. 76–77 and 91.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., pp. 82–83 and 110–11.
illusion of a regulated, legally binding, consensual and legitimate transition is essential to our understanding of early European-Asian colonial dynamics.
Colonialism and Cosmopolitanism: Colombo, Cannanore, and the Chimera of the Multi-Ethnic Melting-Po(r)t in South Asia

Portuguese expansion in South India and Sri Lanka was, as the previous chapters have suggested, a fairly unsystematic and fissiparous affair often fraught by internal tensions and contradictions.¹ Trade, diplomacy, warfare and conquest were all parts of the process to varying degrees in different places at different times, but it is hardly possible to draw a clear picture even by combining the various elements in a structuralist mode: the Estado and its outer fringes were quite simply too complex to evolve in a unitary and coherent manner. A glance at the comparative history of some ports occupied by the Portuguese in South India and Sri Lanka shall further underline this complexity and question simplistic typologies not only with regard to the Estado, but also to its European competitors in the seventeenth century.

From Mumbai to Nagasaki, port cities form an essential part of the material legacy of European expansion in Asia. Many of these conurbations gained significance during the early modern period as the continent’s gateways for trade, migration, political and cultural exchange.² It comes as no surprise that port cities have been under intense scrutiny in the historiographies of Maritime Asia and of European expansion, and that at least some questions have been raised about their role in the genesis of the East-Western power disequilibrium and the

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¹ This chapter is based on a revision and substantial expansion of “Colombo versus Cannanore” (2009). The original paper was delivered at the Portuguese Settlements in India conference in Kannur in February 2005 and published, truncated and with other unauthorised changes, in 2006.

² The designations as “colonial port cities” and “gateways of Asia” are taken from Basu The Rise and Growth of Port Cities and Broeze, Gateways of Asia. The concept of gateway cities as opposed to central places is discussed, although for a totally different geographical context, in Burghardt, “A hypothesis about Gateway Cities”.

consolidation of imperial domination. Whatever the differences between Portuguese, Dutch and English expansion in Asia, there is no doubt that up to the late eighteenth century all these empires had their nodal points in port cities, and that the history of these cities is relevant to an understanding of the early modern world. Yet the structural developments of colonial port cities in Asia during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries have remained neglected by historians in general, and urban historians in particular. One reason for this is that, whilst there is a fair deal of evidence on European urbanism in Asia for the period starting around 1650, less – and generally more problematic – source materials are available for earlier times. Reliable city plans and views are rare for the sixteenth century and work with pre-modern travelogues, letters and geographical treatises written in a number of different languages often carries serious methodological challenges.

Whilst comprehensive systemic analyses such as those proposed by scholars of modern urbanism are certainly out of question, there is a considerable array of issues that the sources can help us address, including morphological, economic, social, political and cultural aspects. A general goal of early colonial urban studies would certainly be to correct outdated schematic views concerning the “traditionalism” of Asian cities as opposed to the “dynamism” of Western ones. Most scholars would now reject such a dualism, but under the

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3 For South Asia see Banga, *The City in Indian History and Ports and Their Hinterlands in India*; Basu, *The Rise and Growth*; Broeze, *Brides of the Sea and Gateways of Asia*; King, “Colonialism and the City”.


5 Cf. Reeves, Broeze & McPherson, “Studying the Asian port city”.

6 Cf. Rossa, “A cidade portuguesa” and “No primeiro dos elementos”; for more bibliography on recent Portuguese urban history see Teixeira, “História Urbana em Portugal”.

7 Cf. Murphey, “Traditionalism and Colonialism”; Nilsson, *European Architecture in India*; Lewandowski, “Changing form and function”; King, “Colonialism and the City”; Pearson, *Western Coastal India*, p. 68. Also see Grewal, “Urban Morphology under Colonial Rule” with a tripartite model going from the “indigenous town” to the “anglicized town” and the “colony town”. For more balanced views on modernization see Bayly, “The Evolution of Colonial Cultures”, pp. 450–454, although the *topos* of imported modernity is still – and maybe inevitably – there for cities like Kolkata as opposed to others like Benares. A related idea is that even commercial towns in India always had a sacred dimension (e.g.
surface it often retains some influence. In spite of a long historiographical tradition concerned precisely with the vibrant commercial nature of many Indian cities and a more recent surge in innovative studies of the early Iberian presence in Asia, the antithesis between organic and rational urbanism has not been entirely overcome. In fact, this dualism affects not only our view of European versus South Asian urban history, but also our understanding of the internal contrasts of Western expansion. The opposition here has been between a purportedly “medieval” and “organic” tradition of urban growth in the Portuguese case, on the one hand, and a more “modern”, “rational” and “planified” set of practices in the Spanish Empire and, above all, in the cities later founded by the Dutch. It goes without saying that some of these oppositions are in fact important and provide us with key concepts and theories for an understanding of a number of issues. The crucial point, however, is that they also tend to impede us from going further in our thinking. There were well-ordered Portuguese cities and chaotic Dutch ones, the organization of urban space depending on many factors, not the least of which is, as I already suggested in chapter 2 with regard to diplomatic history, chronology. These variations are significant, and thus worthy of study.

This chapter examines Colombo (Kolamba) in the southwest of Ceylon and Cannanore (Kannanur) in the north of Kerala, a pair of rarely studied, though fairly important secondary port cities controlled by the Portuguese during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and later taken over by the Dutch, in 1656

Champalalakshmi, “Urbanisation in South India”, p. 93), the implicit – and quite debatable – message being that this sets them clearly apart from European towns.

8 See Grewal, “Historical Writing on Urbanisation in Medieval India”.

9 Cf. Smith, “Colonial Towns of Spanish and Portuguese America”; McAlister, Spain and Portugal in the New World, pp. 133 and 272; and Oers, Dutch town planning overseas. For a pertinent, though brief, comparative critique of Oers based on Brazilian-Dutch cases, see Consolini, “Aspects of Dutch and Portuguese urbanism”. Also see some other papers presented at the conference of the European Association of Urban History in 2006: (www2.historia.su.se/urbanhistory/eauh/mainsessions.htm#m1, last accessed on 18.VIII. 2013). For a brief overview of Dutch towns in Asia see Blussé, “Dutch Settlements and Trading Centres”. Also see Nelson, The Dutch Forts of Sri Lanka.

10 See the in-depth analysis of Dutch Colombo in Raben, “Batavia and Colombo” and “Trade and urbanization”.

11 Recent research on regular-grid towns in late medieval Portugal and on the real influence of Italian Renaissance models on Portuguese colonial urbanism proves much of the traditional historiographical framework wrong, but most of this work has yet to make its way into mainstream historiography: see, among others, Carita, Lisboa manuelina and Trindade and Rossa, “Questões e antecedentes da ‘cidade portuguesa’”.
and 1663. The focus is on morphological aspects and long-term political and social developments that have gone unnoticed by otherwise well-informed authors concerned with the early colonial history of South India and Sri Lanka. Amongst the principal structures considered in this study are walls separating different dwelling areas from each other. Built and rebuilt over the centuries, these walls contributed to the morphological configuration of the cities. Yet they also reflect complex political, social and cultural developments that are of significance for the history of early colonial interactions. What I argue is that, whilst Cannanore as an urban body was characterized by a set of walls separating ethnically and religiously distinct neighbourhoods, Colombo, less influenced by regulations emanating from Lisbon and Goa and more exposed to local politics thanks to a peculiar, but not entirely untypical historical and military context, developed into a more integrative city held together by a single external wall. After the Dutch takeover, the urban structure was little altered in Cannanore, but entirely transformed in Colombo. These contrasting attitudes draw our attention to the complexity of urban developments in the colonial contexts of South Asia between 1500 and 1700.

12 Colombo and Cannanore are here defined as port cities based on the fact that both sprang up and developed primarily due to their situations next to natural harbours that became important commercial ports. The fact that, at later stages, port activities ceased being the dominant factor in the economic and social life of these settlements does not infringe this. Yet for a more dogmatic position on such issues see Kidwai, “Conceptual and Methodological Issues”, pp. 25–26. On port cities in South Asia in general see Banga, The City in Indian History and Ports and Their Hinterlands; Basu, The Rise and Growth of Port Cities; Broeze, Brides of the Sea and Gateways of Asia; King, “Colonialism and the City”. On the “secondary” status of Colombo and Cannanore see paragraph below. As for the word “urbanism”, I use it without restricting it to urban planning (urbanística in Portuguese), but rather including all practices that shaped the structures of settlements, be they premeditated or not. Cf. Carita, Colectânea and Correia, “Urbanismo em Portugal”.

13 Cf. Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule; Bouchon, “Les rois de Kotte” and ‘Regent of the Sea’; Brohier, Changing Face of Colombo; Flores, Os Portugueses; Perera, The City of Colombo; De Silva, The Portuguese in Ceylon; Winius, The Fatal History. For a number of case studies on other Portuguese cities in Asia, see Aubin, “Le royaume d’Ormuz”, pp. 84–97 (Hormuz), Bouchon, “Un microcosme: Calicut au 16e siècle” (Calicut); Couto, “Em torno da concessão e da fortaleza de Baçaim” (Bassein); Flores, “The Portuguese Chromosome” (Macao); Thomaz, “Malaka et ses communautés” and Early Portuguese Malacca, pp. 35–60 (Malacca); Santos, “Goa é a chave de toda a Índia” (Goa); Tavim, Judeus e Cristãos-Novos de Cochim (Cochin). Also see Schurhammer, Francis Xavier for various well-researched descriptions of cities visited by Francis Xavier in the 1540s, and Biedermann, “As cidades luso-asiáticas” for a brief overview.
The common background: Cannanore and Colombo in the early 1500s

Colombo and Cannanore were, on the eve of the sixteenth century, comparably modest ports within the larger regional cluster of maritime trading places that included Calicut, Cochin, Quilon, Tuticorin, Mannar and Galle. In addition to the important parallels between Colombo and Cannanore in terms of geology, climate and vegetation, it is plausible to assume that, being largely – though not exclusively – Muslim sea ports catering to relatively small Hindu or Buddhist political centres situated further inland, both ports were fairly similar in function and possibly in form before the arrival of the Portuguese. Although the hierarchies between South Asian ports are not entirely clear for this period and reliable demographic and commercial data is scant, it seems that Cannanore and Colombo stood quite clearly below first-class transcontinental hubs such as Calicut and Cochin, but also well above declining ports such as Mangalore, Eli, Mannar or Weligama. Both Colombo and Cannanore were, it may be added, similarly specialized in the export of prized local commodities (ginger in Kerala and cinnamon in Ceylon) while playing relatively minor roles in the financing and organizing of long-distance trade. In either case political power was located at a relatively short distance from the sea (about 10–15 km), leaving the port towns with a set of largely commercial functions to perform during their early stages of development. Although political, military and religious functions may have been present in both places in an embryonic state, none of these were of a

14 It is risky to propose clear limits for this cluster, which may be extended to range from Gujarat in the northwest to the Ganges delta in the northeast. Limiting it strictly to the Malabar Coast (from Cannanore to Cape Comorin, cf. Correia, Os Portugueses no Malabar, pp. 17–23) would be one option. Yet from an early-sixteenth-century Portuguese perspective, the core area of the much coveted Indian spice trade stretched essentially from Calicut to Galle, while trade in other, complementary (from a Cape Route perspective) commodities such as rice and textiles linked it with eastern coastal India. It may be noted that ideas for a reinforcement of Colombo as a political and commercial centre of this system flourished among the Portuguese and the Dutch (Rijckloff van Goens Senior and Junior), perhaps due to the apparent centrality of the place on many Indian Ocean maps.


16 The challenge of applying central-place theory and rank-size analysis (see Smith, “Types of City-Size Distributions” for an overview) to the port system of coastal India and Ceylon in the sixteenth-century – in all probability an “immature system” where size is not entirely proportional to importance – remains open. Although quantitative approaches are problematic, other methods may yield results as it has become clear that size can also be “defined in terms of urban functions […] rather than in terms of population” (ibid.: 22). These in turn may to some extent be inferred from late medieval and early modern travelogues and geographical descriptions.
primary importance.\textsuperscript{17} Significantly, as we shall see, early Portuguese visitors to the region compared Colombo with Cannanore, not with Cochin.\textsuperscript{18}

Crucially, however, the parallels began to lose their significance very early on in the 1500s. True, after Calicut (1498), Cannanore (1498), Cochin (1501) and Quilon (1503), the Portuguese landed in Colombo in September 1506, or possibly earlier.\textsuperscript{19} But whilst they established an official presence in Cannanore by 1501, similar attempts were not made in Ceylon until 1518. Such was the difference that, whereas Cannanore remained firmly integrated to the system of Portuguese fortresses administered by Goa on the Malabar Coast from 1505 to 1663, Colombo was, as we shall see, abandoned by the Portuguese authorities between 1524 and 1551, not to be fully reintegrated into the institutional framework of the Estado governed by Goa until the last quarter of the century, when its form already distinguished it clearly from Cannanore.\textsuperscript{20} The difference resulted from diverging Portuguese political and cultural attitudes in distinct geographic areas, on the one hand, and contrasting strategies of dealing with the newcomers on the Indian and Sri Lankan side, on the other hand. In order to understand these processes, it is worth having a closer look at the specific developments in Cannanore and Colombo from the very beginning of the sixteenth century.

\textbf{Cannanore}

The initial prospects for a Portuguese settlement in Cannanore were bright. Jointly with Cochin, though being much smaller in size, this town took up a prime position in the earliest Portuguese Indian Ocean network created in the

\textsuperscript{17} It may be argued that these aspects alone do not justify the comparison of Colombo with Cannanore as opposed to any other case. Certainly this pair of ports is only one among a number of options. The aspects mentioned so far, however, along with the relative wealth of material available, offer reason enough to start the comparative work with this specific pair. Other cases, e.g. Cochin, Nagapattinam or Chennai, shall further enrich the picture.

\textsuperscript{18} In fact, Cochin immediately became central to the Portuguese network, serving as its capital from 1505 to 1530, and as its “secret” (mostly commercial) capital later on. Cochin also remained inhabited by its Hindu King throughout the entire period under scrutiny.

\textsuperscript{19} An undocumented first contact may have occurred in 1501, although there is no positive evidence for it and there seems to have been no follow-up before 1506; cf. Bouchon, “A propos de l’inscription de Colombo”.

\textsuperscript{20} On the history of the Portuguese presence in the area see Abeyasinghe, Portuguese Rule; Bouchon, “Les Musulmans du Kerala” and ‘Regent of the Sea’; Correia, Os Portugueses no Malabar; Costa and Rodrigues, El proyecto indiano; Flores, Os Portugueses e o Mar de Ceilão; De Silva, The Portuguese in Ceylon; Winius, The Fatal History. Sri Lanka, especially Kotte, is overall better studied than the region of Cannanore for this period.
Colombo, Cannanore and other ports

wake of Vasco da Gama’s first voyage. A trading depot (feitoria) was set up in Cannanore in late 1501 and, just a few years later, a fortress was built on the same site. Both resulted from negotiations with the local ruler, the Kolathiri Raja residing in the neighbouring political and ceremonial centre of Valarpattanam. The Hindu sovereign, already used to having Mappila traders (Keralalese Muslims of mixed Arab and local descent) reside in Cannanore, authorized the construction of the feitoria and, later, the fort on a peninsula on the western side of the bay, at a comfortable distance from the rest of the town (for the site’s morphology and a slightly later state of affairs in terms of buildings, see figure 5). The basic infrastructures for the feitor’s (or trading manager’s) work were readily created on this isolated spot: soon there were residential and storage facilities (A), a quay (B), a palisade with a gate guarded by Nayar soldiers provided by the raja, and a trench to separate the tip of the peninsula from the mainland (marked here as C, still visible within the fort today). In October 1505, when the Portuguese-Mappila rivalry stiffened, the site was further fortified and left to be guarded by two hundred and fifty Portuguese soldiers assisted by two caravels. The combined commercial and defensive character of the building, baptized as Castelo de Sant’Ângelo, reflected a complex evolution in Portugal’s overseas establishments. It was a fortaleza-feitoria (castle-cum-depot) combining elements of the commercial feitoria traditionally used in Europe, namely in Antwerp, with the military features of the castelo (castle) or fortaleza (fortress) partly developed in African contexts, namely in Mina. By 1506 the new building, though fragile, was standing. It was structurally defensive in scope, but by its very situation it would be hard not to also see it as a rather offensive element in the landscape surrounding the Mappila settlement.

24 Ibid., pp. 78.
25 Santos and Rodrigues, “A feitoria-fortaleza e o comércio transcontinental” have identified the “feitoria-fortaleza” as a structure based on the Portuguese feitoria model (distinct from the Italian fondacco in that it was firmly in royal hands), originally established in Bruges, later shifted to Antwerp, and then replicated in overseas contexts (Arguim, Mina, Calicut etc.) where, however, it needed to be combined with the fortaleza. Functionally, the feitoria-fortaleza responds to a need of fortifying a commercial infrastructure. It contrasts with the Moroccan-style fortaleza in that it was not designed to host vast numbers of infantry and cavalry used for regular offensive raids into the hinterland.
26 Teixeira, “A fortaleza manuelina de Cananor” argues that with its tower and straight walls this fort was essentially medieval in character and unadapted to the upcoming needs of early modern warfare.
The spatial and social separation between this settlement and the town of Cannanore soon deepened. In 1507, on the occasion of the first major siege conducted by hostile Nayar forces, the Portuguese built new structures for canons and, crucially, cleared the field north of the rebuilt defence line in order to create an open space for their artillery to be effective (D). A new, predominantly Catholic neighbourhood would develop in this area over the following decades. Major defensive improvements were finally made in 1527 as a reaction to tensions that put the Portuguese at risk across the Indian Ocean, including an increase of Mappila naval might, since the beginning of that decade. New walls were to allow for a reduction of the garrison to about a hundred and fifty men. The changes are partially reflected in an undated drawing included in the Lendas da Índia manuscript (figure 5) of Gaspar Correia written in the mid-sixteenth century, as well as in that author’s textual description.

