

## HELEN OR COSTLY BRIDE: THE V.O.C. AND THE CINNAMON TRADE OF SRI LANKA 1766-1796

V. KANAPATHYPILLAI

Philipus Baldaeus, chaplain of the successful Dutch expeditionary forces that expelled the Portuguese from Sri Lanka, very rightly noted that "the most exquisite and finest cinnamon was the Helen or costly bride"<sup>1</sup> over which the V.O.C. had to fight the Portuguese for almost thirty years. By the fifties of the seventeenth century the Portuguese were deprived of their control over the cinnamon of Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> The fragrant and aromatic bark of the cinnamon tree was to affect the course of the history of Sri Lanka from the sixteenth century onwards by the attention it drew from the first Europeans who ventured out to the East, lured by the legendary tales of Asia's immensely profitable silks and spices.

Conventional wisdom had it that up to the end of the thirteenth century cinnamon was certainly not one of the products for which Sri Lanka was famed. Its first mention as a product of trade of the island was made by an Arab writer, Kazwini, in 1275, to be followed by the Minorite friar, John of Montecorvino (circa 1293), while the first authentic account of Sri Lankan cinnamon was given by Ibn Batuta, who visited the country in the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> But subsequent writers have shown that the island was famous for its cinnamon even much earlier. The claim has been made that cinnamon as an article of importance in the spice trade dates back to the time of the early Phoenician traders. B.J. Perera, writing on 'The Foreign Trade and Commerce of ancient Ceylon'<sup>4</sup> points out that though cinnamon was an important export of Sri Lanka, it is strange that neither Greek nor Roman writers have mentioned this commodity as an export from Sri Lanka and offers two possible explanations, viz: either "cinnamon was not exported from Ceylon prior to about the 12th century or that the South Indian traders successfully withheld from the Europeans all information regarding its existence in Ceylon. In support of the first explanation we may state that cinnamon grows best and is found in abundance in the south-west regions of the island. This region was but sparsely populated in the period before the 12th century and consequently the kings would have paid less attention to this possible source of income."

W. I. Siriweera who has made a study of trade in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka states that none of the early Pali or Sinhala chronicles mentions cinnamon as an article of trade prior to the founding of the kingdom of Sri Jayawardanapura.<sup>5</sup> But D.P.M. Weerakody, who has worked on Roman and Greek sources regarding Sri Lankan trade, brought to my attention that E. H. Warmington, writing in 1928 about 'The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India' has noted that "aromatic spices and juices, such as Indian pepper,..... Cinnamon (Indian and Chinese).....were in common use, most'y by land or through the Arabians,' in the Augustan era.<sup>6</sup> Though there is no specific mention as to whether the cinnamon referred to therein came from Sri Lanka, from very early times *Cinnamomum Zeylanicum* came to be considered the true cinnamon.<sup>7</sup>

In any event it is only with the shift of the royal authority to the south west and the founding of the kingdom of Kotte in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with its capital at Kotte, or Sri Jayawardanapura, - a few miles off Colombo, that Ceylon had to deal with

the first European 'visitor' to the island, in the early years of the sixteenth century. The main interest of Europeans by that time was a search for 'the legendary spices' of Asia. By then not only had cinnamon found its place as an important article of trade, but it also had become the chief source of revenue of the kings of Kotte. Its trade was made a royal monopoly; its peeling and collection was assigned to a distinct group of people called the *Chalias*<sup>8</sup> and the whole organisation that dealt with it was called the *Mahabadde* or the great department. Thus, if cinnamon made a sudden appearance as an article of export from the island, it also achieved a quick fame in the spice markets as superior to the variety hitherto known. It was the Arab traders who virtually controlled the cinnamon trade of Sri Lanka, and it was one of their writers who noted in 1368 that the "best *Darchini* is that which comes from Ceylon" while the best Chinese cassia was "thick, reddish, a little bitter and astringent," though sweeter than the Indian *Kirfah*, which "tastes like cloves".<sup>9</sup>

