

# COMMISSIE KOLONIALE COLLECTIES

## ADVIES

Objecten	Twee geweren ( <i>maha thuwakku</i> )
Huidige eigenaar	Nederlandse Staat
Beheerder	Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
Teruggaveverzoek van	Republiek Sri Lanka
Datum teruggaveverzoek	4 maart 2021, gespecificeerd op 18 november 2022
Adviesnr.	SL-2023-2
Datum advies	12 mei 2023
Samenstelling Commissie i.c.	Mr. L.Y. Gonçalves-Ho Kang You (voorzitter), prof. dr. L.N.K. van Broekhoven, prof. dr. R. Raben (leden)
Secretaris	Mr. J.A. van Ooijen MA

### 1. De objecten

De verzochte twee geweren zijn vervaardigd van hout, ijzer en brons en deels beschilderd en zijn respectievelijk 150,5 en 155 cm lang. Het gaat om een type artillerie dat op een muur geplaatst stond of in het veld op een driepoot kon worden geplaatst. In het Sinhala wordt dit type geweer aangeduid als *maha thuwakkuwa*. De geweren zijn geregistreerd onder de inventarisnummers NG-NM-519 en NG-NM-520.

### 2. Het beleidskader

De beoordeling in dit advies vindt plaats binnen de kaders van de *Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context* van de Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap.<sup>1</sup> De beleidsvisie is gebaseerd op het rapport *Koloniale collecties en erkenning van onrecht* van de Raad voor Cultuur.<sup>2</sup> Een verzoek om teruggave kan worden ingediend door een Staat waar Nederland langere tijd koloniaal gezag uitoefende.

In de Beleidsvisie zijn de kaders van de beoordeling samengevat als volgt omschreven:

De Commissie stelt eerst vast of het herkomstonderzoek toereikend is.

Vervolgens stelt de Commissie vast of er sprake is van onvrijwillig bezitsverlies. Daartoe wordt beoordeeld of met een redelijke mate van zekerheid kan worden vastgesteld dat het verzochte cultuurgoed onvrijwillig is verloren in een land waar Nederland langere tijd koloniaal gezag uitoefende. Als wordt vastgesteld dat dat het geval is, zal worden geadviseerd tot een onvoorwaardelijke teruggave van het cultuurgoed.

Indien uit de herkomstgeschiedenis niet kan worden vastgesteld of sprake is van onvrijwillig bezitsverlies, en voor zover deze cultuurgoederen voor het land van herkomst een bijzonder cultureel,

---

<sup>1</sup> Beleidsvisie 29 januari 2021, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2021/01/29/rapport-beleidsvisie-collecties-uit-een-koloniale-context>

<sup>2</sup> Rapport 7 oktober 2020, <https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/documenten/adviezen/2020/10/07/advies-koloniale-collecties-en-erkenning-van-onrecht>

historisch of religieus belang vertegenwoordigen, maakt de Commissie een belangenafweging. Het belang van teruggave voor het herkomstland dient dan naar redelijkheid en billijkheid te worden afgewogen tegen andere relevante belangen.

Relevante belangen kunnen zijn het culturele belang van het cultuurobject voor het herkomstland, de betrokken gemeenschappen in de herkomstlanden en in Nederland, het belang voor de collectie Nederland, de toekomstige bewaaromstandigheden en de publieke toegankelijkheid. Objecten kunnen veelzeggend zijn voor nationale en regionale tradities en de identiteit van een land, volk, gemeenschap of individu. Het belang van een koloniaal cultuurobject zal vaak voor Nederland anders zijn dan voor het land van herkomst. Ook voor Nederlanders met wortels in de herkomstlanden kunnen koloniale cultuurobjecten in Nederlandse musea van speciale betekenis zijn.

Indien het teruggevraagde object afkomstig is uit een voormalige kolonie van een andere mogendheid maakt de Commissie eveneens een afweging. Het belang van teruggave voor het herkomstland dient naar redelijkheid en billijkheid te worden afgewogen tegen andere relevante belangen. Wel zal herstel van onrecht in de beoordeling het uitgangspunt moeten zijn. In dit geval is het onrecht niet door Nederland veroorzaakt, maar is Nederland als huidige eigenaar van de objecten wel de enige om dit onrecht te herstellen.

Indien de Commissie adviseert tot teruggave aan de verzoekende staat, dient ingevolge de Erfgoedwet en de *Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context* van de Staatssecretaris van Cultuur en Media rekening gehouden te worden met de vervreemdingsprocedure voor publieke collecties en wordt het advies van de Commissie tevens beschouwd als een advies over de onmisbaarheid en onvervangbaarheid van het object in de zin van artikel 4.18 van de Erfgoedwet.

### 3. De procedure

Op 18 november 2022 heeft de Republiek Sri Lanka een verzoek ingediend bij de Staatssecretaris voor Cultuur en Media om teruggave van twee geweren die zijn buitgemaakt in Kandy in 1765. De Staatssecretaris heeft de Commissie Koloniale Collecties (hierna: de Commissie) verzocht te adviseren over het teruggaveverzoek.

De beheerder van de objecten, het Rijksmuseum te Amsterdam, heeft onderzoek gedaan naar de herkomstgeschiedenis en heeft daarvan rapport uitgebracht (bijlage 1).

De Commissie heeft het teruggaveverzoek en het herkomstrapport besproken in haar vergadering van 9 januari 2023. De Commissie heeft dr. Alicia Schrikker als herkomstonderzoeker over dit rapport gehoord. Aangezien zij tevens lid is van de Commissie heeft zij niet deelgenomen aan de inhoudelijke beraadslaging en besluitvorming van de Commissie over dit object.

De Commissie had geen aanvullende vragen voor nader herkomstonderzoek.

In januari 2023 heeft Commissielid dr. Schrikker in Colombo gesproken met verschillende vertegenwoordigers van de Ministeries van Cultuur en Buitenlandse Zaken, de senior presidentieel adviseur veiligheid, de Director General van het Department of National Museums en de Nederlandse ambassadeur. Zij heeft met hen gesproken over de voortgang van de behandeling van de teruggaveverzoeken en over mogelijke vervolgstappen.

Op 24 maart 2023 heeft de Commissie gesproken met drs. Taco Dibbits, directeur, en dr. Valika Smeulders, hoofd Geschiedenis, als vertegenwoordigers van het Rijksmuseum, de beheerder van de collectie. Daarbij hebben zij aangegeven het teruggavebeleid te ondersteunen en de samenwerking met het land van herkomst van de objecten belangrijk te vinden.

Het herkomstonderzoek is in Engelse vertaling gedeeld met vertegenwoordigers van Sri Lanka. Het herkomstonderzoek gaf geen aanleiding tot aanvullende vragen.

Op 24 maart 2023 heeft de Commissie het teruggaveverzoek opnieuw besproken en besloten te adviseren zoals hieronder weergegeven.

#### 4. Het herkomstonderzoek

Het herkomstonderzoek is gedaan door dr. Alicia Schrikker en Doreen van den Boogaart RMA in samenwerking met Chamikara Pilapitiya (namens het National Museum Colombo).

Alicia Schrikker en Doreen van den Boogaart waren ten tijde van het onderzoek werkzaam als herkomstonderzoekers in opdracht PPROCE en in dienst van het NIOD.

Het rapport van het onderzoek is als bijlage bij dit advies gevoegd (*bijlage 1*). De inhoud van het rapport wordt beschouwd als onderdeel van dit advies. In het rapport hebben de onderzoekers - samengevat- de volgende bevindingen neergelegd.

“The two large wall guns are identified as typically Kandyan. In Sinhala they are referred to as Maha Thuwakku (plural). The large guns are heavy (weighing between 27 and 28 kilograms and ca. 1/2 pound / 33 mm calibre). They were made to stand on a tripod when used in the field. These objects represent the high-quality of guns produced in the Kandyan Kingdom, its flint locks, in particular, stand out. The guns are currently displayed at the Rijksmuseum as spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war of 1762-1766. It was unclear how and when exactly the museum drew this conclusion as the museum information system did not provide sufficient evidence. It is well known that the palace of Kandy was looted in 1765 and that subsequently the loot was distributed in a very chaotic manner. On the basis of archival research in the Dutch Royal Archives (Koninklijk Huisarchief) and in the VOC archives, this report shows that it is very likely that guns were gifted to the Stadtholder but that the guns travelled to Batavia first. In this scenario, the guns were part of a set of four “large Kandyan weapons” that were sent in a closed box from Batavia as a gift to the Stadtholder in 1767. In the final stage of this research, we discovered two other large guns (NG-NM-515 and NG-NM-516) in the Rijksmuseum collection with a Sri Lankan provenance, which we identified with a high degree of certainty as the two other guns of this set of four.”

#### 5. Inhoudelijke beoordeling van het teruggaveverzoek

Het verzoek om teruggave is ingediend door een Staat waar Nederland langere tijd koloniaal gezag uitoefende en derhalve is de *Beleidsvisie collecties uit een koloniale context* van toepassing.

