

**Ivory usage and iconography during the Late Historical Period (Kotte 1411-1597 to Kandyan 1469 -1815)**

**Abstract.**

My paper will examine selected ivory objects from the Kotte and later periods (Kotte 1411-1597 to the Kandyan period 1469-1815), discussing their traditional usage, and comparing the recurrent design themes and motifs that shaped Sri Lankan iconography. The ivory carvers of Kotte translated imagery from woodcarving found at Embekke devale and Panavitiya ambalama (rest house). Traditional vernacular styles in carved and turned ivories remained prevalent and continued without European influences, until the Portuguese introduced the type of small travelling boxes used for the Kotte caskets. The traditional iconographic language seen on these boxes combines Portuguese Catholic imagery with established local styles and forms, as seen in the caskets presented as diplomatic gifts from the Kotte Kingdom to Lisbon, and later on the so-called Adam and Eve cabinets. This paper will attempt to offer some closer definitions, and will discuss the iconographic imagery of traditional ivories, and the emerging Cingalo-Portuguese style.

**Introduction**

This paper contextualizes ivory objects and examines selected ivory objects from the Kotte and later periods (Kotte 1411-1597 to the Kandyan period 1469-1815), discussing their traditional usage. Many of these objects were used by the royals and court elite. An attempt will be made to offer some closer definitions and discuss the iconographic imagery of traditional ivories and the emerging style that is classified as Cingalo-Portuguese or Sinhala-Portuguese.

This paper simple poses questions for future research. Are these classifications suitable now, or do we define and perhaps reclassify these terms? The place name Kotte and Kandy may only serves to define their place of origin? Does coastal Kotte style develop into Kandyan style? Did royal craftsmen guilds stay within each kingdom or move within the territorial boundaries of each kingdom. Did the four royal craftsmen groups (*patal hatara*) move freely as required by the royals? Was there a center for ivory carving? Due to the caste differences did the ivory turners work separately or with the cabinet-makers?

Coomaraswamy writes that in the craftsmen of the Kandyan kingdom worked solely for the kings. He writes that the best of the higher artisans worked for the king, and are a close mostly hereditary guild of craftsmen incorporated into the Four Workshops (*patal hatara*) working directly for the Kandyan kings (Coomaraswamy, 1979: 54-55).<sup>1</sup>

Recurrent design themes and motifs have shaped Sri Lankan iconography. Research by Coomaraswamy 1908, Sri Lanka art is the main historical source for the arts, crafts and architecture of the island. A diagram from Bandaranayake, 1986 contains rock art and architecture of the classical period can be applied to ivory craft.<sup>2</sup> The art of the Gampola period was a progression from an early date that remains a major influence on the art of the Kotte kingdom. Sharing certain distinguishing patterns that were common in woodwork pillars supporting architectural structures, the art of the Gampola – Kotte - Kandyan period emerges as a close progressive development, and the two paradigms are the Embekke and Panavitiya wood carvings.

Ivory craftsmen are classified under turners and the carvers each working on specific parts of the carving and respected a strict caste system of their own. Wood and ivory carvers fall into the higher social division call *galladdo*, adhering to their societal clusters and practiced strict behavioral practices among them. They ‘do not eat with, or marry with those of the lower division.’(Coomaraswamy 1979: 55)

The turners called *liyana vaduwo* belong to a lower cast system, (Coomaraswamy 1979: 55) by tradition are turners who work on the lathe and turn all the rounded objects. Many conventional ivory objects were made on a turning lathe, and later the carved and turned parts were incorporated into the product. On the later ivories one sees variety of turned parts on some European style boxes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Coomaraswamy, 1908 ed.1979 writes that the best of the higher artisans worked for the king, and are a close mostly hereditary guild of craftsmen incorporated into the Four Workshops (*patal hatara*) working directly for the Kandyan kings (p 54-55),

<sup>2</sup> Bandaranayake, S., *Rock and Wall Painting*, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Coomaraswamy, A.K.C., *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, 1908, has a photograph of an ivory turner working on a lathe, pl. VI, no. 4 , and in no. 5 shows a wood worker on a much larger lathe.

