





# Sinhalese–Portuguese War

The **Sinhalese–Portuguese War** was a series of conflicts waged from 1527 to 1658 between the indigenous Sinhalese kingdoms of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and their allies against the Portuguese Empire.<sup>[1]</sup> The Portuguese were seeking to expand from their trading post at Colombo to incorporate Ceylon into their growing empire






The Portuguese expanded their influence on the island by exploiting the political rivalries of the native kingdoms, placing client rulers on the thrones of several kingdoms and directly ruling other areas as Portuguese Ceylon. These machinations allowed them to control the Kingdom of Kotte, but the main beneficiary was the Kingdom of Sitawaka which from 1521–87 was able to expand – through conquest of other native kingdoms – to cover most of Ceylon. King Rajasinha I of Sitawaka then attempted to expel the Portuguese from the island, but was repulsed with heavy losses at the Siege of Colombo in 1587-8. Most of the newly conquered territories then rebelled against Sitawaka. The divided and disorganised rival kingdoms became easy targets for Portuguese expansion. In a series of military conflicts and political manoeuvres the Portuguese extended their control over the kingdoms of Kotte (1551), Jaffna (1591), Raigama (1593) and Sitawaka (1593).

In 1592 the Portuguese placed a client ruler on the throne of the Kingdom of Kandy, but he died soon after in suspicious circumstances and they were forced to withdraw. Seeking to subdue the last major kingdom on Ceylon, the Portuguese launched a full military invasion of Kandy in the Campaign of Danture of 1594. The invasion was a disaster for the Portuguese, with their entire army wiped out by Kandyan guerilla warfare. The war became a stalemate, with further Portuguese attempts to conquer Kandy repeatedly repulsed, whilst the Kandyans were unable to oust the Portuguese from the rest of the island. A series of rebellions in both Portuguese Ceylon and Kandy led both sides to agree a truce in 1621. The treaty led to Kandy formally becoming a vassal state of Portugal, but in reality maintaining its independence. This allowed both sides to crush the rebellions in their respective territories, and ended direct conflict between them for the next seventeen years. The Portuguese were also able to conquer the Vanni chieftains in 1621.

The uneasy peace was eventually broken by the intervention of the Dutch East India Company in 1638, who sought to exploit the situation to take over Portuguese colonial possessions. The

Sinhalese–Portuguese War		
		
The Portuguese army at Kandy during the campaign of Danture, by Philippus Baldaeus		
<b>Date</b>	1527–1658	
<b>Location</b>	Sri Lanka	
<b>Result</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sinhala-Dutch victory</li> <li>▪ End of the kingdoms of Kotte, Sitawaka, Jaffna and Raigama</li> <li>▪ End of Portuguese Ceylon</li> <li>▪ Incorporation of parts of Kotte and Sitawaka into the Kingdom of Kandy</li> <li>▪ Capture of Colombo, Galle, Jafna, Raigama and much of Sitawaka by the Dutch and the establishment of Dutch Ceylon</li> </ul>	
Belligerents		
 Kingdom of Sitawaka  Kingdom of Kandy • Kingdom of Jaffna • Kingdom of Raigama • Vanni chieftains	 Portuguese Empire  Kingdom of Kotte <i>Supported by:</i> • Lascarins	<i>From 1638:</i>  Dutch East India Company
Commanders and leaders		
 Mayadunne  Rajasinha I 	 Pedro Lopes de Sousa  Jerónimo	 Adam Westerwold  Willem

Dutch initially entered the war as allies of Kandy, and together they won several battles against the Portuguese, most notably the Siege of Galle in 1640. However, the Dutch-Kandyan alliance broke down and the three remaining powers fought each other in triangular warfare for a time. The Dutch and Kandyans re-made their alliance in 1649 to drive the Portuguese from the island. The Portuguese capital Colombo was conquered in 1656, but once this was done the Dutch immediately betrayed their allies, keeping the Portuguese possessions for themselves.

Vimaladharmasuriya I	de Azevedo	Jacobszoon Coster
 Senarat	 Constantino de Sá de Noronha	 Joan Maetsuycker
 Rajasimha II	 Bhuvanekabahu VII	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cankili I</li> <li>• Puviraja Pandaram</li> </ul>		
Casualties and losses		
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

By the end of the war in 1658 all Portuguese forces had been expelled from the island, ending Portuguese Ceylon. The Kingdom of Kandy was the only surviving indigenous state on Ceylon, ruling almost half of the territory. The Dutch were left in control of the major population centres, forming Dutch Ceylon.