De Commissie is van oordeel dat het onderzoek deugdelijk is uitgevoerd en voldoende basis biedt om te kunnen adviseren. Er is grondig bronnenonderzoek gedaan en de bestaande kennis is kritisch geëvalueerd. Het rapport geeft voldoende informatie over de oorsprong van de objecten, de verwijdering en de overkomst naar Nederland.

De Commissie heeft zich afgevraagd of hier sprake is van onvrijwillig bezitsverlies als bedoeld in het beleidskader. Daartoe overweegt zij als volgt.

Over de herkomst van de *maha thuwakku* was nauwelijks informatie aanwezig. Aan de hand van materiaal- en archiefonderzoek scheidt het rapport helderheid.

#### Wat kan uit de objecten zelf worden afgeleid over hun oorsprong?

Het rapport geeft een uitvoerige beschrijving van het materiaaltechnisch onderzoek van de geweren, uitgevoerd door de Sri Lankaanse historische wapenspecialist Chamikara Pilapitiya. Op basis van dit onderzoek aangevuld met expertise van andere specialisten kan worden vastgesteld dat de geweren zijn vervaardigd in Kandy. In de wapens zijn technische innovaties toegepast, zoals het vuursteenmechanisme, en specifieke constructieve onderdelen, zoals kruiskopschroeven, die in die periode

uitsluitend werden gebruikt in vuurwapens vervaardigd in Kandy. Ook decoratieve elementen zoals specifieke bloem- en vogelmotieven wijzen op vervaardiging in Kandy, zoals het typerende liyawela bloemmotief, een hoofd van een makara (draak) en een hoofd van een serapendiya (mythische vogel). Uit het onderzoek komt dus samengevat naar voren dat de twee geweren unieke voorbeelden zijn van de hoogwaardige kwaliteit van wapenvervaardiging in Kandy in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw.

#### Alternatieve duidingen en herkomsttheorieën

Na hun opname in Nederlandse collecties zijn de geweren en hun herkomstgeschiedenis geruime tijd onjuist geduid. In het herkomstrapport is uiteengezet welke -onjuiste- aanduidingen en achtergrond aan de geweren zijn verbonden. In de negentiende eeuw zijn de geweren ten onrechte in verband gebracht met admiraal Michiel de Ruyter. Zij werden aangeduid als 'draaibassen' van het admiraalsschip van De Ruyter. Afgezien van die -foutieve- aanduiding zijn de geweren lange tijd ook onopgemerkt gebleven in de collectie en niet nader onderzocht. Pas in 1975 werd één van beide geweren opnieuw herkend en omschreven als Sri Lankaans en meer specifiek Kandyans in het onderzoek door P. H. D. H. de Silva, destijds directeur van het Nationaal Museum in Colombo en gepubliceerd in zijn *Catalogue of Antiquities and Other Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Abroad* (1975).

#### Waren de geweren onderdeel van de buit van de aanval op Kandy in 1765?

In 1765 werden Kandy en het koninklijk paleis aangevallen en verwoest door Nederlandse troepen onder leiding van de Nederlandse gouverneur van Ceylon, Lubbert Jan van Eck. Bij de plunderingen werden onder meer wapens en munitie buitgemaakt. Een deel daarvan is vervolgens door Nederlandse soldaten verkocht of weer achtergelaten. Uit inventarislijsten van buitgemaakte goederen zijn de geweren niet met zekerheid te identificeren.

In een brief van 17 juni 1767 informeerde Thomas Hope, als representant van Willem V die in naam opperbewindhebber van de VOC was, hertog Van Brunswick, voogd van stadhouder Willem V dat een schip uit Batavia goederen vervoerde bestemd voor de stadhouder, waaronder "vier groote Candiasche geweeren". Tijdens het herkomstonderzoek zijn in de collectie van het Rijksmuseum nog twee geweren van hetzelfde type aangetroffen (inventarisnummers NG-NM-515 and NG-NM-516) die in dezelfde periode in Sri Lanka en mogelijk deels in Kandy zijn vervaardigd. De geweren hebben naar alle waarschijnlijkheid de set van vier gevormd aangeduid als de "Candiasche geweeren" in de brief van Hope uit 1767. Ooggetuigenverslagen bevestigen dat in het 'curiositeitenkabinet' van Willem V in Den Haag oorlogsbuit van de aanval op Kandy in 1765 tentoongesteld was, waaronder diverse wapens. Vanuit de collectie van Willem V zijn de geweren -via andere Nederlandse collecties en locaties- in 1927 opgenomen in de collectie van het Rijksmuseum.

#### Overwegingen van de Commissie

De herkomstgeschiedenis van de geweren kon niet volledig worden gereconstrueerd. De geweren zijn niet met zekerheid geïdentificeerd op inventarislijsten van oorlogsbuit van de VOC of op inventarislijsten van de collectie van Willem V. Desalniettemin is de Commissie van oordeel dat aannemelijk is dat de geweren als oorlogsbuit zijn geroofd uit Kandy in 1765. Uit het materiaaltechnisch onderzoek is overtuigend gebleken dat de geweren van Kandiase makelij zijn. Tijdens de aanval op Kandy en de plundering in 1765 zijn veel wapens buitgemaakt en verspreid geraakt. Er zijn sterke aanwijzingen dat de vier grote geweren als oorlogstroofe vanuit Batavia verzonden werden naar de stadhouder. Op basis van het herkomstonderzoek is aannemelijk dat de geweren onderdeel waren van de set van vier die in 1767 via Batavia naar Nederland is verscheept. Andere routes waarop de geweren mogelijk in Nederland zijn terechtgekomen zijn niet gevonden of aannemelijk geworden.

Het Rijksmuseum gaat zelf ook uit van roof als herkomst en er zijn geen aanwijzingen gevonden die wijzen op iets anders.

De Commissie is op vorenstaande gronden, vervat in het herkomstrapport, van oordeel dat met een redelijke mate van zekerheid is aangetoond dat de verzochte cultuurobjecten onvrijwillig zijn verloren in een land waar Nederland langere tijd koloniaal gezag uitoefende. De Commissie adviseert op grond van het voorgaande tot onvoorwaardelijke teruggave van de twee geweren vanwege het onvrijwillige bezitsverlies.

De Commissie is gevraagd te adviseren over de toepassing van artikel 4.18 van de Erfgoedwet indien het advies inhoudt dat de gevraagde objecten moeten worden teruggegeven. Naar het oordeel van de commissie prevaleert in dit geval het herstel van het onrecht uit het verleden en komt toepassing van artikel 4.19 Erfgoedwet daarom niet aan de orde.

#### 6. Het advies

De Commissie heeft het teruggaveverzoek beoordeeld en adviseert de Staatssecretaris tot onvoorwaardelijke teruggave van twee geweren met inventarisnummers NG-NM-519 en NG-NM-520 aan de Republiek Sri Lanka.

Dit advies is vastgesteld door de Commissie Koloniale Collecties op 12 mei 2023.

De voorzitter

De secretaris

Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You

Jo'anne van Ooijen

#### Bijlagen

1. Provenance report regarding Two wall guns (jingals) - Gingals or Grasshoppers (A.F. Schrikker, D. van den Boogaart, maart 2022)

## Provenance report regarding Two wall guns (jingals) - *Gingals or Grasshoppers*

*Alicia Schrikker en Doreen van den Boogaart*

*In collaboration with Chamikara Pilapitiya, on behalf of the Colombo National Museum*

 <p><i>Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-NM-519 and NG-NM-520</i></p>	Custodian	Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
	Current possessor	Dutch State
	Current location	Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
	Inventory numbers	NG-NM-519 NG-NM-520
	Material/technique	Iron (metal), wood (plant material), brass (alloy), paint (coating)  Forging / cutting / painting
	Measurements <i>NG-NM-519</i>	Length 155cm Length barrel: 110cm Weight 27 kg  Calibre 32mm
	Measurements <i>NG-NM-520</i>	Length 150.5 cm Width 33.0 cm Depth 13.0 cm  Weight 28 kg  Calibre 35 mm

### Summary of findings

The two large wall guns are identified as typically Kandyan. In Sinhala they are referred to as *Maha Thuwakku* (plural). The large guns are heavy (weighing between 27 and 28 kilograms and ca. 1/2 pound / 33 mm calibre). They were made to stand on a tripod when used in the field. These objects represent the high-quality of guns produced in the Kandyan Kingdom, its flint locks, in particular, stand out. The guns are currently displayed at the Rijksmuseum as spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war of 1762-1766. It was unclear how and when exactly the museum drew this conclusion as the

museum information system did not provide sufficient evidence. It is well known that the palace of Kandy was looted in 1765 and that subsequently the loot was distributed in a very chaotic manner. On the basis of archival research in the Dutch Royal Archives (*Koninklijk Huisarchief*) and in the VOC archives, this report shows that it is very likely that guns were gifted to the Stadtholder but that the guns travelled to Batavia first. In this scenario, the guns were part of a set of four “large Kandyan weapons” that were sent in a closed box from Batavia as a gift to the Stadtholder in 1767. In the final stage of this research, we discovered two other large guns (NG-NM-515 and NG-NM-516) in the Rijksmuseum collection with a Sri Lankan provenance, which we identified with a high degree of certainty as the two other guns of this set of four.

