The Black Prince’s Chapel: an architectural record of the Church of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven, Telheiras, Lisbon

> The fall of the Kotte Kingdom and a prince in exile

Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka

At the dawn of the 16th century, Sri Lanka, called Ceilão by the Portuguese, was divided into three autonomous kingdoms: the kingdom of Kotte by which name its capital city was also called, the kingdom of Kandy that of the central mountainous region, named Candea or Candia by the Portuguese, and finally the kingdom of Jaffna in the northern part of the country. The kingdom of Kotte was the largest in extent, the most populated and most prosperous. It extended over the Western and Southern provinces of the island. The port of Colombo, which came to be called Columbus by the Portuguese, was the chief port of the kingdom of Kotte (Image 1).

The Portuguese presence in Sri Lanka was from 1505 when Lorenzo de Almeida, son of the viceroy of Portuguese India, dropped anchor at the port of Colombo. It is recorded that the Franciscan friar who accompanied the fleet did not remain in the island as he returned to India with the fleet. Very little is documented about the religious activities of the Portuguese in the first four decades. According to the sources, “there were two centers of Christian worship in the kingdom of Kotte: the small church of St. Lawrence in the Colombo settlement and another in the capital Kotte where the Portuguese captain resided from 1528”. It is noted that these churches mainly accommodated the spiritual needs of the Portuguese settlers, merchants and soldiers.

The kingdom of Kotte was ruled by king Dharma Parakramabahu IX (1509-1518) when the Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka. According to the chronicles following the death of Dharma Parakramabahu, the kingdom of Kotte was brought under control of his brother Vijayabahu. Subsequently, Bhuvanakabahu, Raigama Bandara (Parara Jayatissa) and Mayadunne, who were the three sons by Vijayabahu’s first queen, killed their father with assistance from the ruler of Kandy, Jayaweera Wickramabahu, and shared the territory of the kingdom among themselves. The eldest Bhuvanakabahu ascended the throne of Kotte, the second received as his share the region of Raigama, while the youngest Mayadunne was granted the provinces further inland which bordered the Kandy kingdom. Mayadunne chose Sitawaka as his capital. Thus the three kingdoms came into

ABSTRACT

A Capela do Príncipe Negro: Um registo arquitectónico da Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Porta do Céu, Telheiras, Lisboa

being where previously there had been one. The sudden assassination of Vijayabahu in 1521 and the fragmentation of the kingdom contributed to the decline of Kotte. It was a prelude to the rise of the Kandyian kingdom as a more independent monarchy and of its ultimate disintegration.

Mayadunne of Sitawaka, the most ambitious and the most aggressive of the three brothers, entertained hopes of becoming the sole monarch of the kingdom of Kotte. He was to add Raigama to his own territory in 1538 when his second brother Raigama Bandara died. Thus Sitawaka emerged as the largest and strongest kingdom in the island. By this time the Portuguese had established a garrison and a factory in Colombo with the intention of controlling the island's cinnamon trade. Bhuvanekabahu of Kotte was aware that in order to safeguard himself and his kingdom from Mayadunne of Sitawaka, he had to seek assistance from the Portuguese. Thus he sought military assistance from the Portuguese garrison in Colombo. The rivalry between the two brothers...
was even made more serious by Bhuvenakabahu’s decision to ensure that his infant grandson Dharmapala, the son of his daughter Samudra Devi, should ascend the throne of Kotte after his own demise.

Franciscans – the pioneer missionaries of the East

At the end of the 15th century the two Iberian nations Spain and Portugal broke the centuries old Islamic siege of Europe and began to spread western civilization throughout the world. During this era of exploration “the popes had granted to the Portuguese and Spanish kings sweeping powers over the missionary works – an activity which pertains to the spiritual field – because at the time of the great sea discoveries there was no central organization in Rome to promote and supervise it”. As a result, the task of disseminating Catholicism in the east was entrusted to the Portuguese. The Portuguese Franciscans were the pioneer missionaries who accompanied the explorers and took the Gospel to the people of Portuguese expansions in the east. Artur Roque de Almeida endorses; when the epic of the discoveries began, the Portuguese Franciscans appeared to be fascinated by the sea and Portuguese historian Jaime Cortesão believes that Franciscanism was rooted in the inspiration of the maritime discoveries and the enthusiasm for it that the Portuguese has demonstrated.

