



OXFORD UNIVERSITY

HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

Wednesday 30 October 2019

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Please read this page carefully, but do not open the question paper until told to do so.

A separate 8-page answer booklet is provided. Please check you have one.

Read the instructions on the answer booklet and complete the information requested in the spaces provided. Please write very clearly in black or dark blue pen.

Applicants for:

- **History**
- **Ancient and Modern History**
- **History and English**
- **History and Modern Languages**
- **History and Politics**
- **History and Economics**

You have **one hour** for this test. We recommend that you read the paper before beginning to write your answers. Spend about a third of your time on reading, thinking and planning, and the rest of the time writing.

If you find the text difficult and unfamiliar, don't worry: the exercise is intended to be challenging, but we hope you will also find it thought-provoking. There is no 'right' answer to the question: you will be judged on the intelligence of your argument, how clearly you make it and how effectively you support it. You should use your own words in answering the question.

This question paper consists of 4 printed pages and 4 blank pages



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NOTE: This test consists of one question based on a passage from a primary source. You do not need to know anything about the author of the passage or the context in which it was written to answer the question. Candidates will not be rewarded for making use of any outside knowledge.

This document is a list of requests sent by a king in Ceylon, Bhuvaneka Bahu, to the king of Portugal, João III. Ceylon is present-day Sri Lanka, a large island south of India. The document was drafted by a Portuguese man in the service of King Bhuvaneka Bahu, Duarte Teixeira, and it was carried to Lisbon by the king's ambassador, Sri Ramaraksa Pandita. When the document refers to 'the king' it means Bhuvaneka Bahu, while 'Your Highness' refers to King João.

Mayadunne Bandara was Bhuvaneka Bahu's brother. The chief Portuguese official in charge of a trading post, who conducted business on behalf of his king and also had substantial powers over local Portuguese, was known as a 'factor'.

The people of the island, who are sometimes referred to as 'pagans' in the document, were largely Buddhist or Hindu. The Portuguese tended to assume that local people who converted to Christianity should have access to Portuguese law and protection.

Question: What does this document tell us about how power relationships worked, both within Sri Lanka and between Sri Lanka and Portugal?

Letter of King Bhuvaneka Bahu for King João III, 1541

1. The lands and the sea-ports: these had always belonged to the king and were a source of revenue to him. Now neither do they belong to him nor do they bring any revenue, since Mayadunne Bandara has seized them. Thus his revenue has decreased, as his ambassador will explain at length to Your Highness. He requests through me that you listen to him. He requests that a decree be issued on the various matters submitted.

2. The king of Ceylon is obliged every year to pay to Your Highness 300 *bahars*¹ of cinnamon as tribute, and when he has it, he gives even 400 *bahars* of cinnamon, and even more, when your factor asks for it. Very often, almost every year, much cinnamon is left over either because your factors are not in need of it, or because they discard it as being of inferior quality. In these cases your factors demand that such cinnamon be burnt as this is of no profit and of no service to Your Highness. He begs Your Highness that when some cinnamon is left over and does not amount to more than 100 *bahars*, he may be allowed to sell it locally, and in this way he will receive some profit from such sale. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

3. The cinnamon gathered here is preserved in a storehouse of which one key is with your factor and another with a servant of the king. In spite of this, the factor keeps stealing cinnamon, choosing the best for himself, and leaving that of inferior quality for Your Highness. Hence some decree should be issued as seems best for your service. Of this the ambassador will give you a fuller account.

4. May Your Highness order that Portuguese merchants in Ceylon should pay what is due both on what they sell, and on what they buy in the country.

5. In this kingdom there are about thirty Christians whether married or single. They own many gardens and fields acquired fraudulently and by force. He requests Your Highness to order that henceforward no Portuguese Christians should acquire any gardens or fields from any person whatsoever without his permission. Further, that when they are allowed to buy lands, they should pay a suitable price and render any service just as did those who owned the land before. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

6. He requests Your Highness to give orders that no ship or small boat should leave the ports of Ceylon without the permission of the king, so that he may first have them searched lest they should leave taking kidnapped boys and girls, men and women; or taking many criminals or much cinnamon. He requests Your Highness to give orders that no ships should leave without his permission so that they may be searched. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

7. Many slaves, in order to free themselves from slavery, become Christians. He requests Your Highness that, if these slaves become Christians to gain their freedom, Your Highness should give orders that due compensation should be paid to the owners. Further, that if any

¹ *Bahar* = a measure of weight. 300 *bahars* amounts to roughly 50,000 kilograms.

free men were to become Christians, while holding fields and gardens for which they had been paying taxes, they ought to continue paying them as before, since they still keep these fields and gardens which are subject to such taxes. And that if pagans were to become Christians while owing some money to other pagans, they ought to pay what they owe, notwithstanding the fact that they have become Christians. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

8. In Ceylon there are nine ports, and in all of them are business transactions, and hence they are frequented by many ships and small boats. From them the king receives the customs with which he can meet his expenses, and they are for him the best source of revenue. The factors of Your Highness place in each of these ports one of their servants. If the merchants who bring betel nut and other goods do not wish to pay their dues, the servant of the factors says that he wants to buy something, or that the things belong to him, and in this way payment is avoided.

9. He requests Your Highness to give orders that your factor should not send to the lands of Mayadunne Bandara any Portuguese, still less any natives; that they should not receive anyone coming from the lands of Mayadunne Bandara to avoid rebellions, intrigues, wars and losses. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

10. He requests Your Highness that to avoid hatred and ill-will and to prevent thefts from your revenue, as well as from his revenue (which does equally belong to Your Highness); and to prevent insurrections in Jaffna and from Mayadunne Bandara on account of the damages and losses which your factor causes in those lands to him as well as to the native inhabitants; and to avoid the loss of his territories, Your Highness should be pleased to send to this country every three years fifty men to guard his revenue, for the peace and tranquillity of his territories, and to avoid what I have mentioned above, and other things which I here pass over not to tax your patience with things that are the object of the greed of men. Besides the pay that those men will receive from Your Highness, I will be happy to treat, entertain, and pay them well. For me it will be great gain if Your Highness sends them. Those who come will not regret having come, nor will they ever have a chance of speaking ill of me for not providing them with the proper accommodation. And those men will not be obliged to do what your factor commands them but only what I command them in what regards the service of Your Highness. They will thus be able to see for themselves what others are doing, whether good or bad. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

11. The king of Ceylon requests that, besides the twenty *bahars* of cinnamon which he is allowed every year, Your Highness may grant him another thirty *bahars*, so that in all he may be allowed fifty *bahars*. He requests that a decree be issued in this matter.

12. With the ambassador Pandita comes Duarte Teixeira. He requests that Your Highness may grant him the office of factor of these lands so long as he does loyal service to Your Highness and does no evil, and on condition that he place no man of his own in any port of Ceylon and that he should be busy only with the collection of the revenue of Your Highness.

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