## **Reconstruction provenance**

### **Seventeenth/eighteenth century**

Made in Kandy

See object analysis in this report.

### **Ca. 1767 – 1816**

Collection of the Dutch Stadtholder Willem V

Koninklijk Huis Archief (KHA), A31-1774, Letter Thomas Hope, 17 June 1767.

### **1816– 1875**

Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden

Inventory card NG-NM-519 and NG-NM-520 Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

### **1875 – 1927**

Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst

*NL-HlmNHA, 476, inv.no. 1092, “Inventaris van kunstvoorwerpen, door het Nederlandsch Museum van Geschiedenis en Kunst ontvangen van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden” [Inventory of art objects, received by the Nederlandsch Museum van Geschiedenis en Kunst from the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden], 1875.*

And: *Inventory card NG-NM-519 and NG-NM-520 Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.*

### **1927 – now**

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

*Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst becomes part of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.*

## Introduction and context

NG-NM-519 and NG-NM-520 are two large muskets that are currently part of the collection of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. They are on display in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam in room 1.5: *The Netherlands overseas* and are described as “*jingals* (grasshopper)/wall guns” that were seized by the Dutch as booty during their military campaign against the Kingdom of Kandy in 1765. The two wall guns are unique examples of mobile, heavy artillery that the troops of the Kandyan king used to defend the city and palace. The wall guns had to be mounted on a tripod before being fired.<sup>1</sup>

At the start of this research, knowledge about the provenance of the wall guns seemed scattered. The guns had been mentioned in a few publications since the 1970s, but were never subject to provenance or other historical research.<sup>2</sup> It was unclear, for instance, why and when they had been described as spoils of war for the first time. This report thus focuses on three basic questions.

- 1) What do the objects themselves reveal about the Kandyan origin of the guns?
- 2) What knowledge about the provenance of the guns is currently available in the museum archive and old inventories?
- 3) When and why were the guns transported to the Dutch Republic? Were the guns indeed part of the spoils of Kandyan-Dutch war in 1762-1766?

---

<sup>1</sup> "Two Wall Guns (Jingals), Anonymous, c. 1725 - c. 1760," Rijksmuseum, accessed 17 January 2022, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/NG-NM-519>; "Two Portable Cannons (Jingals), Anonymous, c. 1725 - c. 1760," Rijksmuseum, accessed 17 January 2022, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/collection/NG-NM-520>.

<sup>2</sup> Lodewijk J. Wagenaar, *Cinnamon and Elephants: Sri Lanka and the Netherlands from 1600* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2016): 123; See for example: Ravinder Reddy, *Arms and Armour of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Types, decoration and symbolism* (London 2018): 199.



## 1. Object analysis

According to the Rijksmuseum registration form of NG-NM-520, the barrels of the guns are modelled. The Miquelet locks have three outer springs. The barrel, ramrod, and lock are forged of sheet metal, brass, and iron, and the drawer shows carved decoration and remnants of paint.<sup>3</sup> Both wall guns have two support points and are meant to be put on a tripod.

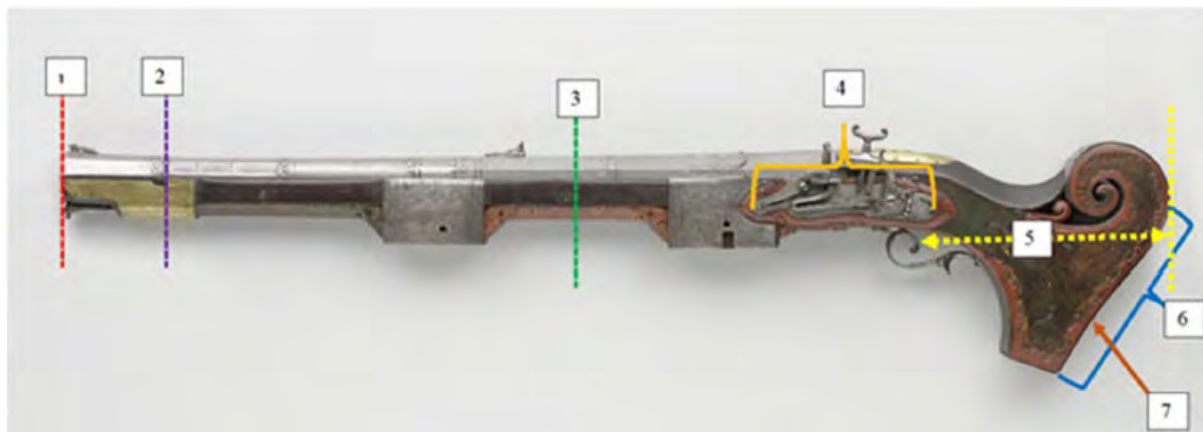


Photo 1: NG-NM-519, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Chamikara Pilapitiya, a historical firearms specialist and the author of several books on the Kandyan period, provided us with an extensive description of the guns, based on photographic evidence.<sup>4</sup> He argues that the two guns have to be understood as unique examples of high quality gun making which prevailed in the Kandyan kingdom (seventeenth-eighteenth centuries).

### Identification: not gingals or sprinkhanen, but Maha Thuwakku

The wall guns are characteristic of the guns made in the Kandyan period: “The firing mechanism of these two guns are flintlock (Point 4). This firing mechanism is fitted with an external safety catch. The firing mechanisms of these two guns are fitted on the left side [rather than on the right side] which is unique to the guns of Sri Lankan origin. These firing mechanisms are referred to as ‘Bondikula’ by the Sinhalese.”<sup>5</sup> [...] The difference on the length of the pull and the difference of the lengths of the lock plates (Point 4), suggests that these two guns have been made to individual specifications.<sup>6</sup> The unique feature of these guns are, that they are designed to be fired with the butt stock resting from the chest to the shoulder, rather (Point 7 & 6) than on the shoulder, which is a unique characteristic of guns of Sri Lankan origin.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Rijksmuseum documentation, B. Kist, Registratieformulier, NG-NM-520, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Report Chamikara Pilapitiya, historical firearms specialist and the author of several books on the Kandyan period, ‘Observations on the two Sinhalese Guns at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam’, [historypila@gmail.com](mailto:historypila@gmail.com) 15 July 2021. Please note that this report will be available via the Documentation folder of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from April 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Report Chamikara Pilapitiya, 15 July 2021.; See also: Chamikara Pilapitiya, *Maha Nuwara Yugaye Apprakata Viththi, Volume I*, (Neptune Publishes Sri Lanka: 2018): 209.

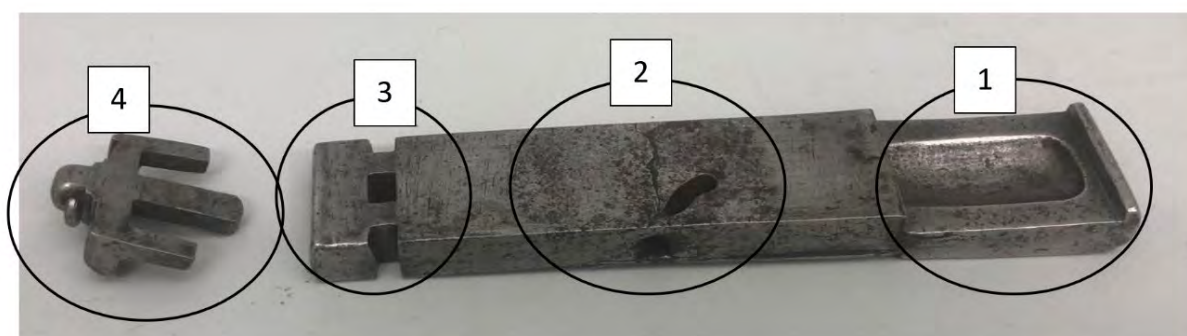
<sup>6</sup> Report Pilapitiya, 15 July 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Report Pilapitiya, 15 July 2021. The following references are added to this report: George Cameron Stone, *Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armor in All Countries and in All Times* (Courier Corporation, 1999): 261-262. For the Sinhala terms, see: P.E.P. Deraniyagala, “Sinhala Weapons and Armor,” *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Volume XXXV. No. 95 Part III, 7 December 1942. 126, 127: “The Sinhala gun smith terms the barrel the ‘Kandha,’ the sight is the ‘Manama’ the trigger is the ‘Pāthālē, the hammer is the ‘Koka,’ the pan of the match lock is the ‘Kan Padiya,’ the touch hole is the ‘Kana,’ the stock is the ‘mitta’ or ‘Atchuva, the ram rod is the ‘Atchu kura.’”