As pioneer missionaries their work extended over a vast geographical area in continents of Asia, Africa and the new world. From the point of view of extent of mission field and the number of personnel engaged in mission work, the Franciscan order became in fact the foremost missionary order of the early colonial period when Spain and Portugal were active in extending their dominion, trade and influence beyond Europe.

Towards the end of 1543, as a result of an ambassadorial mission between Bhuvenakabahu and the King of Portugal, a group of six Portuguese Franciscan missionaries arrived in Sri Lanka with the hope of converting the king to Christianity, but were disappointed. The group was led by Friar João de Villa do Conde and he was accompanied by Friars António de Padrão, Sirão de Coimbra, Gonzalo and Francisco de Monteprandone. Nevertheless, afterward they began to preach the gospel in the territory. The Franciscans were not only the pioneers but even after other orders arrived, i.e. Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1602 and the Dominicans and Augustinians in 1606, Franciscans continued to be the most numerous and had pastoral charge of the greater part of the country.

In 1551, after Bhuvenakabahu’s sudden death, prince Dharmapala was proclaimed as the King of Kotte. Later, the young Dharmapala decided to receive baptism taking the name Dom João, in honour of Dom João III, then King of Portugal. The baptism took place in 1557 at the hands of Friar João de Villa do Conde and ever after lived under the protection of the Portuguese who defended him as long as he lived and maintained him on the throne not withstanding the opposition of Mayadunne, his uncle. Even after death of Mayadunne in 1581 the troubles of Dharmapala and the Portuguese were not over, as the Kingdom of Kotte and the Portuguese garrison of Colombo were laid siege many times by Prince Tikiri Bandara, Mayadunne’s son, who become king of Sitawaka as Rajasinghe I at the death of his father.

Kingdom of Kandy

Jayaweera Wickramabahu (1511-1552) feared an attack on the Kandyan kingdom by the Sitawaka troops. Therefore around 1545, he too sought assistance from the Portuguese in Colombo. As a result, in 1547, two friars of the Franciscans entered the Kingdom of Kandy without any opposition. The Portuguese agreed to help on the condition that the King converted to Christianity. “The first Franciscan to enter Kandy was Fra. Francisco de Monteprandone. He was asked to go and baptize King Jayaweera Bandara.” The king was secretly baptized under the name of Dom Manoel. The baptism of the king was purely a political move as he had no intention of changing his religion. In the following decade a major change occurred in the Kandyan kingdom. Around 1550 the crown prince Karaliyadde Bandara, who had been baptized with the name of Dom João ousted his father, Jayaweera Wickramabahu, from the throne. Karaliyadde Bandara had been given ready support by the Portuguese.
The situation in the “mountain kingdom” alarmed the lowland kingdoms. Finally, in 1582, Rajasinghe of Sitawaka invaded the Kandyian kingdom. During the battle, Weerasundara Bandara, who was a leading general in Karaliyadde Bandara’s army, aligned himself with Rajasinghe and his troops. King Karaliyadde, unable to hold his crown, withdrew to the forested lands to the north-east of his capital where soon afterwards the king and the members of his family died of smallpox, leaving his nephew Yamasinigh Bandara and infant daughter Dona Catharina to the care of Franciscans.11

Paul E. Pieris, in his account “Ceylon the Portuguese Era” describes this incident, “The King accompanied by his family and some of his Mudaliyars fled through Bintenna into Trincomalee (Image 2) escorted by the Portuguese troops, and there he was joined by Dom Luis Coutinho with some more soldiers who had been sent from Goa (...). Smallpox now broke out among the fugitives; the King himself, his Queen and his son fell victims to the plague, leaving behind an infant Princess, the future Dona Catherina, who was only a year old at the time. There also remained his nephew, Jama Sinha Bandara, who was nominated by the dying king as his successor till such time as his own daughter was of sufficient age to be married.”12 In the 13th chapter of his chronicle, “Conquista Spiritual Do Oriente” Franciscan historian Paulo da Trindade writes, “Our Religious who educated this prince and baptized him, seeing that he was the legitimate heir to the throne of Candea, and also that this was a good opportunity to acquire it. (...) He lodged in St. Francis Friary, and was there baptized by the archbishop Dom Vicente, the godfather being the viceroy.”13 The prince was given the name of Dom Phelippe. Together with him, a legitimate son was baptized whom they named Dom João prince-heir to all his kingdoms.14 All this took place in the year 1588, more or less.15

The political scene at the hill country continued to be unstable. Many incidents that occurred during this period proved that Rajasinghe’s control over the Kandyian kingdom was under threat. Weerasundara Bandara, his one-time ally, was executed on suspicion of fostering a rebellion. His son Konappu Bandara on hearing of his father’s death fled to the Portuguese in Colombo and then to Goa where he was baptized and took the name of Dom João of Austria.16 Subsequently he returned to Colombo and took part in the siege where he was twice seriously wounded.