### **Usage, domestic tradition**

This section will explore the usage of certain ivory objects that were used during the Kotte - Kandyan period. Ivory was a material of privilege and used by the royal and their court. A group of these objects have survived, and the best collection is in National Museum Colombo.

Lathe turning and carving are the two techniques used. Turned objects have been made for traditional domestic use. The following turned objects had religious uses. The handles of fans and animal hair whisks used both turned and carved techniques, and the handles were often turned. Numerous handles have survived in museum and Buddhist temple collections, and they were part of the monk's regalia.<sup>4</sup> (See image 1). Scent sprayers were turned so finely as to allow the thin cylindrical container to be squeezed to squirt the liquid out through the opening. (See image 2) Musical instruments also produced such as the various turned horns (NM See image 3) used in religious ceremonies. Classified under medicinal use, syringes have been used in indigenous medicine practice on both humans and animals. (See image 4). Small round cylindrical lidded containers are often labeled as pillboxes. Numerous different sizes of cylindrical shaped containers with flat and domed shaped lids have been made and had diverse uses as storage containers. (See image 5)

The technique of carving was used to make flat and partially rounded objects such as combs, ear cleaners, knife handles, ola leaf book covers and parts of fan handles. Numerous combs were used for personal use, and are among the intricately carved flat object with detailed carving on both sides. The handle-parts of ear cleaners were carved with a decorative pattern. Categorized under weaponry, several intricately carved knife handles exist, and these small ivory parts were attached from their flat side onto the iron knife handles. The comb provided two sides for carving, examples show a comb with affronted elephants, and one with a border design. (See image 6 and 7).

### **Iconography**

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<sup>4</sup> Gangarama vihara, Colombo has an extensive collection of ivories and other objects in their treasury gifted to the vihara over the years.

The second part of this paper explores the iconography used during this period, and compares the re-occurring decorative design themes that appear in several objects that have shaped the tradition of Sri Lankan iconography.<sup>5</sup>

The ivory carvers of Kotte translated imagery from woodcarving found at Embekke devale and Panavitiya *ambalama* (a rest house). Bandaranayake, 1985 factually dates the art and architecture of the Gampola and Kotte School of art to the late historical period Kotte period I, (1250 to 1600AD).<sup>6</sup> The Embekke structure was constructed between the 14 and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. (See image 8).

The site of Embekke devale located in the Kandy district, dates to the Gampola-Kotte period, and originally used by the Gampola kings as an audience hall. At this time in the early part of his reign, the king of Kotte, Buvanekabahu V (r.1371-1408) was king of Gampola. The building was built as a hall, now called the *dig-ge*, a long open house supported by numerous wooden pillars, and is yet used daily for ceremonial drumming. Parts of the structure may have been repaired, restored and added over the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The devale dig-ge is what we see today. The entire underneath portion of Embekke's wooden roof, beams and pillars are carved, and of particular note is that each pillar has individually decorated flat squared panels at eye level with every facet carved with a different design. Detail of the carved pillars are seen. (Image 9]

Ivory carvers of Kotte interpreted the imagery from woodcarving found at Embekke devale and Panavitiya *ambalama*. The following discussion concentrates on the dominant iconographical patterns and motifs. The Embekke devale carvings have survived and dominate the traditional canon of Sri Lankan decorative designs that determines their iconographical language. These designs are repeated with minor changes and have been also used to decorate different materials such as metal,

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<sup>5</sup> Refer Coomaraswamy's chapter 4, Elements of Sinhalese Design and Ornament, as the drawings, figures and plates are not in the illustrations.

<sup>6</sup> Bandaranayake, S. 1986, Rock and wall Paintings, and he dated the art of the Kandyan period to late historical period 2. 1600 to 1800, the Central Kandyan school.

ceramic, ivory, and in temple wall paintings. The dominant patterns are floral designs, scrolls, border designs, and figurative human and animal forms that are replicated. For the figurative forms such as the wrestlers and dancers are found. (See image 10, 11, and 12.) A non-traditional image is seen in a Portuguese soldiers on horseback, (See image no. 13), indicating Portuguese presence that becomes a significant new descriptive narrative presentation carved on the flat square pillar facet. These figures clearly define the date of the Portuguese military influence at this time.