These two guns are inventoried in the museum as “jingal,” with the European name being “wall piece.” However, Sri Lankan researcher Chamikara Pilapitiya notes that the label *jingal* or *walgeweer* is not appropriate, nor is the designation “grasshopper.” The proper Sinhalese term for gun is *thuwakkuwa*: “As this gun was a large musket weighing over 27kg the Sinhalese called this type of gun Maha Thuwakkuwa,”<sup>8</sup> wrote Pilapitiya. The adjective “Maha” means large, and refers to the size of the gun. Therefore, more appropriately these two guns should be called “Maha Thuwakkuwa” or “Maha Thuwakku” in plural.<sup>9</sup>

#### Detachable pan

One of the remarkable features of these two guns is the “detachable pan.” Both of these Maha Thuwakku consists of detachable pans.



*Photo 2: Detachable pan and the pin, Sinhalese Maha Thuwakkuwa at Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (Inv.no. NG-NM-520)*

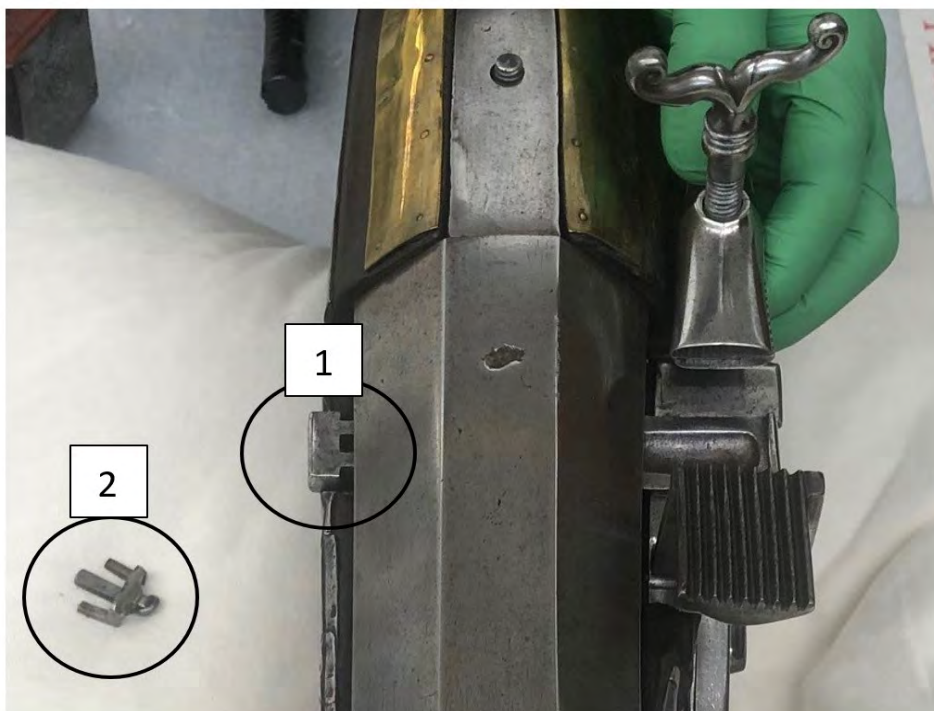
The detachable pan is made in a form of a slide, consisting of a pan<sup>10</sup> (No 1), touch hole (No 2/photo 2), and a slot (No 3/ photo 2) to which a clip is fixed (No 4/ photo 2) in order to prevent the movement of the slide. All of these, excluding the clip, are one unit. (Photo 2)

---

<sup>8</sup> Report Pilapitiya, 15 July 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Report Pilapitiya, 15 July 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Email with additions by Pilapitiya, 17 February 2022. ‘When the gun is fired, the flint strikes the frizzen and shaves off iron to create sparks. The hammer’s blow also snaps the frizzen back to expose the gunpowder in the pan. The pan’s gunpowder ignites, and it flashes through a small hole in the side of the barrel to ignite the gunpowder inside the barrel. Then the gun fires!’



*Photo 3: The Breech of the gun and the slot where the Clip is fixed to the end of the slide, Sinhalese Maha Thuwakkuwa at Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (Inv.no. NG-NM-520)*

The breech of the gun consists of a rectangular slot on the left side of the gun which goes through the breech of the barrel to which the slide is inserted. A small part of the slide protrudes (No 1/ photo 3) from the other side of the barrel, to which a clip is fixed in order to prevent any movement of the slide (No 1/ photo 3). There is a small hole on top of the clip to which a cord can be fixed to prevent it from flowing off. This slide could be removed from the barrel, by simply removing the clip, which is fixed to the other side of the slide. Looking closer at the touch hole, signs of heavy usage are visible (No 2/ photo 3).<sup>11</sup>

Chamikara Pilapitiya identifies the same feature in the Maha Thuwakku, which is at the Royal Armouries Museum Leeds, West Yorkshire, England, Inventory Number XXVIF.50. This suggests that this feature, which he calls as the “detachable pan,” is typical to the Sri Lankan Maha Thuwakku, and is also very rare in guns of other origins.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Email correspondence with additions by Pilapitiya, 17 February 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

### The Crosshead Crew

One of the most interesting features of the Maha Thuwakku that Chamikara Pilapitiya emphasises is that of the crosshead crew. He explains that the unique feature of these crosshead screws is that it has been only used in points where high torque is used, such as to secure the lock plates to the stock.<sup>13</sup>

Similar cross head crews could be found in the following guns of Sri Lankan origin.

1. Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2017, Inventory Number: NC 437,<sup>14</sup>
2. Sinhalese Gun at the Metropolitan Museum of art, New York, Inventory number: (1680.AD),<sup>15</sup>
3. Sinhalese Gun at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg Russia, Inventory number: (1680.AD),<sup>16</sup>
4. Sinhalese Maha Thuwakkuwa at Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Inventory number: NG-NM-519. (1765.AD),<sup>17</sup>
5. Sinhalese Maha Thuwakkuwa at Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Inventory, Number: NG-NM-520. (1765.AD).<sup>18</sup>



*Photo 4: Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Inventory Number: 91.1.907, Dating: 1680AD, Two Crosshead screws in the gun stock*

---

<sup>13</sup> Report Pilapitiya, 15 July 2021

<sup>14</sup> Pilapitiya, *Maha Nuwara Yugaye Apprakata Viththi*, Volume II276.

<sup>15</sup> Pilapitiya, *Maha Nuwara Yugaye Apprakata Viththi*, Volume I , 252-254.

<sup>16</sup> Pilapitiya, *Maha Nuwara Yugaye Apprakata Viththi*, Volume I,255-256.

<sup>17</sup> Pilapitiya, *Maha Nuwara Yugaye Apprakata Viththi*, Volume I 528.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



*Photo 5: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam in Netherlands, Inventory No: NG - NM - 519 (1765.AD)*

Chamikara Pilapitiya explains that the Sinhalese craftsman used crosshead screws on guns of Sri Lankan origin as early as 1680 A.D., and each of the Maha Thuwakku at the Rijksmuseum also have crosshead screws to secure the lock plate to the gun stock. He points out that this innovative technology used by the Sinhalese craftsmen should be credited, especially when taking to account of the resources and the circumstances that prevailed in the period.<sup>19</sup>

During the material research in the Rijksmuseum atelier on 25 November 2021, the steel was analysed and the gun was taken apart. Chamikara Pilapitiya, who was present via video conferencing, took particular notice of the jaw screw. The thread of the screw was measured. It was concluded that no modern thread fitted exactly right and the thread measured as follows: NG-NM-520: diameter: 10 mm pitch: 3mm; NG-NM-519: diameter: 10 mm pitch: 2mm (fine thread).<sup>20</sup>



*Photo 6: NG-NM-520, Measuring the screws at the Rijksmuseum Atelier. Conservation and Science department, 25 November 2021. Photograph by Conservation & Science Department Rijksmuseum.*

<sup>19</sup> To further underline the uniqueness of this early use of cross-head screws, Chamikara Pilapitiya added the following information: "In the first half of the twentieth century, the slotted screws proved to be increasingly problematic. The industrialisation brought about more and more power-operated screwdrivers. Aligning the screwdriver to the slot in the screw took up too much time and excessive torque resulted in slipping off of the screw, leading to damages of the work pieces. To counteract these disadvantages, J. P. Thompson patented a screw with a cross recess in 1933. He sold the patent to the Phillips Screw Company, which improved the profile and introduced the screw to the market in 1936/37. Henry Frank Phillips (4 June 1889 – 13 April 1958) succeeded in bringing the design to industrial manufacturing and promoting its rapid adoption as a machine screw standard. The Phillips-head ("crosshead") screw and screwdriver are named after him." See also: <https://www.pbswisstools.com/en/news/detail/philips-and-phosidriv-cross-head-screws-explained-in-simple-terms>

<sup>20</sup> Report Arie Pappot and Joosje van Bennekom, Conservation & Science Department, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 'Research Guns and Sabres Sri Lanka', 30 November 2021. Please note that this report will be available via the Documentation folder of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from April 2022.

