Echoes of History: A legend retold

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Their canon report – it is like thunder

The Portuguese arrived on the shores of Lanka during the reign of King Dharma Parakrama Bahu of the Kingdom of Jayewardanapura. News of their strange appearance and manners so frightened the King that he and his Council decided that to fight them would be useless; it would be better to give them audience. So they met and exchanged gifts of goodwill, thus allowing the Portuguese to gain a foothold in Colombo. They dominated Lanka for the next 150 years.

The arrival of the Portuguese

In fifteen zero five AD
They anchored in our harbour, These Portuguese from Goa State
Atti’red in suits of armour.
And those who saw them step ashore,
Oped wide their eyes and mouths in awe,
(For such creatures they had never seen,
They seemed like Gods, not human beings!)
They hastened to their Lord and King
With tidings, stating everything They’d seen upon Colombo’s shore,
With each one adding more and more!
Kneeling before the King they said,
“On our sea shore now there tread
Strangers, God-like, tall and fair With deep blue eyes and spun gold hair.
They rest not, but they walk about
Up and down, and in and out.” The men who brought the news went on
Of the strangers’ wondrous goings-on.
“Iron jackets they do wear And iron head gear hide their hair,

They eat hard stones, yes, great big chunks
Which they cut off from greater chunks,
From those who’ve seen we’ve heard it said,
They drink of bottles, blood, bright red!”
(To the Sinhalayas that ‘blood and stone’
Was wine and bread, it was not known!)
“And when they buy e’en limes and fishes
Tney toss us gold and silver pieces.

They’ve got great iron balls which fly
About and up, high in the sky, Their cannon report, it is like thunder
It could even burst the rock Yugandara!”
The King gave ear in wonder And with his Council met,
“They seem to be our enemies Come to take our land, but yet Discretion is the better
Part of valour, let’s endure Their presence, it’s a problem For which we· have no cure.”