

# THE LADY'S GEOGRAPHY.

[Kelly Plante](#) August 30, 2021

*DESCRIPTION of the Island of CEYLON. [Continued from Page 480.]*

THIS country, though mountainous, is watered by a great number of very fine rivers which fall from the mountains:—most of them are too full of rocks to be navigable, but they contain fish in great abundance. The river of Mavelagongue, which is the principal of them, has its source in the Picus Adami, of which we shall give a description hereafter; it traverses the whole island towards the north, and falls into the sea at Trinquemale. Its breadth is about a cross bow shot: the rocks, which render it very little navigable, afford harbour and retreat to a great number of alligators. It runs within a quarter of a league of the town of Candi; but as the rapidity of its waters will not admit of any bridge being built over it, it can only be crossed in little canoes. It is moreover a point of policy amongst the inhabitants, who are far from desirous to render travelling commodious in their country; but rather chuse to embarrass the roads as much as possible. In some places this river flows for leagues together without meeting any interruption from the rocks. But the Ceylonese in general reap very little advantages from the waters, either in the way of commerce, or for the conveyance

of goods.

Excepting the province of Ouvah, and the districts of Oudipollat and Dolusbang, the whole island is covered with wood. It is well peopled about the centre, but very indifferently towards the borders. The inhabitants do indeed shew many places where they pretend heretofore to have had very considerable cities, the names of which the places retain to this day; but there are scarcely the vestiges of any buildings remaining in them. Knox, who traversed the island several times, takes notice of only five which can deserve that title; and in which the king has palaces, although they are all in ruins, excepting that which he particularly inhabits. Of these cities Candi, or Conde, is the chief. It has the advantage of being placed in the centre of the island; so that it may be approached with equal facility from every part of it. Its form is triangular; and, according to the custom of the country, the king's palace occupies the eastern angle of it. It is fortified only to the south, because the access to it is more open there than from any other quarter. This fortification, however, is nothing more than a rampart of earth about twenty feet high, which crosses the valley from one mountain to another. All the avenues to the city, for two or three miles distance, are closed up with barriers of thorn, and a continual guard always kept at them; and the great river which comes down from the Picus Adami, passes within a quarter of a league of it towards the south.

The next city is Nellembey-neur, about twelve miles south of the preceding. Allout-neur stands to the north-east of Candi, where the king keeps large magazines of corn and rice in reserve against the time of war. Badoula, which is the fourth city, is two days journey from Candi, towards the east of the province of Ouvah. In this province the best tobacco in the island is cultivated: it is very well watered; but wood is scarce in it. Rice and cattle, however, are in abundance in it; with respect to which, however, this very singular circumstance is observable, that the cattle reared there cannot live for any considerable time when transported into any other province: the occasion of which, is attributed to a certain shrub, which is found in all the other provinces, and not in this.

The fifth and last of these cities is Digligyneur, situated also to the east of Candi. In this city the king has kept his court ever since the year 1664, when a revolt of his subjects drove him to quit Candi; and with his departure began the ruin of that city. It is situated in the province of Hevoiattay, a country which is covered with mountains and rocks, that render the soil of it extremely infertile. Yet has the king chosen it for his residence, as a place of security, by being in the neighbourhood of a very high mountain called Gauldua, which may, on any occasion, afford him a safe retreat; and where as much rice may be gathered as will amply maintain the garrison of three forts, which defend the entrance to it. It is extremely steep on all sides; and so invested with rocks,

woods, and precipices, that a handful of men might stand their ground there against very numerous armies.

As to the towns and villages of Ceylon, altho' they are very numerous, there are few of them that are worth a traveller's attention. The most remarkable are those which are consecrated to their idols, in which some of their Devals, or temples, may be seen. The inhabitants give themselves very little trouble about making their streets strait, or preserving any regularity in their houses; each family living in a seperate building, which is most usually surrounded with a hedge and ditch. The Ceylonese never build in the high road, as they do not chuse to be observed by passengers. Their largest villages do not contain above a hundred houses. Their usual number is about forty or fifty, although there are some which consist of only eight or ten. Besides which, they quit them whenever sickness happens to be in any degree frequent amongst them, or that two or three people chance to die within any small space of time. They then imagine that the devil has taken possession of the place, and therefore immediately abandon their lands and habitations, in order to go in search of some more fortunate dwelling.

