

Quarterly Tours – No. 23



National Trust – Sri Lanka

25th August 2012

Compiled by Nilan Cooray

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Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 25th August 2012.

Programme

0700 hrs:

Leave PGIAR by bus to the Boat Embarkation point at the Wellawatte Canal near the Old Spinning Mill

0720 – 1100 hrs:

Boat tour along the Wellawatta Canal up to Diyawanna Oya

1130 – 1215 hrs:

Power Point presentation on the old fortifications and other heritage sites of the Kotte Kingdom at the Kotte Municipal Council.

1230 – 1330 hrs:

Lunch

1330 – 1730 hrs:

Visit to the old Kotte Fort and its suburbs

1745 -1830 hrs:

Visit Kotte Rajamaha Vihara

1900 hrs:

Arrive at PGIAR

The compiler acknowledges the information provided by Mr. Prasad Fonseka.

Wellawatta Canal

A canal connecting the Kotte marshes and the Bolgoda Lake Commenced by the Portuguese and completed by the Dutch, which is popularly known as the Kirillapone – Dehiwala – Nedimala Canal. In about 1872, a new canal was constructed from the Portuguese-Dutch canal to the sea at Wellawatte. This work was initiated by C.P. Layard, the then Government Agent of the Western Province. Wellawatta Canal was intended to be a flood outlet, but soon came to be called “Layard’s Folly” because the bed of the canal was much higher than the flooded area. However the Wellawatta canal was subsequently deepened and functioned as one of the best flood outlets of the low lying areas around Kotte. Later it was converted into a rain water outlet, draining from the area protected by the Colombo South Flood Protection Scheme.



The boat tour along the Wellawatta Canal westward up to the Wellawatta Railway Bridge and back right up to Diyawanna Oya will provide the opportunity to view the ever growing urbanscape of Wellawatta and Bambalapitiya as well as to observe the animal and plant life on the Kotte marshes and to see some of the remains of the fortifications associated with Kotte such as Diyawanna Oya, Ralapanawa and the drawbridge.



Kingdom of Kotte.

Kotte (meaning fortress) was originally founded as a fortress by the chieftain Nissanka Alakeshwara (circa 1370- 1385) of the Gampola Kingdom. It served as a strategic location to combat the invasions of the western coastal belt from Arya Chakravarti of the Jaffna kingdom. Parakramabahu VI (1412 – 1467), who first become the king of Raigama, made Kotte his capital in 1415 by building an inner city. Therefore at present it is divided into two parts known as the inner city (Ethul Kotte) and outer city (Pita Kotte).

In 1450, Parakramabahu VI had with his conquest of the Jaffna kingdom, unified all of Sri Lanka under one flag and Kotte became the seat of the royal power of the whole island for the last time, before the advent of European colonizers during early 16th century.

Parakramabahu upgraded the existing fortress into an urban and royal centre by strengthening its fortification and building royal palaces, shrine room for the sacred Tooth Relic, civic structures and monasteries. At the height of the kingdom oversaw one of the greatest eras of the Sinhala literature. Notable poets of the period were Buddhist monks such as Ven. Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera and Ven. Weedagama Maitree Thera. These literary works give a vivid description of the glory of the kingdom of Kotte. By 1477, however, 10 years after the demise of king Parakramabahu VI, regional kingdoms became more powerful. Most notably, the new kingdom founded at Kandy by Senasammata Vickramabahu, who successfully lead a rebellion against the dominance of Kotte kingdom in 1499.

The advent of Portuguese at the beginning of the 16th century and the division of Kotte kingdom into three kingdom by three sons of king Vijayabahu (popularly known as the “Vijayabahu Kollaya”) in 1521 had made the down fall of once mighty kingdom of Kotte. The divided kingdom of Sitavaka became more powerful with local popular support and Kotte kingdom had to rely on Portuguese for military and political assistance. In 1565, the capital of Kotte was destroyed and abandoned by the Portuguese who were the protectors of King Dharmapala, due to frequent attacks from Sitavaka and the king was taken to Colombo. Most of the areas of the Kotte kingdom were annexed to the kingdom of Sitavka and after the down fall of Sitavaka itself in 1594, these areas were occupied by the Portuguese. The Portuguese made king Dharmapala to gift the Kotte kingdom to king of Portugal by deed, which was revised twice. With the death of King Dharmapala without heirs in 1597, the Portuguese became the rulers of certain areas which were under Kotte. As such the Kingdom of Kotte officially ended in that year.

The fortress of Kotte had been built taking the ancient city Mithila as a model. According to the Ummagga Jataka Mithila was also protected by water and mud as Kotte. Both the inner city and outer city are surrounded by a lake known as Diyawanna and its swamp forming an island in the middle with land access from the outside of the city to the outer city positioned at the south of the city. The inner city was further fortified by a rampart and the link between the inner and outer cities was provided by a gateway positioned at the centre of the arm of the rampart. A deep inner moat has been built only on the eastern side and there is no inner moat on the western side.



Defense works

Moats

The fortifications of the city consist of the Diyawanna lake formed due to the dam on the north with its associated swamps and the moats defending the city from the land side.

