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புத்தசாசனம், மத மற்றும் கலாசார அலுவல்கள் அமைச்சு  
Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs

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**PRESS RELEASE- FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Six Kandyan artefacts to return home from the Netherlands  
after more than two centuries**

In a collaborative international provenance research which was concluded in April 2022, six Sri Lankan objects from the Rijksmuseum collection in the Netherlands, were confirmed to be of Lankan origin. A golden and a silver kashhāné or sabre, a golden knife, two maha thuwakku or wall guns and Lewke Disave's cannon-all belonging to the Kandyan kingdom, now found in the Rijksmuseum collection were confirmed to be war booty, obtained by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) during the siege of the palace of Kandy in 1765 when large scale looting of Kandyan objects took place.

Following the conclusion of the provenance study, a diplomatic request was made by the Hon. Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, Vidura Wickremanayake to the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to return the six objects to Sri Lanka. It is significant that this was the first request which was taken up before the independent commission appointed by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to assess and facilitate the return of colonial objects to their respective countries of origin. Accordingly, on the recommendations made by the committee, the six objects will be officially returned to Sri Lanka. The decision has been gazetted in the Netherlands on 6th July. Sri Lankan Advisory Committee on the Return of Artefacts has been appointed by the cabinet to facilitate the return of the six objects.

Commenting on the occasion, Director General of the Department of National Museums, Ms Sanuja Kasthuriarachchi notes that the whole exercise is a historical moment in many perspectives. "The laborious provenance research has led to the dispelling of many myths and ambiguities that shrouded our Kandyan artefacts for centuries. It is heartening to see these cultural symbols which mirror the cleverness of Sri Lankan artisans of yesteryear, reclaiming their due pride of place in their land of birth."

The joint research which was carried out under the Pilot Project Provenance Research on Objects of the Colonial era (PPROCE) of the Rijksmuseum is also a landmark in Sri Lankan provenance studies. Since the Provenance Report of Dr. P.H.D.H. de Silva, the Director of the National Museum in Colombo in the 1970s, very little notice was taken of the Kandyan objects in discussion until this recent intense study. The international joint provenance research represented researchers from Sri Lanka, and the Netherlands. The local research team comprised Additional Director General (Cultural), Department of National Museums- Senarath Wickramasinghe, Prof. Asoka de Zoysa and Dr. Ganga Dissanayake from the University of Kelaniya and firearms specialist and the author of several books on the Kandyan period, Chamikara Pilapitiya. The Department of National Archives too made a significant contribution to the research by providing numerous archival material.

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අංක 135, ට්‍රිමත් අනගාරික ධර්මපාල මාවත, කොළඹ 07. இல. 135, ஸ்ரீமான் அனகாரிக்க தர்மபால மாவத்தை, கொழும்பு 07.  
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Scores of historical documents, Dutch records, art and craftsmanship of objects in study, their artistic value, technology and chemical composition were among the criteria adopted by the experts in determining the provenance of the Kandyan objects. The golden and silver kasthānēs presented in the Rijksmuseum as spoils of war, were obtained by the VOC during the siege of the palace of Kandy in 1765 when large scale looting of Kandyan objects took place. The research confirms that both kasthanes were made in the royal workshop and were probably meant for a Kandyan aristocrat.

The intricately crafted knife which also reflects the skill of the 18th century Kandyan workmanship, formed part of the royal garb.

The two wall guns which translated into *maha thuwakku* in the vernacular during the Kandyan times are decorated with woodwork and engraved symbols. The guns represent a unique and early Sri Lankan tradition in gun-making and warfare. The two wall guns, each weighing 28kg, are unique examples of mobile, heavy artillery that the troops of the Kandyan king used to defend the city and the palace.

Richly ornamented with silver, gold and gemstones, Lewke Disave's cannon is another interesting object among the six artefacts. Embellished with Kandyan designs such as *liyawel*, *kalpa vrukshaya* and *nari lata*, the cannon bears an inscription which claims the Kandyan aristocrat Leweke Disave to be the donor of the cannon.

Once the transfer of ownership is acknowledged upon signing of relevant documents, the exact date of arrival of the six artefacts in the island will be determined. Upon the arrival of these historical objects, a public exhibition featuring them, is to be organised by the Department of National Museums. "Although the backdrop in which these historical artefacts of ours were taken to the Netherlands was that of grief and pain, we earnestly hope that their journey of returning home more than two centuries later, will be that of delight. This journey will further strengthen the diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and Sri Lanka," says the DG of the Department of National Museums who extends her sincere thanks to the Hon. Vidura Wikramanayake, Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, Secretary to the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, Mr. Somarathna Vidanapathirana and the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Sri Lanka, Her Excellency Bonnie Horbach for their unfailing support and enthusiasm in this exercise.