The Portuguese soon displaced the Arabs from the cinnamon trade of Sri Jayawardanapura. By offering to protect and defend the ports of its kingdom they obtained an annual tribute of three hundred initially, and later four hundred *bahars*, or approximately 200,000 pounds of cinnamon. The internecine quarrels that broke out between the two brothers, Bhuvanekha Bahu and Mayadunne, after they had killed their father Vijaya Bahu in 1521, provided the Portuguese with the opportunity to strengthen their hold on the kingdom. By 1597 they became sovereigns of the kingdom of Kotte by virtue of a deed of donation made out to the King of Portugal by Don Juan Dharmapala, the grandson of Bhuvaneka Bahu.<sup>10</sup>

Even as they obtained a complete monopoly of the cinnamon trade of the island they had also gained control of the centres of production of *canela do mato* (jungle cinnamon) on the Malabar coast, becoming thereby the sole supplier of cinnamon to the European market. Luiz Vas de Camoens (1524-80) came to record the fame of Sri Lanka for its cinnamon as that which makes it "rich, illustrious and beautiful".<sup>11</sup> Even the Portuguese soon realised the superiority of the Sri Lankan product. Garcia da Orta, writing in the middle of the same century, spoke of the island's cinnamon as being worth four times that of Malabar.<sup>12</sup>

The envious Dutch soon followed in its quest with the formation of the *Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie* (V. O. C.) in 1602. Linschoten certainly helped to whet his countrymen's interest when, in his *Itinerario*, written at the end of the sixteenth century, he recorded that "the cinnamon of the island of Ceylon is the best and finest and is at least three times dearer in price".<sup>13</sup>

As noted above, by the fifties of the seventeenth century the Portuguese were deprived of their control over the cinnamon of Sri Lanka. The Dutch soon succeeded in establishing a monopolistic control over the supply of the island's cinnamon, despite the fact that they did not obtain control over all the cinnamon districts that had been held by the Portuguese. Their monopoly was to prove more effective than that of the Portuguese, whose officials amassed large profits through illicit sales, in spite of the regular edicts forbidding infringement of the royal monopoly. Furthermore, the Portuguese also sold sufficient quantities of cinnamon in Asia itself. Under the V. O. C. the monopoly was more strictly observed, the proverbial corruption of its officials not affecting this article of trade. Only limited quantities were sold in Asia, and in any case prices were so regulated that it was hardly profitable for

anybody else to take it to Europe.<sup>14</sup> Hence, cinnamon in the hands of the Company became the one article of the spice trade which it was able to control without any fear of being undersold by others on the European market. The price trends of cinnamon at the Amsterdam exchange during the whole period of the Company's relations with the island are indicative of the manner in which the absolute control of supply made it possible for it to manipulate prices. It was the continuing story of steadily increasing prices. Up to 1660 the price averaged 1.50 guilders the pound; during the rest of the century it virtually doubled; between the fifties and seventies of the following century it had increased four-fold. The prices in the eighties were exceptional though; they stood at 8 to 9 guilders the pound, which returned to the normal average of 6 to 7 guilders after the fourth Anglo-Dutch war.<sup>15</sup>

Apart from the virtual monopoly which ensured them high prices, there is no doubt that the Dutch merchants were also proficient in advertising their products. Paludanus, in notes provided by him to a new edition of his friend Linschoten's *Itinerario* claimed such medicinal values and uses for cinnamon such as that it "healeth, openeth and strengtheneth all the inward parts", and further that "it is somewhat attractive, stretcheth the mawe and digesteth the meats ... is used against all kinds of poyson that may hurt the hart", while the "Oyle of cinnamon doe greatlie strengthen all the inward parts as head, hart, mawe and lyver"<sup>16</sup> But one must admit that these claims by the Dutch regarding cinnamon's medicinal properties were not entirely fanciful. According to B. J. Perera, in the *Sikhavalandā* of the 10th century, which he claims contains the first reference to cinnamon in local literature, cinnamon seems to have been used as a cosmetic in bathing. He also cites a 15th century work of Nicola de Conti, the Venetian traveller who spoke of the growth of cinnamon in Sri Lanka in great abundance from which was extracted "an odoriferous oil ... which was adapted for ointments".<sup>17</sup>

