

Review Article

ROBE AND PLOUGH  
MONASTICISM AND ECONOMIC INTEREST IN EARLY MEDIAEVAL  
SRI LANKA

R. A. L. H. Gunawardana

(Association for Asian Studies, Arizona, 1979)

Gunawardana's study of *Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Mediaeval Sri Lanka* is a welcome addition to a growing volume of historical writing on Buddhism in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. It is a revised and enlarged version of a doctoral dissertation accepted by the University of London. The original work seems to have been substantially revised and updated to form a neat and compact volume of 377 pages, which bears the imprint of a very mature mind. In view of the significance of Gunawardana's contribution to the advancement of our knowledge of an important sector of the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, his book deserves detailed comment.

Justifiably the author seems to avoid the broader title 'History of Buddhism in Sri Lanka' used by previous writers on the subject, though, both in its content and treatment, the book outstretches the restricted title. The period covered by the author ranges from 833 to 1215 A.D., *i. e.* from the accession of Sena I to the invasion of Māgha. The chronological limits set by the author may seem to some as rather unusual, because he cuts across the last centuries of 'the Anurādhapura period' and moves on to 'the Polonnaruwa period.' The 'hiatus' that separates these two 'periods' seems more apparent than real, as cultural continuity which runs through them is unmistakable, apart from other considerations which militate against such periodisation. Thus we see no reason to quarrel with the author for setting out his own chronological limits. The book ends with the invasion of Māgha in 1215, a clear and distinct landmark at the end of one phase of historical development. But much less discernible is the justification for the starting point placed at the accession of Sena I (833—853), though the author gives his own reasons for doing so.

During the period preceding the ninth century, certainly by the fifth century, it seems fairly clear that Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka had become property-owning institutions, enmeshed in the complex web of property relations involving purchase, sale, exchange, tenancy rights and obligations and many other issues related to land ownership. This is best illustrated by citing