

## **A Preliminary Study on Sinhala Armour**

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If proximity is a factor in transfer of technology and culture, Sri Lanka should be able to boast as varied and as comprehensive a collection of armour as do the museum collections in India. However, surprisingly, Sri Lankan collections are conspicuous in their absence of any armour of significance, with the exception of the shield. To the student of weaponry and martial exploits, this is not unique, in that this is not the only area in which, in martial endeavor and accoutrement, Sri Lanka deviates from the Indian context.

Whilst Indian museums are full of chain and plate armour and exotics such as crocodile skin and fish scale armour, Sri Lankan artifacts are exceedingly rare and the few that survive have not been recognized by museums as such.

This study traces the remaining scanty evidence on Sinhala armour, human and animal.

The early period is addressed through literary, sculptural and mural sources which indicate the use of basic armour far less elaborate than the Indian material. These sources continue the study through to the colonial era when, with the changing face of warfare, armour came to metamorphasize to adornment in the dancer's costume. Thus, today what remains are only the aesthetically pleasing elements that would have in the past furnished protection for the warrior in single combat and in battle.

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Next, several pieces of remaining armour in the guise of dancers costumes will be examined. This material is sourced from the museum collections in Sri Lanka and abroad as well as from private collections.

Together with an examination of the existing armour, this paper will also present some findings that seek to explain the absence of heavy body armour. The reasons for the absence of such armour varies from attitudes of bravado as recorded by the enemy themselves as well as the limited value of armour in the type of battle that the Sinhalese waged. Where ever possible parallels will be drawn with comparable cultures. It is hoped that this paper, which as the title suggests is preliminary, will serve to engender interest in this important area of study.

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