### Bondikula firing mechanism

Philip Tom, an arms and armour connoisseur, investigated the two guns on 25 November 2021 together with researchers from the Rijksmuseum and PPOCE. He noticed that “the unusual flintlock mechanisms common to both guns are based on prototypes introduced from Southern Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, with important mechanical and stylistic influence born in a Sinhalese context. At the heart of the design is a Portuguese system called the *fecho de Anselmo* which originated sometime in the mid-sixteenth century.”<sup>21</sup> The locks on the Sinhalese guns are left-handed versions of these.<sup>22</sup> The report contains a more thorough comparison with locks from the Southern and Northern Europe. On the basis of these comparisons, he concludes the following: “in short, we can feel safe at this point in describing the Rijksmuseum’s locks as interesting hybrids of an essentially Portuguese model refined with an Italian sear system and also a dog catch which could be either a local innovation or a borrowed concept from certain northern European firearms. (...) In the realm of Oriental firearms, the Sinhalese were one of the few cultures which showed a sense of mechanical innovation, to display a high level of production quality and go beyond mere imitation enhanced with native decorative flourishes. These rare and unusual wall guns are excellent examples of this talent.”<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubt that the flintlocks are locally made, which is also evidenced from the Kandyan artistic elements that have been integrated in the locks, such as typical *liyawela* flower motifs, a *makara* (dragon) head, and a *serapendiya* (mythical bird) head.



Photo 7: Flintlock NG-NM-520, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Photograph by Conservation & Science department Rijksmuseum.

---

<sup>21</sup> Report Philip Tom, Expert in European and Oriental Arms and Armor ‘Mechanical design of the locks on two Sinhalese rampart guns in the Rijksmuseum,’ December 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Report Tom, December 2021

<sup>23</sup> Report Tom, December 2021

According to Deraniyagala, former director of the Sri Lanka National Museum, “some of the Sinhala flint lock guns are the most artistic and ornate guns known [...] and well merit the encomiums of the medieval Europeans. The entire weapon, both metal and wood, is often profusely ornamented, the stock being fretted with delicate traditional designs and inlaid with carved ivory or tortoise-shell panels, while the barrels are inlaid with silver or gold.”<sup>24</sup> The Metropolitan Museum in New York City holds one of the most elegant examples known (object number 91.1.907), which is inlaid with silver and ivory.<sup>25</sup>



*Photo 8: Detail picture of the Sri Lankan Flintlock Gun at the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, 91.1.907*

Its flint lock bears a clear resemblance to the Maha Thuwakku of the Rijksmuseum in terms of technique applied. Furthermore, it is likewise placed on the left side and has similar artistic motifs, such as the serapendiya (mythical bird figure) on the right part. Certainly, the two Maha Thuwakku are not as richly decorated as the above example, yet while most of the paint has faded, the woodwork and engraved motifs are recognisable as Kandyan (photos 9 and 10).<sup>26</sup>



*Photo 9 and 10. Detail pictures of the wall guns NG-NM-519 and -520. Photos made by Alicia Schrikker*

In all, the object analysis shows that the two Maha Thuwakku are of historical relevance as they represent a unique and early Sri Lankan tradition in gun making and warfare.

<sup>24</sup> P.E.P. Deraniyagala, “Sinhala Weapons and Armor.” *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Volume XXXV. No. 95 Part III (1942): 130.

<sup>25</sup> Metropolitan Museum, New York City, 91.1.907, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/25037>.

<sup>26</sup> For typical Kandyan design motives, see: Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art (Being a Monograph on Mediaeval Sinhalese Arts and Crafts, Mainly as Surviving in the Eighteenth Century, with an Account of the Structure of Society and the Status of the Craftsmen)* (Broad Campden: sn, 1908):

## 2. Knowledge in the museum collection and literature

Until now, very little notice has been taken of the two guns, and as far as we know it was only in 1975 that one of the two guns was described as Kandyan by P. H. D. H. de Silva, then director of the National Museum in Colombo. No explicit connection to the Kandyan-Dutch war was made at the time.<sup>27</sup> What then does the museum documentation tell us about prevalent knowledge about the guns? When was it first recorded in the museum system? To answer these questions, we will work our way backward through the museum documentation system and inventories.

The Rijksmuseum as it exists now was built in 1885 and it incorporated the collections of various national museums that had been established over the course of the nineteenth century. These predecessors of the Rijksmuseum were in turn founded on older collections, such as the eighteenth century Cabinet of Curiosities of the Dutch Stadtholder Willem V. The unravelling of this part of the Maha Thuwakku's history starts with the object number that is assigned to it: one of the collections that the Rijksmuseum housed from the start was that of the *Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst* (Dutch Museum for History and Art) and this is what the NM in the object numbers of NG-NM-519 and 520 stand for. In 1927 the objects from this collection were incorporated in the Rijksmuseum and became part of the Dutch History collection, *Nederlandse Geschiedenis*, hence the additional NG.

The inventory card of the *Nederlandsch Museum* actually does not reveal much about the provenance of the two guns, and only includes a short description of the objects. However, it does refer to number 28 in A.A. Van de Kastele's *Korte handleiding ter bezigtiging der verzameling van zeldzaamheden in het Koninklijk Kabinet op het Mauritshuis in 's Gravenhage*. This was a guide for visitors of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities (*Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, KKZ*) (1816 tot 1883). Van der Kastele was director of the KKZ between 1840-1876).<sup>28</sup>

To our surprise, number 28 in the *Korte Handleiding* of the Royal Cabinet described the current guns as "Two revolving basses from the Admiral's ship from [Michiel de Ruyter]."<sup>29</sup> In 1875, parts of the collection of the KKZ were redistributed, and the objects that were considered as related to Dutch National History found their way to the *Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst*.<sup>30</sup> Among them were obviously the objects related to Michiel de Ruyter, who played a big and triumphant role in the seventeenth century Anglo-Dutch Wars. Of the 253 objects from the Koninklijk Kabinet van

---

<sup>27</sup> De Silva, *A Catalogue*, 376.

<sup>28</sup> R.P. Van de Kastele, *Handleiding tot de bezigtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden op Mauritshuis, in 's Gravenhage* (The Hague, n.d. [1824]), 97,101. The Royal Cabinet of Curiosities was a public museum founded by the Dutch King Willem I in 1816, and it was consecutively housed in various buildings in The Hague. The holdings of the Royal Cabinet came from a variety of sources: a collection of objects relating to important events in Dutch history transferred from 's Rijks Museum; donations made to the cabinet by private donors and private collections, including royal collections such as the curiosity collection of Stadtholder Willem V; and newly made acquisitions. A substantial part of the collection consisted of objects from Japan and China. However, there were also several objects from Sri Lanka in the collection. The lowlands of Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, were occupied by the Dutch for about 150 years until the British took over in 1796. Therefore, the Sri Lankan objects would have arrived before the start of the KKZ in 1816. In fact, it is known that many of these objects originated from the collection of the last stadtholder of the Dutch Republic, Willem V (reign 1751–1795).

<sup>29</sup> A. A. van de Kastele, *Korte Handleiding Ter Bezigtiging Der Verzameling van Zeldzaamheden in Het Koninklijk Kabinet Op Het Mauritshuis in 's Gravenhage [429 Nrs.]* ('s Gravenhage: A.H. Bakhuijzen, n.d.): 7. "27 Wapenrusting, sabel, goeden ketting, medaille en bevelhebberstaf van den Admiraal de Ruyter. 28 Twee draaibassen uit het Admiraalschip van idem. 29 Een fraai met zilver opgelegd en verguld kanon, door de Oost-Indische Compagnie aan de Ruyter vereerd."

<sup>30</sup> NL-HlmNHA, 476, inv.no. 1092, "Inventaris van kunstvoorwerpen, door het Nederlandsch Museum van Geschiedenis en Kunst ontvangen van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden" [Inventory of art objects, received by the Nederlandsch Museum van Geschiedenis en Kunst from the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden], 1875.



