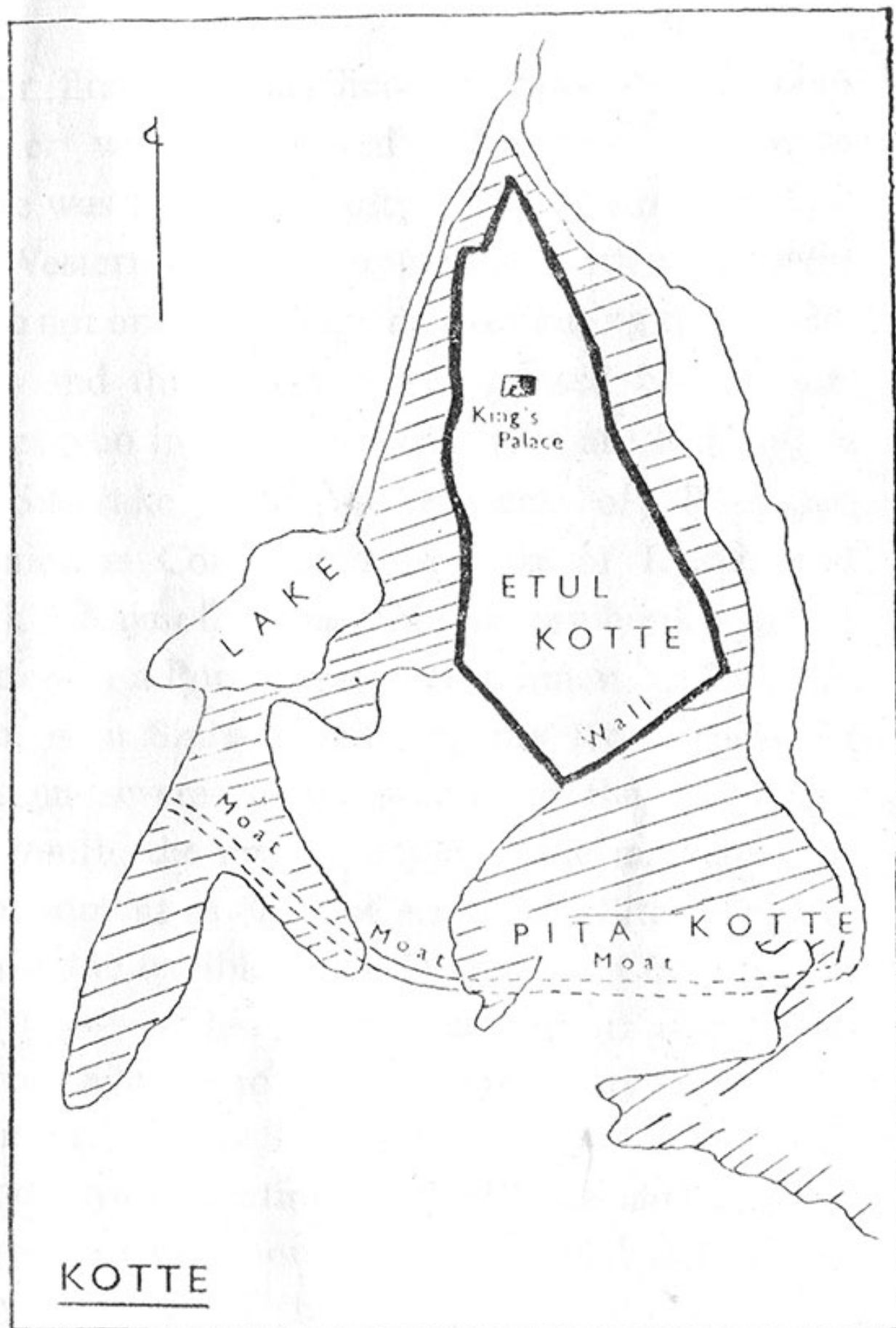


A NATIONAL HERO FROM KOTTE



Dominicus Corea Edirilla Rala

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Our first national hero to oppose a foreign invader was undoubtedly Ravana but, when Kotte was the capital city of Lanka, invasion by the Western powers commenced with the Portuguese not only invading and even ruling the coastal areas and this was fiercely opposed by national heroes who in chronological order are Rajasinghe of Sitawake, Vidiya Bandara of Raigama, Dominicus Corea Edirilla Rala of Kotte, and Sankili Raja of Jaffna. No history book whether written by a Portuguese, a Dutchman, an Englishman, or a Sinhala regarding the Kotte period is without several pages describing the parentage, the youth, the martial exploits, the marriage, the appointment as King of Kotte and Sitawake, and finally the terrible death Dominicus Corea had at the hands of his Portuguese captors due to his fierce fighting to drive them away from this country. When Sri Rahula wrote the Selalihini Sandesaya entreating the God Vibishana to grant Ulukada Devi a son the prayer was heard and the boy thus gifted became Jaya Bahu II. His daughter Aberanawathie married Ranamuka

Bandara, a descendant of Buvenakha Bahu Epa the son of Buvenaka Bahu IV of Gampola. This Buvenakha Bahu Epa accompanied Alakeswara in his campaign and ultimately settled in Kotte. Ranamukha Bandara and Abaranawathie had two sons named Ranamukha Arachy and Edirilla Arachy who were officers in the Sinhala Army. Edirilla Arachy latterly became a convert to Christianity and was baptised as Emmanuel Corea. His son was Jeronimo Corea, the Interpreter to King Don Juan Dharmapala. Dominicus Corea was the eldest son of Jeronimo and his wife Anna. Born in AD 1565 Dominicus grew up in the precincts of the Palace, by virtue of his father's position, and underwent a training in martial exercises and athletic sports in which he excelled particularly as a swordsman. Handsome and with winning ways he soon won favour both with the King and the Portuguese who were then in power in Kotte. Desiring to employ himself in the Army of Rajasinghe of Sitawake he made his way to that city and obtained employment in the Palace there. He unfortunately started a love affair with Padma Wannisaperuma, who was the favourite of Rajasinghe and about to be made a Junior Queen, and this was discovered

