

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the Portuguese attempt to settle Sri Lanka in the period between 1580–1630. It analyses, at first, the origin of the colonization project which was a product of the transformation of the character of the Portuguese influence on the island in the transition of 16th and 17th centuries. This character has been changed from commerce oriented on conquest-oriented. At second, it finds the causes of decisive failure of Portuguese and their evaluation. It attempts to contextualize the events within the scope of Portuguese policy in Sri Lanka and within the overall context of the Portuguese expansion in the East. The events outside of the island were immensely important for the development in Sri Lanka because they contribute to the formation of military and political concepts as well as to take of specific decisions.

In Sri Lanka, the Portuguese traded since 1506 when they for the first time stood on its shore, but, during the 16th century, they have been still more involved in the local political situation on the part of the Kingdom of Kotte. Finally, during the 80's and 90's of the 16th century, they decided to control the island. In a very short time, they gained under their direct or indirect control all island territories, except the Sri Lankan central plateau on which the Sinhalese and Buddhist Kandyan Empire laid, which steadfastly resisted. Now, lacked only a little to the creation of some plan of systematic settlement, which has been incited not only by positive results of the territorial expansion carried out hitherto, but also by the success in legal terms – the Portuguese Crown acquired through the donation of the last king of the Kingdom of Kotte claim of succession to the throne (1580–1583), applied in 1597.

The systematic Portuguese settlement should have been commenced, according to the ambitious royal project, in 1607. Although it has been achieved several undoubted successes, especially in the formation of the thriving Luso-Sinhalese mestizo community, in the propagation of Christianity and in the establishment of the basic elements of Portuguese culture, the overall results evoke rather disillusion and disappointment in comparison with the original intention to transform Sri Lanka into a "new Portugal" in the tropics. The causes of this setback can be divided into five levels: demographic, military, cultural-social, ethnic and religious. The Portuguese could have been successful only if they had accomplished to find compromise with the Kandyan king, changed their haughty attitude, did not scatter their meager resources and received a little more time. Unable to any fundamental reform, they have been expelled from Sri

Lanka until 1658 as a result of the Dutch intervention in favour of the Kandyan Empire which caused the deflection of existing balance of power in the island.