Border design patterns reoccurs in Embekke and Kotte period ivories. The border designs are defined by *kundarikan* or *kunjirikkan* patterns surrounding the square or somewhat rectangle flat surface with the image. This form of design is seen in a majority of the flat comb design, with teeth at both sides. A prevalent pattern is the knot or *lanu gata* design. (See image 14)

Mythical creatures are depicted, some with imaginary animal forms portraying part bird and part animal. Additionally numerous fantastic part-human part-animal or bird forms occur in the imagery.<sup>7</sup>

### **Panavitiya**

Although not a devale, this rest house was built in the traditional structure on a stone pillar or boulder foundation on which was constructed a heavy wooden beam and pillared super structure. The ambalama's purpose was different, and is found located on routes and used as rest stations for persons requesting permission to enter the borders of the Kandyan kingdom.<sup>8</sup> The Panavitiya carving style suggests a close dating period to the site at Embekke. Structurally the ambalama is much smaller and fewer carved flat panels. The following two panels show seated and standing figures bordered by the kundirikkan, and a variation of this style. See image no. 15, 16, 17 and 18).

### **Floral vocabulary**

Numerous variations of scrolls and vine designs survive. An intricate variation is found in the *Tirigi tale*, an essential part of the iconographical language derived from a simple form the *vaka deka* a double curve that Coomasaswamy defines as, 'the first

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<sup>7</sup> For details see Coomasaswamy, Chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> In conversation with Srilal Perera, September, 2013.

and most thorough part of the Sinhalese craftsmen's education in design consists in the close study of the ideal curved form of the vaka-deka, or double curve, and from this point - the spiral being evolved by the reflection of the simple curve upon itself - he is carried on until he has such command of curved form as to design easily such forms as the most elaborate tirigi-tale; and the subtle sense of curvature thus ingrained in him expresses itself ever after in what so form or stem or feather that he may devise.<sup>9</sup> This emanates in scroll upon scroll that radiates into a never-ending configuration, and various examples of scroll designs exist. See Coomaraswamy's figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 that illustrate the development of the tiring tale form.<sup>10</sup>

An important development within the scroll pattern is the incorporation of the mythical female body (*nari lata*) as a flowering form blossoming within the vines this translates to a woman in vine design called *nari lata vala*. Image no. 19, shows a detail from a painted storage chest used for ola leaf books, *puskola petiya*, chest in Ridi vihare,<sup>11</sup> and a wooden carved panel from embekke, (see image no. 20) From this develops the intricate design that incorporates an arrangement of women, and this form of decorative imagery is found in various materials such as stone, metal, wood, and ivory. The five-woman knot design *panca nari ghata* form that is seen as part of the carved decoration on a round ivory box from the Victoria and Albert Museum,<sup>12</sup> and an ivory doorframe detail from Ridi vihara.<sup>13</sup> A stone stele from Hagurankatha devale, with the *panca nari gata* is perhaps the finest example carved from stone, seen in image no. 21. A metal example carved with the *panca nari lata* is seen on a brass tobacco box.<sup>14</sup> Various forms and interpretations of *nari lata*, *nari lata vela* and *panca nari lata* designs are seen.

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<sup>9</sup> Coomasaswamy, p 104.

<sup>10</sup> Coomaraswamy, p 65 and 66, figs 5, 6, 7, and 8.

<sup>11</sup> Coomaraswamy, p 92, fig 29, drawing of the *nari lata vala* from a box in a Ridi Vihara chest, and p 93, fig.31 *nari lata* from a painted earthenware pot.

<sup>12</sup> V and A, London, Inventory number SI 13 1896 004, round carved box with a domed lid, and silver fittings.

<sup>13</sup> Coomaraswamy, plate XXXVIII, no. 1 (detail, top center).