The king's palace at Digligy-neur, is surrounded with a rampart of earth, cased with thatch, to prevent the rain's beating it down. This inclosure is full of various irregular buildings, most of them low, and covered with stubble,

excepting some few, whose roofs are tiled. These latter have two stories, with open galleries round them to let in air, surrounded with ballusters, some of ebony, and others of painted wood. The windows also are inlaid with plates of silver and ebony; and the top of each edifice adorned with vases of earth, or moresque. These several buildings form a kind of labyrinth, to which there are a great number of very handsome gates, two of which have draw-bridges to them. The porticoes of these are of a most admirable relief; and, even to the very locks and bolts, are decorated with carved work. At each of these doors, and at every passage, are placed centinels, which are regularly relieved day and night.

The common houses of the inhabitants are little, low, and thatched. Nor are they allowed to build them with more than one story, nor to cover them with tiles, nor even to whiten the walls of them with lime, though they have a kind of white clay which they might employ with advantage to this use. As the country is very hot, they for the most part neglect the plaistering of their walls, contenting themselves with the branches and leaves of trees. They have not even chimneys in their houses, but make what fire is necessary for the preparation of their victuals, in a corner of their apartment, which blackens the floor very much. The grandees have houses very handsome and commodious, consisting for the most part of two buildings opposite to each other, and united by a wall, which forms a square court. These walls are

surrounded with borders of clay, rubbed over with cow dung, which renders them impenetrable by the rain. Their domestics and slaves inhabit the houses round them.

As to the temperature of the air, it is very unwholesome in the southern parts, though all the rest of the country enjoys a very pure and healthy air. The vallies are, for the most part, marshy, and full of fine springs. Those which have these qualities are looked on as the best, because the rice, which is the principal subsistence of the inhabitants, requires a great deal of moisture.

The variety which is observed in the air and rains in the different parts of this island are very remarkable:—when the west winds begin to blow, the western parts have great falls of rain, and this is the proper season to plough and till the ground; and yet at the very same time the eastern parts of the island enjoy very dry weather, and gather in their harvest:—On the contrary, when the wind blows from the east, they plough and till in the easterly parts, and gather in the corn in the opposite ones, towards the west.—Thus the business of ploughing and harvest employs the islanders almost all the year round in different seasons of the year.

This division of rain and drought is made about the middle of the island; and it frequently happens that there is rain on one side of the mountain of Cauragahing, whilst it is extremely hot and dry on the other side of it. It is also remarked, that

this difference is no less violent than it is sudden: for on the quitting a very wet spot of ground, you shall come immediately into a soil the heat of which shall scorch and burn your feet.

The southern parts of the island, however, are not subject to this great quantity of wet weather:—for there will sometimes continue there for three or four years together so great and constant a drought, that the ground shall be incapable of receiving any kind of culture. It is even difficult to dig any wells thereabouts deep enough to get water that can be drank; and even the very best that is to be got retains an acrimony and brackishness, which renders it extremely disagreeable.

On the south of Candi, and at about fourteen or fifteen leagues from Colombo, is a mountain, which is looked on as the highest in the island, and which, from its height and form, which is nearly that of a sugar-loaf, is very distinctly to be seen not only all through the island, but even at upwards of a dozen miles out at sea. This is the famous Picus Adami, whereof all the travellers, who have ever been in this country, have spoken with so much admiration. On a large flat stone, which is at the top of it, is an impression resembling that of a man's foot, but upwards of twice the natural size of one. The general superstition is, that this mark was left there by the foot of our first parent; from whom therefore the mountain

receives its name. In short, were we to recount all the fabulous things that the Ceylonese introduce in their history of this mountain, it would be only abusing the patience of our fair readers.— let it suffice then to give a plain description of the place, such as it is, only adding, that these people look on it as a meritorious action to go and pay their adorations to this foot; especially on the first day of the year, which falls with them in the month of March: at which time are to be seen immense processions of men, women, and children, who have undertaken this pilgrimage.

