

## PORTUGUESE INFLUENCES

### The Coming of the Portuguese

In 1505, Dom Laurence de Almeida, son of the first Portuguese Viceroy of India, and his fleet, in pursuit of spice traders reputed to be operating in the Maldives, was driven of course during a storm, making a landing at Galle on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. Replenishing the fleet's water and fuel, he then made his way up the coast to Kolan Tota, Colombo, the seaport of the kingdom of Kotte. Within days he sent an envoy to King Dharma Parakrama Bahu with a proposal for trade. The Sri Lankan historian Paul Pieris describes the terms offered:

*'[The Portuguese] custom [in the East] was to enter into a treaty with the Indian princes by which they acquired a monopoly of the trade in the articles which they required, while the princes agreed not to deal with the nations where were hostile to the Portuguese. The latter promised to purchase all the articles covered by their monopoly at prices which were agreed on, to bring into the country the European goods which were required, to guard the coasts from all attacks by sea, and to defend the Kings from all enemies. For the purpose of carrying on the agreement the Portuguese were usually allowed to have their own settlements, within which they exercised practically sovereign rights.'*<sup>i</sup>



Parakramabahu accepted the terms, agreeing to give the Portuguese 400 hundred bares of cinnamon a year (one baar is the equivalent of 176.25 kilos). The Portuguese established a small factory in Colombo under the charge of Jane Meades Cardoso.

At the same time, the Portuguese had been making inroads into the Tamilian north of the island. The Jaffna peninsula was strategically important to them in controlling sea trade on the Malabar coast of Southern India. The first stages of intervention here came via Catholic missionary activity among the fisherfolk of Mannar and Jaffna, and was widespread by 1544.

So began the Portuguese years in Sri Lanka which were to end a bare century and a half later with the decisive victory of the Dutch beginning with the surrendering of the fort at Colombo in 1656 and ending with the capture of Jaffna in 1658.

### Cuisine Influences

Look in a Sri Lankan recipe book and the most obvious Portuguese influence in Sri Lankan cuisine is, perhaps surprisingly, in sweet pastries - *bolo de coco* (coconut cake - *bolo* is Portuguese for cake), *bolo folhado/bol fiado* ( a layered cake of sweet pastry rounds alternating with a cashewnut, sugar and rosewater thickish syrup – *folha* meaning a leaf or sheet in Portuguese), *boroa* (semolina biscuits), *foguete* (a tube of deep fried pastry filled with a mixture of pumpkin, sugar, semolina, cardamom and rosewater – *foguete* is Portuguese for rocket so alludes to the shape) and *pente frito* (pieces of sweetened pastry deep fried – the Portuguese translates as something like fried comb but for no reasons I can see).<sup>ii</sup>

*Love cake*, the moist delicacy of semolina, almonds and, yes, rose water is ascribed by De Silva to the Portuguese also, casting it as *bolo d'armor*, and this is the same as the festive semolina cake Tan says is popular in Malaysia and which is 'said to be a legacy of the Portuguese'.<sup>iii</sup> De Silva also gives to the Portuguese the addition of *marzipan* and *macaroons*. The former may well have travelled with the Portuguese to Sri Lanka but may also have come via Iranian traders depending on which tradition for the origin of marzipan you opt for. The origin of macaroons is also obscure and they could as easily been a late entrant to the Sri Lankan sweet table via the British.

That sweets should be characteristic of the Portuguese influence is interesting given two characteristics of the Portuguese who travelled to and lived in Sri Lanka during these years. 'One characteristic which was not unique to the Portuguese, but distinguished the Portuguese by its prevalence from other European nations overseas, was the predominantly male nature of the overflow of Portuguese from the mother country. A second characteristic was the high incidence of Portuguese who took up residence overseas and spent their lives in the tropics and sub-tropics. These were the *casados* and they settled in India, Macao, Africa, or Brazil and, for the most part, took local females as wives.'<sup>iv</sup> Were there pastry cooks among the men who established bakeries or taught their local wives to make these sweet treats, or were there expatriot women who passed on the skills to local servant/cooks?