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29 Bouchon, ‘Regent of the Sea’, p. 171.
Quite strikingly, the Portuguese appreciated the isolation of the spot granted to them as much as the Kolathiri Raja did. It made their settlement more defendable in a context of ambiguous relations with the Hindu authorities and of increasing competition with the Mappilas. Moreover, it guaranteed distance to the bustling port town of Cannanore. From the very beginning the clerks of the Portuguese feitoria were prohibited of going to the neighbouring settlements except for official trade and to purchase provisions.\[31\] Naturally, the existence of such rules indicates that some people were transgressing them, but in the case of Cannanore there does not seem to have been a great deal of sustained intercourse beyond the fort’s walls.\[32\] It is maybe of significance that the main trading port remained dominated by the Mappilas, many of whom were equally keen on keeping a distance from the newcomers after the fierce hostilities that had arisen between the two groups, at least in some places, as early as 1498.\[33\] Although there was a moment of relatively pragmatic cooperation between the Portuguese and Mamale, Cannanore’s Muslim “Regent of the Sea”, around 1515–18, the following decade brought a profound and durable rupture.\[34\]

**Colombo**

A comparable pattern of isolationism can be found in Colombo, although – quite crucially, as we shall see – within a slightly different timeframe and political context. The harbour of Colombo was remarkably similar to that of Cannanore from a geo-morphological point of view, and when the Portuguese arrived there in September 1506 they were indeed struck by the resemblance.\[35\] Both ports were situated in bays of a comparable size created by rocky promontories stretching out into the ocean alongside otherwise unprotected coastlines. These harbours were far from secure during the peak of the southwest monsoon, but they did offer reasonable shelter for medium-sized ships during the

31 Bouchon *Regent of the Sea*, p. 58.
32 There does not seem to have been a significant number of Portuguese individuals offering their services to the Kolathiri Rajas in a way comparable to the attraction of Kotte on the Portuguese in Colombo (Bouchon in *Regent of the Sea*, the most comprehensive study of sixteenth-century Cannanore, only mentions desertions in Ceylon). This may have been due to the proximity of Cannanore to Cochin. Possibly Ceylon was precisely one of the places where deserters from the Malabar forts looked for new opportunities, together with the more obvious destinations in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia. On Portuguese renegades in this region see Cruz, “Exiles and renegades”.
33 For a recent reassessment of the first decade of Portuguese-Asian relations see Subrahmanyan, “The birth-pangs of Portuguese Asia”.
rest of the year. Moreover, both were connected with the ginger and cinnamon-producing hinterlands through nearby rivers including the Valarpattanam and Anjarakandi rivers in Kerala, and the Kelani Ganga in Ceylon. Placed in proximity to political/religious centres craving for new revenues from maritime trade – Valarpattanam and Kotte – such spots naturally attracted commerce during the later Middle Ages and gained an increased importance when the volume of ships began to grow in response to a rising demand of the international markets in the 1500s. In both instances this commerce was not directly carried out by royal agents but by other, mostly Muslim traders forming part of the commercial networks that linked the spice producing regions with the Middle East and East Asia.36

In theory, the initial prospects of the Portuguese in Colombo seemed as good as those of Cannanore. Being the prime trading port in the Kingdom of Kotte (and thus most probably the largest port in Ceylon, although possibly rivalled by Galle and Negombo at this time, because cinnamon was produced in a vast area accessible through those ports as well), Colombo easily whetted the newcomers’ appetite. During a first visit to Kotte in 1506, the envoys of Dom Lourenço de Almeida, the Portuguese viceroy’s son, were well received and discussed the possibility of establishing a fort at Colombo with the King of Kotte, Dharma Parakramabahu IX.37 Soon the viceroy Dom Francisco de Almeida informed Manuel I of Portugal that “in Colombo there is a peninsula like that of Cannanore, where a fortress could be built; it has much sweet water and a good port; [and] it is also on the way to Malacca”.38

The conditions, however, were not exactly the same in terms of political and commercial geography. Although Colombo was less than a week away from Cochin under favourable sailing conditions, communications across the Gulf of Mannar were very difficult during the stormy season, from May to August. Moreover, the Portuguese traders established in Cochin had an interest in keeping Ceylon out of official Portuguese control.39 Hence Colombo remained peripheral to the Portuguese fort system of the Malabar Coast – to which Goa was added in a northward drive in 1510 – and stayed virtually untouched for another decade. The delay was not, it must be underlined, due to local resistance, although parts of the Muslim trading community were certainly hostile to the idea of a Portuguese establishment in the island. The Crown of Kotte showed, as we have seen already, considerable interest in attracting the Portu-

The Portuguese were interesting not only as traders, but also as soldiers who could provide military assistance both externally – on the seas – and internally, namely in the princely guards at court, following a longstanding practice of importing Indian mercenaries. At least one request for the creation of a permanent Portuguese garrison in Ceylon was made by the King of Kotte in 1513. Ironically, it was the Portuguese already established in India who first refused to build a permanent stronghold in Ceylon, for reasons that have to do with internal factional divides.40

Only in 1518, seventeen years after the establishment of the Portuguese feitoria in Cannanore, did Governor Lopo Soares de Albergaria, a fierce defender of free commerce, give in to the orders of King Manuel I and build a fort next to Colombo.41 Soares obtained a portion of ground on the northern tip of the peninsula that protected the bay of Colombo on the seaside, an isolated and uninhabited piece of land known by the name of its rocky littoral, the Galboka.

40 See chapter 3.
41 Flores, Os Portugueses, pp. 136–139.
This was the spot that had caught Almeida’s attention in 1506 due to its similarity to the peninsula at Cannanore. Despite the distortion in Correia’s drawing (see figure 6), the textual evidence suggests that there were originally few or no houses in this area. The land stretching from the seacoast to a little creek (A) that ran into the bay of Colombo from a swampy lagoon in the south (now known as Beira Lake) was unoccupied, providing a comfortable buffer zone. Construction work on the northernmost tip of the peninsula began in late 1518. The site was almost a mile away from the bustling town of Colombo. Like in Cannanore, the occupants of the fort were strongly discouraged from going further inland than the little creek, and deserters—who seem to have been more numerous here than in Cannanore—were severely punished when caught.

As for the shape of the fort built next to Colombo, baptized as Fortaleza de Santa Barbara, it reflected some changes that had occurred between 1505 and 1518 in terms of military engineering. Warfare was becoming more widespread and more devastating between the Portuguese and the Mappilas as the latter increased their ballistic power and responded to challenges in a more sustained manner whilst the former struggled with severe problems of military organization, mostly in terms of manpower. The fort built next to Colombo was more “modern” than the original fortifications built by the Portuguese in Cannanore in 1505. True, there was still a central tower (B) comparable to the first keep built in Cannanore. There was also a trench (C) separating the fortified area from the mainland and thus creating an artificial island like the one at Cannanore. But the triangular shape of the building and the existence of bastion-like structures (D) on the corners of the traditionally walled (F) compound from which at least some heavy artillery could be fired are features pointing to new tendencies in military architecture. The most heavily armed bastion at the Colombo fort was the one standing on the northern tip of the land-tongue, controlling the entrance of the bay (H). The compound (E) within these structures served as a yard where cinnamon, a bulkier commodity than pepper and ginger, could be left to dry in the sun before being shipped off in October-November each year. Houses for the one to two hundred soldiers stationed here were built outside the walled area (G), between the fort and the trench.

45 On the complex transition from medieval to early modern forms of fortification in the Portuguese sphere, especially the transitional combinations of towers (torres) and bulwarks (baluartes), see Moreira, História das fortificações, pp. 144–153.
In its conception, this fort stood halfway between the predominantly vertical structures built in Cannanore in 1505–06 and the more markedly horizontal ones built in that same location a little later, around 1527 (the ones that are to be seen in figure 5). The Portuguese were at this time adopting new methods of fortification all over their empire, placing an increased emphasis on bulwarks with canons. Although the structures in South Asia were of a comparably modest size until the mid-sixteenth century, the general logic of innovation may be linked to contemporary processes occurring in Europe as well as in South Asia. Yet as a whole, the complex at Colombo remained, like the one at Cannanore, an almost perfect expression of how Portuguese maritime power worked during the early 1500s when it had to set foot on land. Both forts followed the functional logic of the feitoria-fortaleza, a type of structure essentially built for the sake of draining commodities through well-suited harbours while keeping a clear distance from the actual port settlements which they neighboured. Hence the importance of not taking the surviving Portuguese imagery as full representations of Cannanore and Colombo: the vistas we possess focus on the Portuguese fortifications and leave much of the rest out of sight.

**Reinforcing segregation: Cannanore under the Portuguese**

Although we only have little concrete information about the development of Cannanore’s urban structures during the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a comparison of Gaspar Correia’s drawing with seventeenth-century materials, namely António Bocarro’s drawing and description from around 1630, suggests that the settlement took its characteristic shape early on. Crucially, the Portuguese-controlled part of Cannanore remained committed to the basic principles of isolation involved in the earliest settlement – as in many other instances of early colonial European presence overseas. It developed four strictly separate areas. Firstly, a purely Portuguese fort area (K+L+M in figure 7). Secondly, a town-and-garden area (B) resulting from the growth of an early Chris-

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46 Moreira, *História das fortificações* insists on the importance of Italian, French and German influences and their revolutionary impact after 1530, yet also points out the existence of particular developments in the Portuguese Empire, e.g. hybrid experimentations until the 1520s with bulwarks that did not yet form part of truly integrated systems of cross-firing (p. 147–149), and the upcoming of an empire-wide “national school of military architecture” (p. 155) in the wake of the fortification of Mazagan in Morocco in 1541.

47 This being said, there is no detailed and critical study of the practicalities of Portuguese fortress-building in South Asia in connection with the longstanding debates on the impact of gunpowder on military techniques in this region. For comprehensive overviews on the matter see Gommans and Kolff, *Warfare and Weaponry*, pp. 26–42 and Rogers, *The Military Revolution Debate*. On the forts of the *Estado* until 1521 see Teixeira, *Fortalezas*. 
tian street that had sprung up next to the trench (mentioned and depicted in Correia’s Lendas; notice the crosses in figures 5 and 7). This was inhabited by a growing number of Portuguese and/or Luso-Indian Christians and surrounded by what may have been a mud wall.

![Figure 7: Cannanore in the early seventeenth century, as seen from the SW. Drawing reproduced from Bocarro, Livro das Plantas das Fortalezas.](image)

Thirdly, there was a more humble settlement (povoação) just outside the latter wall, about which very little is known. This is where the presumably Hindu fishing folk lived (N). And finally, a predominantly Muslim area called the

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48 Bocarro, *O livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas*, vol. II, pp. 188–189. No mention is made of Hindu merchants of higher caste for the “bazaar”, but the historiographical myth of their cultural fear of the Ocean shall in no way make us believe that they were not settling nearby; cf. Pearson, *Western Coastal India*, pp. 116–144 (although some of the evidence quoted therein should be handled with care) and Subrahmanyan, “Staying on: The Portuguese of southern Coromandel”, p. 454. A hypothesis advocated for other contexts is that Hindu merchants would have lived further inland and commuted to the port areas. In reading Ibn Battuta’s descriptions of Indian coastal towns (*The Travels*) one is indeed left with the impression that the waterfront was often dominated by Muslims, but this refers to a state of affairs almost two centuries earlier than the period under discussion.
“bazar” by the Portuguese (bazaar dos mouros). In fact, we do possess some depictions of this town from the seventeenth century, showing a Mosque, a market area, a fortified palace and various residential streets (see figure 8).\textsuperscript{49} The “bazaar” also appears designated in one vista from the early 1600s as “higher Cannanore” (Cannanor de cima) – i.e. the original non-Portuguese town of Cannanore, as opposed to what one might want to call a “lower Cannanore” (Cannanor de baixo), though I have not come across the latter expression in the written records.\textsuperscript{50} This situation remained largely unchanged afterwards, as one can infer from the Dutch descriptions made around the takeover in 1663, to which we shall come further below.\textsuperscript{51}

![Figure 8: The Mappila settlement of Cannanore as seen from W. Drawing from Albernaz, Plantas das Cidades, c. 1648 (Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich)](image)

In other words, “Portuguese” Cannanore was two Christian settlements carrying the same name and, perhaps even more importantly, Cannanore as a

\textsuperscript{49} See Garcia, Cidades e Fortalezas, pp. 143–145.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 143.

\textsuperscript{51} The campaign led by Jacob Hustaert is described in Meilinck-Roelofsz, De Vestiging der Nederlanders, pp. 344–347.
whole was four quarters existing side by side with ethnically and religiously distinct populations. Within this larger framework, the relationship between the walled area of the Portuguese and the town of the Muslims was not only one of trading cooperation, but also, and maybe essentially, one of distance and mistrust, as Portuguese-Mappila relations deteriorated sharply due to open warfare in the Sea of Ceylon after 1518. It was in the Muslim town, ignored in most Portuguese drawings, that the chiefs of the Muslim community, Nayars by origin (designated by the Portuguese as “Malabars”), began to thrive as a virtually sovereign dynasty. Under the leadership of Ali Raja they would, in 1559, defy the Kolathiri Raja’s authority and constitute a renewed challenge to the Portuguese. As a consequence of Ali Raja’s coup, the seat of Hindu royal power was transferred to Kasaragod further north in the country in 1564, allowing for the development of a now entirely autonomous Muslim political centre next to the Portuguese fortress, and making relations between the Portuguese and the Kolathiri Rajas even more complicated.

The process surrounding the secession of Ali Raja was, as we shall see, diametrically opposed to what happened at the same time in Colombo, where the Sinhalese capital was integrated into the “Portuguese” fortress in 1565. In Cannanore, according to António Bocarro’s account from the 1630s, the cannons of the bulwark (A) that protected the entrance of the Portuguese fort and the beach stretching alongside the outer Christian neighbourhood pointed directly to the Muslim town, and to the main non-Portuguese port area, the desembarcadouro (C–N), clearly distinct from the Portuguese quay (cais) situated next to the old feitoria (E). In this context, the Portuguese fort area (K+L+M in figure 7) was much smaller than suggested in most vistas, being roughly identical in surface with the rather tiny area of what is today known as Saint Angelo’s Fort. The eastern point of departure of the trench-and-wall complex that protected it on the landside was a large semicircular bulwark (A) controlling the central square of the local Christian town (B) and overlooking the beach on the bayside (C). From there the main fortification (J) stretched to the seaside in an almost straight line running from point (A) to (H). It was certainly less curved in reality than suggested in the early seventeenth-century images, as is easily con-

52 Although Meilinck-Roelofs affirms that the Muslim town was walled before 1663 (ibid.: p. 12), other sources suggest that the Ali Rajas only really invested in fortifications in the eighteenth century (cf. Galletti et al., The Dutch in Malabar, p. 67). Fig. 7 shows a moat.
54 Ibid., p. 173.
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The total circumference of the fort area is given as 255 braças (each braça measuring roughly 1.76 meters), which corresponds to a total of less than 450 meters. The area (K), enclosed by the main moat-and-wall complex (I & J) and the primitive wall running from waterfront to waterfront next to the “old tower” (E) was thus greatly inflated in the drawings. In reality, it was too small to house and feed even a community of only seventy households mentioned by Bocarro, i.e. less than a thousand people. That is why another wall with a total length of 600 braças (almost one kilometer) had to be built surrounding an urbanized area (B) lying just next to the fort. This extension zone would have been a home to at least some of the forty “Portuguese” casados and their families, and to most of the remaining thirty “black” Christian families of Indian origin (“soldados e casados da terra, pretos”) registered in the 1630s. And it would also have been a ground for gardens (“ortas e quintais”), essential for the food supply of any Portuguese community and garrison in times of hardship.

This constellation seems to confirm and even reinforce the hypothesis recently formulated by Paulo Varela Gomes, who holds that the Portuguese settlements in Asia, though perhaps characterized by a generally more “organic”, less strictly regulated growth than their Spanish and Dutch counterparts (and this in itself is a point calling for further assessment), shared with the latter the fact of having separate dwelling areas for different social groups, which were

57 Within this measurement, the length of about half of the bayside coastline stretching from the main bulwark to the tip of the peninsula is given as 70 passos, roughly 70 meters: approximately 50 meters from (A) to (D), plus 20 from (D) to (E). Bocarro does not give a measure for (E) to (F), but the total length on this side must have been around 120–150 meters, as it is today. From the tip (F) to point (G), Bocarro gives 58 braças, which would correspond to about 100 meters. Summing up these measures, we get about 230–260 meters between (A) and (G), which is already more than half of the total circumference. Thus the remaining 250 meters must correspond to the seaside coastline going from (G) to (H) plus the fortification (J) running between (H) and (A). It may be added that the written account is clear in stating the absence of walls between (G) and (H). All this would roughly correspond in terms of topography to what is now visible as Saint Angelo’s Fort.

58 Bocarro, O livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas, vol. II, p. 190. Unfortunately, the Bocarro description is very sketchy when it comes to the number of Portuguese families living within the fort (K) and without (B), but the fact that there was a need for a semi-fortified area populated by Portuguese and local Christians certainly was a direct consequence of the inner area’s (K) reduced dimensions combined with the hostility towards the Muslim community – no-one seems to have gone to settle in Cannanor de cima. Note how the drawings from the seventeenth century deflated the outer walled area as much as they inflated the inner one.
most commonly defined by their ethnic and/or religious identity. In Cannanore, this separation was materialized not only in “ethnic streets” as in Goa or Diu. There were clearly delimited areas separated from each other by walls, trenches, artillery positions and guarded gates.

Within this setting the wall that was most heavily fortified was not the one separating the two Christian quarters from the rest, but the one defending the fort core area. Significantly, the longer but structurally weaker wall surrounding the outer part of Christian Cannanore does not even appear on the maps and plans of the Dutch period, whilst the inner, much more solid separating structure clearly does. After the takeover in 1663, the Dutch, who tried to run their fortresses with fewer personnel than the Portuguese and hoped to avoid the formation of local Dutch Creole communities (though not necessarily with success), maintained the inner fort area (K) but dropped the outer, half-fortified area (B), the fate of which could certainly be traced through materials of the late Dutch and early British periods. The Dutch consequently reinforced the central defence structure (J), thus creating the basis for what is nowadays visible as the impressive northern front of “Saint Angelo’s Fort”. The original Portuguese moat-and-wall line running between (K) and (B) was therefore maintained and further developed, serving as the fundamental social and cultural border between “European” and “Asian” Cannanore. This boundary, it should be underlined, had been structurally embedded within the sector dominated by the Portuguese from the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

Towards integration: new urban structures in Colombo

Compared with Cannanore, Colombo evolved in a strikingly different direction from the 1520s. The contrast was partly due to divergent local political contexts. While no one in the Kingdom of Cannanore – as it was usually called by Europeans – ever seems to have complained about the isolation of the Portuguese compound, the garrison of the fort set up next to Colombo in 1518 was perceived by the Kings of Kotte as being insufficiently committed to Lankan affairs. The problem here was not an excess of Portuguese action on the ground, but a lack of it in the perspective of both Vijayabahu VI (r.1513–21) and his

59 Gomes, “Portuguese Settlements and Trading Centres” and “Dans les villes de l’Asie portugaise”. For recent research on streets in early modern Europe (generally not including matters of ethnic divisions of space though) see Laitinen and Cohen, “Cultural History of Early Modern Streets” and the entire thematic issue of the Journal of Early Modern History dedicated to the “Cultural History of Early Modern Streets” (vol. 12, nr. 3–4, 2008).