by the king who ordered Dominicus Corea to be killed. Dominicus Corea ran away but was caught by Rajasinghe's men at Kosgama where they cut his throat and left him in the belief that he was dead. Fortunately for him a Mukkuwa woman found him and took him to her house where her skill in herbal medicine cured him of his wounds. This left his head slightly crooked resulting in his getting the nickname of *Mal Degolado or the Ill-Beheaded*. Coming back to Kotte he employed himself under King Don Juan Dharmapala and the Portuguese from whom he received quick recognition due to his bravery and stratagem on the battle field. He was a favourite of the Governor Azvedo who sent him to subdue the area between Colombo and Chilaw and this he did with such thoroughness and ruthlessness that earned him a place amongst the seniors in the Army and paved his way to becoming the General or Vikramasingha. This was not to the liking of Samarakoon Fernando Mudaliyar his rival and became worse when Dominicus Corea was sent by Azvedo to and successfully subdued the Denawake area, in Sabaragamuwa, which Samarakoon had failed to do resulting in his being sent to Matara. Dominicus Corea

installed King Don Juan Dharmapala in Sitawake and fought several battles till he captured Akaragane Appuhamy who was a member of the Sitawake Royal family and Pretender to that throne. He handed Akaragane Appuhamy to Wimala Dharma Suriya I of Kandy who had the unfortunate man executed by elephants whilst all his great treasure came into the possession of Dominicus Corea. He is also said to have taken the Tooth Relic from the Delgomuwa Temple, where it was hidden in a grinding stone for safety, lest the Portuguese capture it, and taken it to Kandy where King Wimala Dharma Suriya I received it. King Wimala Dharma Suriya I was Konappu Bandara who grew up with Dominicus Corea at Kotte but had a grievance against the Portuguese who had sent him to Goa on punishment. He came back to Lanka and turning against the Portuguese became the King of Kandy when he defeated the Portuguese forces and married Dona Catherine Karaliyadde the Queen of Kandy. Whether Dominicus Corea had a similar grouse on being upbraided by Azvedo for losing many out of the twenty-five Portuguese soldiers sent with him to capture seven Portuguese deserters of whom he only captured two alive,