Zeldzaamheden that were transferred in 1875 to the Nederlandsch Museum, the same number, 28, is used and the objects were described once again as “Two revolving basses [draaibassen] from the Admiral’s ship from [Michiel de Ruyter].<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, other Sri Lankan objects from the Rijksmuseum collection, such as the Lewke’s cannon and the golden Kasthāné, were at the time also attributed to De Ruyter.<sup>32</sup> In the inventory of 1875, these latter weapons carried the numbers 27 and 29, respectively. The provenance of the cannon of Kandy was questioned by the successor of A.A. van de Kastele, D. van de Kellen, who was at that moment Director of the Nederlandsch Museum van Geschiedenis en Kunst.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, his conclusion that the cannon and the golden kasthāné could never have been owned by De Ruyter was accepted. Van der Kellen paid no explicit attention to the Maha Thuwakku, but as the inventory card does not mention the link with Michiel de Ruyter either, it seems similar conclusions were drawn for the Maha Thuwakku. At an unknown date after 1875, a curator added on the inventory card of 519 ‘decorated with leaf-ornaments in eastern style.’<sup>34</sup>

The history of the mistaken attribution to De Ruyter of several objects from the Royal Cabinet can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. In 1825, a range of objects were transferred from 's Rijks Museum in Amsterdam (with a focus on objects relating to important events in Dutch history) to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ).<sup>35</sup> Among them was the group of objects that were thought to have belonged to Michiel de Ruyter. In his research about the curious history of the De Ruyter objects, R. van Luttervelt (curator of the history department of the Rijksmuseum from 1946 to 1963) noted that among the objects transferred in 1825 from 's Rijks Museum to the KKZ ‘Vier draaibassen van M. Az. de Ruiter’ [four revolving basses from Admiral De Ruyter] were listed. Luttervelt did not further elaborate on these objects.<sup>36</sup> This is where the information that passed through the museum system ends, and it leaves us with more questions than answers:

First of all, it raises the question whether the two Maha Thuwakku were originally part of a set four. Secondly, it appears odd at first sight that the guns were described as draaibassen (revolving basses/ships cannons/swivel guns). The two Maha Thuwakku do not look like the typical revolving basses, which usually resemble small cannons rather than guns.<sup>37</sup> However, this may not indicate an actual mix-up of objects, but rather different interpretations at the time of what the objects were.

After all, the Nederlandsch Museum inventory card from 1875 clearly identified the so called draaibassen from the 1825 inventory of Van der Kastele as wall guns, and the added description of them having “two support points and being engraved” certainly matches the two Maha Thuwakku (see photos 4 and 5).<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. ‘Twee draaibassen uit het Admiraalschip van idem.’

<sup>32</sup> See Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart, PPOCE reports NG-NM-1015 and NG-NM-560.

<sup>33</sup> D. van der Kellen, “Een merkwaardig stukje geschut,” *Nederlandsche Kunstbode* (1880), p. 388.

<sup>34</sup> R. van Luttervelt, “Herinneringen Aan Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter in Het Rijksmuseum,” *Bulletin van Het Rijksmuseum* 5, no. 2 (1957): 36-50; See inventory card NG-NM-519, backside, “versierd met bladornamenten in oosterschen stijl.”

<sup>35</sup> NL-HlmNHA, 476, inv.no. 844 ‘Stukken betreffende de overdracht van kunst- en andere voorwerpen door personen en overheidsinstanties 1821-1827’ [Documents regarding the transfer of art and other objects by persons or public authorities 1821-1827], 11. ‘Voorwerpen door de directeur van 's Rijks Museum te Amsterdam, 1825’. [Objects by the director of 's Rijks Museum in Amsterdam in 1825].

<sup>36</sup> Van Luttervelt, “Herinneringen Aan Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter,” 36, 50.

<sup>37</sup> See for a fine description of the use of draaibassen in Southeast Asia: Atsushi Ota, *Changes of Regime and Social Dynamics in West Java: Society, State and the Outer World of Banten, 1750-1830* (Leiden 2006) : 127

<sup>38</sup> Inventory card Rijksmuseum Amsterdam NG-NM-519: “Zwaar walgeweerd met 2 steunpunten en gegraveerd beslag.”

The most likely explanation is that the Maha Thuwakku were by mistake interpreted as draaibassen already back in 1825. But then, if we follow the inventories of the early nineteenth century, the two Maha Thuwakku must have been accompanied by two other, similar guns that were also interpreted as draaibassen. The question of whether there were originally four, rather than two, large guns of similar type is highly relevant, as will be explained in the following sections.

#### When and why the Guns were related to the Kandyan-Dutch War?

Other issues that arise from our research in the museum documentation involve determining how and when the guns were related to the Kandyan-Dutch war. It was not described as such in De Silva's *Antiquities and Other Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Abroad*. He recorded merely the existence of a single "Ginjal gun from Ceylon. Eighteenth Century" in the Rijksmuseum collection.<sup>39</sup> He might not have been aware of the fact that there was another very similar gun. It was only in 1984 that both guns were explicitly recorded as Sri Lankan in the museum registration.<sup>40</sup> It was then also assumed that they were manufactured in the eighteenth century. The historical associations were VOC/Ceylon, but no further information was added. The provenance history only pointed at the transfer in 1875 from the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden. We know that by that time, NG-NM-520 was displayed in the dedicated "Ceylon-vitrine," the showcase of objects from Sri Lanka, but it is uncertain that NG-NM-519 was included in the display.<sup>41</sup>

We have not been able to trace the moment when the connection with the war of 1762-1766 was made, and when the two guns began to be exhibited as such. However, it is certain that this was the case in 2005.

In 2016, Lodewijk Wagenaar argued that "[i]n all probability, the large weapons were also plundered during the conquest of Kandy [in 1765]. When mounted on a bipod, this 'grasshopper' field-gun served as a small-calibre cannon, but it is unknown whether they were ever used on the battlefield."<sup>42</sup> He based his description on the information from the Rijksmuseum. As the museum information does not contain direct evidence of the guns being part of the loot, we assume that this connection was simply made because there was some evidence that other Kandyan weapons were spoils of the Dutch Kandyan war. Implicitly it has been concluded that all these objects arrived together in the stadtholders' collection as war trophies.<sup>43</sup>

The following two questions remained open for us after the literature review:

- 1) Can we confirm that they were indeed part of the loot from Kandy in 1765?
- 2) When did the Maha Thuwakku arrive in the Royal collection?

---

<sup>39</sup> De Silva, *A Catalogue*, 376.

<sup>40</sup> Rijksmuseum documentation, B. Kist, Registratieformulier, NG-NM-520, 1984.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Wagenaar, *Cinnamon and Elephants*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van den Boogaart, PPOCE Reports NG-NM-1015; 560;7112 and 7114.

### 3. Were the two Maha Thuwakku part of the loot from Kandy in 1765?

To answer the first question, we revisited the archival sources in Sri Lanka and the Netherlands concerning the Kandyan-Dutch war. The war of 1762-1766 is commemorated in both Sinhala and Dutch primary sources, and in both cases the looting of objects plays a prominent role. On 19 February 1765, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) army attacked the Palace and Temple of Kandy. Prior to this moment, the Kandyan King Kirti Sri Rajasinha had made sure that the city's treasures were brought to safety.<sup>44</sup> After that, the royal family, inhabitants, and the Kandyan soldiers left the city. The Dutch troops had found the warehouses partly emptied by the retreating Kandyan troops, who were allowed to do so by the king.<sup>45</sup> The looting that followed spread from the warehouses even to the apartments of the king himself, even though VOC Governor Lubbert Jan van Eck had explicitly prohibited this.<sup>46</sup> Several objects from this Kandyan-Dutch war circulated in Ceylon but also in the Netherlands in the decades after the war.<sup>47</sup> Still, a great deal of the booty was eventually sold or left behind by the soldiers in Kandy or during their trip back to Colombo after the retreat of the troops from Kandy at the end of August 1765.<sup>48</sup> It is certainly possible that the wall guns NG-NM-519 and NG-NM-520 were among these looted objects.

On 25 March 1765, a description was made of the ammunition goods present in Kandy (both from the VOC army and those left by the Sinhalese). Among them, Kandyan iron cannons and other artillery were noted, including forty-one Sinhalese 'sprinkhanen' /grasshoppers.<sup>49</sup> We have tried to identify the Maha Thuwakku on this list, but were unsuccessful. We expect they would have been described as *snaphanen*, or as large guns (*grote geweeren*), but none are found, nor are there any guns of other description in the list of the same calibre as the two Maha Thuwakku from the Rijksmuseum. It appears that the listed Kandyan ammunition good were left these behind because they were in bad condition. Furthermore, it seems that the Dutch left these weapons behind in Kandy for the same reason when they retreated in August that year.<sup>50</sup> This may also explain why the Maha Thuwakku do not appear on this list.

---

<sup>44</sup> Wilhelm Geiger and C. Mabel Rickmers, *Culavamsa: Being the More Recent Part of the Mahavamsa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996): 267, line 122-126. "The King had sent two Uparajas with his treasures and the sacred Tooth Relic to 'a province which was scarcely passable owing to mountains, forest and difficult roads.'"

<sup>45</sup> Colombo (SLNA), Lot 1: Archives of the Dutch Central Government of Coastal Ceylon, inv.no.4881, "Report of the military campaign." Transcription kindly shared with us by Chris Nierstrasz, author of *In the Shadow of the Company: The Dutch East India Company and Its Servants in the Period of Its Decline (1740-1796)* (Brill, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, 3138, Copia secreete brief van den gouverneur alleen aan generaal en raden in dato 10 November 1765 [Copy of the secret letter from the Governor [Falck] only to the general and boards, dated 10 November 1765], f. 363.