60 These observations are based on a brief survey of the drafts and plants preserved in the Dutch National Archive at The Hague.
successor Bhuvanekabahu VII (r. 1521–51), who had originally sought to attract the Portuguese in order to make use of them in local warfare. Eventually the latter sovereign suspended his tributary payments to Goa, and in 1524 the Portuguese abandoned the fort.  

For a decisive period of nearly thirty years ranging from 1524 to 1551 there would be no official Portuguese settlement in Ceylon, i.e. neither a fortress nor a feitoria. During those years, however, a number of Portuguese freelance traders and mercenaries did get involved in local affairs. By the late 1520s, at least twenty such merchant-soldiers – mostly men of obscure origins, many of whom must have been deserters from Portuguese garrisons – had households in the Kingdom of Kotte. By 1541 there were at least thirty of them. These were people who, in opposition to those settling in Cannanore, had only little to do with the institutions of the Estado. Placed halfway between Goa and São Tomé de Meliapor, on the brink of the Portuguese “shadow empire” developing in the Bay of Bengal since the late 1510s, they participated in the flourishing semi-official cinnamon trade of Colombo, purchasing local real estate without constraints from the Portuguese authorities, and establishing new families with non-Christian women under the Sinhalese sovereign’s nominal protection. As this group developed its relations with Lankan society outside of Goa’s sphere of direct influence, it socially resembled the spontaneous Portuguese colonies in the Bay of Bengal much more than the official ones on the Malabar Coast. It maintained some feeble – and occasionally quite useful – links with the Estado, but at the same time it was naturally engaged in getting adapted to local conditions and participating – not always smoothly – in local trade and society.

During the Portuguese-Mappila wars of the 1520s, namely after the invasion of the Kingdom of Kotte by Muslim forces aiming for the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1525, the latter obtained a victory and demanded the removal of the Muslim traders by Bhuvanekabahu. Although this was carried out in the same year, soon after the Portuguese also had to accept that many of the Muslim merchants came back only to stay until well into the seventeenth century.

Little data is available on Colombo during those years. As mentioned above, the area (C in figure 9, which is a much later view) between the sea and the creek (A) that today separates the busy Pettah from the administrative Fort District had been a wasteland in the 1510s. Given the character of Portuguese immigration in the 1520s and 1530s, the newcomers probably preferred to settle

61 Biedermann, “Tribute, vassalage and warfare”, pp. 188–190.
62 Cf. Subrahmanyam, The Portuguese Empire in Asia, pp. 55–79
65 Cf. De Silva, “Portuguese policy towards the Muslims in Ceylon”.
in the old urban core (B) of Colombo. This area had, it seems, grown along two roads, the first running along the waterfront towards the mouth of the Kelani River in the northeast, the second pointing diagonally to Kotte in the southeast. When the *Estado* became an increasingly stable ally of Kotte during the 1530s and, above all, the 1540s, a new breed of royal trade representatives and missionaries began to arrive in Colombo with no plans to mingle. It seems that at that point a new, more distinctly Portuguese neighbourhood may have started to grow on the formerly unoccupied lands where the Fort District now is (C). Here the Franciscans set up their church and convent in 1543, and some later Dutch maps and views seem to suggest that the streets of the area may have been structured around, and hence posterior to, the church.

![Dutch view of Portuguese Colombo, as seen from N. Atlas Vingboons, 1660 (courtesy of Nationaal Archief, The Hague)](image)

Significantly, however, this area (B) was not consolidated as a clearly delimited, ethnically distinct area. It never received the name of “*Colombo de Baixo*” (“Lower Colombo”), nor is there any mention in the sources of the old urban core being called “*Colombo de Cimá*”, as happened with “*Cananor de
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Cima” and “Cochim de Cima”.66 No Portuguese district came into being in Colombo even in the 1540s, the Lusophone “community” of Colombo being a heterogeneous group of settlers, traders, mercenaries, missionaries and other adventurers with noticeably divergent origins, status, wealth, cultural habits and religious orientations. It was certainly none that would have formed a single neighbourhood to live in, and it seems that there was also nobody on the other side encouraging them to do so. As noted in 1552 by a genuinely scandalized Jesuit, the Portuguese men mingled with local women and performed very poorly in terms of Catholic orthodoxy. Many stood closer to the Lankan population than to their original compatriots. In his words, they were “rebels and allies of the heathens” (“aleuántados, e deitados com os gentios”67). This was the fabric of a hybrid society that would soon begin to create its own, highly idiosyncratic practices and memories, the latter of which condensed in a local Creole tradition that would come to inform vast stretches of Fernão de Queiroz’s Conquista, the chief chronicle of “Portuguese” Ceylon.

The most decisive and original developments took place in Colombo between 1550 and 1570 in a context of deep political turmoil. When Bhuvanekabahu VII died in 1551, his grandson Dharmapala was made king with Portuguese support. Many of his nobles abandoned him, defecting to Mayadunne, King of Sitawaka. The Estado and its subjects, however, could not change allies any more at this point.68 They saw themselves bound up with a militarily weak protégé sovereign requiring significantly more support than Bhuvanekabahu. An official garrison of 400 men was established in Kotte and Colombo by Vice-roy Dom Afonso de Noronha in 1551 and placed under the command of a Portuguese captain who would get his orders from Goa. Colombo received a (rather fragile) set of fortifications built of mud, small stones and wood. The new fortress, however, was not built at the site of the old one, on the isolated tip of the peninsula protecting the harbour from the sea. Instead, a different solution was chosen. As the garrison was established, Noronha ordered the fortification of the whole area west of the creek, i.e. the Galboka together with the Monte de São Lourenço, where the Franciscans had set up their church (C). This area, currently known as Fort District because it later served the Dutch and the British as such, was presumably where troops were stationed when they were not in Kotte or campaigning further inland.69

66 Gomes, “Dans les villes de l’Asie portugaise”.
67 Schurhammer, Ceylon, p. 625.
68 See chapter 3.
69 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 341; cf. Perera, The City of Colombo, pp. 11–12. Some later drawings suggest that there was a sort of “fortaleza” specifically at Galboka, but there is no textual evidence for this being more than a bulwark, and Queiroz is explicit in stating that a
Significantly, however, things then developed very quickly toward a more inclusive solution, and one that had not been intended by the viceroy at all. In an atmosphere of hardening warfare against the reinvigorated Kingdom of Sitawaka, which came to besiege the area of Kotte/Colombo a number of times during the 1560s to 1580s, the ancient capital had to be abandoned in 1565, its court and population transferred to Colombo, and the fortifications built after 1551 enlarged drastically to secure the new capital. Now the entire urban area of Colombo (B+C) was provided with a complex set of walls, bulwarks, trenches and palisades, at once reminiscent of the walls that had protected Kotte, and anticipating the grand fortifications that would appear along the same lines in seventeenth-century drawings of Colombo (see figures 9 and 10). Although major bulwarks were only added later, the area thus protected was already larger than any other Portuguese fortress in India, with the exception of Goa. It had a total perimeter of almost five kilometres and, at its centre, the creek (A) that once served as a divide. The area thus encompassed still forms the historical nucleus of Colombo today.

The striking new defence structure transformed the entire city into a vast fortress, one that is indeed more properly described as a praça (fortified town) than as a fortaleza, and one that soon evolved to become a multi-functional capital city combining in its growing body a set of features that had formerly existed in separate locations. The city began to undergo a deep transformation from being a port city with primarily commercial purposes to a decidedly multifaceted urban centre combining commercial, religious, military, and, finally but crucially, political functions. In other words, it started to become an increasingly complex central place. This transformation of Colombo into a multifunctional capital city on the seaside was not, it must be underlined, a result of Portuguese action in the first place. The truly decisive step was the transfer of Kotte in 1565. Militarily and politically, this was fully in the interest of the Sinhalese ruler Dharmapala, a little studied figure often dismissed by historians as a puppet king manipulated by the Portuguese. True, Dharmapala, known as Dom João Pereapandar after his conversion to Catholicism in 1557, had succumbed to Catholic missionary pressure in a conjuncture of military crisis driven by his rival Mayadunne, King of Sitawaka, a man who himself tried to

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71 Cf. Burghardt, “A hypothesis about Gateway Cities”.

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planned larger fortification never came into existence (ibid.). A platform (couraça) for cannons was built on the northern tip of the peninsula, where the very first fort had stood in 1518 – hence possibly the confusion.
gain Portuguese support. This, however, was both a defeat and a victory for Dharmapala, since it entitled him to more military support from the Estado.\footnote{On these events and those of the following paragraph, see chapter 3.}

As a consequence of the transfer organized in 1565, Colombo came to thrive as the new political, religious, social and symbolic centre of the Kingdom of Kotte – and hence, within the imperial logic explored in chapter 3, of the entire island of Lanka. At this time, Kotte was still considered the rightful heir to the cakravarti title, even though most of its territories were lost during the 1560s to 1580s and not recovered until the 1590s. There are strong signs that this symbolic supremacy remained meaningful, if not exclusive, even from the perspective of the independent Kingdom of Kandy until the late seventeenth century.\footnote{Cf. Goonewardena, “Kingship”, pp. 9–16.} Combined with the sudden increase of population (Queiroz mentions a surge to a total of over sixty thousand people, which might be exaggerated),\footnote{Queiroz, Conquista, pp. 353 and 357.} the transfer of Kotte’s symbolic prestige also brought along a considerable

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\footnote{\textit{Plantas das Cidades}, c. 1648 (courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich)}

Figure 10: Colombo in the seventeenth century, as seen from S. Drawing from Albernaz, Plantas das Cidades, c. 1648 (courtesy of Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich)
Cosmopolitanism

boost to the self-esteem of Colombo’s inhabitants. A new caput regni was born, and institutional changes on the Portuguese side were soon under way.

The Portuguese casados were quick to emphasize how their city had inherited the status of “the royal city of Kotte, metropolis and head of kingdom” (“real cidade Da Cota metropolitana e cabessa de reino”). Whilst in 1565 Colombo was still, in terms of Lusitanian law, a town (vila), by 1580 it rose to the rank of city (cidade). There were officials such as a magistrate (or justice of the peace, juiz ordinário), a notary public (tabelião público) and an ex-Crown judge (ouvidor). If any doubts remained, the city boasted a full-fledged municipal council (câmara) the standard governing institution of cities in the Portuguese world, from at least 1583. This council represented the “casados e moradores”, i.e. married men – of Portuguese origin, with wives and often parents of local or mixed descent – who had their households in Colombo, as opposed to the soldados, unmarried and paid (or indeed, often not paid) for their services by the royal treasury. Ironically, the new city status seems to have been granted on grounds of an administrative error. According to Fernão de Queiroz, the promotion originated from “a letter from King Dom Sebastião, on the backside of which was written: ‘To my city of Colombo’”. Immediately, the inhabitants “took and claimed this title; which the city deserved on grounds of the greatness that it achieved […] and because it became a new Rome to Ceylon after the transmigration of Kotte; hence [they] always kept using this title and, without opposition, the city rights”. Such an appropriation reveals a fair deal of autonomy on the periphery of the empire, and it certainly required a robust self-confidence at a time when Colombo rarely dominated more than a few square miles of its hinterland.

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76 Letter by Dharmapala to King Dom Sebastião, Colombo, 10.I.1566, Lisbon, National Archive, Corpo Cronológico, 1–107–100.
78 Ibid., pp. 609–10; List of the expenses of the Estado da Índia, 1581, in Matos, O Estado da Índia, p. 178. It is not entirely clear whether the royal ouvidor – usually a force opposed to municipal power – was or had been employed as such in Colombo or elsewhere.
79 These councils were usually formed of three or four councilors or aldermen (vereadores), two magistrates (juízes ordinários), a municipal attorney (procurador) and representatives of the mechanic guilds (mesteres); see Boxer, Portuguese Society in the Tropics.
81 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 341 (my translation).
Crucially, the last three decades of the sixteenth century were a period of ethnic and religious ambiguity among Colombo’s inhabitants, and even between the various authorities present in the city. Many of the most prestigious inhabitants, including a number of casados, were still directly serving King Dharmapala, not the Portuguese Crown. Although the Sinhalese sovereign’s powers were dwindling, many casados remained members of his entourage and received money and land grants in exchange for their services.\textsuperscript{82} Unless a significant number of Portuguese female orphans had been brought to the city, of which there is no sign, these casados were necessarily sons of Portuguese (or, by the 1560s, mestizo) fathers and Sinhalese or Tamil mothers. Identities and solidarities seem to have been floating rather freely during these years of uncertain power relations and shifting allegiances.\textsuperscript{83} The Franciscan church, for instance, stood next to Dharmapala’s rather modest residence.\textsuperscript{84} The Igreja de São Francisco, also known as Mosteiro de Santo António, thus became a neighbour of the royal “palace” in a way quite similar to what had been the case in Kotte after 1557, when the Dalada Maligawa (the Temple of the Buddha’s Tooth) had been transformed into a Catholic church.\textsuperscript{85} At the same time, many inhabitants of the city remained attached to their Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim backgrounds,\textsuperscript{86} and although there is no mention of non-Christian places of


\textsuperscript{83} This seems to have been the case not only in Colombo but also, though maybe to a lesser extent, in other areas of Ceylon. This is not the place for a detailed discussion, but mention must be made of the two fundamental pieces of scholarship challenging – though in quite different ways – traditional assertions about ethnic and religious identity in early modern Sri Lanka: see Roberts, \textit{Sinhala Consciousness} and Strathern, \textit{Kingship and Conversion}.

\textsuperscript{84} Gavetas, vol. III, p. 52.


\textsuperscript{86} The chronological extent of this affirmation is yet to be systematically explored, but I can see evidence over a long period of time. A number of data indicate that “gentios” remained in influential positions until at least the end of the sixteenth century (cf. Strathern, \textit{Kingship and Conversion}, chapter 10), and it is also clear that Portuguese power after the symbolic transfer of the Crown of Kotte to the Habsburgs in 1597 remained, at least on the surface, committed to certain practices associated with Lankan kingship, in part removed to the ceremonial centre of Malwana a few miles inland (cf. Abeyasinghe, \textit{Portuguese Rule}, pp. 76–77). As for Muslim traders, they were a perennial presence in Colombo. Although in 1613 a vice-regal decree issued in Goa ordered the expulsion of all “Moors” from Colombo within a month, Muslims in general were allowed to stay in the city for the time between one monsoon and the next. Sri Lankan Muslims who had been residing in
worship within or next to Colombo in contemporary documents, they must have existed at least until the first decade of the seventeenth century. Many Sinhalese nobles, comfortably settled even after the Habsburg takeover of 1597, resisted conversion until well into the seventeenth century, whilst maintaining crucial administrative functions within the kingdom, now formally integrated into the Catholic Monarchy. From an official Portuguese list of expenses dated 1581, it is possible to infer that there were two police corps in the city, one serving the new Catholic justice, the other serving the older Lankan system – both subsidized, rather unwillingly, by the Portuguese Crown. Although this legal separation may be read as a sign of distinctness between the two communities (and indeed legally, within the Estado, there was a clear border between Christians and non-Christians since at least 1562), it must also be underlined that in practice the religious and ethnic boundaries were blurry. Whilst a conversion to Christianity would have immediate legal effects and perhaps open doors to the Lusitanisation of a family in the long run, it would hardly mean – given the distance to Goa and the absence of a Tribunal of Inquisition – a radical break with other practices, nor, for that matter, a need to settle in a different area of the city.

At a fairly secure distance from Goa, Colombo became a place where the local identity of the urban population grew more important than other identities linking its inhabitants to, say, the Portuguese Estado or the Kingdom of Kandy. Controlled by a particularly unruly elite with a strong commitment to this local identity, of which the thousand-page chronicle Conquista Temporal e Espiritual de Ceilão by Fernão de Queiroz is perhaps the most imposing testimony, the

Colombo since the time of Dharmapala with privileges received under Viceroy Dom Anfão de Noronha (v.r.1564–68, Kotte having been abandoned in 1565), were entirely exempt from any of these regulations (Perniola, The Catholic Church, vol. II, p. 358). In 1615 a new royal decree was passed because none of these rules had been put into practice (ibid., vol. II, p. 390).

87 A royal decree issued under Philip II in 1581 had stipulated “that neither the gentios nor the mouros may be allowed to have temples and to hold ceremonies and public rites in those parts and lands of India belonging to my dominions” (Perniola, ibid, vol. II, pp. 94–95). Obviously, this was much easier said than to put in practice, especially in the legally ambiguous environment before 1597.


90 Even in Goa individuals who opted for a new religious identity and legal status would not necessarily define themselves as exclusively pertaining to their “new” group in their daily lives: cf. Xavier, A Invenção de Goa.

91 Queiroz, Conquista; cf. Strathern, “Re-reading Queirós”.
city maintained a position halfway between the centres of the Estado and those of the “shadow empire”. Along the dense pages of Queiroz’ work, the local casado community emerges as Portuguese and Christian in its self-definition, yet with strong Lankan influences and pursuing a political, military and economic project that remained closely associated with that of Colombo’s dwindling yet still influential Sinhalese and Tamil elite. It makes sense to assume that this commonality was partly a product of the extreme pressure put on the city as a whole, including the casados and the remains of the court of Kotte, during the 1560s to 1580s. During that period, Colombo had to defend itself from continuous attacks by the Kingdom of Sitawaka whilst not always receiving the necessary support from Goa and Cochin.92

From the 1590s, Colombo posed many problems in terms of imperial administration. It also became a major source of expenses and worries for the royal and viceregal treasury. Colombo such as it appears in seventeenth-century images, with its vast fortifications embracing the entire city, certainly befitted the interests of the topographically dispersed casados and Lankan nobles much more than those of the Iberian central authorities. These could have lived very well with fortifications around today’s Fort District only and with a concentration of the “Portuguese” elements of local society in that area. But when orders were sent from Lisbon (with the consent of Madrid) in 1589, and again in 1590, to reduce and rationalise the city’s fortifications, the inhabitants resisted firmly: they consistently ignored the letters. Importantly, the Crown’s proposal at that time resembles the later Dutch plans (to be discussed below) quite strikingly. The idea was to have a fortress with a total perimeter of only 1000 braças, i.e. about 1700 meters, restricted to the area (B) west of the creek again, as in 1551. A moat on the southern side, around the northern end of today’s Galle Face Green, would have separated this district from the mainland.93 With the old creek serving as part of the defence line on the eastern side (as in 1551, but not in 1565), the fort would have become an artificial island, not insignificantly reminiscent of the solution adopted in 1518, and ominously prefiguring the late-seventeenth-century achievements of the Dutch.