Ramparts



Defending the inner city or the citadel a rampart had been built which is about 8 feet thick and said to have reached a height of about 8-9 feet. It was constructed out of laterite blocks, which is the principal construction material of the Kotte Period. However the constructions of Nissanka Alakeshwara had been out of granite. These laterite blocks have been later reused by the Portuguese through dismantling to build their military and other utilitarian structures elsewhere, while the local residents have also used them for their own construction proposes. At present, some houses and other structures are also constructed on top of the ruined ramparts. Despite such intrusive features, ruined ramparts could be traced to a certain extent. Visit to modern Parakumba Parivena, Sunethraramaya and other locations at Kotte will provide an understanding of the scale, design and construction of this rampart. Segments of the rampart are also being conserved by the Department of Archaeology.

Gates and Passes

According to chronicles the city had seven gates and passes to gain access to both the inner and outer city from land and water fronts. There are a few physical remains to identify some of the passes. The Old Dutch map and the geomorphology of the site help to located these remains. The Dutch map of Kotte show that the gate to the inner city was completely intact when the Portuguese left and the later maps show that it was in a reasonable state of preservation till the dawn of the 20th century. The western side of this gate is now within the premises owned by the Salvation Army.

“Alakesvara Palace”



Located within the inner city, this ruined building is popularly called the “Alakesvara Palace”. Constructed out of laterite blocks, only the basement of this structure has survived at present.

Angampitiya Pass and the Bastion

It is believed that the open space called “Angampitiya” located just outside the western rampart was the location for military parade and training during Gampola and Kotte Periods.

It is interesting to note that there is always a well, positioned near a pass located just outside the area defined by the ramparts. The ancient well at this location still exists and its water still over flows continuously. The remains of a large and elevated bastion could also be seen in this location. It is built using an existing laterite mound. On top of the bastion, the floor had been originally paved with cut laterite blocks. A small section of this paved floor still remains. The side walls of the bastion were faced with granite blocks and some sections still survive, which confirms what the Portuguese historian Couto has said, that the bastions were built out of granite.

Konthagantota Pass

Although no trace of the bastion associated with this pass could be seen due to present interventions at this location, the pass could be positively identified due to the location of the well outside the rampart.

The Royal Palace Complex

Located within the inner city, the literary sources indicate that the royal palace complex was a seven storied structure. Although the exact site of the palace complex could be identified with the aid of old Dutch Maps, at present no traces of any structural remains could be identified.

According to the Administrative Report for 1909, the then owner of the land had dismantled the materials used for the basement of the palace complex and disposed in cartloads. At

present several new constructions stand on the site where the former royal palace complex once stood. Interestingly, the approach road to the palace complex is still called by that name (Maligawa Road). However, the original road has been blocked at present at the middle of the road stretch by the construction of a large factory complex across this historic approach road.

Ambalama (Rest house)



There had been at least three *ambalamas* inside and outside of Kotte but at present only the one called ‘Gal Ambalama’ remains. Since it is made out of granite blocks it is perhaps dating from the Gampola Period. A few decades back it was relocated due to urban development.

Tunnels

There are two underground tunnel systems for Kotte. One linking the inner and outer cities and the other linking the outer city and the outside of the city. They are formed by excavating through natural laterite deposits on the subsurface.



The exist point of the tunnel linking the inner and outer cities had been exposed in 1964 and it is recorded in the Administrative Report for 1968 – 70. A tunnel junction linking the outer city and outside of the city is located within the premises of the modern school Ananda Sastralaya. Perhaps the small tunnel started from this point ran under the Rajamaha Vihara and ended as a ditch.

Beddagana mounds



Two mounds built on a single platform located to the east of the city (beyond the Diyawanna) are believed to be the tombs of Parakramabahu VI and his queen Swarnamenike. Perhaps one could be the tomb of Sunetradevi, the mother Parakramabahu VI. One tomb had been built with laterite blocks and the other, the foundation is out of laterite and the rest is out of bricks. The platform on which they stand also made out of laterite. These two stupas resemble the 12th century twin stupas built at Alahana Parivena at Polnaruva. There is a shrine room and some other buildings in the vicinity.

This area has been excavated by the Department of Archaeology in 1949 and some architectural elements such as stone lintels and a makara arch found during excavation are now deposited at the National Museum in Colombo.

Rajamaha Vihara, Kotte

This could be a shrine built by Alakeshwara when constructing the fortress. Several remains suggest that both Buddhist and Hindu shrines existed. This had been further developed during the Kotte Period as seen by the laterite constructions. According to literally sources of the Kandyan period, there existed the Shanmuka Devale and Otpilimage (shrine room for reclining Buddha image existed).



The present shrine room of the Vihara contains wall and ceiling paintings of the 19th century maritime mural tradition covering the last phase of Sri Lanka's long tradition of painting. The date 2414 of the Buddhist Era inscribed on one of the stone door lintels show that the last of the major interventions had taken place in 1870. Perhaps the Dalada procession during the Kotte Period which started from the Dalada Maligawa has ended at this vihāra.

