

Elephant Images in the Art and Graphic Designs of Colonial Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Use of the image of elephant in various artifacts of Sri Lanka can be traced in the various periods of Sri Lankan history. The objective of this paper is to explore into the use of the elephant image in art and graphic designs other than traditional art forms during the colonial period in Sri Lanka (from the 16th century to the first half of the 20th century). The colonial rulers were more inclined to use the image of the elephant in maps on Sri Lanka, and also on graphic designs frequently due to the fact that the elephant is symbolic of wisdom, majesty and strength and also an attractive representation of the topography and natural beauty of the island. Therefore the image of the elephant played a significant role in the cartouche of maps during Portuguese, Dutch, and British periods. Up to until 1952, coat of arms of Sri Lanka also carried the image of an elephant facing forward placed in the middle of two coconut trees. Rix dollar and Striver coins issued during the British period too included elephant images. The one pound note issued in 1818 which is considered the oldest currency note issued in Sri Lanka depicted an image of an elephant on it. Thereafter, the ten rupee note issued in 1929 also included an image of the elephant. In 1935, a postal stamp was issued carrying the image of an elephant for the first time. During the British rule, the image of the elephant was used as the logo of several government institutions. Ceylon police, Ceylon Government railway, Royal College Colombo, Hatton National Bank are some of the examples. Only the image of the elephant used in the crest of Sri Lanka police has been altered slightly while all the other institutions still carry the image of the elephant in their logos without any alteration.

Keywords: *Elephant image, Colonial period of Sri Lanka, Graphic Designs, Coat of arms of Sri Lanka, Logos with elephant figure.*

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