None of these plans were put into practice, because cutting through the flesh of the urban body along an arbitrary line – which would have included the Sinhalese royal household in the fortified area, whilst leaving the municipal council of the casados (the câmara) outside of it – would not have made any

sense from a local perspective. It was the all-embracing defence structure developed after the arrival of the Kottean court in 1565 that served as the elemental framework for Colombo’s urban development for almost a hundred years. Within the area thus delimited, the city’s internal morphology remained largely unaltered, based on the original backbone of two main roads in the east (B) leading to the Kelani River and to historical Kotte, and a set of streets around the Franciscan church in the west (C). Whilst one could argue that the two eastern arteries, plus some blocks of housing arranged between them and represented with some detail by Dutch observers after 1650, might somehow have been the result of urban regulations – perhaps related to the Portuguese tradition of having more or less straight high streets (ruas direitas) traversing urban cores from the medieval period – doubts about such a hypothesis easily arise. 

Regular urbanism such as it was practiced in some parts of the empire was a remote and abstract reality to Colombo’s war-stricken casados in the late 1500s. Even if one takes into account the rather flexible nature of what would later become known as the “Portuguese Method of Designing the Fortifications of Regular and Irregular Fortresses” (Methodo Lusitanico de Desenhar as Fortificações das Praças Regulares & Irregulares), it seems difficult to imagine when, how, by whom and by what means any such acts of urbanistic intervention should have been imposed in Colombo. Certainly there are no traces of any major makeover in the fairly well-documented decades ranging from 1600 to 1656, when political and economic conditions would have been favourable to such deeds. It seems much more plausible to assume that no regulations were put into practice at all in terms of street layout, and that whatever order existed was down to the relatively flat nature of the land.

Although there may have been architectural patterns applied to new buildings – after 1600 a considerable number of churches, municipal edifices and noble residences sprang up as the city came to dominate larger extensions of territory – we have no evidence concerning the aesthetic characteristics of a city that was almost entirely destroyed or transformed in the later 1600s after the arrival of the Dutch. From the Vingboons vista it emerges that there were a number of two-storied houses reflecting considerable wealth, that several churches had monumental façades onto the open spaces of the city, and that many houses were covered with small hipped roofs in the tesoura style typical

94 Cf. Conceição, “A Praça da Guerra”.
95 Pimentel, Methodo Lusitanico de Desenhar.
96 Also note that the main street appearing in Dutch views as almost entirely straight may have been more irregular, as shown by Portuguese plans that emphasize the disposition of the blocks rather than the streets (compare e.g. the Dutch views with Albernaz’ plan).
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of the Portuguese world.\textsuperscript{97} We also know that the area surrounded by walls was large enough to leave plenty of space for gardens and pasture grounds. Seventeenth-century visitors to Colombo still noticed the village-like character of much of the city with its dense vegetation dominated by palm trees, a feature that was common to many Indo-Portuguese settlements (as well as Indian cities including Vijayanagar), helping the populations to endure prolonged sieges. Even on the eve of the Dutch takeover in 1656, Colombo, then housing an unusually large crowd of refugees from nearby areas along with its normal population, was still vast enough to include substantial stretches of agricultural land, hence survive in almost total isolation for over seven months. As for the rural area outside the walls, in times of peace the wealthier \textit{casados} built residences amidst the lush vegetation all the way up to the Kelani valley\textsuperscript{98}, a natural process of upper-class expansion that was later repeated (and extended to the Cinnamon Gardens area in the south) by the city’s elite under the Dutch.

In striking contrast with Cannanore, Colombo, the new capital of the Luso-Lankan Kingdom of Kotte – a polity transformed after 1594 by the Habsburgs into the territorially expansive “\textit{conquista geral de Ceilão}” – emerged as a conurbation characterized by a lack of internal physical borders. Correspondingly, I believe, the city continued to exert an influence on its inhabitants by which local identity (“being an inhabitant of Colombo”) remained stronger than alternative identities of an ethnic nature (“being Portuguese”, “being Sinhalese”). While Cannanore was straight-jacketed and fragmented by its walls, maintaining a strict separation between “Portuguese” Christians, “local” Christians and other non-Christian groups and never housing more than about seventy or eighty \textit{casado} families as opposed to the growing Muslim town next to it, the Lankan city entered a phase of dynamic growth-cum-amalgamation, attracting and blending an increasing number of inhabitants from different backgrounds without developing distinct dwelling areas for them.\textsuperscript{99}

This is not to say that life in Colombo was harmonious or free of internal divides. Nominally, Colombo was a part of the \textit{Estado} and could be subjected to armed violence from the official garrison or fleets at any time. Life in Colombo was marked by pressures on non-Christians to convert to Catholicism, rather than the other way around. Yet it also seems significant to note that “cul-

\textsuperscript{97} The Vingboons vista is available in high resolution at http://www.gahetna.nl.


\textsuperscript{99} 80 \textit{blanke Portugeezen} (“white Portuguese”) established in Cannanore is the figure that can be inferred from a Dutch report of the conquest of that fortress in 1663. Another 120 out of the total 200 belonged to the crews of two ships sent from Goa (Meilinck-Roelofsz, \textit{De Vestiging}, p. 347).
tural conversion”, i.e. the cultural Lusitanisation of people seeking to comply with the expected standards of the empire, seems to have been much less pronounced in Colombo than for example in Goa. The sustained practice of intermarriage, allied with the distance from the centre of the Estado, the prolonged absence (until the early 1600s) of religious orders that might have competed with the Franciscans in imposing an orthodox discipline on daily practices, and the presence of the Sinhalese courtly elite at the very heart of the city contributed to what seems to have been an exceptionally blurry socio-cultural constellation. There clearly was, as will be mentioned in the following paragraph, a distinction between “white” and “black” people, and this must have had consequences, if not in the building of material walls within the city, then certainly in the creation of “mental walls”. Yet it seems significant that this distinction was not reflected in the spatial order of the city. Moreover, the category of the non-“blacks” was vast and far from homogeneous, remaining open to a continuous influx due, once more, to the widespread practice of intermarriage. Significantly as well, no system of sub-categorization by colour existed within the so-called “white” population.

Some figures taken from seventeenth-century documents may give at least an impression of the crowds inhabiting Colombo. More than any other group, it is the utterly self-confident casado community that has left records of its flourishing. The casados moradores, i.e. casados with a household officially established in Colombo, were nominally “Portuguese”. This means that they were Christians while, as mentioned, they were also generally of mixed blood. Three hundred and fifty casado households with military obligations in the defence of Colombo were listed around 1630, amounting to a “Portuguese” population of maybe five to ten times that figure if one includes women and children. This group alone was able to add at least another fifteen hundred armed servants from diverse ethnic backgrounds to the defence of the city, who in turn might or might not have been living in functional households of their own. Two thousand “black”, predominantly but not exclusively Sinhalese men in arms (“pretos, chingalas e doutras nações”) hence lived in Colombo in the service of the casados. Crucially, there seems to have been a closer proximity between

100 On “cultural conversions” in the Estado, i.e. the transformation of material and intellectual habits (food, dress, architecture, language etc.) see Xavier, A Invenção de Goa, particularly the chapters of part two concerning the development of a Christian Brahmin elite in Goa that considered itself to be more honourable than most Portuguese, and of course entirely distinct from their local Hindu environment.

101 There are e.g. no such distinctions of “shade” in the work of Fernão de Queiroz, despite the large numbers of Colombo individuals mentioned therein.

102 Bocarro, O livro das plantas, p. 217.
these two groups – the *casados* and the “*pretos chingalas*” just mentioned – than between the *casados* and the more strictly “Portuguese”, markedly exogenous group of the *soldados*, i.e. the official garrison with its large numbers of soldiers and officers, including the captain of the city and to some extent the captain-general of the conquest of Ceylon, most of whom came directly from Goa or Portugal. Conflicts arose with much more frequency and to a much greater degree of violence between the latter than between the former two groups.

According to a later, maybe somewhat exaggerated testimony, Colombo’s population peaked around 1650 at nine hundred families of “*moradores nobres*” (“noble citizens”), a huge number for its time. This leaves it unclear whether they were all considered “Portuguese”, though one may speculate that by this time only a small portion of the urban elite would have remained Buddhists or Hindus. But there were also fifteen hundred other “Portuguese” families of artisans and merchants, most of them equally living *intra muros*; True, there were separate military companies for “Portuguese” and “non-Portuguese” (*naturais*) citizens, but the former usually brought with them armed servants (*criadões e domésticos*) from diverse ethnic backgrounds in an arrangement that may reflect a good deal of interaction in everyday life as well. As for the official garrison of *soldados* paid by the Portuguese Crown, it held an unstable position in the city. Normally most of the troops were stationed in the fortified outposts (*presídios*) of the frontier areas east of Colombo. But sometimes this disorderly crowd of around a thousand or more men came to stay in the city, then causing considerable tensions and occasional outbursts of intra-urban violence. To judge by these numbers and by some Dutch views produced around 1655–60, namely in the Atlas Vingboons, Colombo seems to have been one of the largest and most vibrant port cities in South Asia precisely because it allowed for such a varied population to live within a single walled space.

Obviously enough there were social divisions of many sorts. It is likely that social segregation compensated, at least in part, for the lack of spatial ethnic or religious segregation in Colombo. For instance, it is clear from the pictorial sources that there were two main types of residential buildings: on the one hand, large stone or brick houses along the streets reserved for the wealthy; and on the other hand, more modest dwellings in their backyards and in the agricultural areas enclosed by the walls, presumably inhabited by the poor (see figure 11). But who were the wealthy, and who the poor, in terms of ethnicity and re-

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104 *Ibid.*., p. 32.
105 See e.g. Queiroz, *Conquista*, p. 811.
ligion? Crucially, there were no neighbourhoods separated by walls or any other physical barriers, nor is there any sense that one particular area of the city was inhabited, for example, by poor “pretos chingalas”.

![Figure 11: Anonymous view of Portuguese Colombo, c.1655]( Courtesy of Nationaal Archief, The Hague).

True, the progress of Christian proselytizing after 1600 must have contributed in often forceful ways to a homogenization of the population, Catholicism acting as a factor of involuntary desegregation. This is certainly a process that deserves further attention. But the point here is that somehow the one-wall scheme seems to have gone along with the creation of an overarching common identity for most of the city’s inhabitants. This local identity surfaced most dramatically during the city’s final stand. When the Dutch besieged Colombo in 1655–56, its population defended it as one community – certainly traversed by internal conflicts, but clearly united around a common goal, along a single line

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106 There is no recent, nor any unbiased study of the Catholic missions in Sri Lanka, with the exception of Strathern’s work on the Franciscans and Dharmapala. On the concept of desegregation see Schnell and Ostendorf, *Studies in Segregation and Desegregation*. 
of fortifications encircling the city as a whole. There were few defections, and no significant internal divisions emerge from the accounts of the siege. Unlike in Cannanore, Colombo’s casados did not negotiate an easy escape to Goa or Cochin: they did not see those cities at the centre of the empire as an alternative home. Even after the Dutch troops overcame the principal defence structure of Colombo, the great wall established originally in 1565, they still faced fierce resistance at a street barricade immediately next to the wall. When this outer line of defence fell, the entire city surrendered. Despite the fierceness of the resistance during the previous months, there was now no inner fortress or hierarchically superior “core area” left to be fought for.

Reacting against ambiguity: Dutch attempts of reorganization

After the conquest of 1656, the Dutch East India Company felt sceptical about Colombo, a city that had drained such large amounts of money from the Estado. The existing walls encompassed a vast area populated by an ethnically mixed crowd, and there was no distinct “white town”. This was an issue with financial and cultural implications, but also one involving functional hierarchies of the Dutch urban system in Asia. Colombo had taken up a political and military role under Dharmapala which had only been tolerated because it also became associated with the imperial ambitions of the Habsburg administration as an heir to the Kottean court. For the Dutch East India Company, in contrast, Colombo needed to be remodelled if it was to serve as its new headquarters in Ceylon and, at the same time, find its new place in the larger hierarchy dominated by Batavia. Soon after the conquest of Colombo, the VOC decided to impose a new, more “rational” spatial order on the city (see figure 12). This fascinating process has been studied in detail by Remco Raben. It shall thus suffice here to recall the main aspects of the transformation.

Most importantly, the Dutch tried to create a clear-cut separation between, firstly, the European officers’ quarters in the administrative centre (the “Company town”); secondly, an ethnically mixed area next to it populated by a largely Christian crowd of servants and traders (the “Burgher town”); and thirdly, an area of mostly non-Christian Sri Lankans on the periphery outside the city walls (the “new town”). The three areas were to be straightforwardly separated into (a), (b) and (c), i.e. a political and administrative fort area, a commercial town,

107 The main narratives of the siege are to be found in Queiroz, Conquista and Ribeiro, Fatalidade Histórica.
108 Queiroz, Conquista, pp. 802–810.
109 See Raben, “Batavia and Colombo” and “Trade and urbanization”. The following paragraph is entirely based on Raben and on Oers, Dutch Town Planning, pp. 91–108.
and the outskirts. The area next to the seaside became the core of the Dutch system of fortifications later inherited by the British (hence its actual name, the “Fort District”), whilst the civilian town next to it, extending east of an empty stretch of land reserved for military purposes, would be half-integrated to the complex and remodelled on a gridiron base. In case of serious peril, the defence line would always run along the shorter and stronger walls of the fort, not those of the town. All non-Christians were to be housed entirely extra muros, alongside with some country houses and estates for the Dutch elite in times of peace. Such was at least the outline imagined by the VOC’s officials.

Significantly enough, the new Colombo of the Dutch thus came to resemble Portuguese Cannanore, a town that had maintained the spatial segregation of populations from different ethnic and religious backgrounds throughout the entire period ranging from 1505 to 1663. The three areas (a), (b) and (c) of Dutch Colombo correspond quite strikingly to what already existed in Cannanore as (K+L+M), (B) and (N). It seems that the compact Portuguese fort at Cannanore, along with its larger logic of separation between ethnically and religiously distinct populations suited the official VOC plans better than the muddled realities of Colombo. There were projects to remodel Cannanore as well, namely by dropping the middle or “black” town entirely (and further restricting the fort area in size by building a southern wall). But the principal line of defence remained where the Portuguese had drawn it in the 1520s to separate local from non-local Christians. Along exactly the same line, the Dutch deepened the moat and heightened the walls, thus creating the impressive defence structure that is known today as Saint Angelo’s Fort.\footnote{The process would deserve a closer study. In 1663 Hustaert left a garrison of 200 (Meil-\textit{inck-Roelofsz, De Vestiging, p. 350). In 1667 Commandeur Isbrand Godske proposed to reduce the fort drastically and have it guarded by only 15–20 men instead of 160, for a matter of profitability. This was accepted by Batavia and communicated to the Heren XVII (Godske and Raad to the Heren XVII, 10.III.1667, in Coolhaas, \textit{Generale Missiven}, vol. III, p. 595). In a memoir by Hendrik Adriaan van Reede from 1677, Cannanore is indeed described as having a new wall made of good masonry, something the Dutch considered to be a distinguishing mark in comparison to less elaborate Portuguese walls (van Reede to Jacob Lobs, Cochin, 14.III.1677, in s’Jacob, \textit{De Nederlanders in Kerala}, p. 182). However, in 1698 the Dutch were still discussing the reduction of the fort on the southern front (Hendrik Zwaardecroon to Magnus Wichelman and Raad, Jaffna, 31.V.1698, \textit{ibid.}, p. 326), and in the 1740s, although there had been renovation work, there were still about 80 soldiers stationed there (Memoir by Julius Stein van Gollenesse, in Galletti, \textit{The Dutch in Malabar}, pp. 82 and 84). The whole structure was sold to the Ali Raja in 1771, but never entirely paid for (\textit{ibid.}: pp. 19, 148 and 204). A systematic exploration of Dutch documents might lead to a reassessment of the rationality of Dutch strategies in Cannanore.}
Conclusion: colonial urban patterns in South Asia and their significance

The question may arise as to which of the cases under scrutiny was “typical”, and which was not. But typical of what? It is no doubt interesting to seek for patterns in one empire or the other, to attempt comparisons between Portuguese and Dutch urbanism, and perhaps even to compare and contrast Portuguese and Dutch expansion as a whole.\footnote{The Weberian approach to the VOC as a profit-driven capitalist enterprise contrasting with the redistributive nature of the Estado is expressed most influentially in Steensgaard, The Asian Trade Revolution, itself inspired by the pioneering work of Jacob van Leur, Indonesian Trade and Society. Despite severe critiques pointing to the blurry nature of the Luso-Dutch contrasts established by Steensgaard, namely in Meilink-Roelofsz, “The Structures of Trade in Asia”, pp. 9–27 and in the conclusion of Subrahmanyam, The Portuguese Empire in Asia, the idea that the VOC was by its very nature more efficient in the management of money and manpower than the Estado remains widespread. See e.g. Gaastra, The Dutch East India Company, among many others.} There are noteworthy differences in some fields, and it is certainly not my suggestion that we discard dissimilarities as meaningless. But at some point it becomes more rewarding to experiment with
alternative categories rather than clinging to timeworn, suspiciously simple binaries. A fine example of how it is worth revisiting apparently obvious cases of “Dutch-Portuguese” contrast arises from what the VOC did (or attempted to do) with Colombo after the takeover. The transformative process initiated in 1656 has been seen as embodying the purest possible expression of northern European rationality and – inevitably – modernity reshaping the chaotic realities left behind by the Portuguese: defensive structures were rebuilt, a hierarchical organisation of space imposed, and a gridiron plan applied. And yet, associating these aspects with Dutch colonial culture as a whole in contrast with Portuguese culture comes dangerously close to wider anachronistic assumptions about the inherent modernity of northern European as opposed to the backwardness and irrationality of southern European societies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – not to speak of the questionable credibility of the nation as a unit of analysis in the early modern period as a whole.