Emergence of Yamasinha Bandara

Dom Phelippe Yamasinigh Bandara returned to the island as the commander of a troop which formed part of the expedition sent from Goa on 4th February 1588. This expedition helped to relieve the siege of Colombo and to defeat the military of Rajasinghe. Toward the end of his regime, Rajasinghe lost his hold over the Kandyian Kingdom. Mudaliar Dom Francisco Wijayakon led the revolt of the Udara in 1592 and proclaimed himself king of the hill country. But made way for Yamasinha Bandara, the legitimate heir to ascend the throne. Trindade writes about this episode as “Dom Francisco was proclaimed King and as absolute monarch ruled that Kingdom of Candea for a period of six months. He then offered it to Dom Phelippe, who by then had arrived in Manar from Goa, not only because by right it belonged to him, but also because he enjoyed the favour of the Portuguese.”17

Dom Phelippe Yamasinigh Bandara made his entry into Kandy with great pageantry. According to historical records, “Dom Phelippe marched through the country without opposition, and at Wahakotte was received as King as Wijayakon waived all claims for the throne in Dom Phelippe’s favour. Dom Phelippe found himself strong enough not only to hold his own but also to push within the dominions of Rajasinghe to Gantenna.”18 “Konappu Bandara volunteered to join this expedition against Rajasinghe who had killed his father.”19 The Portuguese protégé “Yamasinigh Bandara had donated the kingdom of Kandy to Filipe II (of Portugal) – in case he should have no more sons or if his son Dom João should have none”.20 In 1592 Yamasinigh Bandara died. It was suspected that he was poisoned by Konappu Bandara. “The Franciscans hurried to fetch the heir, Dom João from his college21 in Colombo”.22 But he was given no chance to rule the kingdom. Dom João was ousted by Konappu Bandara who then ascended to the throne as Vimaladharamasuriya and became a persistent enemy of the Portu-
In a short period of time, the kingdom of Kandy went from being a partner to being an enemy of the Portuguese and became the main obstacle to total domination over the island.

When Rajasinghe died in 1593, he had no legitimate heir to succeed him. Therefore a close relative, Prince Nikapitiya Bandara was proclaimed the King. The Portuguese in Colombo took advantage of his immaturity and routed the forces to Sitawaka and brought Nikapitiya Bandara to Colombo. The Prince was entrusted to the care of Franciscans monastery of Colombo where he was baptized under the name of Dom Philipe and enrolled to Franciscan College of St. Anthony. Then within a few years of Rajasinghe’s death the Portuguese gained domination over the maritime provinces of the island. Kotte and Jaffna too were under the control of the Portuguese, it was only the Kandyan kingdom that survived to be the last of the independent Sinhala kingdoms.

Exile of Dom João

Subsequent to being expelled from the throne, Dom João was taken by the Portuguese to Mannar where he was looked after by the Franciscans. Later he was brought to Colombo and further educated in the Franciscan College of St. Anthony. From there he was sent to Goa with Prince Nikapitiya Bandara for further education. In his chronicle, Trindade describes, “Dom João, seeing himself excluded from the kingdom, left it with his grandmother the old queen, to save his life which they were trying to take, as they had already taken his throne. He went to Wahakotte, and from there to the Seven Coralas, where he was met and taken to Manar."

How the Franciscans took care of Dom João is recorded by Queyrozs in his chronicle “The Temporal and spiritual Conquest of Ceylon”; he says “There were ever by his side in all these perils the Fathers of St. Francis, especially Father Friar Francisco do Oriente who like a father brought him up and had care of him.” Further Trindade concludes thus, “From Manar, Dom João was taken to Colombo, lodged at our College where he remained until the arrival of Father Fra. Jeronimo do Espírito Santo, Custodian and Commissary General of this Custody of St. Thomas. (...) The Father thought it appropriate, not only for the welfare of the island, but also for their education, to transfer them to Goa, which he did, registering them at the College of Reis Magos in Bardez. These two princes remained fifteen years in this College, where, beside Christian doctrine and good customs, they learned to read and write, and were taught also Latin.”