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## Origin

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The Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505<sup>[2]</sup> and established trade relations with the Kotte kingdom.<sup>[3]</sup> During the early 16th century their intentions were directed towards defending their trading interests, particularly the lucrative pepper trade.<sup>[4]</sup> However, with time this policy gradually changed to territorial ambitions with the objective of outright conquest.<sup>[5]</sup> Island resources, Sri Lanka's strategic location for both trade and naval security and rise of the Mughal empire in India influenced this change.<sup>[6]</sup><sup>[note 1]</sup>



Political map of Sri Lanka soon after the Spoiling of Vijayabahu in 1521.

In 1521, the three sons of the Kotte king Vijayabahu VII rebelled against their father. After killing Vijayabahu, his sons (Bhuvanekabahu, Pararajasingha and Mayadunne) divided the kingdom among themselves in the 'Spoiling of Vijayabahu'. Mayadunne received the Kingdom of Sitawaka, Pararajasingha was given the Principality of Raigama (taking the name Raigama Bandara), and Bhuvanekabahu ruled over the remaining part of Kotte (as Bhuvanekabahu VII). The subsequent rivalries between these three new realms gave the Portuguese an opportunity to expand their influence on the island, by becoming involved in its internal politics.<sup>[7][8]</sup>

At first the Portuguese limited themselves to securing their share of the cinnamon trade in Colombo and supporting - and defending - their allies the rulers of Kotte. It was only after Dom João Dharmapalla converted to Christianity and bequeathed his kingdom to the King of Portugal upon his death in 1597, that the Portuguese regarded Kotte as their territory, and considered the conquest of the entire island to secure it.

## Early stages 1521–1538

During the initial encounters, the Portuguese lent their assistance to the Bhuvanekabahu VII of Kotte to defend against the attacks from Sitawaka.<sup>[9]</sup> Their influence over the Kotte grew with the military aid they provided.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Sitawaka expansion 1538–1587

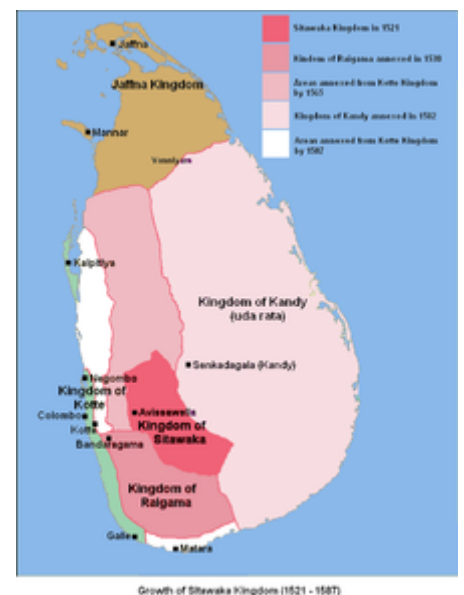
In 1551, this uneasy alliance came to an end with the death of Bhuvanekabahu VII as a result of a shot fired by a Portuguese soldier which he claimed to be an accidental discharge of the weapon.<sup>[10][11]</sup> Following his death his young grandson was established on the Kotte throne under the protection of the Portuguese. Later his conversion to Christianity and becoming a vassal of Portuguese emperor<sup>[12]</sup> sparked a series of campaigns between the Portuguese and the Sinhalese<sup>[13]</sup> who were led first by the kingdom Sitawaka and then by the kingdom of Kandy

### Siege of Kotte

### Battle of Mulleriyawa

### The Siege of Colombo 1587-1588

Having conquered Kandy, King Rajasinha I of Sitawaka turned his attention to the Portuguese stronghold at Colombo. He timed the campaign to begin shortly after the start of the monsoon season, so the Portuguese would not be able to send reinforcements by sea. The Sinhalese army appeared around Colombo on 4 June, consisting of 50,000 men, 2200 pack elephants, 40,000 oxen and 150 small calibre bronze cannon. Supporting the army were 65 light galleys which were to blockade the fortress by sea. The Portuguese captain defending Colombo was João Correia de Brito, who had 300 Portuguese soldiers assisted by 700 Lascarins, plus a civilian population of some 60,000. Foreseeing the possibility of a siege, he had stockpiled supplies of food and ammunition. The Portuguese flotilla of 6 galleys was beached due to the weather, but nevertheless Brito sent a small craft over the sea to Goa with a distress call!<sup>[14]</sup>



