

Representation of Introduced Exotic Plants in Temple Paintings

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Plant and animal images are included in temple paintings of Sri Lanka since ancient times, such images being found in pre-historic rock art and more importantly in temple paintings of historical times. These are used, as a part of the context of the painting, for decorative purposes and for filling in of spaces.

About a quarter of the plant species found in Sri Lanka have an exotic origin. These plants were introduced in the past from different parts of the world, a high number of these introductions being through humans. These include plants such as fruits, vegetables, cash crops and ornaments. Due to the high economic importance of these plants, they are widely cultivated and are well known to the public.

Traditional painters have used some of these exotic plants in temple paintings. This study focuses on naturalistic representation of recently introduced plants in paintings of the Kandyan tradition. These include a number of exotic plants such as pineapple, cashew and some citrus species.

The study focuses on three main aspects of exotic plants represented in temple paintings. These are the identification of introduced exotic plants found in temple paintings, analysis of the representation of these among other plants and the factors that attracted the public, including artists, to these plants.

Keywords: temple paintings, plant dispersal, historical biogeography

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