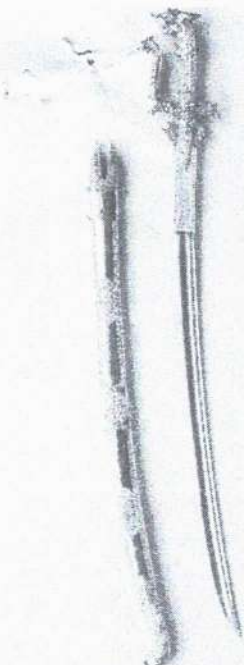
Cultural cooperation between Dutch and Sri Lankan institutions have already commenced and will focus on the exchange of technical expertise, knowledge sharing and education. It is hoped that this cooperation will lead to more returns of the Sri Lankan artefacts in the future. The recently established Sri Lankan Advisory Committee on the Return of Artefacts will take the lead in the cooperation as well as requests for return of the artefacts to their country of origin.

**Somarathne Vidanapathirana**

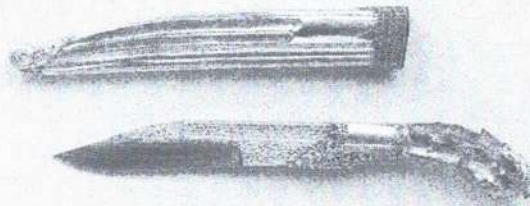
Secretary

Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious & Cultural Affairs

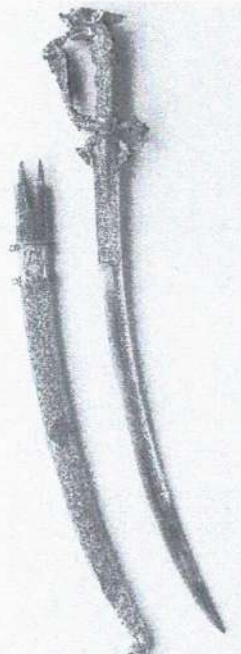
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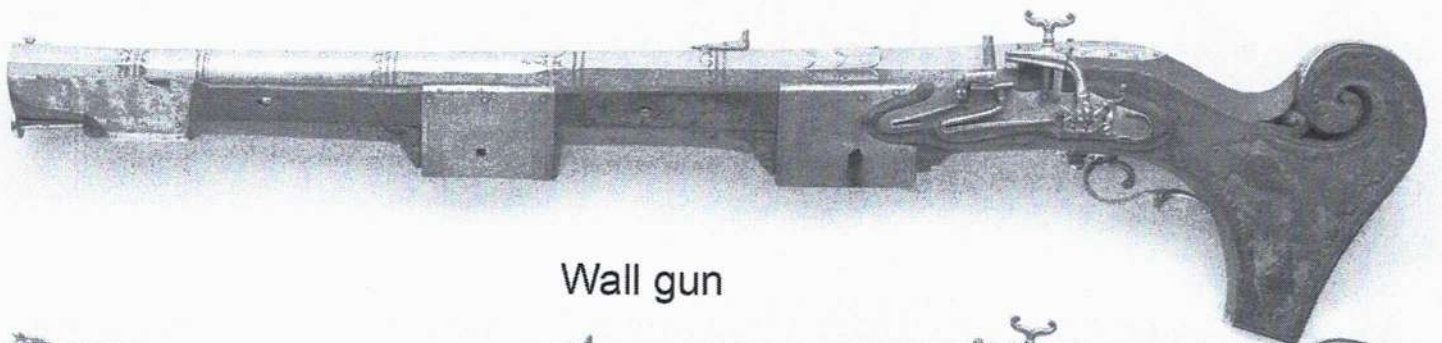
Golden Kasthāné