The profits obtained from the sale of cinnamon in Asia by the V.O.C. were nothing compared to what it was in Europe, but it was by no means inconsiderable. Though profits from cinnamon were hardly comparable to the profitability of cloth in the Asian trade of the V. O. C., cinnamon still figured as an important item. At least 150,000 pounds were sold in the markets of Mocha, Gamaron, Surat, Wingurla, Bengal, Coromandel and Batavia in the 17th century.<sup>18</sup> But by the middle of the following century decreasing collection in the island made it difficult to meet even the demands for Europe, resulting in a sharp drop in the quantities sold in Asia. It hardly exceeded 80 to 90,000 pounds, with hardly anything sold in some years.

Of the quantities available for the Asian markets, the Batavian authorities were given a prior claim to whatever was available, as cinnamon was the chief article of interest to the Manila traders who called there, as the silver they brought to make their purchases was certainly a more desirable *specie* than the currencies of the various Indian ocean traders.<sup>19</sup> The Batavian authorities knew well how to make profits even when supplies had dwindled. During this period the profits on cinnamon sold to the Manila traders alone amounted to 870% on the outlay. Thus, not surprisingly, the Batavian authorities were impressing upon their subordinates in Sri Lanka the importance of sending at least 500 bales to maintain this profitable trade. The value of the profits from cinnamon was all the more because it was obtained free and the cost of its collection was minimal<sup>20</sup>.

The V. O. C. claimed that they had inherited the rights to cinnamon collection as a monopoly of the sovereign once they had established their *de facto* control over the cinnamon growing districts in the maritime areas of the south-west. What is more, the traditional organizations for the collection of cinnamon had been maintained intact by the Portuguese.<sup>21</sup> But the V. O. C. set about the task of reorganising and restructuring the system even more efficiently with a view to meeting the increasing demand made for more cinnamon both by the Directors in Amsterdam and of the Batavian authorities. A Dutch official was placed as the head of the whole organization dealing with the protection, collection and embaling of cinnamon for export with the title of *Hoofd der Mahabaddes* or *Capitein van de Canneel*.

The very profitability of cinnamon made the Company government in Sri Lanka adopt strict and harsh measures which created some of the problems which bedevilled the company's rule right through to the late seventies of the eighteenth century. The fear of an infringement of its monopoly over cinnamon by its rivals was the chief cause of the harsh measures it adopted for the protection of its cinnamon lands and all their problems with the inhabitants ensued therefrom. A strict surveillance of all the ports and coasts, intended to prevent illicit smuggling and check the embittered Kandyans from dealing with foreigners had the inevitable result of the king taking steps to disrupt the Company's cinnamon harvests either by causing the destruction of plants or instigating the peelers to revolt. But the peelers themselves had reasons of their own for disaffection and were only too ready to cause annoyance even without the promptings of the king. Thus, very rightly indeed has a Dutch historian noted that the task of collecting cinnamon was a "veritable annual nightmare for all Governors" "Even as the king proved to be accommodating, the despicable cinnamon peelers were wont to put a spoke in the wheel. The costly spice had to be collected like taking embers from the fire".<sup>22</sup>