> Dom João, the Black Prince of Lisbon

Black Prince of Lisbon

According to Paul E. Pieris’s account, “subsequent to the death of Dharmapala and in accordance with the request contained in his will, the Council of Portugal decided that the two should be sent to Europe; whither they sailed in the company of André de Furtado[46] and the Archbishop Aleixo de Meneses[47]. They were received in Lisbon with great honour. (...) Dom Francisco da Gama, then the president of the same Council, went to the quay to meet the visitors; since he was the viceroy of India during the time that they came from Ceilão. Having disembarked, they were lodged in Convent of St Francis of Lisbon. The King on being informed of their arrival directed that they should be sent to the colleges of St. Peter and St. Paul at Coimbra, till they were qualified to receive Bishoprics.

Coimbra had many university colleges and most of them were formed in the sixteenth century, during and immediately following the Reformation of the University, during the reign of King D. João III. They were intended for clergy who wished to study in the University and belonged to or were managed by religious orders, as a result of which they were often called Colégios Monásticos – “Monastic Colleges.” It is recorded that Dom Philipe who had already completed the Arts course accepted the offer and went to Coimbra. But soon afterwards took ill and died in the Franciscan monastery of St. Francis de Ponte and was buried there.

Dom João on the other hand elected not to go to College and was granted permission to remain in Lisbon as a priest with a suitable allowance. The king allotted him an income of four thousand cruzados per year from
the royal treasury to be paid by the India house\(^4\), from the royal dues imposed on the ships that go from here, until such time as a vacancy occurred from which Dom João could draw an income, or could be given an ecclesiastical benefice, as he had already been ordained a priest.\(^5\) M. H. Goonatilleke writes, “he seems to have preferred to stay in Lisbon to enjoy the luxury of court life denied to him in Sri Lanka.”\(^6\) The Portuguese records show that afterwards he resided at a place of Moorish quarters — “Mouraria” of Lisbon, the neighborhood of the nobility of the time (Image 3).

Around 1635, Dom João acquired a land in the Telheiras village, a locality with mild climate and surrounded by farms and vineyards. He built a hermitage chapel with the invocation of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven and founded the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven and St. John the Baptist, which become the present civil parish of Lumiar, in the northern area of the capital of Lisbon (Image 4). He was the first brother and judge of the Brotherhood.

However it was said that his allowance was paid with great irregularity. Since at that time Portugal was subject to Iberian Union\(^7\), Dom João thereupon went to Madrid in 1626 to visit the king\(^8\). “There he renounced his right to the kingdom of Cândia and other states giving them to His Majesty, the King of Portugal.”\(^9\) He was received at the court with great honour. The king made him a Grandee of Spain\(^10\), ordered that a seat be given to him on the Bench of Bishops and increased his monthly allowance.\(^11\)

**Franciscan monastery of Telheiras**

A few years later, i.e. around 1634, in addition to the church at Telheiras, Dom João started a convent with the establishment of a small hermetic community with
five Franciscans. The monastery building was completed and granted to the Order of Franciscans on 20 October 1639. The volume V of Portuguese Franciscan chronicle “Historia Serafica” (1569-1775) states that he had built this church and the convent in appreciation of what the Franciscans had done for him since his boyhood. The church was dedicated to ‘Nossa Senhora da Porta do Céu’; literally translated as ‘Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven’. This was an unusual invocation as patron of a church, although already cast-off since the early Christianity. The Virgin Mary is represented with the Child in her left arm and a key in her right arm which symbolizes her intercession as the gateway to heaven. “It was the first church in Portugal to be dedicated to Our Lady under this title.” (Image 5)

Death of Dom João

Dom João died on 1st of April, 1642 at the age of sixty four at his home in the Moorish quarter. At his request, he was buried in the church of Telheiras which he founded. In the first decade of the 18th century, the friars of the community reposed the mortal remains of Dom João in a special crypt on the left side chancel wall of the church, with a marble sepulchral stone which engraved thus: “Here lie buried the bones of the Prince of Candia who built this sacred edifice to Mary.” (Image 6) It is known that the right side of the chancel was reserved for the mortal remains of his cousin Nikapitiya Bandara who was buried in the monastery of St. Francis de Ponte but it was never transferred.

