The Sinhalese poet Alagiyavanna Mukaveti (1552-1622?) was no humble person. In the closing verse of his first work—The Cock’s Message (Savul Sandesaya), written in the early 1580s—he presents himself as “The very fine pandit named Alagivan Mukaveti, / who dove into the deep ocean of poetry and drama in Sanskrit and Pali, / Who, like a lion, destroyed the elephants of poets who are is foes, / Composed the Cock’s Message with a sweet poetic sentiment” (45). In this particular aspect, Alagiyavanna was rather distant from his younger (also Sinhalese) contemporary Dom Filipe Botelho, who penned the Jornada de Uva ordenada a maneira de dialogo in 1633. We were then at the high tide of political and military confrontation between the Portuguese and the kingdom of Kandy, following the former’s defeat in the battle of Randenivala and the killing of the captain-general Constantino de Sá de Noronha (1586-1630), an emblematic figure that Alagiyavanna himself would come to praise towards the end of his career as a poet. The Jornada consists of a Portuguese fictional dialogue between two South Asian cities—the besieged Colombo in Sri Lanka and the “liberator” Cochin in the Kerala coast (South India)—and Botelho performs in this text basically as any European Baroque writer, using its prologue as a space of false humility (Jorge Flores and Maria Augusta Lima Cruz, “A ‘Tale of Two Cities,’ a ‘Veteran Soldier,’ or the Struggle for Endangered Nobilities: The Two Jornadas de Uva (1633, 1635) Revisited,” in J. Flores, ed., Re-exploring the Links: History and Constructed Histories between Portugal and Sri Lanka (Wiesbaden, 2007), 95-124).

Despite different takes on the humility of a writer, Mukaveti and Botelho were both “hybrid” authors—Sinhalese and Portuguese, Buddhists and Catholics alike. The latter was simultaneously a loyal Portuguese vassal, a devoted Catholic priest and a proud Sinhala nobleman from Colombo-Kotte, while the former started as a poet in the court of Rajasinha I (r. 1581-1593), the last king of Sitavaka, and finished his days as “Dom Jerónimo,” a Catholic convert working for the Portuguese as a bureaucrat-poet. Their lives and works reflect the extraordinary challenges of Sri Lanka vis-à-vis the Portuguese imperial presence in the island between the late 1500s and the first half of the seventeenth century. This was a time of unmatched political turmoil, when processes of socio-religious disruption and reconfiguration were as frequent as puzzling.
Stephen Berkwitz—a prolific scholar in the field of religious studies, and Buddhism in Sri Lanka in particular—has written an excellent book on Alagiyavanna Mukaveti, his poetry, and their circumstances. After an introductory chapter on Buddhist literary culture in early modern Sri Lanka, *Buddhist Poetry and Colonialism* unfolds Alagiyavanna's complex figure and context by analyzing his entire poetic work, which consists of five major pieces authored between the early 1580s and the late 1610s. A full chapter is devoted to each work, thoroughly discussing intricate problems of attribution and chronology.

The *Cock’s Message* is the work of a court poet that reflects the importance of the capital city of Sitavaka and the power of its last ruler (King Rajasinha I, d. 1593). It mirrors a world where the frontiers between systems of belief such as Buddhism and Hinduism were quite tenuous and where Christianity was not yet part of the religious (and political) equation. Penned in the late 1580s, *The Poem of King Dhammassonda (Dahamsonda Kava)* already reflects religious decadence (“the decline of Dharma and of morality as whole,” 96) as well as strong political instability, corresponding to the announced demise of the Sitavaka court and kingdom. The long *Poem of the Birth-Story of King Kusa (Kusa Jataka Kavya)*, ca. 1610, is clearly a work by someone displaced, with no court to live and no ruler to serve as a poet. It reflects the dramatic political and social changes that occurred between ca. 1590-1610, with the two independent kingdoms of the “lowlands” (Sitavaka and Kotte) vanishing from the political arena and the rise of a fierce competition between Portuguese Ceylon (now decidedly invested on territorial conquest) and Kandy, the “kingdom of the mountains” (*Udarata*).

*Well-Spoken Words (Subhasitaya)* reads as a rather complex poem. Like the *Kusa Jataka Kavya*, it shows “an unmistakable shift away from primarily aesthetic interests to primarily ethical ones” (131). But unlike this text, the *Subhasitaya* distances itself from multi-religious practices and affirms “a substantive notion of Buddhism as a tradition of rites and beliefs associated with the Buddha as opposed to those linked with other deities” (155). It was probably written in 1611, when the poet had no patron, no institutional framework for himself and no literary and cultural *raison d’être* for his poetic production. He did not then seem to identify himself either with Portuguese Ceylon or with Kandy. And yet, unexpectedly, he decided the following year (1612) to convert to Catholicism. Alagiyavanna became Jerónimo, after Jerónimo Azevedo, the long-term Portuguese captain-general of Sri Lanka (1594-1612) and later viceroy of the *Estado da Índia* (1612-1617). He then worked as a secretary for the Portuguese, compiling property records (*tombos*). Simultaneously, he wrote what seems to have been his last poem—*The Kustantinu Hatana (War