But the influence of the Portuguese runs much deeper than sweets. Sri Lankan cuisine is almost unthinkable without the range of fruit and vegetables that followed the Portuguese and the Spanish out of the America's, via what is now termed the Columbian Exchange, and into Africa and Asia. The list includes sweet potatoes, papaya, tobacco, maize, cochineal, tomatoes, cocoa beans, agave, numerous species of beans, vanilla, squashes, capsicums, chillies, cotton, pumpkin, manioc, peanuts, pineapples and cashews.<sup>v</sup> While it's difficult to give exact dates or routes for the carriage of these into India and Asia chillies were to be found in mid 16<sup>th</sup> century CE Goa and the sweet potato was found in Yunnan in the 1560's.<sup>vi</sup>

The transplantation of fruit, vegetables and spices was not all one way. 'In the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century, there had been mooted the idea of making Portugal independent of Asian sources of spices, by cultivating in Brazil plants of oriental provenance. ....With the gradual loss of Portuguese hegemony in the Indian Ocean and Muslim merchants holding the key to trade in Indonesia and the Spice Islands, the Portuguese monarchs appear to have had a change of heart. The loss of Colombo to the Dutch in 1596 not only deprived the Portuguese of access to spices, especially cinnamon from Ceylon, but placed these resources in Dutch hands. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE not only the Dutch but also the English had direct access to supplies in Asia and transported spices to Europe. Portugal witnessed a decline in her revenues from the spice trade, especially pepper. This spurred the Crown to action...in 1678 the crown ordered the viceroy in Goa to dispatch plants such as pepper, clove, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger, from India to regions more securely under Portuguese control.'<sup>vii</sup>

Jesuits played a major role in the dissemination of plants from Portugal to Brazil and from India to Brazil. 'In 1682, cultivation of cinnamon was started in the Quinta do Tanque, the country estate officially known as the Case suburban de São Cristóvão belonging to the Jesuit College in Bahia, with a cutting and five trees. Success was apparently attributable to elimination by the Jesuits of the scourge of all planters in Brazil, namely ants.'<sup>viii</sup> In 1602, the Dutch emissary Joris Spilbergen was met on his way to Kandy by messengers from Vimala Dharma, king of Kandy at

the time, who offered him wine made from grapes grown and processed in Sri Lanka under the guidance of Jesuits.<sup>ix</sup>

But the deeper penetration of the Portuguese into Sri Lankan foodways didn't end with ingredients either. A surprising number of Sinhala words about cooking and eating are derived from Portuguese:<sup>x</sup>

<i>bandesia</i> (bandeja 'tray')	<i>barreniya</i> (barrenhao 'earthen vessel/pan')
<i>basame</i> (bacia 'basin')	<i>botela</i> (botelha 'bottle')
<i>buliya</i> (bule 'earthen jar')	<i>buiyama</i> (boiao 'earthen vessel')
<i>garapuva</i> (garfo 'fork')	<i>guruletuva</i> (gorgoleta 'water jug')
<i>jaruva</i> (jarro 'earthen pitcher')	<i>karappu</i> (garrafa 'bottle')
<i>kuppiya</i> (copa 'small bottle')	<i>kuspidera</i> (cuspideira 'spittoon')
<i>kussiya</i> (cozinha 'kitchen')	<i>kope</i> (copo 'cup')
<i>padasaya</i> (pedaço 'slice/portion')	<i>penereya</i> (peneira 'sieve')
<i>piriseya</i> (pires 'saucer')	<i>praskuva</i> (frasco 'flask')
<i>praskinna</i> (frasquinho 'small flask')	<i>pukaro</i> (pucaro 'drinking cup')
<i>punilaya</i> (funil 'funnel')	<i>pusalana</i> (porcellana 'porcelain')
<i>rapinadu</i> (rafinado 'refined')	<i>rattala</i> (arratel 'pound')
<i>gulan</i> (rulao 'semolina')	<i>saleruva</i> (saleiro 'salt cellar')

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<sup>i</sup> Pieris 1983 (1913)

<sup>ii</sup> Deutrom 1985

<sup>iii</sup> De Silva 2001 and Tan 2011

<sup>iv</sup> Russell-Wood 1998

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<sup>vi</sup> Russell-Wood 1998

<sup>vii</sup> Russell-Wood 1998

<sup>viii</sup> Russell-Wood 1998

<sup>ix</sup> Hulgalle 1965

<sup>x</sup> de Silva 2001