The recalcitrance of the king in granting permission for the collection of cinnamon within his territory meant that the Company had to collect all the cinnamon required for export to Holland as well as meet the requirements of the Batavian Council from its own lands. This led to what Governor van Imhoff described as the impolitic policy of keeping all cinnamon growing lands waste and unproductive of any other crop. If Ribeiro's account, that of the 21,863 villages in the south and south-west, 16,000 were covered with cinnamon is correct,<sup>23</sup> it is not surprising that the inhabitants resorted to its destruction and the encroachment of such lands for their own use. The counter-measures taken to reclaim such lands and the devastation of planted gardens inevitably made cinnamon what Schreuder described as "the most hated object among the inhabitants that was often clandestinely uprooted despite deterrent measures to the contrary".<sup>24</sup> He was though indulging in needless exaggeration when he added that "the Company's cinnamon lands have been encroached upon to such an extent that, in places where one formerly saw as many as 20 or 30 peeling sheds standing, one now only finds nothing but coconut gardens, and if we were to delay much longer in taking the necessary steps, there would eventually be found not one single cinnamon shrub in the Company's territory."<sup>25</sup>

The records of the collection of cinnamon by the Company in the period 1765-1793 (Table I) as against the period 1700-1750 (Table II) shows a falling off in the quantities collected.

Table 1: Annual Cinnamon Collections from 1764 to 1793<sup>26</sup>.

Year	Bales	Year	Bales	Year	Bales
1764/65	5000	76/77	5097	88/89	4716
65/66	5315	77/78	3129	89/90	5143
66/67	10009	78/79	5130	90/91	4290
67/68	7724	79/80	—	91/92	5585
68/69	5655	80/81	—	92/93	5360
69/70	5542	81/82	4476		
70/71	5348	82/83	4333		
71/72	5355	83/84	3999		
72/73	5316	84/85	5674		
73/74	5837	85/86	5750		
74/75	4690	86/87	5522		
75/76	4156	87/88	5081		

Table 2: Annual Cinnamon Collections from 1700 to 1750

Year	Bales	Year	Bales	Year	Bales
1700/01	7290	17/18	11300	34/35	8843
01/02	7866	18/19	7685	35/36	2888
02/03	6849	19/20	8108	36/37	6546
03/04	5483	20/21	8820	37/38	9137
04/05	5878	21/22	8881	38/39	8721
05/06	5868	22/23	7724	39/40	9736
06/07	6179	23/24	—	40/41	5439
07/08	6018	24/25	8515	41/42	9182
08/09	6685	25/26	8673	42/43	8736
09/10	6393	26/27	8889	43/44	9112
10/11	6138	27/28	9065	44/45	8248
11/12	6011	28/29	9224	45/46	8144
12/13	7285	29/30	9041	46/47	8028
13/14	4337	30/31	9722	47/48	7964
14/15	13158	31/32	9763	48/49	5673
15/16	8515	32/33	9423	49/50	6692
16/17	8449	33/34	9425		

In addition to the problems already noted, the quest for quality cinnamon loomed large in the period under review. After almost a century of cinnamon sales at Amsterdam the buyer had certainly gained the expertise needed to be choosy about quality. Though Sri Lanka cinnamon was superior to other varieties, there were ten different types of varying quality and having different uses. Of these only three or four the *Rasse Koeroendoe*, *Kappoeroe Koeroendoe*, *Kahata Koroendoe* and *Wellie Koeroendoe* – were of fine quality.<sup>27</sup> The rest were inferior and had other uses and were not meant to be used as a food spice.

The Dutch had obviously fallen into the error that Cordiner was to make in the early nineteenth century when he observed of the ten sorts, that their “apparent difference consists merely in a slight variation in the form of the leaf.”<sup>28</sup> In the absence of systematic planting, the propagation of cinnamon was left to the vagaries of the wind and the seed droppings of birds. This hardly guaranteed that the right quantity of the right seeds took root to provide in due course the fine-quality cinnamon needed. What was more, the quality of the cinnamon also varied according to the soil in which it grew. The best cinnamon grew on fine white quartz sand overlying a good rich sub-soil at altitudes of less than 1,500 feet and having an average temperature of 85° F. and a rainfall of about 85 inches annually. These requirements were met mainly in the areas around Negombo. The lateritic gravel soils of the Southern Province, while making for rapid growth, made the bark thicker and coarser. Rocky and stony ground was not suitable either, while marshy land gave the bark an undesirable bitterness. Free exposure to sun produced a better quality bark than shaded plants, though prolonged spells or dry weather were harmful.<sup>29</sup> Thus it is not surprising that all the cinnamon growing lands of the Company extending from the Deduru oya near Chilaw along the whole coastal belt up to Matara, failed to yield cinnamon of uniformly good quality. The only answer to the problem lay in planting the seeds or cuttings of the best varieties in the areas best suited to its propagation. One is left to wonder why the Company failed to pay more attention to a product of such importance.