However tempting it may be to see the regular layout of streets as a “typically Dutch” innovation, it would also seem appropriate to bear in mind how the VOC’s plan took many more years to implement than the surviving maps and plans suggest and, perhaps more importantly, how even on the paper there was not much new about the Dutch solution at all. The project was long preceded by gridiron layouts in sixteenth-century Portuguese towns in India, such as Bassein and Daman, both firmly rooted in a flourishing tradition of southern European urban planning. Recent research has shown that there is a long tradition of late medieval and early modern gridiron urbanism not only in Italy and Spain, but also in Portugal and its empire.\textsuperscript{112} As for the hierarchization of urban spaces, the overall structure advocated by the VOC after the city’s conquest was remarkably similar to what the authorities in Lisbon and in Madrid had repeatedly called for in the late 1580s and early 1590s. In fact, the scheme associating a walled town with a citadel, i.e. a more restricted and heavily fortified core area that could help defend it, but also control it, was not a Dutch invention at all: in the Low Countries it was known as an innovation introduced precisely by the Habsburgs. Like so many other things at the time, the new military architecture extended its roots back to Italy. Charles V and his successors fomented Italian influences in military architecture across the Low Countries,\textsuperscript{113} roughly at the same time as those building practices spread across Portugal and its empire.\textsuperscript{114} When the Portuguese Crown fell to Philip II, the authorities in both halves of the Monarchy expressed worries about imperial overstretch, ex-

\textsuperscript{112} Trindade and Rossa, “Questões e antecedentes da ‘cidade portuguesa’”.
\textsuperscript{113} As shown in Heuvel, “Papiere Bolwercken”.
\textsuperscript{114} Moreira, \textit{História das fortificações}. 
cessive exposure to northern European rivals, and a need for fortifications to be further updated. That is why, as mentioned already, orders were sent to Colombo in the first decade of the Union of Crowns to create a fortified core area precisely where the Dutch and later the English would have theirs.115

Significantly as well, this earlier model appearing in orders from the 1580s was not a novelty either. It had its precedent in the spatial configuration of the Portuguese garrison established on the west side of Colombo by viceroy Noronha in 1551, a transitory solution soon abandoned due the incorporation of the Kottean court in 1565. Noronha’s scheme, in its turn, was conceptually reminiscent of, and possibly inspired by, the earliest fort built on the Galboka Peninsula in 1518. Not insignificantly, that first pattern of settlement had itself been inspired by the arrangement negotiated in Cannanore in 1501. And both had been, it may be added, the objects of agreements with South Asian rulers. In other words, the general scheme of spatial partition championed in Colombo after 1656 by the Dutch, whose actions are often seen as the quintessential expression of seventeenth-century Protestant modernity, represented no rupture at all with what the Portuguese had created there in the sixteenth century, including the reign of Manuel I, the “last medieval king” of his country.

Rather than reducing Colombo to a reflection of contrasting national cultures, we would be well advised to recognize that the idea of creating a small and clearly delimited, militarily superior core area separated from the adjacent town prospered transnationally as a consequence of wider social and political developments. It was part of a certain conception of expansion and empire that was not invented by any European nation in particular – nor by any means exclusive to the West: the city of Surat presented a similar scheme under the Mughals.116 The ambition to control urban spaces through efficiently administered, rationally fortified positions was common to early modern Portugal, Spain and many other countries. To put it more precisely, it was common to certain parts of Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch society, emanating from groups that developed an interest in managing resources efficiently and rationally from a centralist perspective, in a way that had little to do with the ways most societies really worked at the time, but became increasingly important during the early modern period. True, there may have been a greater proportion of such people in a profit-oriented organization like the VOC during the seventeenth-century than in the Estado da Índia in the sixteenth-century – it would be rather

115 Although the royal letters from 1589–90 do not explicitly state that the spatial separation should be accompanied by an ethnic or religious reordering of urban space, it is fairly reasonable to assume that, from a metropolitan Iberian point of view, this was implied in the plan – whilst locally it would have made no sense.

116 My thanks to Jos Gommans for pointing out this aspect to me.
surprising if this were not the case. But none of this was invented in northwestern Europe after 1600. And, methodologically speaking, it would be rather problematic anyway if we were to accept a set of fixed national contrasts on grounds of a comparison that does not take into account the huge variations in urban practices over time and across different regions.

Last but not least, the gap between planning and reality is often a wide one, not just in the Iberian world. True, Portuguese commoners and lower-ranking nobles usually left their country for good and often disappeared entirely from the sphere of influence of the still fragile institutions of social control existing in Goa and some other outposts (Church, Inquisition, royal justice, navy, customs). Perhaps the VOC was able to administer its clerks in a generally more efficient way and bring more of them back home after relatively short periods of service in Asia, provided they survived. Indeed, Dutch Colombo, despite all its conflicts with Batavia, does not seem to have given birth to a Dutch Creole elite capable of challenging the orders of the VOC in a measure similar to the autonomist behaviour of the city’s Portuguese \textit{casados} when facing the \textit{Estado}. But the problem existed, as the unruly behaviour of the Van Goens clearly shows, and administering cities perceived as peripheral – because India and Sri Lanka only became a Dutch field of action in the 1620s – remained a knotty task for the VOC until the very end of its rule in South Asia. Anjana Singh’s outstanding recent work on Cochin clearly shows that miscigenation was a pervasive reality at least in some Dutch settlements, and that Dutch Company servants and their descendants did create local roots in ways that are not at all in contrast with Portuguese practices in the region.\footnote{Singh, \textit{Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750–1830}.} Nor did regulating orders issued by the Company always have that much more of an effect than those of the \textit{Estado}, namely when it came to transfer the plan of ethnic segregation from the paper to reality. Although a decree was issued in 1684 forbidding the selling of houses in the Fort of Colombo to natives of the country, the Company was still worrying about exactly the same matter in 1786.\footnote{VOC decrees, 13.III.1684 and 28.XII.1786, quoted in Oers, \textit{Dutch Town Planning}, p. 96.}

These issues lead us to questions that run across European – and often South Asian – societies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rather than being typical of any nation in particular: questions about the relationship between society, city and state, the role of nascent bureaucratic institutions, and the position of individuals and communities in early modern empires. These are matters that take us well beyond the customary, generally uninspiring, discussions about whether “the Dutch” were or not more organized, more profit-oriented, and less culturally permissive overseas than “the Portuguese”. Essen-
tialistic contrasts such as these have not taken us far in our understanding of early colonial history. It is time to move on to more complex comparative frameworks.

Epilogue: the Chimera of the South Asian Melting-Po(r)t

Over the past few paragraphs I have pushed the argument – rather unsurprisingly at this point – towards a critique of “national tradition” as a meaningful category in the study of Portuguese and Dutch urban attitudes overseas. What may remain unclear is how all this can be articulated with South Asian history. It might be time to take the argument back to where it originated: South India and Sri Lanka at the beginning of the early modern period. After all, we have been talking about colonial port cities, and whilst no clear-cut general opposition between “Portuguese” and “Dutch” urbanism could be found to be ultimately meaningful, there could still be the temptation of identifying contrasts between Western and South Asian models of building and living in cities. One might feel inclined, for example, to conjecture that it was Colombo, with its hybridism and cross-cultural integrationism, that stood nearest to the supposed holism of the quintessentially South Asian city, whilst segregationist Cannanore, readily accepted by the Dutch as a functionally coherent conurbation, could figure as the ultimate example of an exogenous transplant of “northern” social practices to the Tropics.  

The main problem with such theorizing is not just that, as I believe the present study shows, segregation in Cannanore resulted from a complex local situation that was not shaped by the Portuguese alone. The main issue is that it is utterly difficult to draw any clear borders between “North” and “South”, or indeed between “East” and “West” in urban history on a transcontinental scale. Most importantly, there is no such thing as a distinctly South Asian or by any means a South European or Middle Eastern tradition of melting pot cities. The longer one observes Portuguese Colombo, the more one gains the impression that there are very few parallels to it at all even in the vast universe of early modern “mestizo cities”. Early colonial Colombo was the exceptional product of a very specific combination of historical factors: one that brought to-

119 On Gilberto Freyre and his impact on Portuguese historiography see Castelo, “O modo português”. Freyre’s Luso-Tropicalism is in many ways a reaction to narratives of modernization developed in Protestant northern Europe. It thus participates, ironically, precisely in the exclusion of Iberian early modernity from those narratives, a phenomenon described and criticized recently by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, “Iberian Science in the Renaissance”.

120 García Ayluardo and Ramos Medina, Ciudades mestizas, and titles in the following notes.
gether the most culturally/socially heterodox part of the Portuguese diaspora, the *casados* living on the edge of the Estado’s direct sphere of influence, with a local society marked by a fairly far-reaching tradition of integrating newcomers and caught in the line of fire between two competing Sinhalese sovereigns. Under the extreme pressure of three decades of sieges and warfare in the late 1500s, Colombo became quite literally a melting pot where proto-racial distinctions such as those cultivated in colonial Mexico were pointless. Honour was not a matter of race or blood here, but one of social standing in a hierarchy that included, at its very centre, a hybrid form of Christianized Sinhalese royalty for more than half a century and maybe even longer.

In order to evaluate the relevance of Portuguese Colombo it may be useful to invoke another, more widely known case. Chennai, a large and dynamic port city on the southeastern coast of India, is sometimes pointed out as an example of urban cosmopolitanism with its many communities ranging from Armenians to Tamils (see figure 13). However, this city was very clearly divided into distinct quarters which, on the whole, resembled Cannanore much more than Colombo. Before the British set up their fort in 1640, there were already distinct dwelling areas that became known as the White Town (walled in 1661), the Black Town (delimited on three sides by the river, the sea and a canal), and a number of other separate dwelling areas of a more village-like character, including the Portuguese town of São Tomé. Even if we take into account the existence of a considerable amount of interaction between the communities living in these areas – after all, walls and other barriers can always be traversed by individuals – it remains a fact that Chennai was a conglomeration of separate urban areas with physical boundaries drawn along ethnic divides that did not exist in the same way in Colombo. Again, this was not linearly the product of “colonial influences”, but rather something that had grown over time in connection with widespread practices of urban organization. It was only within the Black Town of Chennai that, clearly separated from the White Town and the fort, populations of increasingly different origins lived together from the seventeenth century. But even here people barely melted into one community, as shown most dramatically by ethnic riots and the consequent division in 1652 of the Black Town into distinct and mutually exclusive zones.

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122 See Gomes, “Dans les villes de l’Asie portugaise”.

123 Subrahmanyan, “Madras, Chennai and Sāo Tomé”, p. 236. The decree was passed in 1652. This is in no way to suggest that there was a British tendency to separate popula-
Although there is no doubt that Chennai – as many other cities in Asia – was a remarkably cosmopolitan and multicultural place, it is also quite clear that we do not exactly know what “cosmopolitan” (nor, by any means, “multicultural”) should mean – neither socially nor in terms of urban structure – nor whether it can serve as a widely applicable historical category at all. Not too surprisingly, historians and political scientists describe (and often prescribe) many different sorts of cosmopolitanism.\textsuperscript{124} Posing Chennai side by side with

\textsuperscript{124} E.g. elite cosmopolitanism, aesthetic cosmopolitanism, everyday cosmopolitanism, or more abstract notions such as “exclusionary” versus “inclusionary cosmopolitanism”, or even “cosmopolitan communitaris” etc. (Vertovec and Cohen, \textit{Conceiving Cosmopol-}
Colombo, deciding which of the two cities was “more cosmopolitan” is difficult. The outcome will depend strongly on how one interprets the term. On the one hand, Colombo takes the trophy for its ability to transcend parochialisms by melting the Portuguese and the Lankan, the Christian, the Buddhist and the Hindu, into one urban body, while also protecting its Muslim minority against centralistic attempts of expulsion. On the other hand, internal spatial desegregation and mingling in Colombo seems to have come along with religious homogenization to the detriment of Buddhism and Hinduism, mainly after 1600. Additionally Colombo’s Creole communitarism was combined with attitudes of fierce social exclusion displayed towards soldiers, slaves and perhaps other individuals coming from the outside.

This may have left little space for cosmopolitanism in the Diogenean sense of “world citizenship”. If we define early modern cosmopolitans as people who were (or wished to be) “strangers nowhere in the World”\textsuperscript{125} a cosmopolitan city should logically be a place where nobody would have felt like a stranger. Then, however, it is probable that cities like Chennai (with Madras and São Tomé), greater Cannanore (including Cannanor de cima), and maybe more generally the cities of the Islamic world,\textsuperscript{126} also allowed newcomers from different parts of the globe to settle more smoothly than in Colombo, precisely because their communities refrained from mingling and preferred to live their lives “back to back”. In contrast with the Lankan capital, Chennai seems to have functioned

\textit{itanism, pp. 1–22). Of course there is also the ghost of “genuine cosmopolitanism” (Ulf Hannerz, quoted by Peter van der Veer in “Colonial Cosmopolitanism”, p. 165). What these notions have in common is that they refer to something that transcends the local and the national allowing for “complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest” and being, at least in some ways, “culturally anti-essentialist” (ibid., p. 4) – but meta-essentialist may be a better definition, in the sense that cosmopolitanism rarely gets to the point of abolishing essentialisms, rather thriving to handle various “essences” simultaneously.\textsuperscript{125} Jacob, \textit{Strangers Nowhere in the World}. The expression is taken from Diderot.

\textsuperscript{126} All this certainly relates in some largely unexplored ways to the common Islamic urban heritage extending from Lisbon to Malacca in the 1500s, with its deeply influential model of spatial separation between dhimmi communities and all the cultural and historical implications that this carries along; see Hourani, “The Islamic City” and Kathirynthamby-Wells, “The Islamic City”, pp. 340–341. Also see the descriptions of Ibn Battuta for Mangalore, Pandarane, and possibly Kurunegala in Ceylon (\textit{The Travels of Ibn Battuta}, pp. 808, 812 and 850), pointing to a long-standing tradition of spatial segregation in South Asian port cities. On methodological issues related to Islamic and early European expansion in India see the brief but incisive notes in Arasaratnam, “Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial Port Towns”. 
on the grounds of a “dynamic contiguity of groups”¹²⁷ rather than as a melting pot, hence allowing for communal conflict, but also for a greater variety of cultures – or what we would call “minority cultures” – to thrive. This paradox forms part of the fundamental dilemmas of multiculturalism anywhere at any time, and relates directly to current debates about identity, ethnicity and citizenship.

From here I would like to take the argument only one step further. If the different ways for a city to be “cosmopolitan” and the corresponding multiplicity of urban functions and forms – be they political, social, or spatial – have not so far been satisfactorily addressed by historians of early modern Asia, this is perhaps because there has been an excessive focus on finding similarities rather than differences, fueling the construction of interesting, but ultimately sterile historiographical models. Such models have usually been inspired by the macro-theories of economic historians. This is the case of the all-embracing and still widely used concept of the “commercial city”, Polanyi’s and Revere’s more specific ideal type of the “port-of-trade” somewhat hastily applied to the Indian Ocean by Leeds, or Kosambi’s “schematic model” based on Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.¹²⁸ Valuable though as such models may be, they also fail to address the existence of often disconcerting contrasts and contradictions, be they morphological, social or political – and historical change.

The remaining question is whether the generic concept of “port city” can come out of a sustained comparative scrutiny untransformed as far as early modern South Asia is concerned. This is a question connected with morphological, but also, more importantly, social and political issues. As has been

¹²⁷ The expression is taken from Driessen, “Mediterranean Port Cities”, pp. 136, where reference is made to Robert Ilbert’s work on Alexandria.

¹²⁸ See Finley, The Ancient Economy, pp. 130–133 (“cities which by their location were clearing-houses and transfer points”); Polanyi, Arensberg & Pearson, Trade and Market in the Early Empires, and namely Robert Revere’s chapter on eastern Mediterranean Ports of Trade, ibid., pp. 38–63, inspired by an unpublished memo on “Archaic Thalassosophia [sic]” written by Polanyi in 1954 (whilst Polanyi 1957 explores a specific Babylonian inland trading post only, where “trade and business activities were not originally market activities”, Revere theorizes about places where “trading did not depend primarily upon markets but had a history and logic of its own, stemming from the principle of a politically neutral meeting place”, pp. 25 and 51); Leeds, “The port-of-trade in pre-European India” offers an interesting, though rather hastily elaborated view of places where “trade was a function of the polity rather than of the economy”); Kosambi and Brush, “Three Colonial Port Cities in India”, apparently inspired by Bird’s 1963 “Anyport model”, explore common structural aspects of major colonial ports; cf. Kidwai “Conceptual and Methodological Issues”.

briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, some definitions overemphasize the economic role of ports in detriment of their political dimension.\textsuperscript{129} Although maritime commerce is certainly at the origin of most port cities, this does not mean that it remained their central raison d’être over extended periods of time, in the urban longue durée. Early modern port cities in South Asia, including colonial ones, were much more than ports of trade in the Revereian/Polanyian sense of neutral spaces used by inland empires for the external exchange of goods.\textsuperscript{130} Above all, they did irradiate power. Cities are inhabited by people, and people do not always rest contented with the fulfilment of historiographical ideal types.

True, the search for typical port communities has recently led to a fascinating new historiography of “port Jews” as opposed to “court Jews” in northwestern European contexts.\textsuperscript{131} But it is very doubtful whether it makes sense – as has been done implicitly – to talk about comparably distinct port Hindus, port Muslims or “Port-uguese” as a stable category in the much vaster context of early modern Asia. To be sure, Portuguese merchants, as many other nations scattered over Maritime Asia, behaved in ways that can be described as highly pragmatic and aiming at political neutrality for the sake of commercial profit. Moreover, the corresponding attitudes of local princes in Cannanore and Kotte towards the Western newcomers do indeed reveal an equally pragmatic interest in developing “neutral” ports with the help of outsiders, an attitude that mirrors, to some extent, the “philosemitic mercantilism” that was developing among European rulers at the same time.\textsuperscript{132} However, it is also crucial to acknowledge that the Portuguese (as the Dutch and the English) acted not only as merchants, but as soldiers as well, and in more than one way. As long as contacts with the Estado existed, Portuguese ports (or rather ports hosting Portuguese communities) were not only trading emporia, they could also serve as platforms for the growth of military power and responded to the changing imperial policies of Goa, Lisbon and Madrid in ways that often proved to be disruptive of the local status quo. Colombo is such a case, where the casados, in spite of behaving as an autonomous group, also relied on forces sent from Goa in times of need, thus transforming the local political landscape. Additionally, the very same casados served the Kottean Crown in courtly, mostly military functions until its extinc-

\textsuperscript{129} See note 12.
\textsuperscript{130} Revere, “‘No Man’s Coast’”; Polanyi, Arensberg and Pearso, Trade and Market.
\textsuperscript{131} Sorkin, “The Port Jews”; Cesarini and Romain, Jews and Port Cities. The concept has sprung up in studies of modern northwestern European societies; on the problems of applying it in other contexts, see Trivellato, “The Port Jews of Livorno”.
\textsuperscript{132} Or slightly later; cf. Trivellato, “The Port Jews of Livorno”, p. 35; Israel, European Jewry, pp. 47, 56, passim. For Israel, the process really only takes off in the late 1500s.
tion in 1597. They were thus “Court-uguese”, as well as “Port-uguese” – to stretch the above-mentioned parallel with Europe’s Jews –, and in various senses at the same time. Nothing similar occurred in Portuguese Cannanore, but comparable processes may well have taken place in Muslim Cannanore, home to the Ali Rajas. Here, too, a trading community gained more and more military and political power over time, eventually transforming their port into a centre of sovereignty.