Growth of the Sitawaka kingdom from 1521 to 1587

Knowing of Colombo's defences, which included a lagoon serving as a moat by its southern side, Rajasinha began the siege by having entrenchments dug around the walls and the lagoon drained, which lasted a month. With the digging complete, Rajasinha rallied his entire army outside Colombo in a display of force, shouting war-cries to intimidate the besieged. Undaunted, Brito ordered a sally against the troops closest to the city throwing them into great confusion.<sup>[15]</sup>

On the night of 3 August, the Rajasinha ordered the first mass assault. Thousands of Sinhalese attempted to scale Colombo's earthen walls, while sappers (aided by hundreds of elephants) tried to breach them. They were met with superior Portuguese firepower. Some Sinhalese were able to climb onto the bastions *São Lourenço* and *São Gonçalo*, but were repelled by a swift Portuguese counter attack. By the following morning, the Sinhalese had been driven off, having suffered 400 dead and 2,000 wounded!<sup>[16]</sup>

Over the following months Rajasinha attempted three more assaults on Colombo, along with attempts to undermine the walls, while the Portuguese conducted sorties against Sinhalese positions. With the end of the monsoon, the first Portuguese reinforcements from Goa arrived on 11 September. Further ships carrying reinforcements arrived on 4 October, 23 October, 4 November and 15 February. Finally, on 18 February a large fleet of eighteen galleys commanded by Manuel de Sousa Coutinho arrived, after raiding Sitawakan shores in northwestern Ceylon. The fleet sailed in battle formation and sounded its guns; the Portuguese defenders greeted it by ringing their church bells and firing a general salvo from the fortress' cannon.<sup>[17]</sup>

With the arrival of the reinforcements, there were now 2,000 Portuguese soldiers inside the fortress, in addition to the Lascarins and civilian defenders. Rajasinha realised that the opportunity to take Colombo had been lost and lifted the siege shortly afterwards. Over the eight-month campaign, the Sinhalese had lost 5,000 men.<sup>[18]</sup>



Plan view of Portuguese Colombo, made in 1650

## Portuguese campaign in Jaffna and takeover of Sitawaka 1588–1593

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In 1588 Kandy rebelled against its new Sitawaka rulers. However, the heirs of the Kandyan royal family had fallen under Portuguese influence and were held in Colombo. In 1592 the Portuguese intervened in Kandy, placing their protégé Yamasinghe Bandara on the throne. However, the new ruler died in suspicious circumstances shortly after his coronation. The Portuguese accused a rival Kandyan faction of poisoning Bandara, but the Kandyans blamed the Portuguese, who were forced to withdraw. Vimaladharmasuriya I became the new king of Kandy

Meanwhile, the Jaffna Kingdom in the north of the island fell increasingly under Portuguese influence. In 1591 a Portuguese expedition deposed (and killed) the Jafna king Puviraja Pandaram, then installed his son Ethirimana Cinkamas as a client ruler.

In 1593 Sitawaka forces attempted to re-take Kandy, but were repulsed and their king Rajasinha I died of disease contracted during the fighting. One of the rival claimants to his throne defected to the Portuguese, enabling them to take complete control over Sitawaka.

## Campaign of Danture 1594

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The Portuguese tried again to put their preferred candidate on the throne of Kandy as a client ruler. This time it was Dona Catarina, a Kandyan princess who had been entrusted to the care of the Portuguese and brought up in a Catholic European style. She was then aged ten or twelve.



Pedro Lopes de Sousa led a force of about 20,000 in an invasion of Kandy, of which one thousand were Portuguese troops (the majority transferred from Goa in India for the expedition), 15,400 native Lascarins allies, 47 elephants used as pack animals,<sup>[note 2]</sup> and the remainder Badaga mercenaries from India and coolie labourers. The initial number of opposing Kandyan forces is unknown, but is estimated at 10,000. The defenders held a distinct advantage in the terrain, as Kandy is a mountainous region and the invading force would be forced to traverse well-defended mountain passes.