<sup>14</sup> Coomaraswamy, p 91, fig. 28, A. Kandyan tobacco box.

Variations of the woman in vines patterns were used frequently in ivory panels, and boxes for the European luxury market. Mythical female beings emerging from climbing vines are seen. As seen sometimes the image is in the form of the upper part of the female figure and sometimes the whole female figure is seen emerging from the foliage. Coomaraswamy records that, “ in the true nari lata the lower part of the figure is replaced by conventional foliage are typical, in other cases limbs and garments are complete, and the figure is often seated on a throne”<sup>15</sup>

For an example see drawing. (Coomaraswamy 1979: 93).<sup>16</sup> In addition to the popular panca nari gata four woman knot, other multiple women design forms exists. The following forms are the four woman palanquin six woman arch seven woman horse design, eight woman chariot design, and nine woman elephant design. (Coomaraswamy 1979: 91)

The next image of a scroll design incorporates a repeat of a flour petal floral pattern. This carving is clearly dated to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, from a carved and pierced wooden bedhead belonging to Rajasimha the 1<sup>st</sup> of Sitawaka (r.1581-93)<sup>17</sup> See image no. 22.

### **Mythical creatures**

Traditional vernacular styles in carved and turned ivories remained prevalent and continued without the European influences that came with the Portuguese. A great variation of imagery includes mythical creatures.<sup>18</sup> Some are part human, an example of this form is the *kindura* or *kinnnara*, a siren or harpy type mythical creature, and to the Kandyan painters and artisans these mythical beings were interpreted as half human above and below half bird-like. A representation of Sri Lankan iconography is the *hamsa*, a mythical goose or swan, often portrayed affronted with entwined necks. The *serapendiya*, also known as *gurulupakshaya*, is depicted as a creature with a lion head above and hamsa-like bird body below. The *burunda pakshaya*, is a double-headed bird. Animals are also frequently seen in mythological forms, and the *et-*

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<sup>15</sup> Coomaraswamy, p. 92, refers to pl XXXIX, 1 and 3, pl XL, 13, etc.).

<sup>16</sup> Coomaraswamy, fig 31, p 93.

<sup>17</sup> Bedhead in pierced carved hardwood. Permission from Kabulamulla devale. Photo credit A. Abdur-Rahman.

<sup>18</sup> See Coomaraswamy for a full list and drawings, p34-40.

*kanda lihiniya* ‘elephant seizing bird’, is interpreted as an elephant headed bird clutching two small elephants in its claws. The *makara*, is a mythical creature resembling crocodile with an elephant-like short trunk, and seen in early period stone entranceways and steps, and several makara heads are seen as part of the architectural structure of the Polonnaruwa period. Furthermore the *makara thorana* is frequently seen as two affronted makara heads that link into a portal entering into Buddhist vihara inner sanctuaries and portrayed as the background for thrones for Buddha statues. Coomaraswamy is suggested for further details and numerous illustrations.<sup>19</sup>

Several animal figures have been used, and elephants, lions, bulls, hare and other animals are combined with other animals. The natural elephant form is depicted, and a stylized elephant and bull form is the *usamba kunjara* that combines the head of the two animals.<sup>20</sup> The lion is a frequently used and mythicized image rendered in various styles. The lion called *simha* is depicted in several forms. In profile with an open mouth it is referred to as *kesera simha*. In frontal view is known as *kibisi muna*. Further mythical manifestations are found in *nara simha* a human headed lion, and *gaja simha* an elephant headed lion<sup>21</sup>. Examples of lions are seen in image no. 23 and 24 are examples in wood from Embekke devale, and image no. 25 depicts the lion heads from Kabulamulla Devale.<sup>22</sup> Other references the ivory panel in Ridi Vihara,<sup>23</sup> and a VOC brass tobacco box.<sup>24</sup> Several examples of traditional iconographical styles can be seen in the ivory objects at the collections at National Museum, Colombo. For more details refer to Coomaraswamy, Chapter Four.<sup>25</sup>

### **Short history of Kotte period ivories**

During the Portuguese the ivory boxes were gifted and traded and became a highly valued luxury item for the European market. Substantiation of the importance of

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<sup>19</sup> Coomaraswamy, p 80, Chapter 4. Elements of Sinhalese Design and Ornament, remains an important source for this study.