Issues of urban morphology such as those addressed in the present chapter can hardly be separated from others touching upon urban functionality, and ultimately politics.133 As I have argued, the blurring of communal divides in Colombo went hand in hand, during the second half of the sixteenth century, with a radical functional transformation of the city. After having been fundamentally a commercial port for more than 200 years (and maybe something of a Polanyian port of trade indeed), late-sixteenth-century Colombo took up a hybrid urban identity combining commercial, multiple symbolic, religious, military and political functions. Structurally and functionally, the city became both a maritime emporium and a capital, combining mercantile with political and other functions. It thus participated in a larger process of capital formation that also affected Lisbon and Goa, not to mention many other cities across the early modern world.134 But at the same time it interacted very deeply with, and drew its forces from, a less noticed process of local capital formation, as it absorbed Kotte and, with it, the Lankan capital’s imperial mandate. The politicization of Colombo – as opposed to Portuguese Cannanore, but maybe not so distant, after all, from the simultaneous politicization of Mappila Cannanore – points to an intriguing wider context of urban transformations in the early modern period, where many commercial cities became increasingly imbued with political and military power.135 Even the Dutch succumbed to the political appeal of Luso-

133 Cf. Champalalakshmi, “Urbanisation in South India”, pp. 67–68. Formal aspects may even be of a reduced significance if other questions on the organization of society, production and trade are not addressed: cf. the brief but incisive critique of Childe’s “urban revolution” theory by Polanyi in Polanyi, Arensberg & Pearson, Trade and Market, pp. 12–13.
134 See Santos, ‘Goa é a chave’ on Goa, including bibliography on Lisbon and Madrid.
135 Cf. the late medieval and early modern political-commercial-manufacturing port cities that fashioned the face of Southeast Asia in Reid, “The organization of production”; also see Wake, “Banten around the Turn of the Sixteenth Century” on Java. Colombo, of course, does not seem to have had an important manufacturing sector (whilst Mappila Cannanore appears with a “street of weavers” in figure 8). Concurrently, a number of new fortified towns sprang up in the interior of South India during the later Vijayanagar period, and sacred centers such as Madurai and Tanjavur received large fortifications, taking up a more markedly military and secular character than before. Tanjavur e.g. had had walls only
Lankan Colombo in the long run. It is a remarkable irony of history that the profit-oriented VOC ended up spending vast amounts of money and manpower on the defence of a large multi-functional capital city like Colombo until the British takeover of 1796.

Much of what I have suggested over the last pages may be speculative in character, but it certainly would be useful to think about these matters in relation with a wider survey of urban structures and social appropriations of space in early colonial port cities across South Asia, including Portuguese, Dutch, English and other cases. In all probability, it will be difficult – and perhaps vain – to establish a clear typology of cities. But as we think about changing practices of communalism and segregation, we may come across some deeper truths (or doubts) about the impact of European expansion on South Asia, and the impact of South Asia on European expansion.

around the central temple area, distinguishing it from the surrounding residential quarters (Champalakshmi, “Urbanisation in South India”, p. 103, cf. ibid. 77).
7

Change and Resilience under Colonial Rule:
The Hunting and Trading of Elephants in Sri Lanka, 1500–1800

Measuring the impact of imperialism on a colonized society can be more difficult than the violence involved in conquest suggests. Sri Lankan nationalists demanding reparations from Portugal for heritage destroyed may have a point, though even this kind of rather palpable devastation is often difficult to document in detail. But to establish the exact ways in which life changed for the Lankan population after Lisbon and Goa embraced the idea of conquering the island is even more challenging. Obvious subjects in need of a critical enquiry include missionary and military history, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, the social history of economic production. Whilst much has been written on the commercial history of the Portuguese and the Dutch in Asia, relatively little is usually said about the social and cultural mechanisms involved in the making of commodities and their consumption.

One way of addressing the challenge is to look at rare commodities such as precious stones, materia medica, or high-end crafts. It is usually with rare goods that historians are most likely to escape the constraints of quantitative analysis, and some of the most rewarding scholarship on early European-Asian...

1 Inscription at the “Elefantenhaus” (torn down in 1866) near Vienna’s Stephansplatz, in memory of an elephant sent to Vienna by John III of Portugal as a present for the Archduke Maximilian II in 1552 (Bermann, Alt- und Neu-Wien, vol. II, p. 704, note 116).

2 This chapter is a translation, with some changes, of “Das Geschäft mit den Dickhäutern” (2005). It is an impressionistic attempt at tackling the complexities of the subject, which would deserve closer scrutiny. An excellent overview by Remco Raben, based mostly on late Dutch sources, has in the meantime become available in The World of Jan Brandes, pp. 262–271, with valuable illustrations and comments on pp. 272–299.
economic history has indeed come out of projects such as *Mirabilia Asiatica*, launched in 2001 by Roderich Ptak, Claude Guillot and Jorge Santos Alves.\(^3\) While we await integrated historical studies of more common goods such as pepper or cinnamon, the present chapter approaches a rather bulky and generally not well-known commodity with wide political and social implications: elephants.

Elephants were never traded in very large numbers, but the profit they generated was substantial. Many people were needed to hunt, tame, feed and transport them. Sizeable sums of money were transactioned to purchase them, and considerable efforts were made by monarchs and companies to control their trade. Elephants could be found in the wild in many parts of South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Africa, but those from Sri Lanka were generally considered to be the best: they were seen as noble and intelligent animals willing to learn highly specialized tasks within short periods of time. In this they were believed to exceed the capabilities of other pachyderms from India, Arrakan or Siam. Nor was their inherent value lowered by the fact that few Lankan elephants possess large tusks, or that larger animals could be found in the forests of Bengal and Kerala. Elephants from Sri Lanka, people thought, received the greatest respect from other elephants, even stronger ones. When a Lankan elephant walked down to the shore of the Mandovi River to work on the Goan shipyards, the others, so it was said, would kneel down in front of it even if it was their first encounter.\(^4\)

Respected authors such as João de Barros or Jan Huygen van Linschoten embraced this originally Asian *topos* unreservedly and contributed to its circulation among European readers: “Elephants from Ceylon”, the chronicler Barros wrote in Lisbon, “are the best in all of India; they are the most beautiful and at the same time the easiest to tame, which is why they are the most appreciated of all”.\(^5\) For such reasons alone, Lankan elephants deserve our attention. In addition to this, elephants are also a rewarding subject because the economic and political interest they generated among Portuguese, Dutch and English authorities, traders and colonists in South Asia contributed to the production of a relatively large number of textual and visual sources, many of which remain unexplored. The present chapter is based primarily on early modern texts written in European languages.\(^6\)

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4 Ribeiro, *Fatalidade histórica*, pp. 50–51.


6 A brief summary for the “Portuguese period” can be found in De Silva, “Peddling Trade, Elephants and Gems”; further details in Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule* and De Silva, *The
Elephants as Mirabilia between Orient and Occident

Elephants were popular subjects of geographical and travel narratives across Europe and Asia. Both continents saw the circulation of countless stories about the remarkable intelligence of pachyderms, their strong memories, linguistic capabilities, pride, loveworthiness and sense of justice — in other words, all those qualities that approximated them to the human species. An elephant in Cochin, the Portuguese chronicler Damião de Góis reported, used to work every morning in the service of the Crown. During the afternoons, it then went about to earn itself some money by carrying heavy items for private customers. People would tell it where to leave the cargo, and the biest would follow their instructions without hesitation. With the coins that the clientele placed into its trunk, the elephant would buy itself fruit and bread. One day a Portuguese trader attempted to trick the animal, asking it to carry a heavy wine barrel without paying properly for the service. The elephant took revenge later in the day by breaking into the trader’s house and hauling the barrel high up into the air, leaving it to fall on the ground and break.7

Figure 14: An elephant used for the execution of a Dutchman.
From the 1672 edition of Johann Jacob Saar, Reise nach Java, Banda, Ceylon, und Persien.

In Vijayanagar, the same author tells us, two Portuguese travelers were shown an elephant that could use its trunk to write letters in the dusty ground.

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Asked about its breakfast, the animal replied in a clearly audible voice: “rice and bethel”. Such wondrous things were witnessed not only in the distant Indies, but also at home in Lisbon. When the legendary pachyderm Hanno was taken aboard a ship in the Tagus River to be sent to Italy for King Manuel’s (r.1495–1521) embassy to Leon X in 1514, he showed such sadness that the monarch had to send him word about how he was being dispatched to an even greater lord than the King of Portugal. Only when Hanno received the additional promise of being brought back to Lisbon if he were to be unhappy in Rome did he take his farewell – not without shedding tears in front of the men and women who had gathered for the event, and emitting sounds of great sadness.

The evolution of the image of the elephant in Western art and its political and diplomatic uses has been thoroughly studied by Donald Lach. Importantly for the present purpose, perceptions and beliefs attached to elephants were not always equivalent in Europe and Asia. For the West, it is mostly the commemorative and mirabilistic dimension that emerges from historical materials. Indian elephants had once been confronted by Alexander in the battle at the Hydapsos against King Poros in April 326 BC. They had offered a formidable defensive formation but ultimately proved of limited value against the more dynamic cavalry of Alexander. War elephants first entered Italy under Pyrrhus II around 280BC, but their most memorable appearance occurred when they crossed the Alps under Hannibal during the second Punic war. This said, when some were captured and taken to Rome, they hardly made it beyond the rank of curiosa void of any particular religious or symbolic meaning. In the imperial capital, elephants were used mostly as circus animals and accessories in triumphal entries.

During the Middle Ages, when elephants were long gone from Rome, they mutated into allegorical figures standing for virtue or – as biests fighting dragons in the period’s imagery – into symbols of goodness. In this context, ele-

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8 Ibid., p. 49.
9 Ibid., p. 50.
11 Five years before the encounter with Poros, in 331 BC, Alexander had fought against the Indian elephants of Darius III at Arbela. It is said that he captured 15 of them, and that one of these was inspected by Aristotle. The triumphal entries of Alexander – e.g. in Babylon – became the model for such events in the Renaissance (Lach, Asia, vol. II, 1, p. 124).
Elephants made their appearance in Western heraldry. But because only very few specimens reached Europe between the seventh and the fifteenth centuries even the growing interest of Italian artists and erudites during the Quattrocento brought no great improvement with regard to the zoological knowledge about elephants or people’s ability to depict them. A number of peculiar topoi going back to Pliny thus remained influential well into the early Renaissance.

It was not before the Portuguese reached India that the image of the elephant changed substantially in the West – though even during much of the sixteenth century many textual and visual representations of pachyderms especially in Central Europe remained attached to the medieval tradition. During the Renaissance, the rediscovery of the Indian elephas was a cause for enthusiasm – yet it remained very rare for anyone to actually see one in real life. In the first two decades of the sixteenth century, it was mainly King Manuel I of Portugal who explored the freshly gained access to the Asian animal market, making abundant use of the classical and biblical connotations of various species for his own political purposes. It thus occurred to this flamboyant monarch, in 1515, to bring Pliny to life by setting up a fight in front of his newly built palace on the riverfront of Lisbon between a young elephant and a rhinoceros. It is said that Manuel kept such exotic animals in the stables of the palácio dos estaus on Lisbon’s central square, the Rossio, where his son John III (r.1521–57) later allowed the Inquisition to set up its infamous headquarters. Under Manuel, elephants were regularly paraded with great pomp through the streets of the Portuguese capital. The monarch’s greatest success was the dispatch of an embassy under Tristan da Cunha to Rome in 1514. The above-mentioned Hanno, who was there handed over to Leon X, remained an attraction for years and is still remembered today in the urban lore of the Eternal City. Even Manuel’s suc-

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14 Charlemagne received an elephant named Abulabaz in 801 as a gift from the Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Frederick II brought one from the Holy Land and to Cremona in 1229. Finally, Saint Louis of France received an elephant as a gift from the Middle East, which became the model for a chimera at Notre-Dame in Paris (Lach, Asia, vol. II, 1, p. 130).
15 Ibid., pp. 131–135.
16 On Manuel I, see the biography by Costa, D. Manuel I. On Manuel’s millenaristic ideology see Thomaz, “L’idée impériale manueline”.
17 The fight, which never quite took off since the elephant panicked and ran away, is described in detail in Góis, Crónica, vol. IV, p. 53. The palatial setting, later destroyed in the 1755 earthquake, has been studied by Nuno Senos in O Paço da Ribeira.
19 Cf. Ciuitis, Une embassade portugaise à Rome; Andrade, História de um fidalgo quinhentista, pp. 119–131; Carvalho, “Tristão da Cunha e a expansão manuelina”.

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cessor, the more austere John, nurtured an interest in pachyderms, though in a less extravagant manner than his father. John oversaw a second flourishing of the Renaissance in Portugal during the 1530s to 1550s, as if reacting against the eclecticism of Manu line style. But he and his wife Catherine of Habsburg did send an elephant – now widely known thanks to a successful book by José Saramago – to Austria, certainly one of the most spectacular royal gifts of the time. It comes as no surprise that a renowned artist like Francisco de Holanda felt encouraged to plan a monumental fountain flanked by four huge elephants hewn out of stone for Lisbon’s central square.

At first sight all this might suggest some proximity between Europe and Asia with regard to the symbolic significance of elephants – after all, pachyderms were closely associated with royal authority in South and Southeast Asia. But in the Hindu and Buddhist sphere religious aspects seem to have had a greater weight in the perception of elephants than in the Christian and Muslim world (which is in no way to say that kingship as such was more deeply imbued with religion in South Asia than in Europe). In India – and here the Islamic states of the subcontinent occupy an ambiguous position – elephants were seen as attributes of the sacred dimension of royal power. They stood in close connection with the role played by the monarch in the maintenance of peace and harmony. Indra would, as Lord of the Heavens, ride an elephant, and Shiva, too, was seen in association with that animal in his function as Lord of Justice and Destroyer of Evil. Elephants as warrants for peace and prosperity were in no contradiction with the fact that most monarchs used them in war. After all, military action was one way of restoring order on earth.

Possessing elephants thus carried a deeper symbolic significance in South Asia than at European courts. In the West, elephants were little more than a petite (or rather grande) folie for monarchs keen to show their access to distant markets. In South Asia, in contrast, they remained indispensable attributes of

20 The Renaissance style was originally introduced under John II (r. 1481–1495), but then undercut by the more messianically oriented Manuel I, who developed an interest in biblical and Oriental motives. Only under John III did the style make its comeback in a sober form where decoration was kept to a minimum (see Moreira, “A arquitectura do Renascimento”, vol. 1, pp. 198–251 and “Cultura material e visual”).
21 Cf. Jordan Gschwend, *The story of Süleyman* and Saurer and Hinshaw-Fischli, “They called him Süleyman”.
22 The fountain was never built, but the plans survive. On Holanda see Deswarte, *Ideias e imagens em Portugal* and “Les ‘De Aetatibus Mundi Imagines’ de Francisco de Holanda”.
24 On the role played by elephants in Lankan military culture see Peris, “Kandula”.
royalty and, as such, warrants of the political order. This contrast is, as we shall see later on, of significance for the history of elephant trading.

**Elephant hunting in Sri Lanka**

For elephants to be traded, they generally need to be hunted first. The reproduction of these animals in captivity is difficult and, even if successful, a costly affair. Our earliest European testimony on the matter is Gaspar Correia, who visited Sri Lanka in 1518 and observed that “the king of Ceylon possesses stables for his elephants in the manner of our horse stables.” Whilst breeding elephants was difficult, Correia also states that “the Ceylonese put no great effort into capturing these animals as adults” – a rather strange remark considering all that appears in later texts. The chronicler then adds that the Sinhalese “make use [in their island] of the females, which are caught at a young age when they wander around with their mothers; the young males being sold to traders who embark them in Ceylon and re-sell them in Cambay.”

Apparently, the males were particularly welcome in India, because they were the best for military purposes – whilst in Sri Lanka there was a need for females. These were crucial, as we shall see, for the hunting of more elephants.

Most elephants that were at some point taken around the Cape to Europe were young and small specimens: taking a fully grown pachyderm across two oceans on a journey that rarely lasted less than six months would simply not have been feasible. Yet it seems rather doubtful that the inner-Asian trade should have been entirely limited to very young animals. It takes several years until an elephant reaches its full size and is able to perform all tasks especially in terms of carrying heavy weights and participating in war. Taking into consideration the large amount of fodder that even small elephants consume, this would have made it desirable for purchasers to invest directly in bigger specimens. Given that even adult elephants can be tamed within a few weeks to the point of fetching a reasonable price, there is reason to believe that their trade was at least as important as that of younger specimens. Sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggest, as we shall see, that despite some selection the hunting parties took animals of various sizes and made use of all of them. We also know that large elephants fetched by far the highest prices in India.

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26 Some sources are explicit about this, for example with regard to the above-mentioned young elephant bull that fought a rhinoceros in Lisbon despite having tiny tusks, or another animal sent from the Mughal Empire to England in 1615. On the latter, see Foster, *Letters Received by the East India Company*, vol. III, p. 85.
How, then, does one hunt, catch and tame a wild elephant? For centuries Europeans believed that elephants had no proper knee joints and could not stand up without the help of other elephants if they happened to lie down on the ground. Pliny concluded that elephants had to lean against trees to get sleep, which also meant that felling those trees would yield helpless pachyderms ready for collection. It was only in the forests of Sri Lanka that the Portuguese realized how wrong the classics had been. There were fundamentally two main methods of catching elephants. The first was based on the understanding that wild elephants are best caught with the help of tame elephants. Wild males in particular would be rather easily charmed by domesticated females trained to take them into a trap.27 The most dangerous variant of the honeytrap method was no doubt the one where a hunter would hide under the belly of a female and jump out in the crucial moment to put a thick rope around the legs of the wild male – the rope being bound already to the female.28 If necessary a duly trained animal could then, according to some reports, be of further help by delivering a blow to the wild specimen’s head, though this is rather difficult to imagine.29

A less risky method consisted of trapping the wild beasts in deep holes made in the forest ground and then leaving them to starve for some days until they started to get attached to the humans who would bring them food. Abd-er-Razzak, a late medieval traveller to India, suggests that a good human – bad human approach was sometimes taken, whereby the caught elephant would be exposed to successive moments of violence and trust-building, thus learning very quickly who its true friends were and consequently growing attached to them.30 Once the elephant began to give signs of calming down, small amounts of earth were thrown into the pit, allowing the biest to come gradually closer to the surface. At the end of the process, the elephant was tame enough to be simply led away to a stable.31 Some sources state that a trained elephant cow could entice even wild bulls into walking along with them all the way to the royal palace at Kandy – reason enough to ask ourselves about how far the credulity of European observers could go in matters related to Asian animals.32

Hunting and Trading Elephants

The second major catching method was based on the understanding that, whilst being powerful animals, elephants are also rather easily frightened. With the help of some noise and fire, they can be scared and driven into an enclosure or corral (kraal). Some of the most fascinating accounts of such hunts appear in the writings of German-speaking soldiers who served in the VOC – incidentally, a widely untapped source for the history of Sri Lanka.³³ Once a year or at slightly larger intervals, preferably in the dry season, when large herds of elephants moved from the more remote areas into the proximity of rivers and lakes, a major elephant hunt was organized. Hundreds of people began by setting up (or refurbishing) a vast structure made of wood and branches, stretching across the half-forested, half-open landscape like a giant funnel. Then the herd would be driven slowly but steadily to the open end of the structure.

