

VAIJAYANTA TANTRA

(A Sanskrit Treatise on the Arts and Crafts of Medieval Sri Lanka,
with a word-for-word paraphrase in Sinhala.)

Edited by Nandasena Mudiyanse

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Ananda Kumaraswamy in his monumental work *Medieval Sinhalese Art* mentions a triad of *Sāstras* or textbooks on the fine arts as practised in Sri Lanka down the ages, supplying the pedagogical requirements of our craftsmen and artists. Being highly technical in character, they were codified in Sanskrit *Ślokas* (verses), as was the custom in India, and apprentices were required to learn them by heart. Kumaraswamy did not have the good fortune to study these texts himself; he came to know of them through a contemporary colleague, Mudaliyar E. R. Goonaratna who supplied him with English translations of extensive chapters of at least two of them, the *Sāriputraya* which deals with the iconometry of the Buddha image, and the *Rāpāvaliya* which deals with the art of the ancient Sinhala painter. The third of this triad is the *Vaijāyanta*, the translation nor edition of which ever saw the light of day during Kumaraswamy's lifetime, and which remained so right up to the present day until the appearance of the work under review, which is the first ever edition in print of this important text.

Like the *Sāriputraya*, the *Vaijāyanta Tantra* abounds in errors. The Sanskrit is very corrupt and does not conform even to the elementary rules of Pāṇinian grammar. In many instances, even the Sinhala *sanne* (paraphrase) fails to make sense. Mudaliyar Goonaratna says that he had great trouble with the *Sāriputraya*, getting the verses corrected and put into proper metre before commencing the translation. Prof. Mudiyanse, who has spared no pains in editing this text has collated as many as ten old leaf manuscripts which he had obtained from various temple libraries besides consulting several other fragmentary and incomplete ones. However, he has not dared to correct the verses and put them into proper metre, a colossal task which would have delayed the publication further. We should be grateful to him for presenting the material as it is, drawing attention to variant readings in the footnotes.

Kumaraswamy has noted that this text used by Sinhala jewellers describes the sixty four kinds of royal ornaments, and many other kinds of jewellery and metal work. Thanks to the present edition we now know that it deals with much more besides. It is a veritable mine of information regarding a vast spectrum of the arts and crafts of medieval Sri Lanka. The intricate techniques of making and carving designs on jewellery, crowns, thrones, swords, fore-head bands and other ornaments, of the casting of images of Hindu deities, coins etc. are here described in detail. The picture is that of a society where art and aesthetics were woven into the fabric of peoples' lives - such relatively trivial objects as the *dat-kafuva* (tooth pick) and *kar-hōnula* (ear-cleaner) and *poshinda* (stylus) being ornately carved with intricate designs. Not only the students of medieval arts and crafts, but also the archaeologist and the sociologist will no doubt find this to be a text of absorbing interest.

Furnished as it is with a valuable introduction by the editor, which provides the student with a 'bird's eye view' of the work's content and an exhaustive index, this edition of the *Vaijāyanta* should serve as a firm basis for future in-depth studies regarding our arts and crafts, and as aptly observed in his foreword by Prof. S. L. Kekulawala, the Vice Chancellor of the Kelaniya University which has sponsored this publication, it should serve to lend a true Sinhala character to our modern artistic creations and innovations, by ensuring the continuance of our own traditional roots.

While we congratulate Prof. Nandasena Mudiyanse on the publication of this work, we wish to say that he would be rendering a great service to the study of the history of fine arts in Sri Lanka if he now directs his attention to a similar edition of the *Rāpāvaliya*, hitherto known only by name.

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