

CONVERTING A HEATHEN KING - THE SILENCE IN THE SINHALA SOURCES

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Abstract

The conversion in 1557 to Christianity of Dharmapala, the last King of Kotte, was considered a signal achievement by the Portuguese. Lisbon and the Vatican showered congratulations and public celebrations were held throughout the Portuguese Orient. That sense of exultation has been recorded in full in Portuguese chronicles.

The manner the Sinhala sources have responded to the conversion is a striking contrast. Their response is a total silence. Sinhala epigraphic, literary and historical sources have nothing to say about it.

This paper discusses the significance of this silence of the Sinhala sources and their failure to condemn Dharmapala. It argues that the reason for this was the awareness that the circumstances in which the conversion was done were extenuating.