we do not know. But astonishment, consternation, dismay, horror—the vocabulary is not enough to describe the feelings of King Don Juan Dharmapala and the Portuguese when they came to know that on the 17th of November, 1595 Dominicus Corea had assembled his army of 7,000 men at Atulugama, near Bandaragama, and in the presence of a vast concourse of people who had been assembled by beat of drum, had taken the title of Edirilla Bandara and King of Kotte against the Portuguese. Was this a plan between Wimala Dharma Suriya I and Dominicus Corea to drive out the Portuguese and rule the Hill Country and the Low-Country respectively? He then carried on a vicious campaign against the Portuguese and their puppet King Don Juan Dharmapala even to the extent of destroying their churches. He almost captured King Don Juan Dharmapala at Puwakpitiya but his elephant fled when badly injured on the trunk by a Portuguese officer named Salvador Pereyra de Silva who went to the rescue of the King on seeing the Royal bodyguard flee. At the battle of Uluwela Dominicus Corea received a gun-shot injury which felled him resulting in his men retreating as they thought he was dead. On losing this

battle Dominicus Corea proceeded to Kandy where his friend Wimala Dharma Suriya I received him with the greatest cordiality. The king sent out messengers summoning all to be present at the coronation and wedding of Dominicus Corea as he proclaimed him King of Kotte and Sitawake and also gave him as bride Subadhra Devi, daughter of Vidiya Bandara the King of Sat Korale. The wedding celebrations were on a magnificent scale with honours distributed and this is the only wedding in the Kandy Maligawa described in our history books. It is probable that Dominicus Corea took possession of the Sat Korale as his dowry because he took his wife's family name of Edirimasuriya and Father Queyroz states "They reached the city of Urune Rengale (Kurunegala) which within the short time of his kingship Domingos Corea had built like a robber among rugged and inaccessible mountains". Not long after his marriage Dominicus Corea returned to Raigama and renewed his campaign against the Portuguese. At Uduwara he was defeated when his men retired due to a signal that was misunderstood and the enemy taking advantage of this. It was not possible to rally his men and Dominicus Corea fled with them to find himself ultimately isolated. He hid in the jungle for

three days obtaining sustenance from huts he came across. At last, fatigued beyond endurance and famishing with hunger he came to the hut of an old woman at dawn and asked her for food telling her who he was. She fed him with jak which made him fall asleep and when he was almost unconscious with fatigue she sent a message to Samarakoon Fernando Mudaliyar who was with the Portuguese army and offering rewards for the capture of Dominicus Corea. He did not believe the information at first but later rushed to the hut where he was able to seize Dominicus Corea who was still asleep. The captured man was treated for his wounds for three days and then taken by Samarakoon Fernando Mudaliyar to Kalutara where Azvedo was in the fort built on the site previously occupied by a temple and now the Kalutara Chaitiya. Dominicus Corea was taken in chains to Colombo where he was questioned for forty days mainly with the idea of ascertaining where his treasure was hidden. He is said to have always answered with courage, calmness and dignity when questioned and never expressed a word of regret for taking up arms against the portuguese. On the contrary he gloried in his fighting them. At his execution on the 14th of

July, 1596 in Colombo he addressed the gathering regretting his changing his religion after which he turned to his executioners who forthwith cut off both his hands first, then his head, after which they quartered his body and placed the dismembered portions in four public places in the City. These quarters were however later buried in consecrated soil at the request of pious persons who were scandalised by their exposure in public places. His severed head was taken by the Portuguese to Atulugama, where he was first crowned King of Kotte, and suspended from a pole in the bazaar so that the village urchins could make sport of it. A villager who had served as a Lascorin under Dominicus Corea, soon rescued it and buried it. His brother Simao Corea succeeded him with the title of King of Sitawake, Dissawe of Kotte, and Dissawe of the Sat Korale. Dominicus Corea had a posthumous son named Lewis Corea who was the Dissawe of Uva. Sir Paul Peries tells us that "With the disappearance of Edirilla Rala came a short lull in the military operations of which the Portuguese officials availed themselves to give free rein to that rapacity which has so frequently disgraced their careers in the East".



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