The Great Lisbon Earthquake

The century 1650-1750, can be highlighted as the most flourishing era of the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven and St. John the Baptist, since they generated a substantial income and ensured several prestigious benefactors. It is said during this period the kings of that time and other nobilities visited and attend-
ed the church. In 1752 the Brotherhood marked another important milestone. The king of Portugal, D. José I (1750-1777), and Queen Mariana Vitória were designated as the judges of the Brotherhood. Subsequently in 1755 the Secretary of state, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the first Count of Oeiras, later obtained the title of the Marquês de Pombal by which he is referred to in this writing, was appointed as the president of the brotherhood.

In the year 1755 the church was destroyed by the Great Lisbon Earthquake followed by a tsunami and fire which almost devastated most of Lisbon and its suburban. It was recorded as one of the deadliest earthquakes in the history of the world. Almost all of the City’s major structures suffered extensive damage. The rebuilding of the city was begun immediately under guidance of Marquis Pombal. The king directed him to take charge of bringing order back to the city. Under his post-earthquake reconstruction enterprise, Marquis Pombal ordered to restore the devastated church of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven as well. The restoration was completed in 1768.

The Latin inscription in the commemorative plaque placed over the main door of the restored church is inscribed thus:

“This temple is of Mary and called the Gate of Heaven
This house, as it was formerly built
by Prince of Candia, was destroyed by earthquake.
And now that reigns Joseph First, not only is restored,
but it is a work worthy of eternal posterity
that shines with the name of the Count of Oeiras.
1768”

The monastery also suffered extensive damage during the Portuguese Liberal Wars that lasted from 1828 to 1834. In 1833, when the entire Luminar region was involved, the liberal army moved into the district of Telheiras. The church and the convent were occupied by the liberal army during the final phase of the conflict, the church was robbed, the monastic library was destroyed and the bells and the clock tower were damaged. In the following year, with the establishment of the new constitutional monarchy, by the Law of May 30, all the Religious Orders in Portugal were suppressed and confiscated their properties; the religious space of the country gradually gave way before the growing power of civil authority, and many of the monastery buildings were appropriated for other functions. This pronounced the extinction of the monastery of Telheiras as well; the convent and church buildings remained vacant for several years which resulted in the destruction of the buildings.

Portait of Dom João

According to the same Franciscan chronicle of “Historia Serafica”, there had been a true portrait of Dom João in the sacristy of the church of Telheiras. With the dissolution of the monastery in 1834, it was removed from the church to the Biblioteca Nacional (National library of Portugal) but it is no longer there at the library.

The “Historia Serafica” says that “in the sacristy of this oratory (of Telheiras) we have a true portrait of the prince, which by the height of the figure, proportion of
the body and grave countenance manifests his nobility. He was dark-complexioned like everybody in Ceylon, but in features and hair was not different from Europeans." It is said that the original figure was in full length, showing D. João in ecclesiastical costume. Today a reproduction of the same but only the bust is published in the "Archivo Historico Portuguez," Vol. III – (1905) (Image 8). It can be noticed that "on the left corner is the curiously erroneous legend "D. João d'Austria Prin- cepe de Candia, Falleceu em 2 de Abril 1664" – probably a later addition."

Moreover in 1910 with the establishment of the first Portuguese Republic, the monastery building was converted into private dwellings and the church building was occupied as a blacksmith workshop. The course of establishment of the Portuguese republic spanned a complex 16-year period, where the church lapsed into further decay. In 1927 the remains of the tombstone of the original crypt and Coat of Arms of Dom João were taken to Carmo Archaeological Museum in Lisbon (Image 9).

Coat of Arms of Dom João

The heraldic of Coats of Dom João basically contained two elements: a shield and a coronet. The shield bordered by the seven castles appears as a direct adaptation from the coat of arms of Portugal which supposedly represents the castles that were conquered by the Portuguese during their fighting against the Moorish for the independence. The center of the shield is depicting "the Sinhalese lion rampant and the sun, from which he claimed descent, supported by a tower crowned with the cross of Aviz or cross of Calatrava.