<sup>20</sup> Coomaraswamy, P 90, fig 27.

<sup>21</sup> Coomaraswamy, p 86 to 88, refer variations of lion forms, figs 22, 23, 24, and 25.

<sup>22</sup> See Coomaraswamy, p 137, fig 85, for a drawing of the carved wooden bed head with lions.

<sup>23</sup> Coomaraswamy, p336, and Plate XXXVIII, 1. Ivory door frame, Ridi Vihara.

<sup>24</sup> p 202, fig 123 for affronted lions on a brass tobacco box from the VOC period.

<sup>25</sup> Coomaraswamy, p80, Chapter 4, Elements of Sinhalese Design and Ornament.

ivory caskets for the Portuguese royal market is found in an important article that discusses and lists nine caskets from collections in Europe, USA, and one remaining unknown. (Jaffar and Schawbe, 1995:14) Some were studded with gems, and some precious metal mounts were manufactured and fitted on in Europe for these caskets, according to the prevailing style at that time. They all conform to the style of Portuguese travelling boxes with pitched lids dating to the sixteenth century.

Jaffar and Schawbe 1995, have analyzed the caskets in collection outside Sri Lanka, and accurately dated these from documented sources. Their term of Sinhala-Portuguese art that emerges at the early Portuguese encounters is an applicable. “The group of caskets which form the focus of this article is among the earliest examples of Sinhala-Portuguese and is material evidence of the growing European influence in the East in the sixteenth century. In particular the, the caskets represent the assimilation among the Sinhalese of Christianity and reflect the early understanding in Sri Lanka of the imagery which was part of that faith.” (Jaffar and Schawbe 1995: 3-13). Their article remains a key discussion for the ivories of the sixteenth century and invite new theoretic perspectives. The nine caskets reviewed all conform to the travelling rectangular casket type identified by their pitched roof lid, and flat sides and bottom, with embellished metal handle and trim, most with flat bottoms. These have their history in the Kotte period and can be classified as cingalo-Portuguese, sinhala-Portuguese, or Kotte styled boxes. Important references for the Portuguese period can be found listed in their bibliographic references to help contextualize the ivories. This analytical article on the group of 16<sup>th</sup> ivory caskets discusses Sri Lankan-Portuguese political history surrounding the Kotte Kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

The Kotte caskets conveyed a narrative. By 1505 AD the Divided Kingdoms periods left Sri Lanka fractured and weakened, as the island was governed by several independent rulers, which created an environment of intrigue and conspiracy. Bhuvanekabahu VII (r.1521-1551AD) of Kotte had gained the support of the Portuguese, and was at war with his brother Mayadunne (r.1525-1681AD) of Sitavaka. Bhuvanekabahu’s only daughter had a grandson, a child named Dharmapala, and Buvanekabahu intentionally sent two missions to

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<sup>26</sup> Jaffar, Amin, and M. A. Schawbe, 1995, “A Group of 16th Century Ivory Caskets from Ceylon”, 1-14pp. *Apollo Magazine*, V. 445,