If we are to believe the VOC soldier Von der Behr, such kraals could be up to three miles long and comprise of thousands of tree trunks.³⁴ One testimony mentions that it took half an hour to walk across the open mouth of the funnel,³⁵ and at least a quarter of an hour to then reach the narrowest point – which, in this specific case at least, suggests a very wide angle.³⁶ How exactly the kraals were built is not entirely clear. Early modern prints show palisades made of trunks vertically driven into the ground, but they do not appear to be longer than a few hundred metres. Perhaps there were additional structures, for example felled trees laid across the forest in a way to discourage the animals from fleeing sideway. Once the corral was operational, people could start targeting a nearby herd of elephants. They would make noise with drums and trumpets and

³³ Firstly around 1630 in Trindade, Conquista espiritual, vol. III, pp. 18–19; then in 1639 in the instructions given by Pero da Silva to Diogo Mendes de Brito (Abeyasinghe, Portugese Regimentos, p. 71). And later on in various texts written and published by German VOC servants, reprinted in Naber, Reisebeschreibungen von deutschen Beamten und Kriegsleuten. The most relevant passages are in Behr, Reise nach Java, Vorderindien, Persien und Ceylon, 1641–1650, pp. 124–126; Herport, Reise nach Java, Formosa, Vorder-Indien und Ceylon, 1659–1668, pp. 137–139; Saar, Reise nach Java, Banda, Ceylon und Persien, 1644–1660, pp. 76–78; Schweitzer, Reise nach Java und Ceylon, 1675–1682, pp. 60–64; Wintergeist, Reisen auf dem Mittelländischen Meere, der Nordsee, nach Ceylon und nach Java, 1688–1710, pp. 43–48. A further improvement in the quality and detail of sources on elephants occurs during the British period, for example with Cordiner, A Description of Ceylon, pp. 126–146.
³⁴ A maximum of six miles in total, i.e. two times three miles (Behr, Reise, p. 124). Six miles is also the distance from which elephants could be herded into a kraal, as another source has it (Saar, Reise, p. 77).
³⁵ Herport, Reise, p. 137.
³⁶ Saar, Reise, p. 77; Behr, Reise, p. 124.
light fires during the night so that the herd would gradually be driven towards the *kraal*. Herds roaming around in Sri Lanka would often comprise of up to 200 or even 300 animals,\textsuperscript{37} but if smaller groups were found a set of these would be taken to the *kraal* from different locations.\textsuperscript{38}

![Figure 15: Kraal hunt in the Alutkuru Korale in 1717. From François Valentijn, *Oud- en Nieuw Oost-Indië*, 1726.](image)

With the herd arriving at the entrance of the structure, the crucial phase of the hunt began. Dutch and German texts describe four different stages in connection with four different types of structure and animal behaviour: *losse kraal* (a), *speel kraal* (b), *maal kraal* (c), and *nood kraal* (d).\textsuperscript{39} This suggests a complex drama where three stages were dedicated to calming down the animals (walking

\textsuperscript{37} Queiroz, *Conquista*, p. 56. Saar, too, mentions herds of 200 animals (*Reise*, p. 77).
\textsuperscript{38} Herport, *Reise*, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{39} Notebook of Jan Brandes, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, NG 1985–7–2. This is now published as *The World of Jan Brandes*, where the following Sinhalese designations are also given for the first three sections: adayam gala, rahas gala and kelina gala (p. 280).
about loosely in the *lossekraal*, playing in the *speelkraal*, and grazing in the *maalkraal*) before they would be driven into a narrow corridor at the end of the *kraal*, where panic (*nood*) was inevitable. The latter was at the meeting point of the two arms of the funnel. A gate through which the animals could only walk one by one was followed by a narrow chamber and a second gate. Note, however, that in the visual sources it is sometimes precisely in the sector before the final battleground that animals began to panic as they perceived the palisades surrounding them.⁴⁰ Albrecht Herport speaks of entire herds left to starve for days in a row, ending up so stressed that fights were frequent and the outcome often deadly.⁴¹ The suggestion here seems to be that in the *maalkraal* there was effectively a lot of *nood*. An illustration printed along with his account attempts to render the chaotic atmosphere of the hunt. This is, incidentally, in accordance with the testimony of the Reverend James Cordiner, an Englishman who observed several *kraal* hunts around 1800.⁴² Amidst such a confusion in the *maalkraal*, it may have been easiest to force all the animals of a herd through the gates at the end of the *kraal* rather than driving only select specimens into the *noodkraal*. The best could thus be kept, and the others left to run away afterwards or killed.⁴³ In any of these cases, there would have to be a mechanism impeding the return of the elephants from one section to another: an internal division with gates shut after the animals passed.

Once an animal was in the *noodkraal*, attempts would begin to place ropes around its legs and neck. This could take several hours even if the sluice was narrow enough to impede the animal from turning around.⁴⁴ To avoid an excessive loss of time, one solution was to increase the number of elephants in the *noodkraal* and thus work on several specimens at the same time. According to Johann Jacob Saar, who visited Ceylon in the mid-seventeenth century, the “*Nothstall*” at the end of the *kraal* he saw could house up to eight animals standing in a row.⁴⁵ Once an elephant was tightly bound up and the ropes held by a sufficiently large number of men, the second gate was opened. At the exit, there would be two to four tame elephant cows that could take the captured animal between them and help lead it away peacefully.⁴⁶ It is also mentioned that

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⁴² Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, p. 141. According to this text, the animals were taken out of the *kraal* one by one in the end.
⁴³ Herport, in contrast, reports that people mutilated the animals and left them to die (*Reise*, p. 138).
⁴⁴ Saar, *Reise*, p. 78.
⁴⁵ Saar, *Reise*, p. 78.
the locals taking the elephants into their care would not go directly to the nearest village, but stop on their way to perform a ritual under specific trees, as if to ensure the appropriateness of the passage from the wild into the human environment. Others, such as Jan Brandes, mention the “baptism” of freshly caught animals at the kraal.47

Figure 16: Elephants being taken away from the kraal after a hunt in 1785. From the Jan Brandes manuscript (courtesy of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam).

If the figures vary with regard to the number of elephants captured, then this may have to do in part with natural fluctuations in the animal population, but also with the dexterity of those hunting them and the actual investment of labour in each hunt. The average may have been somewhere around 100 to 150 animals captured per year by means of kraals and other types of hunting.48 It is

48 For the Portuguese period, C. R. De Silva has calculated a yearly export of not more than 100 animals ("Peddling Trade, Elefants and Gems", p. 293). Johann Jacob Saar, who par-
the *kraal* technique, however, that stands out with the complex social apparatus sustaining it. Building (or re-building) such vast structures every year (or possibly at longer intervals) would demand not only technical skill but also a singular social setup. People specializing in the building of *kraals* and the hunting of elephants needed to be supported during a substantial period of time, often for several months in a row. They had to be able to leave their villages and agricultural tasks to dedicate themselves to the hunt. And in fact, whilst Sri Lanka’s caste system is overall much simpler than India’s, there were three different groups dedicated specifically to hunting and looking after elephants.\(^{49}\)

The actual hunters, including those men daring enough to put ropes around the animals in the *noodkraal* and take them through the final gate, were known as *panikkayas*. The care of tame elephants – which as we shall see counted as royal property in principle – was the realm of the *kuruwe* people. Their tasks included waiting for freshly caught elephants at the rear end of the *kraal* with tame females. A third group known as *pannayas* was in charge of the foodstuff. All three groups resided mostly in the Four Koraless, a region north of Colombo. They were allowed to grow paddy on fields that the Crown, as the owner of the land, provided for them in exchange for their services – a system of duties known as the *rajakariya*.\(^{50}\) This social structure, which is documented mainly for the western and southwestern lowlands pertaining to the area of influence of Kotte and then taken over by the Portuguese and later the Dutch, was kept intact by the colonial powers. According to the first Portuguese land register dated 1599, groups dealing with elephants lived in 44 villages.\(^{51}\) In the troubled 1650s, Johann Jacob Saar counted 36.\(^{52}\) A register dating from 1614 has 45, housing a total of 108 *panikkayas* with the obligation to deliver 30 animals in total every year.\(^{53}\)

Chandra Richard De Silva concluded from these relatively low figures that at that time there may not have been any *kraals* given that there would not have been enough labour force available.\(^{54}\) Yet this is not necessarily the case, since\[\text{\underline{\text{References}}}\]

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\(^{49}\) See Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon*, pp. 159–164.

\(^{50}\) On the discussion surrounding this issue, see Siriweera, “The Theory of the King’s Ownership of Land in Ancient Ceylon”.

\(^{51}\) De Silva, “The First Portuguese Revenue Register of the Kingdom of Kotte – 1599”.

\(^{52}\) Saar, *Reise*, p. 76.


\(^{54}\) De Silva, “Peddling Trade, Elephants and Gems”, p. 293.
the counted *panikkayas* were only a part of the total workforce, and the other two groups seem to have been simply ignored by the maker of the 1614 survey — or possibly included in one of the two volumes now lost. Saar, who counted ten villages less than the Portuguese officers, speaks of a total of about 500 men, a rather sizeable group — and this of course brings up the question of how many women and children might complement the numbers. 55 500 men may have been enough for the task: between 1645 and 1648, the VOC soldier Johann von der Behr counted about “400 blacks obliged to help” in the construction of a *kraal*. They came from a total of 40 villages. 56

When is it then that the *kraal* technique was introduced? Whilst the designation of the practice could suggest a Portuguese innovation (*kraal* might derive from *curral*), it seems rather unlikely that the complex social structure associated with it should have been set up by the newcomers. It would be more plausible to assume that the technique existed for centuries — in fact, Strabo already mentions a similar type of hunting for North India — perhaps not being regularly practised in times of crisis such as the later sixteenth century, when Sitawaka and Kotte were at the height of their conflict. During the years of Portuguese territorial rule in the island’s southwest (1594–1656) the *pannikayas*, *kuruwes* people and *pannayas* seem to have performed their duties relatively well despite repeated periods of upheaval. The Dutch period, too, seems to have provided a relatively stable environment for the hunting activities around Mata- ra and north of Colombo, despite fierce conflicts fought out in the interior against Kandy. Most sources do suggest, in any case, that the early colonial powers had to rely on the loyalty of local elites, including the leaders or *vidanas* of the “elephant castes”, who had considerable influence in their villages. 57 This falls very much in line with what we have seen in chapter 6.

It also seems that in the Kingdom of Kandy, which only began to free itself from Kotte’s overlordship in the late fifteenth century, the social structure needed for the hunting with *kraals* was largely absent — and remained so afterwards. In Kandy elephants were caught with those simpler methods described earlier in this chapter: the enticing of wild animals with the help of trained females leading them to fall into pits, and their capture with ropes by relatively small parties of hunters. 58 Similar conditions must have existed in other areas of

55 Saar, *Reise*, p. 76.
58 This is described particularly by Robert Knox, who spent many years in Kandy: *An Historical Relation*, pp. 80–81; Knox also describes the use of a *kraal*, but it was comparatively small and served mainly to entertain the king (pp. 82–83).
the island controlled neither by Kotte nor by Kandy – for example, the Vanni – yielding only a few elephants every year.\(^{59}\)

**Between monopoly and free trade: elephants as a commodity**

The latter aspect takes us to the question of who the elephants thus hunted belonged to. Sri Lanka may have been “full of Helfanten”, as Herport put it, but this does not entail that they were free for anyone to take.\(^{60}\) It seems that the right of ownership pertained to the Lankan kings before the Portuguese arrived. Writing in the early sixteenth century, Duarte Barbosa mentions that the King of Kotte was responsible for the organisation of elephant hunting and taming activities and engaged in the sale of the animals.\(^{61}\) When the throne of Kotte fell to the Portuguese Crown in 1597, this royal prerogative transited to the new sovereign.\(^{62}\) In 1599 the caste groups involved were committed to furnishing 40 live elephants per year and an additional 60 tusks.\(^{63}\) Around 1630, the Franciscan chronicler Paulo da Trindade observed that the pachyderms in Ceylon were in principle the property of the kings and that in the Portuguese domains their hunting could only be ordered by the financial representative of the Crown, the *vedor da fazenda*.\(^{64}\) The VOC, too, perpetuated this practice after taking over large parts of the island between 1638 and 1658.\(^{65}\) All this seems to be further in tune with the legal practices in the Kingdom of Kandy from at least the seventeenth century.\(^{66}\) During the eighteenth century, not just the ownership but also the use of elephants and horses was said to be reserved for the king in the capital of the mountain kingdom.\(^{67}\)

Whatever the exact legal situation – there is a complex historiographical discussion around the king’s ownership of land which may indicate a similar complexity regarding elephants – the evidence suggests that trading pachyderms was not entirely unproblematic for independent merchants. Firstly, a number of animals were moved around every year as a part of tributary ar-

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59 For example in the forests of the Vanni, from where one elephant per year was sent as tribute to Kandy (Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom*, p. 236), or among the Veddas (Knox, *An Historical Relation*, p. 193).

60 Herport, *Reise*, p. 137.


62 On the donation of Kotte to the Portuguese Crown, see chapters 3 and 5.

63 De Silva, “The First Portuguese Revenue Register”, pp. 125 and 139.


rangements, thus escaping the logics of what one would consider a commercial transaction in the narrow sense of the word. Dharma Parakramabahu IX, King of Kotte, was said in the early years of the sixteenth century to be sending an annual tribute of 40 elephants to the King of Kollam (Quilon) in exchange for mercenaries. From 1518, at a time when Kollam had lost its influence over Kotte, the Portuguese asked for at least a part of their tribute to be paid in the same way. Agreements of this sort made elephants move around between Kotte, Kandy, Jaffna, the Portuguese, some South Indian powers and smaller chiefdoms in Sri Lanka, the precise direction of their movement depending on the changing power relations between these polities. Between 1617 and 1638, for example, the Portuguese at Colombo received a total of 38 elephants as tribute from Kandy. Traders wishing to procure elephants for money and re-sell them outside of the island could hardly do this without taking into account the tributary mobilization of these animals, and certainly political conditions had an influence on the fluctuation of prices. The market was, to put it simply, far from free.

Elephants were repeatedly at the heart of Portuguese and Dutch efforts to establish monopolies. In 1521 already, Manuel I sent orders from Lisbon to have all Sri Lankan elephants taken to Colombo for registration and taxation before leaving the island. This was, nota bene, at a time when the Portuguese Crown possessed nothing but a tiny fort on the outskirts of the island’s main port. The orders could hardly be put into practice and had little effect on the trade connecting Sri Lanka with Cochin, not to mention tributary transactions that may have existed. Even if Colombo had been under full Portuguese control, there remained a string of other ports along the island’s west coast from

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68 Pires, *Suma Oriental*, p. 188; on the tribute issue see Strathern, “Theoretical Approaches to Sri Lankan History” and Biedermann, “Tribute, Vassalage and Warfare”.
70 *De Silva, The Portuguese in Ceylon*, p. 203.
71 Not necessarily an upward movement: in the case of cinnamon, it is precisely the private trade that is held responsible for rising prices in the sixteenth century (cf. Godinho, *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, vol. III, p. 167).
73 Cochin was an important centre of private Portuguese trade. This community resisted centralistic activities such as those of Afonso de Albuquerque and still had considerable influence on many decisions made in the royal council in Lisbon; see Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor*, pp. 189–206 as well as Guerreiro and Rodrigues, “O ‘grupo de Cochim’ e a oposição a Afonso de Albuquerque”, pp. 119–144.
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which elephants could – and would – be exported. Whilst little is known about the functioning of these ports, there is some evidence that they remained active precisely because of the fragmented nature of the Sri Lankan space and the multitude of political powers. When the Portuguese finally got hold of large parts of the Lankan southwest, they maintained the principle of a royal monopoly on elephants, insisting that it was an ancient right of the Crown they had inherited. Trading in elephants thus remained more problematic for private traders than trading in cinnamon. Perhaps it was more difficult to elude the authorities with an elephant than with a bag of spices, but there was certainly also a strategic consideration given the frequent use of pachyderms in armed conflicts. Like iron or saltpeter, elephants could be crucial in the conduction of war, and controlling their trade could bring political advantages. Although the Portuguese never made direct use of war elephants in their own battles, it was important to allow their transaction to allies and bar them from falling in the hands of enemies.

As with all monopolies, the question remains of course to what extent the authorities’ intention had an effect in practice. In 1630, a decree was passed to regulate the hunting, owning and exporting of elephants. But like all papers of this sort, it can be read as a sign of strength or weakness. Only one thing is certain: elephants did play a significant role in the Estado’s finances. Although we do not possess reliable serial data, we hear from Fernão de Queiróz that the loss of Ceylon to the Dutch meant a loss of revenue amounting, in the Kingdom of Kotte alone, to the value of 33 elephants per year sold at a total value of 34,500 xerafins. To put things into perspective – and assuming this figure is at least roughly correct – the revenue of the Crown based on the leasing of lands

74 Beyond the obvious ports – Jaffna, Galle, Trincomali and Batticaloa – smaller ones were used, too, including Mannar, Negombo, Weligama, Yala and others. This was already mentioned by Caracão in his letter to the king (Bouchon, “Les rois de Kotte”, p. 166).
75 Especially after the defeat of Vijayanagar at Talikotta in 1565, the pressure rose on the Portuguese outposts along the South Indian littoral; cf. Costa and Rodrigues, Portugal y Oriente, pp. 275–277.
76 Cf. De Silva, The Portuguese in Ceylon, p. 204.
77 The prices of elephants seem to have depended on their size in the first place. Animals with tusks were usually worth two to three times more than others. This said, the following tentative prices may serve as a guideline: in Ceylon an elephant could be sold for 300 to 1,000 xerafins in the seventeenth century (De Silva, “Peddling Trade, Elephants and Gems”, pp. 294–295); Johann von der Behr talks of a price of 600 to 700 Thalers around 1650 (Reise, p. 126), but João de Ribeiro, in the 1630s, mentions 8,000 to 15,000 pardaus (Fatallidade, p. 50) and Johann Jacob Saar 2,100 to 4,400 Thalers (Reise, p. 80). In India prices were about two to three times those of Ceylon (up to 2,000 cruzados at the time of Vas-
amended to 11,200 xerafins, the total earnings of the royal customs at Colombo to 7,600 xerafins, and the royal monopoly on cinnamon was worth about 11,000 xerafins (much more cinnamon was traded privately). These are approximate figures, but they give a sense of the huge – and yet mostly overlooked – financial importance of the elephant trade for the royal treasury.