By following the heraldic traditions associated to the coats of arms of the nobles of the time, it can be supposed that the coronet symbolizes the noble title of "Grandee of Spain" and the Calatrava cross possibly recalls the Spanish origin of the grant of arms which he received from the court of Madrid in 1626.

The restoration work of the church was begun in 1940 and reopened for public worship in 1941 (Image 10). It is documented that during the restoration process the
remains of Dom João, as well as all others who were buried in the chancel of the church, were placed in a separate vault. However, this location is still not identified. In 1604, by the Patriarchal Decree of February 27, the new parish of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven in Telheiras was established. Subsequently in 2006 a proper restoration work of the church was carried out. Finally, after almost 400 years of Dom João’s presence in Lisbon, by the Ordinance No. 261 of June 13, 2012, the church was listed as a monument of public interest in Portugal.

The Black Prince’s Chapel of Telheiras

Architecture of the original church

There is no formal documentation about the architectural style of the original church building built by Dom João. Therefore, it can be assumed that the architectural style was in accordance with the period. Apart from the long span (1520–1650) of the Mannerist style which was the dominant architectural order of the era, another substitute type of architectural style emerged. The American art historian George Kubler wrote about the “Arquitectura Chã” (or the “Plain Architecture” as this style was identified) as being the prevalent type of architecture in Portugal and its colonies as well. The creation of this simplified style was needed due to limited financial resources, particularly during Iberian union; under this peculiar temporal arrest of Spain, rule expresses itself in the construction of churches and other buildings. It was a clear transformation from the existing Mannerist and was also a radical break from the preceding Manueline style. José Manuel Fernandes notes that this architecture was based on plain, flat surfaces, clear volumes, purged of the excessive decoration that international Baroque then accepted. Resisting Baroque, the “Plain Style” hung on as long as it could, overcoming temporary renovating trends and attempts at change. It is observed that during this period, the church architecture features pilasters instead of columns, and geometric rectilinear & elementary lines instead of curves.

According to George Kubler’s writings, three main types of church design could clearly be identified in Portugal by 1610. The hall-church formula was abandoned before 1580 and with it the last vestiges of medieval structural habits vanished, being replaced with large, uninterrupted volumes surrounded by thick walls, in a number of variations on the plain box. The first type was the wide barrel-vaulted nave flanked with rows of chapels beneath tribunes. Church of Espírito Santo in Évora is a good example for this typology.

The second type, based on the church of São Roque in Lisbon, was the nave treated as a salon, nearly square in plan, under a tray ceiling in perspective painting, and surrounded by altars set in façades resembling those of palaces, with rooms, corridors, tribunes and stairs within. The tunnel sanctuary branched off from the salon as a grotto-like alcove, usually facing the main entrance, which opened directly without a vestibule into the nave beneath a choir balcony. This type was especially suited to preaching. A raised zone connecting the altars, and raised off from the nave floor, was reserved for clergy and special devotions. These well-lighted salon naves were used not only in religious brotherhood churches but also in pilgrimage churches and increasingly in parish churches of the eighteenth century. (...)

Of all the modalities of the Christian church, it is the most participatory, providing a palatial setting and putting the congregation at its center.

The third type originated in nunnery churches like Santa Clara in Évora, where the deep nun’s choir faced the altar. The public entrance therefore was placed in a side wall rather than the wall facing the altar. Here the participation of the public was different; the worshipper coming from the street was thrust, as it were, into the magnetic field of high energies produced between the main altar and the prayers of the nuns in their grilled and barred choir. Santa Clara-a-Nova in Coimbra is the main example.

On studying the architectural character of the present ‘post-earthquake re-modeled’ church of Telheiras it is clearly evident that it is much in compliance with the characters of the second type of architectural model described above. In architectural terms it can be described as a “salon church” (Image 11). The decorative arts played an extremely important role in the
promotion of this austere architecture. Especially the application glazed tiles panels on vast interior walls and use of gilt woodwork in altars and pulpits compensated the excessive nudity of the interior of the churches.