The Portuguese stormed the pass at Balana with heavy losses, after which the Kandyan forces began to retreat before the invaders. The Portuguese were able to enter the capital Kandy without resistance, finding it abandoned by King Vimaladharmasuriya I. Dona Catarina was crowned as the new ruler of the Kingdom of Kandy. However she and her Portuguese advisers were unpopular rulers, particularly after rumours spread that she was to be married to a Portuguese husband (as the Portuguese were indeed planning).

Vimaladharmasuriya's forces engaged in guerilla tactics, attacking Portuguese foraging parties and cutting off lines of supply and communication. A large Portuguese-Lascarins raiding party of 3,000 men was surrounded and destroyed in the Uva region. Shortly thereafter, evidence was found that Jayavira Bandara Mudali, one of the Lascarins chieftains, was preparing to betray the Portuguese to Vimaladharmasuriya. Part of this evidence was later shown to be fabricated by Vimaladharmasuriya, but Jayavira was killed as a traitor before this was realised.

The death of Jayavira led many of the Lascarins to desert, along with all of the Badaga mercenaries. Less than a thousand native allies were left with the Portuguese forces, who were now massively outnumbered, lacking supplies, and faced a mass rebellion. The Portuguese attempted to retreat from Kandy to the fort at Balana. Losses to guerilla warfare and further Lascarins desertions reduced their forces to about 360 Portuguese and an equal number of Lascarins by the time they reached Danture. In contrast, defections and troops arriving from other parts of the kingdom had swelled Vimaladharmasuriya's forces to about 20,000 men.

At Danture, the Portuguese forces were attacked as they retreated. The organised columns disintegrated in the forest and most were wiped out. Sousa surrendered with the remaining 93 European troops. In a departure from usual Sinhalese warfare, the prisoners were tortured and mutilated. Sousa died of the wounds he sustained during the fighting. With the exception of a patrol sent back to the lowlands during the early part of the campaign, only three Portuguese soldiers escaped back to Colombo.

Vimaladharmasuriya solidified his control over Kandy by marrying Dona Catarina. In an attempt to prevent further Portuguese incursions he built new fortifications in the Balana pass.

## **Portuguese consolidation of Kotte and attacks on Kandy 1595-1617**

With the death of Pedro Lopes de Sousa at Danture, Dom Jerónimo de Azevedo succeeded him as Captain-General of Ceylon, and despite the losses in the battle, Kandy was unable to advance into the lowlands as the Portuguese forts and garrisons remained intact. [19]

Dom Jerónimo proceeded to reform Kotte's provincial administration, dividing it into four provinces, or *disavas*, each administered by the eponymous *disava*, with military and judicial powers. The tax system was also reformed and the old system of tributes replaced with fixed mandatory payments. The original military system of castes and levies however, remained organized under the



Key locations in the Campaign of Danture, 1594



Portuguese soldiers kill the Lascarin leader Jayavira and his attendants, who were suspected of treason. Woodcut by Philippus Baldaeus

local mudaliar commanders, who assisted the Portuguese troops. Dom Jerónimo also encouraged missionary work by the Jesuits, Augustinians and Dominicans in addition to the Franciscans.<sup>[20]</sup>

Nevertheless, the defeat at Danture sparked a number of uprisings in Kotte which Dom Jerónimo had to defeat before he could move on Kandy. He considered the defeat of Kandy an utmost priority to secure Ceylon and secured Kotte first with the construction of fortified encampments in Matara, Sabaragamuwa, Manikkadawara and Malwana, where he established the army HQ.<sup>[21]</sup>

By 1603, Kotte was firmly secured and Dom Jerónimo led his troops into Kandy through the mountain pass, where he seized the Kandian fort at Balana and proceeded towards the city of Kandy itself. However, the kingdom could not be subjugated then due to a rebellion among the Lascarins, and was forced to return to Colombo.<sup>[21]</sup>

Unable to capture Kandy, Dom Jerónimo adopted a policy of first weakening Kandy through devastating raid warfare by land, twice every year, at harvest time, resorting to light contingents of troops, while blockading the eastern Kandian ports of Trincomalee and Batticaloa by sea, between 1604 and 1612 with considerable success. This coincided with a succession crisis in Kandy after the death of king Vimaladharmasuryia in 1604, that was only solved months later with the succession of his cousin Senarat to the throne.<sup>[21]</sup>