It is not unlikely that officials in the early days were eager to propagate the myth that cinnamon could not be cultivated, for fear that cinnamon seeds from the island might be smuggled out, as rubber was from South America.<sup>30</sup> If this were true, then their intentions were selfdefeating. They certainly led to a situation where sufficient quantities of the finest cinnamon needed for the European market could never be found, and what was worse, vast extents of land were being kept idle, on which inferior varieties of cinnamon grew, resulting in an irreconcilable bitterness between ruler and ruled. The real cost of the product, which was apparently obtained free, has to be calculated in terms of the costly military establishment the Company had to maintain to obtain it free. The first anxious concern about the advisability of the continuation of its long-established policy was occasioned by the rude awakening caused by the revolts and subsequent war of the sixties.

Before we go on to examine the measures taken to ensure the propagation of quality cinnamon, which at the same time removed the irritants that caused dissatisfaction amongst its inhabitants, we shall briefly touch on another measure taken to ensure the preservation of the quality of the cinnamon while it was being transported by ship. In fact, in the early years of the V. O. C.’s administration of this territory the problem of ensuring the quality of cinnamon had been merely limited to that of preserving the fragrance and strength of the

quill during the long voyage of more than six months that the Sri Lanka returned fleets took to reach home. But experiments over the years had helped to overcome that problem. Leather skins had replaced the sail cloth in embalging,<sup>31</sup> but this was found to be too expensive leading to the use of jute sacks from Bengal, which proved more satisfactory and cheaper. As a further measure of protection 'loose black pepper was strewn in every crevice as its dry and hot quality attracted to itself all the moisture, thus helping to preserve the cinnamon in its original goodness.'<sup>32</sup> But this hardly solved the basic problem of quality, which really lay elsewhere, as we have already noted above.

It was Schreuder, who, having precipitated the revolts of the sixties by the harsh measures adopted to reclaim the Company's cinnamon lands, was now to make the first suggestion that could have led to a liberalisation of the Company's policies, while at the same time safeguarding the production of cinnamon. He suggested that the inhabitants themselves be permitted to cultivate cinnamon as well as peel and deliver the natural-grown cinnamon found in their lands for cash, thus obviating the need of depriving them of land. He saw in this proposal the only means of making the inhabitants protect and promote the culture of a product hitherto hated.<sup>33</sup>

The intervening war of 1760-66 resulted in the proposal remaining in abeyance for some time. Baron Van Eck, who succeeded Schreuder, also addressed himself to this problem, but mainly with a view to removing the Company's dependence for its supplies of cinnamon on the Kandyan kingdom. He toyed with the idea of exchanging with the inhabitants lands where cinnamon grew for lands where there was none.<sup>34</sup>

Wartime was hardly conducive to try out the above proposal, and what is more, Van Eck did not live to see the end of the war. Thus, fortunately the Company was saved from the dire consequences of attempting its implementation, for it involved the wholesale transfer of the population from cinnamon-growing districts to the districts of the Seven Korales which had been brought under the Company's control in the early stages of the counter offensive against Kandy. Falck, who succeeded Van Eck, dismissed the whole scheme as impracticable and foolhardy, as he found after preliminary inquiries that even the lure of added incentives would not have induced the inhabitants to leave their traditional lands.<sup>35</sup>

Falck, who was to have the credit ultimately of debunking a myth by successfully commencing cinnamon plantations, however began his tenure of office by falling an easy victim to the ingrained prejudices of the local establishment. He did have hopes of overcoming the difficulties relating to the collection of cinnamon by obtaining sufficient quantities from the Kandyan territories, and in the year after the signing of the treaty 1766-1767, a record collection of 10,000 bales of cinnamon was sent to Holland.