**Post-earthquake restoration**

Over time, it is not possible to ascertain either the degree of destruction of the church caused by the earthquake or the changes made to the original architecture during the rehabilitation process. The commemorative plaque of 1758 indicates that it was rebuilt after the earthquake. In rebuilding the church, one approach would have been to rebuild the church just as it was before, the other would be to build according to the standards of the post-earthquake period. In order to understand the origins of the planning and design efforts that influenced the post-earthquake reconstruction programme, it is necessary to understand the tastes and styles which prevailed during the first half of eighteenth century, especially during period of the reign of king Dom João V (1706-50) when the Baroque style flourished in Portugal. As John R. Mullin, in his study "The reconstruction of Lisbon following the earthquake of 1755", points out during this period Portugal had a dramatic increase in affluence and prosperity due to
the gold and diamonds flowing into the country from Brazil. The King embarked on a building programme across the country. Many of these structures were built in the rich and ornate Baroque traditions.

Of all projects undertaken during this period, the most impressive in Greater Lisbon was the Palácio Nacional at Mafra (1717-30, 1752-1794). “The following figures illustrate the importance of Mafra and its influence on Portuguese design: over the span of 15 years, between 20,000 and 50,000 workers, under the control of 6,000 soldiers, toiled on a project that included a basilica, palace, monastery, convent, hospital, library, chapels and monks’ cells. (...), it was and still remains one of the largest construction projects in the history of the nation. Its significance, apart from its massive size, is twofold. First, it established Baroque as the prevailing architectural design style in the country for the first half of the century. Secondly, it served as a training ground for the nation’s architects, engineers, sculptors and other craftsmen for decades. Many of these artists and craftsmen eventually assumed positions of authority and responsibility in the reconstruction efforts that followed the earthquake. Within this background Pombal assembled a team of designers to guide the rebuilding of the city. They were a representative cross-section of the eighteenth century Portuguese design history.”

Interior of the church

It is observed that the interior of the church had five altars: the high altar was dedicated to patroness of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven. It is supposed that it was adorned with rich glazed tiles – Azulejos – and curved gilded woodcarving – Talha Dourada – Portugal’s most original and rich artistic decorative styles of the period. Gospel side altars were devoted to Our Lady of the Conception and St. Vincent, and Epistle side altars were Our Lady of Childbirth and St. John the Baptist. There were certainly other images distributed by altars, among which references one of Our Lady of the Régime. The chronicles say that in 1880 the altar of the church was transferred to the hermitage of Sacred Heart of Mary in Campo Grande and consequently the images of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven were also taken to the same hermitage of Campo Grande.

According to the unpublished Portuguese document of “O Convento de Nossa Senhora da Porta do Céu em Telheiras” there were 13 images in the church: Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven, St. Francis, St. Joachim, St. Dominic, St. Joseph, Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven with Child Jesus, St. Anthony, St. Isabel, St. Amaro, St. Diogo, St. Louis the bishop, St. Rita and Holy Christ. In the Sacristy there were six images: St. John Capistrano, two images of St. Francis, St. Dominic, Risen Lord and Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven.
Architecture Drawings

Image 12
Ground floor plan.

Image 13
Choir level plan.
Architecture of the present church

The most significant part of the church is the façade that bordered the Estrada de Telheiras (Image 19). The bell tower which is flanked by four arches of stone and topped by the bulbous spire with its four skirted pinnacles gives a monumental character to the church. The rest of the façade remains very symmetrical and classically simple. The pair of symmetrical scrolls extended by the crib pattern moldings support the triangular pediment at the center where the cross stands.
The doorway is very sober and balanced, framed by two pilasters and an entablature, on which rests a frieze topped by two urns (Image 20). Overall composition of the doorway looks much like the doorway of the church of Nossa Senhora da Piedade in Santarém. It is a design entirely in Portuguese restoration taste, plain and severe. The Latin commemorative plaque of 1768, topped by a small winged angel head, which holds the key of the Gate of Heaven, is placed over the doorway.

The three delicately decorated windows over the plaque are surmounted by a decorative pediment with two garlands. The central one is higher and triumphed by the royal shield and an oculus (a circular opening in the center of a wall) filled with an eight-pointed medallion at the highest point which looks like the eight-pointed star of the coat of arms of Marquis of Pombal (Image 21).