Lisbon in 1530 and 1542AD, with a delegation from the Kotte Kingdom, that carried an image of his grandson to be crowned by proxy as ruler of the island. Schroder 1990: 449, writes of two existing documents, with a description of the mission, that reports of two ivory statues as gifts, the larger statue was Bhvanekabahu and the smaller one his grandson Dharmapala.<sup>27</sup> However the document completed in 1687 (over a hundred years later), states that the gifts “included a solid cast golden effigy of Dharmapala cast in gold, and a gem studded crown.” (Schroder 1990: 449) and the document reveals that Don Juan III of Portugal by receiving the “fife oath of Dharmapala in effigy, and by crowning the statue thus acknowledged the succession of the grandson of Buvanekabahu VII to the throne of Sri Lanka.” Schroder also writes that the two delegate caskets<sup>28</sup> are identical to the two caskets listed in 1566 to those that were acquired by Duke Albert of Bavaria and recorded in 1596.<sup>29</sup> The narratives carved on the ivory panels on the two caskets illustrate the short history regarding the relationship between the Sinhala rulers of Kotte and the Portuguese Kingdom carried as gifts by the Kotte king’s delegation. The larger first casket depicts the mission of king Buvanekabahu VII, and crowning of the effigy of prince Dharmapala. The smaller second casket also depicted the king of Kotte, and on one panel show the Sinhalese delegates dining with a Portuguese dignitary. Jaffar and Schwabe’s significant appendix at the end of the article provides, dating, dimensions, provenance, and literature on these objects, includes dates and sizes. The 1995, the list is abbreviated here.<sup>30</sup> Two caskets belong to collections in Vienna, Austria: (1). Pitched lid casket, Kotte before 1542. Kunshistorisches Museum, Vienna. Inv. no. 4743, and (2). Pitched lid casket, Kotte before 1542. Kunshistorisches Museum, Vienna. Inv. no. 4745). Two caskets are in Munich, Germany: (3) Pitched lid casket, Kotte c. 1543. Schatzkammer, Residenz Munich. Inv. no. 1241, and (4) Pitched lid casket, Kotte c. 1547. Schatzkammer, Residenz Munich. Inv. no. 1242. One casket is in London, England: (5). Pitched lid casket, Kotte. 1557. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. IS 41-1980, referred to by the name of the purchaser as the Robinson casket. One is in Berlin, Germany: (6). Pitched lid casket Kotte. 1578-80.

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<sup>27</sup> Schroder, 1990, *Buddhist Sculpture in Sri Lanka*, 449.

<sup>28</sup> Schroder, plates 145 A-E, 146, A-E, and p. 449 - 553.

<sup>29</sup> Schroder, p 446, the full details of the history depicted by the persons described on the casket which conveys the sending of the mission to Lisbon, and the crowning of the child Dharmapala.

<sup>30</sup> Jaffar and Schwabe, 1995, *Apollo Magazine*, 3-14.

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Museum for Indische Kunst, Berlin, inv. no. 1-9928. One in Boston, USA: (7). Pitched lid casket, Kotte Probably mid-sixteenth. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 1993.29. Another in Islas Baleares, Spain: (8). Pitched lid casket Kotte, Probably mid-sixteenth. Fundacion Bathaleme March, Islas Baleares. The ninth casket list is from an unknown collection: (9). Pitched lid casket, Kotte, probably before 1550. Undoubtedly other such caskets must exist in private collections.

References include Schroder, 1990, Jaffar and Schawbe 1995, Jaffar 2002. For suggested further reading refer articles by historian Zoltan Biederman (2012, 2009, 2005) referring to Portuguese trade empires relationship with Sri Lanka, and the historic intrigue within the Gampola, Kotte, and Sitawaka kingdoms. Art historian Annemarie Jordan's guest curatorship of the 2010 Rietburg exhibition highlighting the collection of Catherine of Hapsburg, *Elfenbeine aus Ceylon, Luxusgutter für Katharina von Hapsburg (1507-1578)*. Catherine of Hapsburg created a significant trade emporium as a very keen royal collector.<sup>31</sup> Marjory Trusted's clear review of the exhibition is of particular importance to English readers as the accompanying catalog is in German.<sup>32</sup> Trusted writes on the aims of the exhibition, "...it demonstrated the virtuosity of the ivory objects exhibited, secondly, these works exemplified a complex network of trading, cultural and artistic relationships between Portugal and Ceylon (today Sri Lanka), and thirdly it told the story of the global exchanges through trade and diplomacy which took place between Asia and Europe during the sixteenth century."<sup>33</sup>

### **The Dutch period cabinets**

During the Dutch VOC period a significant developmental is seen in the shape of the box, from travelling casket to a larger cabinet. This stylistic change grew from a small

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<sup>31</sup> From Jaffar and Schwabe, 1995, see p. 14, listing full references pertinent to these objects. Also Schroder, 1990, ivory caskets from Kotte, p. 449, Jordan Gschwend, 2010, Catalog *Elfenbeine aus Ceylon, Luxusgutter für Katharina von Hapsburg (1507-1578)*, p.17, 39, 63, 75, 77, and Jaffer, 2002, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Trusted, Marjorie, senior curator, European Sculpture, V and A Museum, London.