But hopes on this count were short lived. The Kandyans proved reluctant to observe the treaty. In any case, the Directors were not satisfied with the quality of most of the Kandyan cinnamon, thus forcing the Company to rely mainly on its own territories. But Falck found that Schreuder's gloomy forecasts for cinnamon in the Company's lands were not unfounded. This was to be more in the light of the Amsterdam buyers having become so choosy about quality. Thus, one finds Falck despairing of being able to meet the quotas

demanded, in spite of the search for cinnamon being made over an extensive area.<sup>36</sup> He saw no answer in Schreuder's proposal to encourage the inhabitants to plant it, obviously relying on the expertise of the local officials. Hence, he had no alternative but to pursue the earlier policies of Loten and Schreuder - that of destroying the illicitly planted gardens and recovering them for the Company. The Batavian authorities however showed concern lest the much longed-for peace be disturbed by fresh revolts. Hence, the Batavian authorities suggested to Falck that attempts be made to implement Schreuder's proposal to get the inhabitants to deliver cinnamon to the Company.<sup>37</sup> Schreuder himself was now a member of the Batavian Council and would doubtless have warned its members of the foolhardiness of continuing with his stringent measures. Having only shortly assumed office, nothing could have been more welcome to Falck than the opportunity to discard the harsh policies of the past and be spared all the problems that ensued therefrom. The consequences of any failure would certainly not be his responsibility either. But he was too duty conscious and an exceptionally loyal servant of the Company to seek an easy way. After a serious and concerned study of the proposals with his council he made out a strong case against any experiments that could prove hazardous.<sup>38</sup> His arguments were a mixture of the old prejudices as well as weighty and justifiable fears. It was not a bland rejection. He, in fact, saw merits in the proposal - especially that it would be advantageous both to the Company and the inhabitants, and what was more, free the Company from any dependence on the king, but only if it could prove to be successful. He pointed out that it was the considered opinion of all native as well as the Company's personnel experienced in the matter that cinnamon could not be cultivated, but thrived in the natural habitat of shrub and jungle land. The laziness of the inhabitants as well as their strong consciousness of caste were adduced as another factor that would militate against the success of such an experiment. The more weighty argument, though, was the fear that the permission to be granted to all, to cultivate and collect cinnamon would lead to the temptation to smuggle cinnamon. He further pointed out that the *Chalias* would seek to profit by the proposal by delivering to the Company through the agency of other inhabitants cinnamon collected as part of their obligatory services and explain the failure to deliver their full quotas on its non-availability.

A final but telling argument was that any inhabitant could freely peel the wild cinnamon and claim to have cultivated it. Thus, without any guarantee of an increase in cinnamon production, the Company, he argued, would be incurring the additional burden of having to pay for a product which it had hitherto obtained free of charge. In the face of all these objections, the Batavian Council dropped the idea altogether, and indeed, as already noted, went over to urging Falck to take more vigorous measures for the protection of cinnamon. Their earlier fears receded as Falck's measures went unchallenged by the inhabitants.

If Falck persisted in continuing with the old policies for the protection of cinnamon he adopted a new approach to the problem of the recalcitrant cinnamon peelers. He abandoned the policy of past Governors to exploit their onerous services as a matter of right without adequate compensation. He did everything possible to win their loyalty and make them attached to the interests of the Company.



