

Embekke*

C. E. Godakumbura

Embekke (pronounce Ämbäkke) is situated in Medapalata Korale of Udunuwara in the District of Kandy (one mile per inch map reference I 25, 50/51). One turns off at Daulagala between the 3rd and 4th mileposts on the Peradeniya-Alakolaanga (Pilimalawa) road, proceeds about a mile on the Welamboda road, walks about a half mile across the tea estate and the paddy-field and arrives at the *vidiya* (street) leading to the *devale*. If the visitor is at Lankatilaka, and if he so prefers, he can walk across the country to Embekke, a distance of little over a mile.

The *devale* of Embekke is dedicated to the worship of Mahasen, popularly known as Kataragama-deviyo. A local deity called Devata Bandara is also worshipped at the site. The shrine consists of three sections, the *sanctum* or *garbha*, the *digge* or dancing hall, and the *hevisi mandapa* or the drummers' hall. It is the "drummers' hall" that has drawn the attention of visitors to the site, because of the splendid carvings on its ornate pillars and its high-pitched roof.

The *devale* is said to have been built by King Vikramabahu III of Gampola (A. D. 1357-1374). It is said that some of the woodwork utilized for the "drummers' hall" came from an abandoned Royal Audience hall at Gampola.

There is every possibility that the hall has seen repairs during the reigns of the Sinhalese Kings of Kandy.

The carvings which adorn the wooden pillars of the drummers' hall, as well as the entrance porch of the *devale* (the *vahalkada* which is said to be older) are some of the best examples of wood carving of the Sinhalese people.

The skill of the ancient masters is to be seen most of all in the medial panels of the pillars and in the crossing brackets, with their drooping lotuses, which form the capitals of these pillars. In this brief article it is possible to draw attention only to the wide range of motives in the panels. Here are displayed, in low relief, the conventional Sinhalese designs – the swans, at times single, at times with heads entwined, the double-headed eagle, the woman growing out of the vine, a Bacchanalian figure in characteristic pose, a wrestling pair, dancers and soldiers, men and women in fluent and graceful movement, floral designs of many combinations based chiefly on the lotus, no one design resembling another in the whole collection of designs.

The roof itself has singular features. The rafters all slant from above towards the incoming visitor and are caught together and kept in position by a *madol kurupava*, a kind of giant catch-pin the

like of which we do not have elsewhere.

At one time this unique structure was in grave danger of being totally destroyed by white ants and beetles. The Archaeological Department undertook its conservation under severe handicaps during the last World War (*Archaeological Commissioner's Report* for 1948). These efforts have ensured the preservation of this monument for the nation. It is a matter of pride that local craftsmen, with claims of lineal succession from the original masters, have played their part in this work.

The pictures in this booklet give an idea of the designs in the medial panels, and the intricacy of their carvings.

In the field close by on a flat rock are the remains of an ancient *ambalama* or Rest Hall, which is said to have been built prior to the *devale* by King Bhuvanekabahu IV (A.D. 1341-1351). The monolithic pillars of this *ambalama* contain carvings similar to those on the wooden pillars of the *devale*. There are hardly any remains of the once beautiful woodwork of the buildings.

*Department of Archaeology