Senarat proved to be an unpopular ruler and unable to prevent the Portuguese from causing great devastation upon Kandian villages and crops. In 1612, Dom Jerónimo was appointed as the next viceroy of Portuguese India and was succeeded in Ceylon by Dom Francisco Meneses (1612-1614), Manuel Mascarenhas Homem (1614-1616) and Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira (1616-1618). Because of his great experience in Ceylon, as viceroy Dom Jerónimo kept the Portuguese garrisons well supplied and reinforced, which caused the depopulation of Kandy on account of the systematic Portuguese raids.<sup>[22]</sup>

## **Rebellions against both powers and submission of Kandy 1617-1621**

### **Uprisings in Portuguese territory**

The taxes imposed by the Portuguese, and the desecration of Buddhist temples by missionaries caused great discontent among the Sinhalese peasantry and in late 1616 an uprising broke out in Sabaragamuwa. Disava Filipe de Oliveira's forces camped in the Seven Korales were dispatched south, but in his absence, in December 1616 a much greater revolt broke out in eastern Seven Korales, led by a disgraced grain measurer who claimed to be the grandson of Rajasinha, late prince Nikapitiya Bandara, dead since 1611. Senarat immediately took the opportunity to support Nikapitiya with a force of 2000 men commanded by the former rebel leader Kangara Aratchi, and ordered the governor of Uva Kuruwita Rala to march his forces southwards into Matara and Sabaragamuwa. Under these conditions, the Portuguese were overwhelmed: part of Sabaragamuwa and Matara were overrun while a considerable portion of the Seven Korales fell to Nikapitiya's rebellion.<sup>[23]</sup>

### **Rebellion in Kandy**

Despite initial cordiality, Senarat quickly grew distrustful of Nikapitiya's success and attitude towards Kandy. Fearing a future rival, he withdrew all his aid and ordered Kuruwita Rala to suspend operations while he attempted to gain a truce with the Portuguese. This in turn caused Kuruwita Rala, a native from Kotte, to rebel in indignation against Senarat, choosing instead to ally with Nikapitiya,



Political situation on Ceylon in the early 17th century



A Portuguese illustration of Sinhalese warriors, produced c. 1540

march against his former ruler and invite Mayadunne of Denawaka exiled in India to become King of Kandy instead (since his lowly caste disallowed him from crowning himself king). In this regard, C.R. de Silva considers Kuruwita Rala to have been "the true Sinhalese patriot, for it was he who put national above dynastic interests"<sup>[24]</sup>

Kuruwita Rala, ruling much of southern Sri Lanka including the port of Batticaloa, now posed a much graver threat to Senarat than Nikapitiya. Thus, after recapturing the Balana fort from the Portuguese turned to them for a treaty and an alliance, but only when he released all the Portuguese prisoners was captain-general Dom Nuno Álvares Pereira convinced that Senarat's proposal was genuine.<sup>[25]</sup>

## The Luso-Kandian Treaty

By this sudden turn of events, in August 17 an agreement between the Portuguese and Kandy was reached and a treaty put into effect. In negotiating with the Portuguese, Senarat proved rather capable, refusing most of Portuguese demands but still had to formally pledge vassalage to the King of Portugal, agree not to interfere in missionary work in Kandy (Senarat even entrusted his children to be educated by Franciscans), offer several noblemen as hostages in Colombo and pay two large elephants a year as a token tribute. The Portuguese on their part agreed to a formal alliance and recognized Senarat as the rightful King of Kandy.<sup>[26]</sup>

With the coming of favourable winds in March 1617, important Portuguese reinforcements had arrived in Colombo. In June, developments in Jaffna favoured the Portuguese as Cankili I usurped the throne through a coup and in exchange for Portuguese recognition, agreed to prevent supplies and weapons from reaching the rebels from there. Between July and September the Portuguese were able to recapture the Seven Korales, and Nikapitiya fled to the jungles inhabited by the Vanni in northeastern Sri Lanka, never to be seen again.<sup>[27]</sup>