The Dutch, too, soon realized the potential of controlling a maximum of ports in the island with a view to getting hold of elephant-related revenues. The VOC planned to export animals from Galle, Mannar and Jaffna to their traditional destinations in Gujarat, Kerala, Tamilnad, Orissa, Bengal and Arrakan, and there was even talk about Arabia and Persia. In Jaffna, a special quay was built to facilitate the embarking of pachyderms. Notwithstanding these efforts, the Kings of Kandy kept some of the profitable export business in their hands through associations with Muslim and Chetty-dominated enterprises. The third European attempt at decreeing a full monopoly over the elephant trade, a VOC paper issued in 1670, was thus never fully put into practice. In the 1760, Sri Lanka’s most important export market for pachyderms, the Mughal Empire, began to shrink as a result of political crisis. True, elephants remained highly

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78 Queiroz, Conquista, p. 989; to these 33 animals, one needs to add another 30 at least from Mannar and some smaller contingents from other areas of the island; cf. ibid., p. 990.
79 Arasaratnam, Dutch Power in Ceylon, pp. 150–152.
80 Many different destinations appear in the sources, for which there is no space in this chapter; see, among others, Correia, Lendas, vol. I, pp. 196–198; Pires, A Suma Oriental, p. 358; Barbosa, O livro, vol. II, p. 282.
81 That embarking elephants was not an easy task is not hard to imagine. Around 1630 Paulo da Trindade noted: “After they have been sold, they are loaded upon some very large ships called champanas in the following manner: [the people] build a pier reaching from the shore to the ship. It is made of very strong wood and is so narrow that only one elephant can stand on it, and it is made secure on both sides with very thick pieces of wood. Then they bring the elephant and lead it backwards onto the pier, so that it does not see the ocean [...] until it stands on the champana, where it is immediately tied up very firmly” (Trindade, Conquista Espiritual do Oriente, vol. III, p. 19).
82 Arasaratnam, Dutch Power in Ceylon, p. 152 and “Dutch Commercial Policy in Ceylon”.
83 Of course it should be noted that the figures of elephants caught in Ceylon kept growing – or were at least stagnant – until the early nineteenth century. As mentioned above, the British would still supervise the hunting of about 150 to 180 animals per year around 1800.
valued work animals in Sri Lanka until well into the twentieth century, and their market value only really imploded with the flooding of South Asia by Japanese trucks and machines in the 1960s. But their political and military significance was in decline from the later eighteenth century.

**Conclusion: on the continuities of elephant trading and hunting**

It may be useful to ask whether there was a specifically early modern elephant trade in Sri Lanka and India. To put it in other words, we are yet to understand whether the production, trade and consumption of this comparatively rare but highly valued commodity took on fundamentally different characteristics during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries than in previous periods. A full answer would require research into non-European as well as European sources. On grounds of the materials surveyed so far, however, one is left sceptical about the notion that the Portuguese (or the Dutch) brought about any fundamental changes. As far as the hunting techniques are concerned, the sixteenth century does not seem to have seen radical innovations. The size of the kraals and the number of captured animals may have increased, but even if this hypothesis could be proven, the fact could still be attributed to gradual improvements rather than a radical revolution. The social apparatus set up to hunt, tame and feed the elephants is unlikely to have been invented after 1500, nor does it appear to have undergone the changes that occurred among the cinnamon peelers who, as if anticipating Hiltonian modernisation theory, experienced the progressive monetarization of their labour duties as cinnamon became an increasingly global commodity – something that, crucially, never happened with elephants.84

Due most likely to cultural and symbolic reasons already hinted at above, there never was a substantial demand for these animals in Europe or the New World colonies. This reluctance to adopt elephants outside of Asia kept the

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84 In fact, the sources reveal instances of de-monetization, for example an initiative in the mid-seventeenth century by the population of Mantota, which did not belong to any of the above-mentioned castes. Given the lack of money in their area, the people of Mantota (near Mannar) asked for permission from the Portuguese viceroy Dom Filipe Mascarenhas to convert their annual tax of 300 *patacas* into an elephant with tusks or two elephant cows without tusks. They also promised to hunt these animals without the assistance of the *pannikayas* – an indication of inter-caste competition for a natural resource such as elephants. The request was accepted in the financial council in Goa in 1653. See Matos et al., *Junta da Real Fazenda*, vol. I, p. 148.

(Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, p. 141). During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, British officials and travelers entertained themselves shooting hundreds of elephants indiscriminately with firearms, without making any use of their carcasses. This novel approach impacted the ecosystem more seriously than any previous practices.
elasticity of the export market limited. Whilst the Portuguese and the Dutch experimented with cinnamon plantations in Sri Lanka (the spice was traditionally collected in the wild) and the acculturation of cinnamon plants in Atlantic climates (for example in São Tomé and the Caribbean), nothing of the sort was ever attempted with regard to elephants. In contrast with most Asian empires and kingdoms, Europe never developed a culture of maintaining and nurturing elephants for practical purposes. Only a few animals made it to the West, and those that did were seen as a curious but fundamentally useless luxury. They were not “useless” in the same way as a silk gown, remaining an overall rather unpleasant and cumbersome commodity, dirty, unpredictable and costly to keep.

This is somewhat surprising if one takes into account how useful elephants could have been. How many blocks of stone might have been carried across the building sites of Europe’s growing capital cities, how many columns and statues lifted up the façades of Versailles or Schönbrunn, and how many sugar mills operated without working millions of men and women to death in the hell of Brazil’s engenhos? None of this seems to have crossed anyone’s mind in the West, whilst cinnamon kept spreading lavishly across European, Middle Eastern and New World cuisines. On the more questionable front of warfare, what a remarkable resource elephants could have been to European powers. The Mughals kept thousands of elephants for construction work and warfare. Pachyderms remained indispensable and difficult to defeat during much of the early modern period. They would carry “castles” on their backs from where archers could operate. They could have swords and spears attached to their legs and wreak havoc among the enemy’s infantry. In the heat of the battle, elephants remained largely invulnerable to early, hand-carried fire arms.

Here some selected figures from Portuguese sources: around 1532 Sultan Bahadur would command between 400 and 800 elephants (Barros, Ásia, vol. IV, fol. 297; Correia, Lendas, vol. III, p. 591); the rulers of Vijayanagar kept about 600 elephants around 1535 according to Fernão Nunes, a Portuguese visitor to the city (Sewell, A Forgotten Empire, p. 150). Many European observers mention thousands of animals, which is certainly down to a general tendency for exaggeration in early modern travel accounts – but partly the confusion may also arise from the difficulty in distinguishing between war and work elephants.

For example in the account of Athanasius Nikitin (Major, India in the Fifteenth Century, p. 23). Also in Gama (Peres, Diário, pp. 127–128); Barros (Ásia, vol. III, fol. 105v, mentioning a battle at Colombo in 1519 or 1520 with over 20 elephants confronting the Portuguese); António Monserrate about the Mughals (Goa, 26.XI.1582, in Wicki, Documenta Indica, vol. XII, p. 658).

Numerous references in all Portuguese chronicles (Barros, Correia, Queiroz etc.) for South and Southeast Asia.
they occasionally panicked when confronted with louder gunfire, then turning around and trampling their own people to death. But to this issue, the Mughals found a simple solution: by the time António Monserrate wrote about North India in 1582, elephants were often made to march behind the infantry. They could then be deployed quickly and efficiently to the frontline in key moments of a battle.\textsuperscript{88} All in all, elephants remained frightening to Europeans in the wars they witnessed across Asia.

Significantly enough, there is not a single mention of the Portuguese having used elephants in battles. As we have seen in chapter 2, Afonso de Albuquerque kept the state elephants of his Muslim predecessors in Goa during his term as governor (1509–15). Every evening, so the legend goes, he would have them parading with temple dancers under his porch in the centre of what was to become the capital of the \textit{Estado}.\textsuperscript{89} But twenty out of these 25 animals were sold off by Albuquerque’s trade-focused successor Lopo Soares de Albergaria (gv.1515–18) to Vijayanagar.\textsuperscript{90} Because elephants are best employed militarily in large and open battlefields, and the Portuguese in South India only engaged in such a type of warfare very reluctantly, it may be that the animals would not have been overtly useful in the defensive tactics of the Lusitanians. What is more puzzling is the fact that in Sri Lanka, where elephants could have been an excellent tool of conquest in the turmoil of the 1590s, they were not deployed either. And it is not that the Portuguese were not made aware of their potential: in 1519 already elephants were put into the field against the newcomers with considerable effect.\textsuperscript{91} Either the chroniclers decided to remain silent on this subject, or there was a cultural barrier hindering the Portuguese from adopting elephants in warfare. In this regard, the Dutch proved more flexible. In 1678, the VOC soldier Christoph Schweitzer took part in a military exercise in Jaffna during which elephants were trained specifically to march against enemy fire. After three days, they were ready to attack a whole company of musketeers without showing any signs of fear.\textsuperscript{92}

If elephants came to be used at all by the Portuguese in South Asia, then it was to perform heavy work in the shipyards of Goa, Cochin and certainly other ports. They could haul boats up the beach and push them back into the wa-

\textsuperscript{88} António Monserrate on the Mughals, in Wicki, \textit{Documenta Indica}, vol. XII, p. 658.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}, vol. II, p. 510.
\textsuperscript{91} Barros, \textit{Ásia}, vol. III, fol. 105v.
\textsuperscript{92} Schweitzer, \textit{Reise}, pp. 90–91.
In Colombo they carried materials “in the manner of mules”, and a large elephant bull known as Ortelã (“peppermint”) was said to be earning up to 50,000 patacas per year for the royal treasury. This, once again, suggests that they were considered a natural property of the king and rented out to private individuals as such. A certain Simão Pinhão was reported to have offered the Franciscans in Colombo an elephant cow, but when she gave birth to a baby, permission had to be sought from Goa to keep the little one as a working animal.

It might tempt to argue at this point that heavy work of what we would call a “profane” nature would have been in stark contrast with the traditional “sacrality” of elephants in the South Asian tradition, especially among Buddhists and Hindus, and particularly with regard to the magnificent religious processes in which they participate today. Yet it is not to be forgotten that even in Kandy, Vijayanagar or Fatehpur Sikri, only a tiny minority of elephants enjoyed the luxuries of being treated as quasi-sacred beings in the finest royal stables. The magnificent buildings that remain visible in Vijayanagar as a testimony to the good treatment of elephants could hardly house more than a few dozen animals. In 1561, a Portuguese Jesuits reported from Bijapur that the sultan exposed his elephants to the elements “so that they may become used to work”. From Lahore it was even reported that elephants were set up to fight each other – but in contrast with what had happened in the distant Portuguese capital under Manuel I, animals would sometimes get killed in these fights.

It would make relatively little sense to argue that people in the West were generally crueler and less respectful of animals such as elephants than people in the East. But of course precisely this idea may already have circulated in the sixteenth century. We do have one testimony from the Islamic sphere that reverses the instances of Muslim cruelty just mentioned: when the Jesuit Gonçalo Rodrigues visited Bijapur in 1561, the aforementioned sultan – Ali Adil Shah I

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96 In possible connection with this sacred dimension, elephants would at times be used to put convicts to death – though they also performed this duty under the Dutch (see figure above), for whom the sacred dimension had no importance.
Hunting and Trading Elephants

(r.1558–79) – had him questioned about whether it was true that Christians not only drank wine, but also ate elephant meat.\(^99\) In fact, the chronicler João de Barros does mention how during one of the earliest skirmishes in India in 1500 an elephant had been killed accidentally, and then eaten by the Portuguese foot soldiers (but not the fidalgos) with great delight, given the exciting new flavour.\(^100\) Sieges may have forced people to do similar things. Both during the siege of Kotte in 1562, when the Portuguese defended their position with Dom João (Dharmapala) against the forces of Sitawaka, or during the final siege of Colombo in 1655–56 against the Dutch, the populace seems to have resorted to elephants as a last source of protein.\(^101\) But how could we tell at a distance of four centuries whether the Portuguese were quicker to give in to such necessities than others? How many people would, by any means, have confessed to taking part in such a miserable feast? The words of the Portuguese chronicler Barros leave no doubt about his deep repulsion.

Nor would it make much sense to affirm that Sri Lankans were generally kinder towards elephants than Europeans. Wild pachyderms were (and still are) feared by rural populations and much hated for the devastation they cause in villages and fields.\(^102\) Attacks by elephants on travellers in the island were not rare, scaring Lankans and Europeans alike.\(^103\) The Kings of Kandy sought to secure roads in their realm by having elephant traps built along them.\(^104\) And during the kraal hunts, local panikkayas and kuruwe people did not refrain from treating the animals brutally. Weaker elephants would often have their trunks cut off and their eyes gouged out only to be left to die miserably at the mercy of crocodiles attracted by the bloodshed.\(^105\)

Perhaps the relatively small impact that early European expansion had on the elephant business can be seen in co-relation with the extent of the impact that the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English had on South Asia as a whole before 1800. The numbers seem to speak for themselves: the elephant Hanno had, on his very own, thrown the crowds of Rome into a delirium during his entry in the Eternal City in 1514. Reports suggest that Sultan Bahadur of Çam-


\(^{101}\) Some accounts even mention the consumption of human flesh, though they emphasise that this was not done by the Portuguese: Queiroz, *Conquista*, pp. 332 and 799–801.


\(^{103}\) See for example the assault on two Jesuits in Jaffna around 1561, as described in Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. V, p. 285.

\(^{104}\) Herport, *Reise*, p. 137.

bay received up to 80 elephants on a single day, while Akbar had 300 animals sent from Bengal on one occasion. In 1615 alone, Bijapur sent 36 animals to the Mughal court. That same year, the EIC received a single young elephant as a gift for the English monarch. Even in good years, the Portuguese could not obtain more than six to ten elephants as tribute from the rulers of Kotte. Jaffna was obliged, from 1591, to send a dozen of them, but this was hardly ever put into practice.

The Portuguese, the Dutch and the English may have had some control over many things in South Asia, and their influence is not to be underestimated. We have seen how diplomacy served as a tool of imperial expansion, and how it ended up fuelling a policy of conquest and colonization. Europeans took over ports, lands, and administrative structures. They imposed taxes and controlled the circulation of commodities. But with regard to the larger powers in the region, they still stood on the margins for much of the time before 1800, and in some fields even powerful economic interests did little to change pre-colonial practices. Nothing could illustrate this situation better than an episode from 1649, when the King of Kandy sent the Dutch in Galle an elephant as a little thank you for a parrot that the Dutch had sent him before – this was of course the time when Kandy and the VOC relied on each other to fight the Portuguese. The Dutch showed some heartfelt joy about the present, but soon realized, much to their dismay, that the animal was too large to cross the drawbridge leading into their freshly renovated fort. According to a German observer who did little to conceal his amusement about the scene he witnessed, the “entire upper part” of the bridge had to be “taken into pieces” to let the animal pass through. And whether the pachyderm really enjoyed its new life in the Dutch settlement with its tidy little townhouses remains to be doubted.

106 Sir Thomas Roe to the EIC, 25.I.1615, in Foster, *Letters Received by the East India Company*, vol. IV, p. 12.
Afterword

Whether it is elephants roaming through the forests of Sri Lanka only to be caught in a kraal and shipped off to North India, or Portuguese soldiers carrying letters and unwittingly becoming diplomats mediating between distant sovereigns, the sixteenth century is all about movements in many different and often unexpected directions. John Russell-Wood spoke of a “World on the Move”, and more recently Dejanirah Couto and François Lachaud have coined the notion of “empires on the move” (“empires en marche”). Certainly what is most fascinating is not just the existence of movement as such, but a sense of generalized acceleration, along with the multiplication of people, goods and ideas crossing cultural borders. There is also the effect that such movements could have in the sixteenth century. A single man like Nuno Álvares Pereira might, in the right place, at the right time and in the hands of the right lord, establish relations between distant political centres and trigger substantial political change. A single elephant – be it Hanno in Rome in 1514 or Suleiman in Vienna in 1553 – could stand for new historical processes on a global scale: Europe’s expansion and confrontation with Africa and Asia, the struggle for hegemony in the Mediterranean, the Ottoman assault on Central Europe, the Luso-Mappila wars over the control of South Asian waters, the global intertwining of trade and politics, or the murky beginnings of commercial capitalism across the continents.

To what extent a person like the mahout of Suleiman, about whom we know even less than about the elephant itself, could grasp the breathtaking amplitude of the changes under way – this remains an open question. But we do know incomparably more now than only twenty years ago about diplomats, envoys, mercenaries, missionaries, spies, traders and adventurers who, sometimes unwittingly, sometimes consciously, helped establish those connections that historians now praise as the material from which early modernity emerges. We also understand, by now, that observing connections alone does not always reveal the whole complexity of the fabric, and that it is important to ask what was being connected, how exactly, and where the potential was for failure or success. A mere accumulation of stories does not make up for the intricacies of history as a whole. If one thing emerges from the materials discussed in this book, it is the fact that no linear, and certainly no consciously forged progression existed from contact through negotiation to conquest and incorporation. Instances
of adaptation and improvisation occurred throughout Portuguese expansion in Asia, making it pertinent to speak of diplomacy, imperialism, conquest, incorporation or assimilation as occurring in complex combinations at any given moment in time – and hence leaving it abundantly clear how a critique of such a multi-faceted approach as being insufficiently political makes no sense. It is precisely the attention to detail, to subtle (and not so subtle) shifts, ambiguities and mutual appropriations that allows historians working with Luso-Asian materials to address the negotiation of meaning and the generation of power at the intersection of raw military might, commercial ambition, dynastic strategy, administrative practice, and the political imagination.

The present volume is but a tiny, geographically limited contribution to the rapidly growing historiography of early modern globalization, and it cannot aspire to anything but a status of preliminarity. Almost everything that has been said here may be re-told differently in the future: a new historiography of diplomacy is emerging and will hopefully start going global soon; connected histories are being combined with comparative approaches; cartographical history is being embraced by mainstream historians as the spatial turn matures; the historiography of the Catholic monarchy is warming to the idea of studying the empire’s fringes in Africa and Asia; the notion of cosmopolitanism is up for empirical examination after decades of normative conjecture; and even the history of animals, including the dynamics of their representation and their role in the making of early modernity, is undergoing a turn to the global. Perhaps in ten or twenty years we will have more clarity in all these matters, as we will have tried out new ways of thinking transversally, comparing and contrasting different empires carefully enough not to reproduce timeworn assumptions about pre-modernity and modernity, South and North, East and West, commerce and politics, pacifism and violence, religion and warfare, or cosmopolitanism and communalism, to name but a few of these intellectual hindrances inherited from the past. For the time being it seems reasonable enough to contribute to the confusion from which something new may some day emerge. That is the raison d’être of this book.
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