<sup>33</sup> Trusted, Marjorie, 2010, Exhibition review of *Elfenbein aus Ceylon. Luxusgüter für Katharina von Habsburg (1507-1578)* Exhibition at the Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 28 November 2010-13 March 2011.

travelling casket with a pitched roof lid into a flat rectangular box shaped cabinet with lidded front doors and several rows of drawers as seen in the cabinets of the Dutch period. The form of cabinet developed as an interior objet d'art and favored by the Dutch traders, and dated to the Dutch period. The Catholic imagery changes to a Protestant one. The biblical images of Adam and Eve dominate these cabinets. The Adam and Eve caskets follow a defined iconography that incorporates the centrally positioned tree, Eve is positioned on the right and Adam on the left, and the serpent coiled around the tree reaching towards the apple in eve's right hand.

(Pearson1922:3)

References for these cabinets include Leelananda Prematilake1961, who analyses an ivory casket in the archeological museum in the University of Peradeniya, which is the only known casket in a Sri Lankan collection.<sup>34</sup> Earlier Joseph Pearson 1922, notes that an ivory panel belonging to an Adam and Eve casket is at the Colombo museum. In 1961 Prematilaka writes of five such caskets of this type known to him, and includes a panel form such as cabinet in the National Museum Colombo collection,<sup>35</sup> and the University of Peradeniya cabinet. The third cabinet part of the Sauvageot collection at the Louvre, Paris.<sup>36</sup> The early 20<sup>th</sup> century assessment by Pearson of the National Museum Colombo, through his correspondence with the Victoria and Albert Museum director Cecil H. Smith, verifies that this cabinet is made in the Dutch period in Sri Lanka (1657-1797) so dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century, and not to the earlier Portuguese period (Pearson 1922:5). The fourth cabinet is part of the Revoil collection in the Louvre. The fifth cabinet is at the Victoria and Albert museum.

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<sup>34</sup> Prematilake 1961 bases his study on Pearson, 1922.

<sup>35</sup> See old black and white image from Prematilake, 1961, who writes that this cabinet is said to be one of the best surviving examples. Dimension 14.6 x10.5x 12in. made of a thin wood paneled box with ivory panels have been attached. Ivory nails have been used in the corners, and the same techniques has been used in the interior drawers, that have engraved metalwork hinges, corner frames, drawer pulls, and lock plates.

<sup>36</sup> Prematilike, includes a black and white image, and comments that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these ivories were said to be made by Italian monks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century either in India or Sri Lanka.

European taste cultivates a demand for ivory cabinets, and it is known that other such cabinets were made and may date to the same period, and are among the luxury items for the European trade market now found in institutional and private collections.

### **Conclusion**

This paper attempts to offer some closer definitions, and has discussed the iconographic imagery of Sri Lankan traditional ivories,<sup>37</sup> and moves onto the emerging Cingalo-Portuguese style that originated with the creating of the Kotte caskets, with their narrative style that historicized key political events of the time. The Portuguese delegate caskets were diplomatic gifts, and combined Catholic imagery with local styles and forms. The traditional iconographic language continues as decorative borders surrounding the figurative panels of Catholic images, producing a stylistic Kotte-Portuguese aesthetic during the sixteenth century that continued until the Dutch displaced the Portuguese trading colonies in Sri Lanka. The Reformation occurs in Europe, which divided the Catholic Church, and Protestantism emerges as a strong faction. In Sri Lanka during the Dutch period a distinctive Protestant aesthetic of figurative imagery develops that combines with the traditional iconography. This developmental style produces a different box structure exemplified by the Sri Lankan-Dutch Adam and Eve cabinets, and is clearly conveyed in the two types of boxes, the casket and the cabinet.

