

= Battle of Vijithapura =

The Battle of Vijithapura was a decisive and major battle in the campaign carried out by Sri Lankan king Dutthagamani against the invading South Indian king Elara . The battle is documented in detail in the ancient chronicles of the country . However , they only provide the viewpoint of Dutthagamani and his army , and details are scarce on Elara 's side .

After launching a campaign to regain the country from Elara , Dutthagamani captured a number of his strongholds before coming to the fortified city of Vijithapura . A four @-@ month siege ensued , followed by a large assault where Dutthagamani 's champions and royal elephant played a major part . The chronicles focus a lot on these ten champions , and vividly describe some unusual " tests " that Dutthagamani carried out to find out their skills .

The battle ended in victory for Dutthagamani 's forces and considerably weakened Elara 's army , ultimately leading to his defeat and death . The exact location of Vijithapura is unknown , though historians have made some speculations on this . The battle is still regarded by Sri Lankans as a legendary event in the country 's history , and has even been compared with victories of the Sri Lanka Army during the country 's civil war .

= = Records = =

Dutthagamani 's campaign against Elara is given in detail in the ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka ; Mahavamsa , Dipavamsa , Rajavaliya and Thupavamsa . All of them describe the battle in detail , and apply a high importance to it . Dutthagamani is a hero in these chronicles , and his campaign is depicted as a " holy war " aimed at restoring Buddhism in the country . Therefore , these accounts are favourably biased to him , and the description of the Battle of Vijithapura , along with the rest of the campaign , is a mix of fact and legend . However , historians agree that the basic facts from these chronicles are accurate . The one sided accounts given in the chronicles mean that there is very little information to be obtained on Elara and his armies . According to Orientalist Wilhelm Geiger , who translated the Mahavamsa , the problem is " not what is said but what is left unsaid " .

= = Background = =

At the time of the battle , Elara was the king of Anuradhapura . He was a Chola prince from South India , who had defeated the Sinhalese ruler Asela in an invasion . Although an invader , Elara is described as a just ruler who had even patronized Buddhism . Most of the country came under this Tamil king 's rule , while his rival Kavan Tissa , a Sinhala king from Ruhunu in the south of the country , organized a resistance against him . Kavan Tissa 's son , Dutthagamani , ascended to the throne after the death of his father .

Soon after he became the king in Ruhuna , Dutthagamani launched a campaign against Elara with the intention of " restoring and glorifying Buddhism " in the country . After setting out from Magama and crossing the Mahaweli river , Dutthagamani captured a number of forts and cities that were under Elara , and killed several of his generals . The ancient chronicles refer to all of the chieftains or generals defeated by Dutthagamani as Demalas (Tamils) . However , it is unlikely that all of them were indeed Tamils , and it is possible that one of them ? whose name is given as Dighabaya ? may even have been a stepbrother of Dutthagamani himself who had later joined Elara .

= = = Vijithapura = = =

After these victories , Dutthagamani 's army marched on to the " great fortress of Vijithapura " . Dutthagamani followed a road between Sigiriya and Minneriya to take his army there ; a road that had been used by Pandukabhaya , a previous ruler , in his military campaigns as well .

The city of Vijithapura , which the Mahavamsa refers to as Vijitha Nagara , had been founded nearly three hundred years ago by the brother in law of king Panduvasudeva . By the time of the battle , it had become a well @-@ fortified stronghold of Elara . It is said to have been surrounded

by three moats and a wall with a height of 18 cubits . The wall had four wrought iron gates on the north , south , east and west . The Rajavaliya describes Vijithapura as a fortress second only to Anuradhapura .

The control of Vijithapura was essential to both sides . The loss of the stronghold would be a largely demoralizing factor for Elara 's forces and would significantly reduce their capability to resist Dutthagamani 's advance . For Dutthagamani 's forces , the capture of the city would mean that they could easily move on to Anuradhapura .

= = Siege = =

Surviving troops of Elara 's forces from previous battles retreated to Vijithapura , further strengthening its defenses . Dutthagamani 's army also arrived and pitched camp close to the fortress . The open stretch of land where they camped later came to be known as Khandavara Pitthi or Kandavurupitiya . They carried out regular assaults against the fortress while the defenders also made occasional sorties , but none of them were able to sway the battle in favour of either side . After laying siege on the city for four months , plans were laid to launch an assault using the entire army . Dutthagamani 's army was led by his ten champions or generals , known as the " Ten Giant Warriors " , who were to play a significant part in the battle to come .

= = Testing the warriors = =

The ancient chronicles mention two tests that Dutthagamani planned to find out these warriors ' skill before the battle . For the first test , Dutthagamani asked the warriors to drink a large cauldron of toddy , intending to test their strength . When all others refused , Suranimala stepped forward and drank the entire cauldron without any effort . The second test was to test Nandimithra , the commander of the army . Dutthagamani had his royal elephant , Kandula , infuriated and set on Nandimithra . However , the warrior stood his ground and taking the elephant by its tusks , pushed it to the ground . Thus clearing all doubts as to the abilities and skill of his warriors , Dutthagamani sounded the war drums and raising his flags , started the assault to take Vijithapura .

= = Final assault = =

Dutthagamani 's army attacked all four gates of the city simultaneously . He led the main assault on the southern gate with Nandimithra , Suranimala and the elephant Kandula , while the attacks on the northern and western gates were led by Bharana , Khanjadeva , Phussadeva and Labhiyavasabha . The eastern gate was attacked by Mahasona , Gothaimbara , Theraputthabhaya and Velusumana . The defenders of the eastern gates were routed by Velusumana after a cavalry attack , and Elara 's forces withdrew into the city .

Elara 's archers , shooting from the walls , inflicted heavy casualties on the attackers , while soldiers on top of the walls prevented any attempt to breach the wall by puring down molten metal on them . The elephant Kandula , attempting to break the southern gate , was injured in such an attack . After tending to his injuries and protecting him using thick animal hides , Dutthagamani encouraged Kandula and drove him against the wall . The wall was breached and Dutthagamani 's army entered the city . The ten champions , unwilling to enter through an opening made by another , destroyed the wall themselves in different places and broke into the city . Led by them , Dutthagamani 's army destroyed the defenders and took control of the fortress city of Vijithapura . The survivors retreated to Anuradhapura .

= = Aftermath = =

The capture of Vijithapura paved the way for Dutthagamani 's army to advance on to Anuradhapura , and they proceeded immediately afterwards , capturing two more of Elara 's strongholds on the way . In the battle for Anuradhapura , Dutthagamani killed Elara in single combat and became the

king of Anuradhapura , bringing the entire country under his rule .

= = Modern culture and studies = =

The battle of Vijithapura is a legendary battle in Sri Lankan history and a significant milestone in Dutthagamani 's campaign to restore Buddhism in the country . It is often referred to as Vijithapura maha satana (the great battle of Vijithapura) . After the ending of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009 , General Sarath Fonseka , the then commander of the Sri Lanka Army , compared several battles they fought to that of Vijithapura .

The exact location of the Vijithapura fortress is uncertain . A village with the same name near the ancient Kalawewa reservoir may have been the place where the battle took place . There is an ancient temple here as well as a granite stone that locals believe to have been used by Dutthagamani 's soldiers to sharpen their swords However , other historians and archaeologists believe that the location is close to Kaduruwela near Polonnaruwa , where the ruins of an ancient fortress have been found .