

Saturday Magazine

Migomu Rala's role in ceding Trincomalee from the Sinhala King to the Danes in 1618 (Part II)



Ceylon of the Early Travellers was written by H. A. J. Hulugalle in 1965. It has already gone into six impressions and in March this year a translation in Sinhala is being released by Arjuna Hulugalle Dictionaries. The book has fascinating stories of 18 travellers, who had visited Sri Lanka from Roman times to the British period. We give here extracts about a Marcellis Boschower, who was better known as Migomu Rala, a Dutch Ambassador to the Kandyan court of King Senarat.

In the last chapter we saw the Danish Admiral, Ove Giedde, off the East coast of Ceylon, in May 1620. His expedition was the outcome of a treaty concluded in Copenhagen between Marcellis Boschower, acting for King Senarat of Ceylon, and Christian IV, the ruler of Denmark. Boschower himself had died during the voyage of the Danish fleet and his remains were buried in Ceylon.

When the Swedish war ended in 1603, Denmark found herself prosperous under her progressive monarch. There were many Danes in the service of the Dutch East Indies Company. At the same time there were Dutch merchants who had been in the East settled in Copenhagen. Among them was Roeland Crape who was in the confidence of Christian IV.

A Danish East India Company was formed in 1616 to which Christian had subscribed a considerable sum of money. His example was followed by "many nobles, almost all professors in Copenhagen and various town councillors from the smaller States". Relations between Holland and Denmark were cordial enough for the Danish king to seek an assurance from the States General of Holland that no obstructions would be offered to Danish vessels by the Dutch in the East Indies. A Danish expedition to the East had in fact been decided on nearly two years before Boschower's arrival, and would have materialised without any treaty with the Sinhalese. Professor Ole Worm wrote on August 18th 1616: "Our merchants are contemplating a voyage to the East Indies, to which our most gracious King will not refuse help. They will be guided by a certain Dutchman who had been sent here at the instance of several citizens of Amsterdam".

The scheme aimed at establishing trade with the principality of Tanjore and Roeland Crape, who was probably its originator, was sent off with a single vessel, The Sound. When three months later, Boschower had concluded his treaty with the Danes, Ceylon became the principal objective and Crape received instructions to inform the Sinhalese King of the impending arrival of Ove Giedde.

Appointed Admiral of an expedition of five ships and Ambassador to the King of Ceylon, Giedde set out from Denmark on December 29th 1618. Christian IV had, at his own expensive, equipped two of the ships, the Elephant and the David. The Company owned the Christian and the Copenhagen. In addition there was a Dutch ship which turned back half way. The ships took

cash in a sum of 31,500 rix-dollars, a considerable quantity of tin and lead and carcasses of 283 oxen.

Roeland Crape had arrived in Ceylon five months before Ove Giedde's ships and brought the Sinhalese King the news of the fleet that was following him. But he ran into trouble soon after. The Portuguese attacked his ship off Tanjore and when it ran ashore only some of the crew were saved. The Naiche of Tanjore took Crape under his protection and maintained him until Giedde's arrival.

We had a diary of events of the Admiral and a log of his flagship. Professor Johann Heinrich Schlegel, Professor and Danish Historiographer, published these documents in 1771 with an introduction in German. He says: "The MS is very valuable and it is doubtful whether the whole collection of accounts of sea and land voyages in England possesses a similar example i.e., the first voyage of any nation to the East Indies written by the Admiral's own hand. It is clear that he presented the account just as it was to the Chancellor Friis Von Kragerup, so that he, and through him the King might see the whole account of his voyage". On the last page he says 'On May 1st 1623 I delivered the above written diary'. The ships which had left Denmark in December 1618 did not arrive in Ceylon until May 1620.

The log of the fleet in Ceylon begins: "On the morning of the 16th May, we saw with great joy the promised land". The Admiral's ship first stopped at Panawa. Two boats were sent with their crews to the shore to ascertain the state of the country as well as to buy provisions. The people they saw were dressed in Portuguese fashion and thinking that they were in hostile territory, they returned to their ship which then sailed to Pallegama.

On May 24th they had reports that the ships, the David and the Copenhagen, had arrived earlier and were lying three miles from the Elephant, the ship on which Ove Giedde had come. The Boschowers had travelled in the David. The difficulties on trip were not only due to the fact that it was the first voyage undertaken to the East by the Danes but also to the bickering between Giedde and Boschower in the early stages of the expedition. The Admiral was advised by a Council which did not always agree with him. There were many foreign merchants and sailors, particularly Dutchmen, on board, who were frequently troublesome.

The mate of the Copenhagen arrived and reported that Boschower and his son had died eight months previously in Stephen V. Hagen's Bay. Ove Giedde also learned of Roeland Crape's misadventures; and it was soon clear to him that the so called Emperor of Ceylon was not the mighty ruler that he had been represented to be in Denmark. The Admiral, who had to be prepared for the hostility of the Portuguese who held part of the coast of Ceylon, took his ships to Trincomalee to await a reply to a letter he sent to King Senarat. Three weeks later the King's Secretary and an aged Mudaliyar arrived with a letter from the King. When shown a Portuguese translation of the treaty which Boschower had negotiated in Denmark, they expressed surprise at its contents, and were sure that Boschower had no authority to bind the King to the conditions in the way he had done.

