

Traditional Ivory Crafts and Technology in Sri Lanka: A Historical and Technological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Firm evidence of ivory crafts and technology in Sri Lanka goes back to the pre-Christian era. Early Brahmi inscriptions and archaeological data provide information of ivory objects, craftsmen and craftsmanship in the country. The *Vegiri Devale* early Brahmi inscription of 3rd century BC situated near Kandy city in Sri Lanka mentioned the word *Datika* among other specific words such as *Kubaraka* (potter) and *Manikara* (lapidary -Gem cutter). According to Senerath Paranavitana, the word *Datika* is linked with ivory craft and the word itself means the ivory-worker. Historical sources, later documents and ethno-archaeological studies also provide many narratives of multi- purpose usage of ivory in Sri Lanka from ancient times to the recent past.

In Sri Lanka the word ivory is used for elephants' tusks only and not for the other tooth. Scarcity of the material led to high demand resulting in acquiring ivory as a prestigious symbol. Hence, the ivory tradition flourished in Sri Lanka and continued from 18th century feudalistic Kandyan Kingdom to the British period and beyond. However, the traditional craftsmanship that was practiced genealogically and maintained a high standard ceased when the use of ivory was prohibited in Sri Lanka by imposed laws. Ancient ivory crafts specimens and records show that ivory crafts and technology used traditional methods and technologies in Sri Lanka until the recent past. This paper attempts to illustrate the traditional methods and the technologies used in the magnificent old tradition of ivory craft in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Ivory craft and technology, Sri Lanka, Ivory craftsmanship, Elephant*

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