## Portuguese conquest of Jaffna 1619

Although the Portuguese confirmed Cankili as the ruler of Jaffna, Cankili's brutal murder of political rivals made him an unpopular ruler, and incapable of preventing dissatisfaction especially from the rising number of native Christians of the Kingdom. In August 1618, a rebellion instigated by Christian mudaliars Dom Pedro and Dom Luiz and aided by local Portuguese *casados* evicted Cankili from the throne, but was eventually suppressed with the assistance of 5000 men of the Hindu Nayak of Tanjore, in south-east India.<sup>[28]</sup> As Cankili was a weak ruler who failed to prevent growing unrest in the kingdom, to pay due tribute to the Portuguese, and was rumoured to be allowing supplies to reach the southern rebels and even seeking aid from the Dutch, in March 1619 the Portuguese captain-general of Ceylon Dom Constantino de Sá decided to dispatch Filipe de Oliveira ahead of 230 Portuguese and 3000 lascarins to subjugate Jaffna. Furthermore, the captain-general had received reports that a Christian Malabarese privateer on the service of the Zamorin, Dom Pedro Rodrigues, was attacking Portuguese and allied shipping in the vicinity of the island of Mannar, and tasked Oliveira to deal with the issue en route.<sup>[29]</sup>

Upon reaching Mannar, Dom Pedro sailed away, and Oliveira proceeded towards Jaffna. Once there, he demanded the payment of due tributes but as negotiations with Cankili failed, in June the Portuguese-Sinhalese forces of Filipe de Oliveira marched on the capital Nallur, defeated the Tamil forces at Jaffna, captured Cankili and formally annexed Jaffna to the Portuguese Crown.<sup>[30]</sup> The ancient capital of Jaffna was moved to the coastal city of Jaffna itself (*Jafanapatão*), and with the kingdom secured from outside threats by February 1621, navigation in the Palk Strait became much safer. Cankili was sent to Goa to face trial, where he was found guilty. However, he agreed to convert before being formally executed.<sup>[31]</sup>



A Portuguese illustration of Sinhalese women and children, produced c. 1540



Portuguese soldiers in Asia in the 17th century, painted by André Reinoso

## Developments in southern Ceylon

Elsewhere, in early 1620 Senarat achieved another truce - with Mayadunne and Kuruwita Rala, by promising them the throne of Kotte instead. Only by June 1620 did the Portuguese captain-general Dom Constantino de Sá de Noronha manage to recapture the southern lowlands, for Kuruwita Rala was a skilled and popular commander and knew the territory well.<sup>[32]</sup> A month later, Kuruwita Rala was himself ambushed and killed by the disava of Matara Dom Costantino Barreto (a Christian Sinhalese) in Panama, southeastern Ceylon. The departure of Mayadunne of Denawaka back to India in March 1621 brought the end of the rebellion in Kandy, and peace between the Portuguese and Kandy.<sup>[33]</sup>

## The Danish

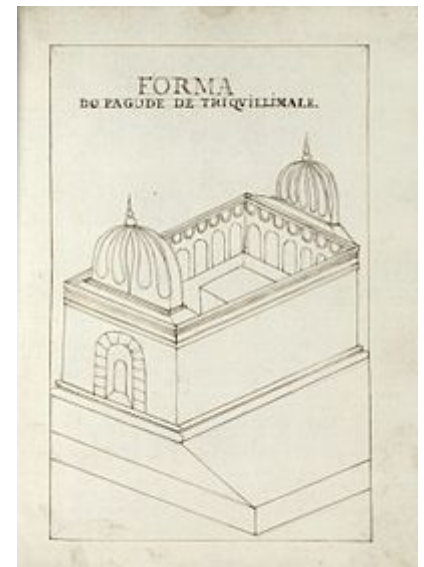
The second European power to establish a foothold on Ceylon were the Danes. In 1620, Senarat received the first expedition of the Danish East India Company led by Ove Gjedde, who reached Ceylon after a perilous journey of over two years, that claimed more than half its personnel. Senarat placed great expectations on a Danish alliance against the Portuguese and agreed to sign a treaty and grant them the port of Trincomalee, where the great Koneswaram temple of was located. However, until the Danish could prove capable against the Portuguese, Senarat was not willing to relinquish his hard-won peace with them or grant the Danes any further concessions. Thus, just two weeks after the treaty was signed, the Danish evacuated Trincomalee and left for Tranquebar in Tanjore, where they established a fort.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Dutch intervention 1638–1658

The kingdoms of Spain and Portugal had been in dynastic union under the Spanish Habsburgs since a Portuguese succession crisis in 1580. This Iberian Union possessed a vast empire of colonial possessions, but lacked the strength (particularly naval forces) to defend them. Other colonial powers sought to take advantage of this weakness to obtain their own empires, particularly after the collapse of the Iberian economy in 1627. The Spanish overseas possessions were generally better defended than Portuguese ones, which were widely scattered and difficult to reinforce.