In fact, one of Falck's very first acts was to inspect the collection of cinnamon in the Galle district. During the course of this inspection he removed the *Hoofd* of the *Mahabaddé*, Du Maurin, on the strength of complaints made by the *Chalias*.<sup>39</sup> The new *Hoofd*, appointed immediately thereon, was the junior merchant W. J. van de Graff, who was then the fiscal at Galle. De Graaf too followed Falck's policy in this respect and in consequence the low and despised group of *Chalias* obtained in the period under review privileges not enjoyed by any other inhabitants. Special consideration in the grant of lands, exemption from land dues and tolls at ferries, the right of plying vessels without paying anchorage dues, the free collection of salt and the right to trade in it as well as arrack, and exemption from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts were some of the privileges granted to the *Chalias*.

This new policy certainly evoked the chagrin and envy of the higher castes, but it paid the dividends that Falck expected. There was to be hardly any case of disruption of cinnamon collections caused by the disaffection of the cinnamon peelers subsequently. Instead, this caste group became so attached to the interests of the Company that they became the chief instruments for the execution of the harsh land policies that affected the other inhabitants. It was they who reported the clearing of illicit *chenas*, served on commissions that reported on the suitability of granting lands for *chena* cultivation and supervised the destruction of garden crops that were found in cinnamon lands. Thus, not surprisingly Bertolacci found them in the early years of the British to be ".....ambitious and vain, of a turbulent disposition .....difficult to rule" and "prone to insult the castes which are superior to them".<sup>40</sup>

But the success that attended Falck's attempts to win over the loyalty of the *Chalias* and the continuance of the senseless destruction of illicitly planted gardens failed to answer the main problem - the increased production of quality cinnamon. The annual collections did not reach former levels, and it was with great difficulty that sufficient quantities were found to meet the requests of the Directors.

During his frequent visits to the cinnamon-growing areas, Falck found reason to revise his earlier opinions on the possibility of planting cinnamon. The point that struck him most was that quality cinnamon was not evenly distributed, even though the land was of the same type. This led him to wonder whether all land had not received good quality seed. To this simple observation of Falck's may be traced the beginnings of cultivated cinnamon plantations.<sup>41</sup>

To verify his doubts, Falck ordered *Dessave de Coste* to clear what was considered to be a good cinnamon growing langts the *Marandaen*, and plant seeds of a good variety, in 1769. In 1771, the new *Hoofd* of the *Mahabaddé*, Daniel de Cock, was able to report the successful growth of the plants and reckoned that they would be peelable in four or five years.<sup>42</sup> If the Company had possessed more agricultural expertise, it could certainly have achieved the desired results more quickly, for in fact, it was to be discovered in the early years of British rule that cinamon could be propagated by means of cuttings, layered shoots and by destroying old root stocks in addition to the sowing of seeds. Cinnamon propagated by the first three methods could be peeled within twelve to eighteen months, while plants raised from seed took two to three years to reach peeling stage. An added disadvantage of the last method was the risk of the careless choice and preparation of the seeds. The seeds had to be fresh, taken from the fruits of mature plants, heaped together until the pulp rotted, washed and dried in the shade for three days before being planted.<sup>43</sup>

If the Dutch were to be ignorant of all the finer points of this culture and thus failed to achieve the desired results during their days, Falck's tumbling on to the right course at least had the beneficial effects of the liberalisation of land policies. It was also to prove a boon to the peeler. He was now less exposed to the risks and dangers of the jungles.

As already noted earlier, Falck hardly attempted to rush headlong with the opening up of plantations. He wanted the experiments carried out on a wider scale in selected plots and with choice seeds. At least, he showed an awareness of the importance in selecting the seeds discriminately but he had to rely on officials, both European and native, who showed a greater desire on producing quick results to earn the rewards provided as an incentive - special bonuses or *douceurs* for the Company's servants and gold chains and medals for the natives. If the quantity of peelable cinnamon was greatly increased, the quality left much to be desired.

