

## Sinhala Weapons and Armor: Adaptation in Response to European Style Warfare

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The study examines the Weapons and Armor used by respectively the Sinhalese and the Portuguese forces during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The paper posits that the weapons of both combatants evolved in response to each other taking into account also developments abroad. The study is primarily based on observation and comparison of specimens in museums, private collections and illustrations from temple art, contemporary European art and literature.

By the time Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka the European armies had phased out the heavy armor used by the knights and were beginning to adopt the somewhat lighter “cuirassier” armor which was used in Sri Lanka at the earlier part of the Portuguese wars. With the arrival of the Portuguese the Sinhala armies were faced with a heavier armored opponent who increasingly relied more on the newly emerging firearms of the period. The emergence of hand held fire arms during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century was changing the face of warfare through out the world. The adaptation of the gun by the Sinhalese and their proficiency in both use and manufacture of firearms forced the Europeans to re-adopt and played a role in the demise of heavy armor in the battlefield. (It is more probable that the Sinhalese first adopted the gun from the Arabs than the Europeans. It is likely that there were more than one school of gun manufacture in Sri Lanka.)

The existence of molded shaped Sinhala spearheads with post apical grooving and arrow points with hardened tips suggest design adaptations which are more suited to the function as armor piercing weapons. The need for such weapons arose out the use of heavy armor during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it is highly probable that these adaptations originated during this period.

Several new weapons including the “Patisthana” spear, “Kasthana” sword “Ath- thuwakku /Bondikula hand guns and the “Kodithuwakku” Grass hopper canon was added to the Sinhala armory during this era. The Study also looks at the evidence for the use of body armor by the Sinhalese.

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