

Dutch Colonial Memories on Sri Lankan Elephants

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ABSTRACT

During the period in which the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) ruled over the coastal region of Sri Lanka, it dispatched the officials to the Island to serve in the Dutch territory. Among the officials so dispatched, the Governor was the highest authority for the administration of territory. The DEIC appointed more than 25 Governors to the Dutch Territory of Sri Lanka. The Governor needed to be aware of the important matters related to the political, judicial, defense, religious, educational, commercial or other realms of the territory. The outgoing Governors used to write memoirs to their successors explaining the state of the above-mentioned realms during their term of office. These memoirs are one of the noteworthy accounts in the archival records of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which have been translated into English for non-Dutch speaking researchers who are interested in the DEIC's administration, in particular, Sri Lanka. What do the so-called Memoirs of the Dutch Governors of Sri Lanka mention of Sri Lankan elephants? To what extent the memoirs of the Dutch Governors of Sri Lanka can be used to tap the DEIC dealings with the elephants of Sri Lanka? What assessment could be made on the DEIC trade in Sri Lankan elephants based on those mentions? The prime interest of the DEIC in Sri Lanka rested mainly on its trade commodities including elephants which then had a significant demand in the foreign markets. It is said that the elephants were abundantly found in the surrounding lands of the Valaveriver in the Giruvāpattu of the Mataradisāvony, the wooded hinterland in Negombo and Ja-ela in the Colombodisāvony, Vanni territories in the northern region and the area surrounding Trincomalee and Batticaloa in the East of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *elephants, trade commodities, Dutch East India Company, Dutch Territory of Sri Lanka, Memoirs of the Dutch Governors of Sri Lanka*

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