Kandy being in a disturbed state at the time, the King did not wish to receive Ove Giedde at his capital but decided to meet him at 'Venthanen' (Mahiyangana?). The Admiral made the journey

to the meeting place by way of Mothram, Pallegama, Samanthurai, Patipal, Nilgala, Hocheville and Bibile. He arrived at 'Venthanen' on August 16th but, as "the Emperor wished to have his head washed," he could not see him till the next day.

On the morning of the 17th Giedde was escorted to Senarat by a large crowd of people with music. After presenting his credentials, Giedde put forward his proposal, having previously given it to his interpreter to translate into Portuguese. The King then said that he could not understand what Boschower had done and what agreements he had made.

Boschower had in Denmark paraded the titles "Prince of Negombo, of Kukul Korale etc., Chief of the Order of the Golden Sun, President of the High Council and the War Council, second in the Secret Council, Admiral, and Captain General of the Sea in the Empire of Ceylon". The King had every reason to laugh at this tomfoolery, but he was taken aback by the claims made by the Danes on the basis of the so called treaty. He was in no position to pay the 100,000 rix-dollars demanded of him for ammunition and the soldiers. But he offered to make an agreement with Denmark, such as he had done previously with Holland. He also agreed to send ambassadors to Denmark. A new treaty was accordingly drawn up on August 25th in Portuguese. The copy in the Danish archives shows that Senarat signed in Sinhalese.

The most important article of the new treaty was the formal cession of Trincomalee to the Danish throne. The only reservation made was that, should the Sinhalese king capture from his enemies other lands and fortresses which would be as advantageous to the Danes as Trincomalee, an exchange may be effected. Meanwhile the King of Denmark promised to allow Senarat's subjects to "visit the pagodas until God Almighty shall enlighten them". From the Danish point of view the treaty was advantageous but it does not appear that the Danes had either the men or the resources to build an Eastern trading empire as the Dutch. French and British were able to do, notwithstanding the view of their historian, Schlegel, that "if it had not been for other circumstances prejudicial to their interests which nullified the agreement almost at once, the Danes would have obtained a monopoly of the trade in one of the finest countries of Asia and the Portuguese would not have had the power, nor the Dutch even the desire to hinder them. These circumstances were, partly, the weakness of the fleet which was intended to prepare the way for their future fortunes and, partly, the military preparations which Denmark was obliged to make immediately after Ove Giedde's return in view of the unrest in Germany, and the war which broke out in 1625."

Giedde took his leave of the King on August 23rd and left Ceylon in the following month for the Coromandel coast. From there he sent Erich Grubbe, a Danish nobleman, with gifts for the Sinhalese king and a reminder that the terms of the treaty should be carried out without delay.

Giedde himself returned to Ceylon for a brief stay in March 1621 when he found that, although nothing had been done to build a fortress, Grubbe had assumed the prefix "Don", in imitation of the Portuguese, and had struck a new coin (a larin) with the inscription Don Erich Grubbe. He had been in charge of Danish affairs in Ceylon for only a few months. The Danish soldiers Grubbe had left behind had become unruly and plundered their own ship the *Patience*. The ship *Christian* had been sunk in the Bay of Trincomalee. Martin Finche, the man whom Giedde sent

with letters to the King never delivered them. Thereupon Grubbe was sent, but he did not return until after the Admiral sailed for Denmark.

Two letters from the King, brought by a Mudaliyar, disclosed that he was asserting that he was relying on Danish support even though thereby he was exposing himself to the annoyance of the Portuguese. He begged Giedde to be his ambassador at the Danish court as he could not send an ambassador from Ceylon. On the 13th May, Giedde sent a letter to the King stating that "no ruler in the world would do for another ruler what my lord at great personal disadvantage had done for him. And for this the Emperor had shown my Lord not the smallest courtesy. But if he wished to obtain any aid from my lord again, he must at once send a great and worthy reward, both to signify the gratitude he owed him and to induce him to send further aid and succour". After giving small gifts to the chief at Pallegama he "sailed away in the name of the Lord", on 1st June 1621. The return journey was quicker than the outward voyage for he landed at Karmsund in Norway on February 1622.

Two Danish ships, the Pearl and the Jupiter, arrived in Ceylon on March 8th 1624. Mads Ramussen, a Danish priest, who was in one of them, has left behind an account of the voyage. He says that one can smell the romantic scents of Ceylon at a distance of sixteen miles over the sea. But the ships did not remain long in Ceylon. In fact the Portuguese were now in possession of Trincomalee and as early as 1622 they had built a fortress there and armed it with cannon from the Christian wrecked in 1621. In 1627 they annexed Batticaloa and built a fortress. But the Dutch were again attracted to Ceylon, and in 1637 they made a treaty with Rajasinha II, the son of Senarat, and in the next year won a great victory over the Portuguese.

Concluded

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