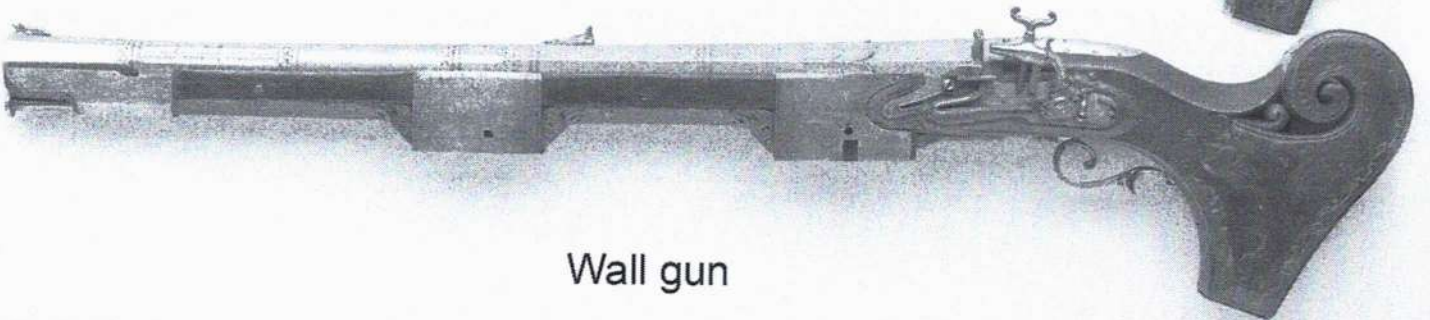
Golden Knife



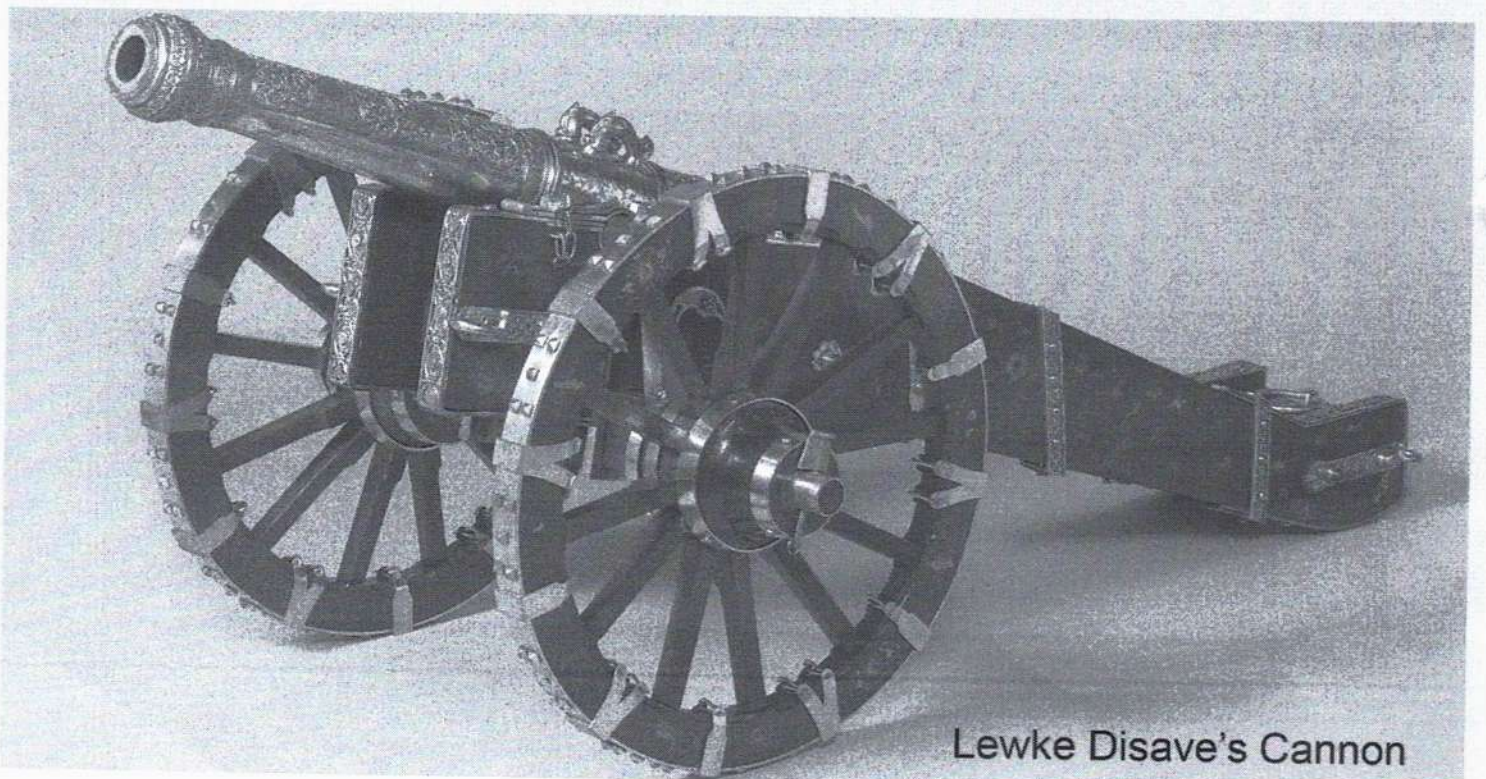
Silver Kasthāné



Wall gun



Wall gun



Lewke Disave's Cannon