<sup>47</sup> Cf.; NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, 3138, Copia secreete brief van den gouverneur alleen aan generaal en raden in dato 10 November 1765 [Copy of the secret letter from the Governor [Falck] only to the general and boards, dated 10 November 1765], f. 366b-367; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1985-7-2-24: It shows a decorated sea coconut from the King of Kandy that was taken by a VOC captain during the looting of the city of Kandy in 1765 and drawn by Jan Brandes in 1786; See Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van de Boogaart, PPOCE reports NG-NM-1015; 560 and 7114.

<sup>48</sup> NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, 3138, Copia secreete brief van den gouverneur alleen aan generaal en raden in dato 10 November 1765 [Copy of the secret letter from the Governor [Falck] only to the general and boards, dated 10 November 1765], f. 369.

<sup>49</sup> NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, 3138, "Een lijst der ammunitie goederen onder 25 Maart 1765 ter Candia te vinden geweest" [List with ammunition goods that were in Kandy on 25 March 1765], f. 881-886.

<sup>50</sup> R. Raven-Hart, *The Dutch Wars with Kandy, 1764-1766*, Ceylon Historical Manuscripts Commission. Bulletin. No. 6. (Nugegoda, 1964): 128.

The fact that the Maha Thuwakku were not in storage when this inventory was made does not mean that they were not among the ammunition goods that the Dutch captured in Kandy. Perhaps they were taken from storage before the inventory was made. Alternatively, they might have been taken by an individual from the battlefield, or from the Kandyan defense works and sold later in Colombo. Considering the circumstances under which Kandy was invaded, and in particular the chaotic looting that took place, this seems like a real possibility. But if that was the case, which route did they take into the collection of the Dutch Stadtholder?

It is important to note that we can provide a complete provenance reconstruction of the route into the collection of only one of the objects currently exhibited in the Rijksmuseum that was looted from Kandy in 1765: Lewke's cannon (see report NG-NM-1015). In all other cases, the archival trails were incomplete. That is also the case with the Maha Thuwakku. We have not (yet) found reference to the Maha Thuwakku arriving in Colombo, or being shipped away from there. However, we have found a clear indication that the Maha Thuwakku indeed found their way from the battlefield in Kandy to the Stadtholders collection. They were shipped not directly from Colombo, but via Batavia instead.

A letter in the archive of Willem V, the Stadtholder of the Dutch Republic, provided us with an important clue. In the Royal Archives (Koninklijk Huis Archief), there is a large collection of letters from Thomas Hope to Willem V and the Duke Louis Ernest of Brunswick-Lüneburg. The duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg was Willem V's guardian when he was a minor, and therefore the regent of the Dutch Republic. Willem V took up his tasks when reaching the age of eighteen in March 1766, at which point he was also appointed as Supreme Head of the East and West India Company. This function had been created by his father Willem IV. For the VOC Thomas Hope was the stadtholders' representative at the board of directors of the VOC. Hope kept Willem V and the Duke informed about incoming ships and their cargo and any other accompanying information, such as gifts.

On 17 June 1767, Thomas Hope informed the Brunswick that a ship had arrived from Batavia containing two boxes addressed to the stadtholder himself.<sup>51</sup> According to the description on one of the two the boxes, it contained "vier groote Candiasche geweeren". This could translate as "four large Kandyan guns," or to use the Sinhala term, "four Maha Thuwakku." But it would probably be better to use the more generic term "weapons" here. In the eighteenth century, "geweeren" could also be translated as an inclusive term for weapons and was not only used for firearms, but also to describe swords and other "blanke wapens." This is one of the reasons why we initially we refrained from immediately identifying the two Maha Thuwakku with this set of four large guns. But it also turned out that we found no further reference to the "four large weapons," nor any other detailed

---

<sup>51</sup>Koninklijke Verzamelingen [Royal Collections] (NL-KaHV), archive access A31, William V Batavus, Prince of Orange-Nassau (1748-1806), inv.no 1774, "Briefwisseling van Thomas Hope, representant van de stadhouder bij de V.O.C., met de hertog van Brunswijk en sporadisch met Willem V 1765-1771" [Correspondence between Thomas Hope, representative of the Stadtholder for the VOC, with the Duke of Brunswijk and sometimes with Willem V 1765-1771], dated 17 June 1767 In the database of cargo on VOC ships, the Boekhouder-Generaal, no mention is made of these caskets as part of the cargo of the Kronenburg, probably because they were gifts; The other box, curiously, contained a zeeklapper, or sea coconut.

description of them in the inventories of the collection of Stadtholder Willem V.<sup>52</sup> This did not mean that the “four large Kandyan weapons” did not arrive in the collection, they most likely did as it is well known that the inventories of the Cabinet of Curiosities of the Stadtholder after 1760 are incomplete and limited.<sup>53</sup> Instead, it simply meant that the archival trail ended with the letter of 1767 and that we could not identify them with the Maha Thuwakku with any certainty. Of course, the letter was an important find in itself because it showed that after the war Kandyan objects arrived via different routes into the collection of the Stadtholder.

Furthermore, an eyewitness account from the 1770's and 1780s tell us that Kandyan arms were on display as war trophy in the Cabinet of Curiosities. Indeed, we found that Kandyan objects do appear in a written account from the. When German traveller Carl Heinrich Titius visited the Cabinet of Curiosities of Willem V in 1777, he explicitly mentioned that he saw a silver cannon with gemstones, and noted that the cannon was taken by the Dutch in their last war with the king of Kandy. No doubt this refers to NG-NM-1015 (see report). Titius further remarked that other weapons were exhibited in that same room.<sup>54</sup> He did not further elaborate on those other weapons. Nevertheless, a guide from 1785 on the museum of with the collection of Stadtholder Willem V, described yet another room that was filled with armour, clothing, and other ornaments from inhabitants of the island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), other Indian countries, and China.<sup>55</sup>

To conclude then, we know that large scale looting took place during the siege and occupation of the palace and that many Kandyan objects subsequently circulated. We also know that four large Kandyan weapons were sent from Batavia as a gift to the Dutch Stadtholder in 1767 and we know that the cabinet of curiosities displayed Kandyan arms a war trophy. The question thus is: were the two Maha Thuwakku indeed in the box and later on display in the Cabinet of Curiosities together with Lewke's cannon (NG-NM-1015)?

---

<sup>52</sup> The following inventories and were consulted: Koninklijke Verzamelingen [Royal Collections] (NL-KaHV), A, William IV, prince of Orange, ruler of Nassau (1711-1751), inv.no. 46 III, 'Bekorte Staat en Inventaris van het Kabinet der Natuurlijke en door Kunstgemaakte Zeldzaamheden...' [Concise overview and inventory of the Cabinet of natural and artistic curiosities]; NL-KaHV, A30, Anne of Hannover, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland (1709-1759), inv.no. 415, 'Inventaris der Rariteiten overgegeven in het Kabinet der Natuurlijke en door Kunstgemaakte Zeldzaamheden, berustende onder de bewaaring van den Directeur Vosmaer' [Inventory of curiosities transferred to the Cabinet of natural and artistic curiosities, residing under the custodianship of director Vosmaer]; NL-KaHV, A30, inv.no. 415, 'Nadere Inventaris benevens derselver bij gevoegde taxatie van de Rariteiten overgegeven in het Kabinet der Natuurlijk en door Kunstgemaakte Zeldzaamheden...' [Further inventory along with the associated valuation of the Curiosities transferred to the Cabinet of natural and artistic curiosities...]; NL-KaHV, archive access A31, William V Batavus, Prince of Orange-Nassau (1748-1806), inv.no. 173, Inventarissen van kleding, sieraden, linnen en zeldzaamheden [Inventories of clothing, jewellery, linen and curiosities], dated 1749-1766; NL-KaHV, A31, inv.no. 184, Inventaris van de kostbaarheden van Willem V in bewaring bij de kamerdienaar Oostheim, vervaardigd door A. Vosmaer [Inventory of precious items belonging to William V held in safekeeping by chamberlain Oostheim, drawn up by A. Vosmaer], 1782; NL-KaHV, A31, inv.no. 185, 'Lijsten van in januari 1795 meegenomen gouden en zilveren tafelgoed, schilderijen en kleding' [Lists of the golden and silver tableware, paintings and clothing that were taken along] dated 1795-1798; NL-KaHV, A31, inv.no. 186, 'Briefwisseling tussen W.C. Vosmaer en Willem V over restanten van de stadhouderlijke collecties die naar Duitsland verzonden kunnen worden' [Correspondence between W.C. Vosmaer and Willem V on what was left of the stadtholder's collection that could be shipped to Germany] dated 1803.

Also consultation of the inventory of the Vosmaer family did not give any result. The following numbers are part of the section of Arnout Vosmaer as director of the Stadtholder's cabinets. NL-HaNA, 2.21.271 'Inventaris van het archief van de familie Vosmaer' [Inventory of the archive of the Vosmaer family], inv. no. 63-67.

<sup>53</sup> Smeets, Laura. 2010. "Door kunst gemaakt. De verzameling zeldzaamheden van Stadhouder Willem V." Master's thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam.