With the introduction of European Christian imagery that enters the primarily Buddhist iconography we see a stylistic amalgamation resulting in (1) emergent cingalo-Portuguese style, and (2) the cingalo-Dutch style. The group of Adam and Eve cabinets takes this development further, with their reoccurring theme. In the symbolic Garden of Eden, the tree plays a central visual role with the male and female figures placed on either side. The profusion of the elephant and other south Asian animals strongly indicate the focus of the local craftsmen, who with the use of traditional borders and motifs utilized a repetitive stylistic imagery. Can these boxes be defined through the origin of their figurative imagery? The writer feels the differences manifested in the iconographic form and styles between the Portuguese

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<sup>37</sup> Traditional design elements evolved from borrowed southern Indian styles from ancient times.

Catholic imagery and Dutch Protestant imagery can be clearly defined. At the same time Sri Lankan tradition iconography is upheld and preserved.

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**Illustrations**



Image no.1. Fan handles, carved and turned. Courtesy National Museum Colombo.



Image No. 2. Scent bottles. Image no. 3. Horns. Courtesy National Museum Colombo.



Image no.4. Syringes.

Image No. 5. Courtesy National Museum Colombo

Courtesy National Museum Colombo.



Image No. 6. A. Comb with nari lata figure.



Image No. 6. B Comb with lotus medallion and scroll



Image No. 7 A. two combs, top, floral medallion, bottom, figurative.



Image No. 7 B. comb with lotus medallion



Image No. 7 C. Comb with mythical hamsa



Image No. 7 D. Comb with affronted elephants



Image No. 7. E. Comb with female dancer



Image No. 7. F. Comb with female dancer

All images on this page courtesy National Museum Colombo.



Image No. 8. Embekke devale, from the front, Kandy district.



Image, No. 9. Embekke devale, interior wooden pillars.



Image No. 10. Embekke devale, male wrestlers  
Both bordered by the kundirikkan design.



Image No. 11. Embekke devale, female dancer.



Image No. 12. Embekke devale, female dancer.



Image No. 13. A. Kotte soldier.



Image No. 13. B. Portuguese soldier.  
Both bordered by the kundirikkan design.



Image No. 14. A. Lanu gata or interlocking knot design



Image No. 14. B Lanu gata or interlocking knot design bordered by the kundirikkan design.



Image No. 15. Panavitiya ambalama, front facade



Image No. 16. Panavitiya ambalama, diagonal view.

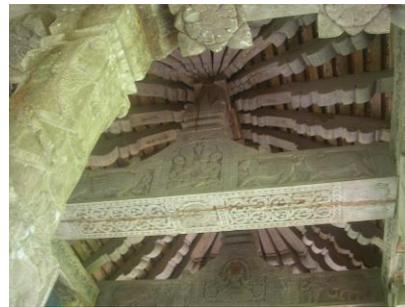


Image No. 16 A Panavitiya ambalama, detail of interior roof structure



Image No. 17 A. Two seated figures bordered by the kundirikkan pattern.



Image No. 17 B. Two figures bordered by a variation of the Kundirikkan pattern.



Image 18 A. Panavitya. Figure of a dancer.



Image No. 18 B. Panavitya. A female and male figure.

Both bordered by variations of the kundirikkan design.



Image no. 19. Nari lata vela from a painted chest, Ridi Vihare.



Image no. 20. Nari lata, Embekke devale.



Image no. 21. Panca nari gata (five woman knot design), Haguranketha devale.



Image no. 22. Scrolls and vine design from wooden bed, Kabulumulla devale, belonged to Rajasimha 1 of Sitawaka. (r.1581-93).



Image no. 23. Mythical lion form, wood, Embekke devale



Image no. 24. Mythical lion form, wood, Embekke devale.



Image no. 25. Detail, of the mythical lion figures from the two ends of the bed head, Kamulumulla devale.