The layout of the church is a simple longitudinal plan. It consists of a single nave bordered by four side chapels, narrowed chancel, choir, sacristy and grandstand which linked the church to the convent (Image 23). Currently it is being used as the secretariat of the parish. All the altars are connected by a raised floor, elevated from the nave. The dimensions of the nave from inner side of the façade to the triumphal arch are: the span 18 meters, 9 meters wide and 12 meters high. The wooden barrel roof creates a very pleasing atmosphere inside. The chancel measures almost a square of 6.5 by 6.5 meters and reflects some modern introductions. The chancel is presided by the image of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven. There are two tribunes in side walls of the chancel. The tomb of Dom João is marked by the tomb stone located before the high altar. The altar table and the baptismal font are very contemporary. The
lighting of the nave is provided by the means of four square windows positioned above the curved arches of side chapels and the three windows in the façade that illuminate the choir. Two red limestone holy water fonts are placed on either side of the entrance.

Access to the choir is through the door to the tower which is flanked by the bell tower and the bulbous spire. The reinforced choir supported on the two stone pillars with a depressed arch that top the main entrance has been plastered thus fits with the sober interior.

The less ornate pilasters and cornices of the nave finished out of pink marble and limestone highlight the radical simplicity of Baroque characteristics, mandated by the revitalization effort. The arch of the choir and the simple pediments of two side doors also complete with pink marble. The triumphal arch which is
identical to the arches of the chapels is further defined by a rectangular frame and surmounted by a pink marble framed pediment. The types of arches formed by a projecting volute announce the elements of an early phase of Baroque.

Although the combination of pink marble and white limestones were used in the early seventeenth century architecture, the application in this church appears to be a result of reuse of fragmented stones from the same building. Further it can be observed that the larger proportion of fragmented marble and limestones have been used for the flooring of the church in a random way. And also this fact can be presented as material evidence to support the above conjunction of reconstruction.

Two pulpits between the side chapels complete the interior. The decorative arched cornices on top of the pulpit access door, which extends to the abacuses of the adjacent arches of the side chapels, make the harmony between them.

The beautiful stucco composition on the pediment over the triumphal arch with an ornate symbol of shell motifs of two medallions resembles works of Milanese sculptor João Groesi, one of the great sculptors of the Pombaline time. The two medallions are surmounted and flanked by the royal crown, an oak branch and a palm; one of the medallions mounts the key of the Gate of Heaven and other one the Portuguese coat of arms.

**Image of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven**

It is said that the original image had been commissioned by Dom João that was in the Indies of Castilian (Spanish American). The image height was 110 cm. Today the present image has a different outlook since according to the image of 1774 it is noticed both hands rise up; in one hand the Key of Heaven’s Gate and the other showed the Child Jesus.

It is said in a century’s old popular tradition of the Telheiras parish, that the silver key that the Virgin is holding circulated among the homes of patients in the area, in particular being placed in the hands of the dying, as they believed that Our Lady would open the gate of heaven for them.

> **Concluding Remarks**

As per the previous discussions it is recognized that over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries the original church of Telheiras, which was built by Dom João, underwent serious transformations especially after the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, which is reflected
in the architectural characters of the present building. However today it stands as an extremely interesting piece of architecture with rich historical and artistic significance. In view of its significance in the political and religious affairs of Sri Lanka and Portugal, the church and the convent of Our Lady of the Gate of Heaven in Telheiras deserves to be preserved as a classical monument that belongs to the period of Portugal’s overseas expansions in the 16th and 17th centuries. In architectural and iconographic sense the church still remains a focal point of the Telheiras Parish. It is fortunate that the church has at least been restored and is being well looked after by present brotherhood of Telheiras with the abundant remembrance of the Dom João of Kandy, the founder of the brotherhood.

Sagura Jayasinghe is a senior lecturer attached to the Department of Integrated Design, Faculty of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, and a Fellow Member of Sri Lanka Institute of Architects. He has won several awards for his publications on the art and architecture of Sri Lanka’s ecclesiastical heritage.

NOTES

9 Ibid, p. 149.
10 Ibid, p. 150.
13 The Franciscans were in Kandy from 1547 to 1582. When Rajasinghe annexed the Kandyans Kingdom, forced the royal family and the Franciscans to flee the capital. V Perinola, The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka: The Portuguese Period, Volume II 1556-1609, p. 215.
14 Yamasinghe Bandara.
16 A Francisca, Metropolitan Archbishop of Goa from 1573 to 1586.
17 D. Duarte de Mendes, The viceroy of India from 1584 to 1588, died in Goa, May 1588.
22 Paul E. Pieris, Ceylon the Portuguese Era Being a History of Island for the Period