The rival Dutch Empire – engaged in the Eighty Years' War against its former master, Spain – concentrated its overseas efforts on conquering parts of the Portuguese Empire in the Dutch–Portuguese War. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) sought to oust the Portuguese from the East Indies and Indian subcontinent so they could control the lucrative spice trade. Seeing an opportunity to undermine the Portuguese on Ceylon, the VOC made contact with the Kingdom of Kandy. Confidence in the Kandyan forces rose after they defeated a Portuguese army at the Battle of Gannoruwain March 1638. Shortly thereafter the VOC and Rajasinha II of Kandy signed a treaty in May 1638, by which the VOC promised to aid Kandy in its continuing war against the Portuguese in exchange for an monopoly on many trading goods.

The combined VOC and Kandyan forces gradually wore down the Portuguese forces, pushing them out of their strongholds across the island. Batticaloa on the East coast fell to Dutch forces in 1639, then Negombo on the West coast in 1640. Galle was captured after a siege in 1640, providing the Dutch with a port and naval base. However the Kandyans became suspicious of their new allies, correctly believing that the VOC goal was not just to remove the Portuguese from Ceylon, but to replace them as the colonial power. The alliance fell apart after a ceasefire was agreed between Dutch and Portuguese forces at some point between 1641 and 1645.



Portuguese drawing of the Koneswaram temple



Dutch forces storm the fort of Galle in 1640, by Philippus Baldaeus



Kandyan forces engaged in skirmishing with both Dutch and Portuguese forces over the following years, but were unable to make inroads. The VOC and Kandy returned to negotiations and reformed their alliance in 1649, albeit on different terms. Meanwhile, the Iberian Union had ended in 1640, depriving the Portuguese colonies of Spanish support. The Peace of Münster in 1648 had ended the Dutch war with Spain (but not Portugal). These developments together acted to free up Dutch forces from other conflicts, allowing them to concentrate on their attacks on Portuguese colonies.

The VOC-Kandy alliance went on the offensive in Ceylon from 1652. Whilst Kandy controlled the interior of the island, it was landlocked and the Dutch fleet were able to dominate the coast. Two naval actions were fought between the Dutch and Portuguese on 23 March near Colombo and 2 May 1654 near Goa; the Portuguese won the first battle but lost their entire Indian subcontinent fleet in the second. The Dutch placed the main Portuguese base of Colombo under siege in 1655. Rajasingha no longer trusted the Dutch and insisted that Colombo be ceded to Kandy as soon as it fell. However, when the city finally fell in 1656, the Dutch immediately closed the gates against their ally

Faced with a complete breakdown in relations with the Dutch, the Kandyan's broke off the alliance and pillaged the area around Colombo. They then retreated back inland and resumed their war with the Dutch, which would continue intermittently for the next century.

The last Portuguese forces were expelled from Ceylon entirely in 1658. The VOC was left in control of Colombo and much of the surrounding coastline, forming Dutch Ceylon.

## Aftermath

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By the end of the war, the Portuguese had lost all of their possessions on Ceylon along with their trading rights. Portuguese Ceylon ceased to exist.

The Dutch were left in control of numerous ports and fortifications along the coastline, along with the major population centres of Colombo and Galle. Their possessions on the island were organised into the colony of Dutch Ceylon. Over the following century the colony gradually expanded its holdings on Ceylon, and engaged in sporadic warfare with Kandy. Eventually the Kew Letters of 1795 led to the transfer of the Dutch possessions on the island to the British in 1796, forming British Ceylon.

The Kingdom of Kandy retreated to the highlands in the interior and east of the island. They continued to resist European influence on Ceylon, engaging in skirmishing and guerilla warfare without making significant inroads into the lowlands. Kandy maintained its independence until 1815 when it was conquered by the British

## References and notes

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### Notes

1. The rise of the Mughal empire led to an increase in efforts on Sri Lanka by the Portuguese, as evident by a claim made by Lisbon. "If someday India should be lost it could be recovered from Ceylon."<sup>[5]</sup>
2. The elephants were used for logistics and not as combat war elephants

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