Thunberg, the famous botanist, who visited the island in 1777 was requested by Falck to examine and report on the cinnamon peeled from newly planted plots, as a sample sent to Amsterdam in 1775 had been found to lack the proper flavour, although at the time of despatch the flavour was satisfactory. On examination, Thunberg too found that the oil content in the peeled bark was too volatile and not sufficiently concentrated in the young branches of plants, whose roots were not more than three years old. He reported that while branches of three year's growth were fit for peeling, the root and trunk ought to be more mature.<sup>44</sup> Thus, he certainly found the answer but failed to provide the formula for quick extension of production to meet the quotas - that of planting cuttings of older trees.

But his was an all too short and busy visit, lasting from 29th July 1777 to 6th February 1778, collecting specimens, visiting an elephant kraal, collecting rare coins and gems and observing the fauna and flora of the country. If he had remained longer it is not improbable that Falck would have had the satisfaction of seeing his efforts rewarded by the achievement of the desired results by the adoption of better methods of propagation. What followed was the continuation of the method of planting seeds while the plants were to be allowed to mature more before peeling. But what resulted was a hasty extension of plantations by chiefs lured by the glitter and glory of chains and medals.

At the end of Falck's tenure of office it was reported that there were 24 million cinnamon plants,<sup>45</sup> but it seems to have hardly made any difference as regards the annual collection of quality cinnamon. There is no doubt that in the haste to open up plantations, inadequate attention was paid to the quality of the the seeds chosen. There was also a more important drawback - planted cinnamon needed more care and attention in the first few years. In the first two years the plots had to be weeded three or four times a year, after which two weedings a year sufficed. The weeds had to be buried between the rows and soil drawn up around the plants. Further, the plants had to be coppiced in the second or third year, the stems cut down to within a few inches of the ground, and the cut surfaces earthed over. Four to six shoots only were to be left growing from the stump, and kept straight by pruning. When the plants were ready for peeling, they had to be pruned of all unwanted or distorted shoots and stumps, and more soil drawn up around the plants.<sup>46</sup>

But all this needed a large labour force and adequate supervision, even if they possessed the knowledge. It was certainly not characteristic of the V. O. C. to incur unnecessary expenditure to obtain its products, and when de Graaf found the young plantations overgrown with shrubs, he requested the sanction of Batavia to appoint a superintendent for the new plantations, or at least to revive the post of the assistant *dessave*, which had been suppressed. His request drew the characteristic answer that the Company could not create new posts when what was needed was retrenchment, and the even more surprising query as to why the *dessave* could not continue the task so ably carried out by de Cock.<sup>47</sup> De Cock had been in charge of an experimental plot of 1750 plants, while what was involved now was the care of 29 million plants. Thus, the stupidity of the Batavian authorities must be reckoned along with the more understandable ignorance involved in a pioneer venture, together with the haste, as the cause of the plantations failing to deliver the goods in the period under review.

De Graaf's tenure of office saw another unprecedented extension of cinnamon plantations. In 1794, the south and south-western districts of the island contained 609 million plants, and even if one were to make due allowance to the exaggerated claims that de Graaf was only too likely to make, this rapid extension of planted cinnamon could certainly have provided, as the Batavian authorities exclaimed "more cinnamon than the whole world could consume".<sup>48</sup> But inexplicably enough, to the Batavian authorities, the Sri Lanka officials were able to collect not more than an average of 5000 bales even in the last years, obtaining a part of that from the border districts of Kandy.

When *Kommandeur* Sluysken, who had once been the *Hoofd* of the *Mahabadde* was asked to examine and report on this failure, he made the inevitable comment on the hasty and indiscriminate extension of the plantations. The chief reason that he adduced, though, was certainly not far off the mark. He attributed the failure of the plantations to the deliberate and harmful effects of the chiefs and inhabitants entrusted with the *thunhavu!* lands for the the cultivation of cinnamon as well as other garden crops, having chosen the best two-third share for coconut, leaving the cinnamon to grow in the less fertile third.<sup>49</sup>

The British in the early years of the nineteenth century were to find the correct answers, and even by reducing the extent of the plantations, obtain 400,000 to 500,000 pounds of cinnamon annually.<sup>50</sup>

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