

## BOOK REVIEWS

H. A. P. ABHAYAWARDHANA., *Kaḍampot Vimarśanaṅga* (A Critical Study of Kaḍampot), Department of Cultural Affairs, Colombo, 1978, pp. i—xxxv + 262.

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Students of Sri Lanka's ancient history are very fortunate in having a rich and unchequered historical literature headed by the Pāli chronicle, *Mahāvamsa*. These writings have facilitated research into various aspects of the island's ancient civilisation. Anyone reading the cūlavamsa account of the reigns of Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110) and Parākramabāhu I (1153-86), would be fascinated by the wealth of detail in the narrative which pulsates with life and vitality. An irony indeed it is that, with the decline of the Rajarāṭa civilisation which set in with the death of Parākramabāhu I, one notices a decline in the Pāli chronicle, too, which is one of its principal records. The last flickering lights are seen in its accounts of the reign of Parākramabāhu II (1230-70). From that point onwards the decline is even more marked, so much so that, if any, it retains only a marginal value as a historical record. While this trend continued, one sees the emergence of an extensive historical literature of a popular nature, written in Sinhala in place of Pāli, authored not necessarily by men of letters, and different from the Pāli chronicle in scope, technique and style. The *Rājāvaliya* with so many varying versions such as the *Vanni Rājāvaliya*, *Buddha Rājāvaliya*, and a host of lesser works such as the *Vitti Paḥ*, *Vanni Upaḥ*, *Baṇḍāva Upaḥ*, and *Malala Kattāva*, represent this class of writing. These works are far less learned than the older chronicles and bear no comparison with the latter, in their arrangement of material, presentation and language. They contain a varied assortment of material, legendary as well as historical or semi-historical, in addition to topographical accounts, anecdotes and episodes. To those of us more conversant with the older Pāli chronicles, these writings would be of doubtful validity. Such a view of these writings, however, would not be in the right direction, as it has been already demonstrated in a few studies that there is much to be gleaned from them, too. Though somewhat different in character and purpose, we may place in the same broad category two other groups of writing called *Kaḍampot* ('Boundary-Books') and *Lāḥav-Ḍiṭṭi* ('Secretarial Files'). The former deals mainly, though not exclusively, with boundaries of territorial divisions, while the latter is related to matters of administration, such as land holdings, service obligations and so forth.