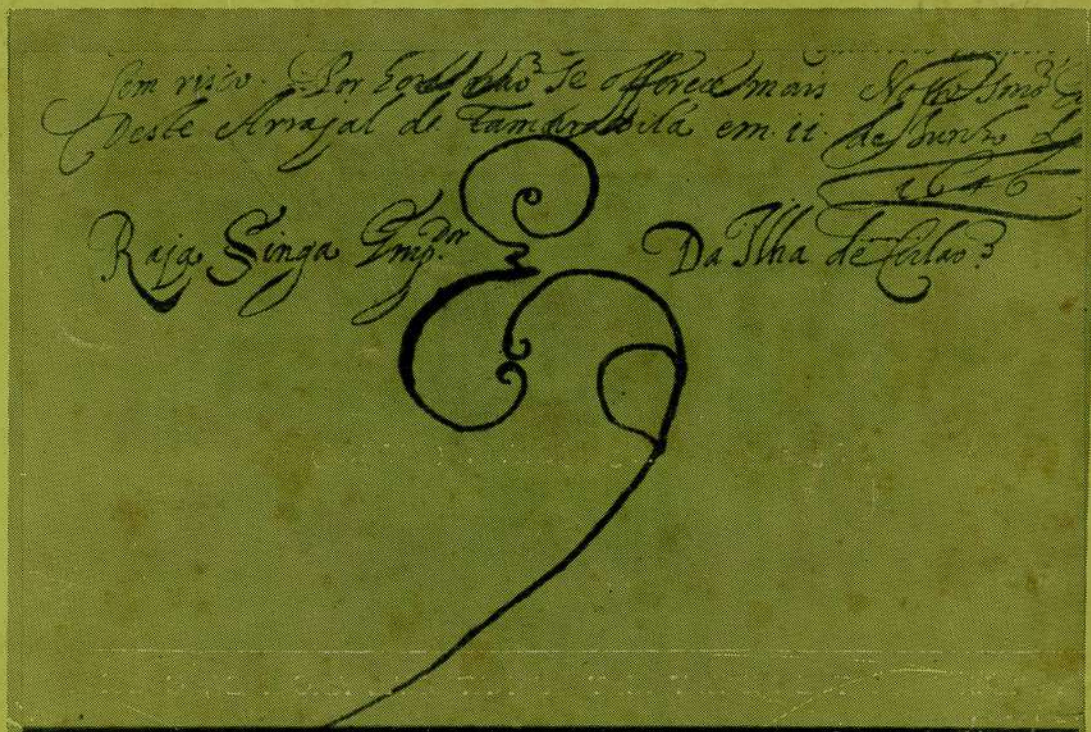


The Sri Lanka Archives

Vol. I. No. 1

1983



The Journal of
the Sri Lanka National Archives
Colombo.

Editor

G. P. S. H. de SILVA

"Sri Lanka Archives" is published once a year and would normally be issued during its last quarter.

Articles and related communications, as well as books and periodicals for review or notice is welcome and should be addressed to the Editor, Sri Lanka Archives, National Archives, 7, Reid Avenue, Colombo 7, Sri Lanka.

Inquiries regarding subscriptions should be made to the same address mentioned above.

Cover Page illustration

Sign manual of King Rajasinha II (1635-1687)

PUBLISHED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES, COLOMBO
SRI LANKA

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PRINTED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT PRINTING, SRI LANKA

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From the Editor

Portuguese Rule in the Kingdom of Kotte in Sri Lanka 1594-1638

TIKIRI ABEYASINGHE

The development of record and archives management in Sri Lanka

K. D. G. WIMALARATNE

Ethnoscience and Technology in pre-Colonial Sri Lanka

R. A. L. H. GUNAWARDANA

ඉපැරණි විසුද්ධි මගේ පිටපත

Rev. KAMBURUPITIYE WANARATANA Thero

The Archives of the "Waare christelijke gereformeerde kerk"
(true Christian Reformed Church) in Sri Lanka

K. D. PARANAVITANA

The Introduction of the Elective Principle to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1910-

S. S. K. WICKRAMANAYAKE

The Kandyan Convention of 1815—a document "lost" and found

G. P. S. H. de SILVA

Off the beaten track : Portuguese connection in Sinhala Literature.

M. H. GOONATILLEKA

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From the Editor

It is my privilege to bring out this first issue of the official Journal of the Sri Lanka National Archives. The journal will be issued as an annual publication, but, if it would become feasible in the future, it would be issued as a bi-annual.

The need for a journal of the department had been felt for many years. Up to now there was no regular publication of the Archives where information pertaining to records, its many aspects of management and conservation, as well as results of research could have been published. During the past this lack of a journal had also somewhat dissuaded the staff, to engage in productive analysis of record groups and in other research projects, as there was no outlet where the results of such specialized studies could have been published. It is expected that, now, with the commencement of this journal more information will become available on the Archival heritage of the country, as well as on the modern period of the island's history.

This first issue, would at a glance, appear to have a bias towards historical topics than those, purely of an archival nature. But on a closer examination of the contents, it would also be seen, that they provide information on source material pertaining to the periods and subjects dealt with by the writers.

A word on the Sri Lanka National Archives, would be pertinent here. The National Archives as an institution—but not under such nomenclature—has existed in Sri Lanka from around the mid 17th c. It would have apparently commenced its activities with the capture of Portuguese records either when they took Colombo in 1656 or perhaps earlier when they took Galle in 1640. During their period of rule in the coastal areas of Sri Lanka, the Dutch accumulated a well organized and rich archival heritage. Eventually they surrendered their archives to the British in 1796, as required by Clause 4 in their Treaty of Surrender. During the period of British rule—from 1796 to 1947—the Archives formed part of the Colonial/Chief Secretary's Office and at the grant of Independence, the Government Archives division of the Chief Secretary's Office was constituted as a separate department.

Thus came into existence the department of the Government Archivist as it was known in 1947. From that date upto 1973, the department functioned under various rules and regulations of the Government of Ceylon and in the latter year, its functions came under a legal frame-work, with the passing of the National Archives Law by the National State Assembly of Sri Lanka.

Over the years, the Archives has published many publications although not on a regular basis. Most of the early 20th c. publications were translations of Memoirs of Dutch Governors. Apart from that series, the department has also, since 1935, published Bulletins and Reports of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. In the more recent years, apart, from smaller publications it has published some Portuguese documents, and a four-volume publication containing the Ceylon National Congress documents of the period 1939-1950.

All the publications mentioned above, had been occasional publications, although the Memoirs, had been conceived as a series and published as such. Yet, the department has had no regular programme of publication upto now. Its annual publication had been the Administration Report published since 1948, and still continues to be so published.

During the recent past, the department has also been considering the publication of a series of the more important documents at the Archives. However, this project had not been able to get off the ground due to lack of personnel for editorial work and also due to financial constraints.

In the forthcoming issues of the journal, we expect to carry more material on archival holdings in the department, as well as information on important record collections available in private possession. It will also contain a section on technical news and notes as and when relevant information would be available, and if possible would also abstract important articles from other professional journals.

Since the archival community in the island, at present, is almost confined to the professionals at the National Archives, the contributions that would be available from Archivists, would necessarily be limited. Therefore, the contents of this journal has been designed to interest not only the archivists and administrators, but a larger academic community and the general reading public in the island.

Finally, while thanking the writers, who so willingly responded to my call for contributions, I would like to conclude these first remarks from the Editor, with the hope, that this journal will continue its regularity and will prosper over the years.

G. P. S. H. de Silva.