<sup>54</sup> Carl Heinrich Titius from 1777 cited by Johann Jacob Volkmann, *Neueste Reisen durch die vereinigten Niederlande* (Den Caspar Fritsch, Leipzig, 1783). "In zweeten saale ist unter den kunstsachen eine ganz silberne kanone mit golde ubersogen, graviert, und mit edelgesteinen besetzt, welche die Hollander in ihren lesten kriege, met den koninge von Candi erbeutet haben, und viele andre sehr kostbare Waffen." See also, Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer "Het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden en zijn beteekenis voor het Rijksmuseum," *Oudheidkundig Jaarboek*, 13 (1946).

<sup>55</sup> *Guide ou nouvelle description de La Haye et de ses environs* ('s-Gravenhage, 1785), 257  
<https://www.delpher.nl/nl/boeken/view?coll=boeken&identifier=dpo:5469:mpeg21:0250>.

The reconstruction of the nineteenth century provenance of the Maha Thuwakku discussed above had provided us with an important hint that: at least from 1825 onwards they were listed together

with Lewke's cannon and the golden kashāné and given the same (wrong) provenance. The provenance of the cannon and kashāné were also connected to the Kandyan-Dutch war of 1762-66.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the list of 1825 described "vier draaibassen." That was when we realized that if the Maha Thuwakku had indeed been part of a set of four, a connection with the box sent in 1767 would be very likely.

#### **4. Could the 'four draaibassen' from 1825 be identified as the 'four large Kandyan guns' from 1767?**

To draw a connection between the "four draaibassen" and the "four large Kandyan guns," we first looked more closely into the historical use of the word draaibas, or swivel gun in English, in the early nineteenth century. Next we tried to trace the two other large draaibassen/guns in the collection of the Rijksmuseum.

Chamikara Pilapitiya provided us with the following information concerning the historic context and use of the word draaibassen or swivel guns:

These were used principally aboard sailing ships, serving as short-range anti-personnel ordnance. They were not ship-sinking weapons, due to their small calibre and short range, but could do considerable damage to anyone caught in their line of fire. They were especially useful against deck-to-deck boarders, against approaching longboats bearing boarding parties, and against deck gun crews when ships were hull-to-hull. Swivel guns are among the smallest types of cannons, typically measuring less than 1 m (3.3 ft) in length and with a bore diameter of up to 3.5 cm (1+1/2 in). They can fire a variety of ammunition, but were generally used to fire grapeshot and small calibre round shot. They were aimed through the use of a wooden handle, somewhat similar in shape to a baseball bat, attached to the breech of the weapon. There were several types of Swivel guns used in the period. The earliest was the *peterero*, and thereafter, *swivel blunderbuss* and small cannons were used. The similarity of all these guns is their small size compared to other larger cannons used in the ships and being mounted on a swivel. The two Maha Thuwakku at the Rijksmuseum have a very close resemblance to a swivel gun as to its mount and to the swivel Blunderbusses for its design and the calibre in the period. It has two mounting points, which resemble a swivel mount, and the calibre of the gun is 1.25 inches (32mm) and the length of the guns is 4.92 feet (150cm). These calibrations point to what would be called a swivel gun of the period. As such, these guns would have been easily identified as draaibassen, or swivel guns.<sup>57</sup>

If the two Maha Thuwakku of the Rijksmuseum indeed originated from this set of four described as draaibassen in 1825, then an identification with the "four large Kandyan weapons" received in the box from Batavia in 1767 would be a realistic possibility. Eventually, and to our own surprise, we were indeed able to identify two guns in the Rijksmuseum collection which were probably the two other draaibassen of Michiel de Ruyter and could very well have been the other two guns referred to

---

<sup>56</sup> See provenance reports: NG-NM-1015 and NG-NM-7112

<sup>57</sup> Report Chamikara Pilapitiya, 'Probable reasons for the misidentification of the Four Maha Thuwakku', 11 February 2022. Please note that this report will be available via the Documentation folder of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from April 2022.

in 1767. An initial object analysis shows that they appear to be of Sri Lankan origin and that they compare well to the two Maha Thuwakku. These are: NG-NM-515 and NG-NM-516.



*Photo 11: Flintlock NG-NM-515, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.*



*Photo 12: Flintlock NG-NM-516, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.*



*Photo 13: Close up of the flintlock of NG-NM-516, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.*

The museum registration card of NG-NM-515 tells us that these were a set: 515 is described as “a pendant” of 516. The lock of NG-NM-516 has the following inscription: “B.FRELY a Colombo” which also reveals a direct connection to Sri Lanka. We found a reference to this gun in the literature,

where it was discussed as Sinhalese-Portuguese and dated around 1650.<sup>58</sup> As the possible related provenance of these two guns was only discovered at the final stage of this investigation, we have not been able to undertake further material research. From the photos and object details, the following observations can already be made: the flintlock of these two guns are on the right side, rather than on the left side, which was usual for Kandyan guns. The lock, barrel, and screws show striking similarities with the two Maha Thuwakku, however. There can be little doubt that these are also Sri Lankan made. Furthermore, at 35 and 28 kilograms, respectively, they are of very similar weight as the two Maha Thuwakku.

Apart from the material evidence, the museum registration card also provided us with a clue: the inventory card of the Nederlandsch Museum related the guns to number 31 of the earlier mentioned catalogue of the Mauritshuis.<sup>59</sup> Number 31 described “Twee draaibassen van den Admiraal M.H. Tromp.”<sup>60</sup> Both De Ruyter and Tromp were Dutch army generals and admirals in the Dutch navy in the seventeenth century and never travelled to Sri Lanka. Tromp’s ‘draaibassen’ were not mentioned in the list of objects that came from ‘s Rijks Museum in the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in 1825. But as we have seen above, at that point four rather than two draaibassen were attributed to De Ruyter. Could it be that at some point prior to 1875 the four ‘draaibassen’ were separated into two sets, and two of them were attributed another provenance? From the work of Luttervelt we know that throughout the nineteenth century there was quite a lot of confusion about several of the objects that around 1825 had been attributed to De Ruyter and that the interpretation of the history of these objects changed in the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, more research into the provenance of the two other large wall guns/draaibassen is needed to further substantiate our conclusion. Yet, based on what we have found so far, it seems likely that the four objects which we would now describe as large guns/Maha Thuwakku (NG-NM-515 and 516 and NG-NM-519 and 520) arrived together in the collection of the Stadtholder in 1767, and that until at least 1825 the four guns were kept together as a set.

## Discussion and suggestion for further research

The provenance research of the two Maha Thuwakku (NG-NM-519 and 520) confronted us with a real puzzle. The object analysis made clear that weapons were indeed of Kandyan origin and of unique quality. However, the museum documentation initially left us with more questions than answers. First we wondered, why were the Maha Thuwakku recorded as part of a set of four draaibassen, or swivel guns, formerly owned by Michiel de Ruyter? This evidence actually turned out to be very important information. It allowed us to make a connection to the “four large Kandyan weapons” that, we discovered, were gifted to the Stadtholder in 1767. This reference was yet another crucial lead and the further identification of the two other large guns in the Rijksmuseum helped us to solve the puzzle. The subsequent discovery of two other large Sri Lankan guns in the collection with possibly a related nineteenth century provenance, seemed to complete the puzzle.

---

<sup>58</sup> Rainer Daehnhardt, “First Steps Towards an Introduction Into the Study of Early Gunmaking in the Portuguese World,” *First American Society of Arms Collectors Bulletin* 37 (1977):1-8: 8; Chamikara Pilapitiya, “Observations on the Gun at Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (Object number: NG-NM-515)”- 31st February 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, Inventory card NG-NM-515 and NG-NM-516.

<sup>60</sup> A. A. van de Kastelee, *Korte Handleiding Ter Bezigtiging Der Verzameling van Zeldzaamheden in Het Koninklijk Kabinet Op Het Mauritshuis in 's Gravenhage* [429 Nrs.] ('s Gravenhage: A.H. Bakhuijzen, n.d.): 7. '31 Twee draaibassen van den Admiraal M.H. Tromp.'

<sup>61</sup> Van Luttervelt, “Herinneringen Aan Michiel Adriaenszoon de Ruyter,” 36.



Because the archival trail was incomplete, we remained critical of our findings throughout the process. For example, during our research we also considered other possible routes that the Maha Thuwakku might have taken. One such a scenario would have been that the wall guns had been taken from Kandy during the siege and sent to the stadtholder at a later moment in the eighteenth century. Another possibility we considered was that they might have arrived in the collection via Britain, as it was known that Kandyan arms were taken during the Kandyan wars in the early nineteenth century. While these other possible routes have been considered, no supporting evidence has come forward.

At this point the most obvious conclusion regarding the provenance of the Maha Thuwakku is that they were taken from Kandy during the siege in 1765 and sent from Colombo to Batavia after the war, and subsequently sent from Batavia to the stadtholder as a gift, together with two other large guns which we have at this point identified as NG-NM-515 and NG-NM-516. There was no time for further research into the provenance and material aspects of these two objects. This would be highly recommended.