Before you come then to the foot of the mountain, you meet with a very large and pleasant plain, watered with a great many rills which fall from the Pic, and form at the bottom of it a pool to which the Gentiles frequently make a pilgrimage, never failing to bathe themselves in it, and wash their cloaths and linen also therein, from a persuasion that that water has a virtue to efface all their sins. After this first act of superstition, they clamber to the top of the mountain, by the assistance of iron chains affixed thereto; and without which it would be impossible to get up, so very steep is it, although there have been steps wrought out in many parts of it. The way to the top is at least a quarter of a league. At a certain distance from the summit are erected two stone pillars, surmounted by another stone, which lies across them, and to which is suspended a large bell, made of metal, having its clapper pierced with a hole big enough to pass an iron thong



through it, which all the pilgrims are obliged to pull, and striking one stroke on the bell to try whether they are purified; because these idolaters imagine, that if they are not so, the bell will give no sound. This imaginary misfortune, however, never happens to them. The summit of the mountain presents a plain surface, of an hundred and fifty paces in length, and an hundred and ten in breadth; in the middle of which is the flat stone which it is said bears the impression of a gigantic human foot, two palms long, and eight inches broad. There are some trees planted about this stone; and to the left of it are a few huts, whither the pilgrims retire. On the right hand there was formerly a very fine pagod, whereof the Ceylonese relate wonders; and Baldeus describes sixty-eight statues and figures, which are to be met with in different cavities of the mountain. From the Picus Adami, as we have observed before, issue most of the rivers which water the island of Ceylon.

### *NATURAL HISTORY of CEYLON.*

This island produces a great quantity of rice: in the cultivation of which the industry of the inhabitants renders itself extremely conspicuous; for when we come to consider how necessary water is in the culture of that grain, and at the same time recollect that great part of the island is extremely mountainous, it will appear wonderful that it should be so fertile as it is. The manner, however, that the Ceylonese have

contrived for rendering it so, is by levelling the sides of these mountains at certain stages, from three to eight feet in breadth, so as to form a kind of staircase from the bottom of the hill to the uppermost of these stages, in which they sow their rice. Now as the island is very much visited with rain, and that there is besides a great frequency of springs on the mountains, they have found means to dig large reservoirs nearly on a level with the highest springs; from whence the water is made to fall on the uppermost rows, and from them gradually to the others, so as to keep them continually supplied with water. Some of these reservoirs are half a league in length, some less, and their depth usually from two to three yards.

There are several kinds of rice distinguishable in the island of Ceylon, which are defined by different names, although they differ very little in their taste; and indeed scarcely in any thing more than the length of time they take in ripening. Some is seven months in coming to perfection, whilst some will ripen at six, five, four, or three months end. That which is soonest ripe is the best tasted; but does not yield so plentifully. There is even a kind which ripens in dry ground, and is therefore sowed in those places where it is not in the power of art to convey water. This would be a very great treasure to the inhabitants of the eastern parts, were it not much inferior to the other kinds both in taste and smell.

Besides the rice, this island furnishes various sorts of grain; which, although by no means approaching to it in goodness, are nevertheless a very good resource in times of scarcity. They have also great quantities of excellent fruits; but they might reap much more advantage from them, if they were sufficiently fond of them, to bestow some care on their cultivation. But as they pay very little regard to those which have nothing agreeable in them but their taste, and cannot serve them by way of food when the grain is at any time deficient, the only trees which they plant are those that produce nutritive fruits. The other kinds grow of themselves: and what still diminishes the care of the inhabitants, is, that in all places where nature produces any delicious fruits, the officers of the country tie a label round the tree in the king's name, with three knots at the end of it; which being done, no one dares touch it, without running the hazard of a very severe punishment, and sometimes even of death. The fruit when ripe is generally carried in a white linen cloth to the governor of the province; who, selecting the finest, wraps it up in another linen cloth, and sends it to court, keeping the rest for himself, and returning none to the proprietors.