

Provenance report regarding Singalees mes [*knife*] or Piha-kaetta met schede

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Photo: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-NM-7114

Custodian	Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
Current possessor	Dutch State
Current location	Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
Inventory number	NG-NM-7114
Material/technique	iron (metal); gold (metal); crystal (lead glass); wood (plant material) Forging / casting / filigree
Measurements	height 3.1 cm × width 29.5 cm × depth 3.3 cm height 2.8 cm × width 24.5 cm × width 3.9 cm width 3 cm

Summary of findings

NG-MN 7114 is an elegantly crafted Sri Lankan knife. It has a crystal hilt and an iron blade, which are partly decorated with gold, while its wooden sheath is entirely overlaid with gold. Its shape and decoration are typical for eighteenth century knives from the Kandyan Kingdom. Experts from the Colombo museum concluded that this object is of a type called *pihiya*, rather than *piha-kaetta* as it is currently labelled. At present, the *pihiya* is on display in the Rijksmuseum and presented as a spoil of war, obtained by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) during the war with Kandy in 1765. This *pihiya* is the most richly decorated known, which has led experts to conclude that this *pihiya* was made in the royal workshops of the Kandyan king and that it formed part of the king Kirti Sri Rajasinha's (r.1747-1782) attire.

The object most likely arrived in the collection of the Dutch stadtholder prior to 1795 and was first recorded in 1816. It is not exactly clear however what route the *pihiya* has taken from Kandy into the collection of the Dutch stadtholders. The eighteenth-century archival trails of this object are less certain. Various scholars have suggested that this object was among the spoils of war that Dutch East India Company Governor of Ceylon, Lubbert Jan baron van Eck (in office 1762 – 1765), collected after the siege of the palace in 1765 and that they were sent to his heirs in the Dutch republic in 1768. There is indeed a description of an object that could be identified as this *pihiya* on a list drawn up in Colombo on 22 October 1765. However, this identification requires some qualification: minor inconsistencies were found in the way the object was subsequently described in the Van Eck family archive after its arrival in the Dutch Republic. Moreover, during the period of research for this PPOCE project, no documentation was found of the transfer of this object by any of the heirs of Van Eck to the collection of the Dutch stadtholder, whose collection has partly become integrated in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. But we have also not come across evidence that would suggest another provenance. The exact moment of arrival of the *pihiya* into the collection simply remained unrecorded.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Kandyan provenance was forgotten, and the *pihiya* was, at least until 1927, understood as a “Malay dagger.” Since 1965, the Rijksmuseum has catalogued the *pihiya*, together with the silver mounted and gold mounted *kasthāné* and Lewke's cannon, as spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war.

Reconstruction provenance

17th/18th century

Made in the *pattal hatara* (four workshops), Kingdom of Kandy (Sri Lanka)

Object analysis, this report

1765-1768

Presumably Colombo, guarded by Governor Willem Iman Falck.

[date unknown] – 1795/1816

Presumably the Stadtholders' collection, Dutch Republic

1795? – 1816?

Probably brought along in exile with Willem V to England and later (maybe) taken to Brunswick, Germany; Slot Oranienstein, Germany

Jan van Campen, De Haagse jurist Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807) en zijn verzameling Chinese voorwerpen (Uitgeverij Verloren, 2000) 215; PPOCE.report RV-360-6021, Tom Quist

1816 – 1885

Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, The Hague

NL-HlmNHA, 476, inv.no. 843, 'Lijst van voorwerpen op last van Koning Willem I overgedragen aan het Kon. Kab. v. Zeldzaamheden te 's-Gravenhage' [List of objects transferred to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague on the orders of King William I], 1816.

Original document in: NL-HaNA, 2.04.01, inv.no. 4030, 'Bijlage 1. Degens, Sabels en Stokken' [Attachment 1. Swords, Sabers and Sticks], dated 6 July 1816, no. 37.

1885 – 1927

Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst in Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Inventory card Rijksmuseum Amsterdam NG-NM-7114.

1927 – present

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Introduction and context

This provenance report focuses on NG-NM-7114, a gold mounted dagger or knife (pihiya) currently displayed in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam in room 1.5: *The Netherlands overseas*. The current narrative adopted by institutions and researchers is that this pihiya together with a gold mounted sword (NG-NM-560), a silver mounted sword (NG-NM-7114), a decorated cannon (NG-NM-1015) and two wall-guns (NG-NM-519 and 520) were spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war (1762-1766) and obtained during the violent, ruthless plundering of the Kandyan palace in 1765.

In this provenance report we assess the material and archival evidence that has been used to support the presentation of pihiya as part of the spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war of 1765 and discusses the current gaps in our knowledge regarding this object. In the report we will therefore answer the following questions:

- 1) Which material elements support the thesis that the gold mounted dagger was of royal origin?
- 2) What knowledge is available in the Rijksmuseum and the literature regarding the provenance of the object?
- 3) What is known about the objects that were looted during the siege of the palace and town of Kandy in 1765 by the VOC?

4) To what extent do the eighteenth-century archival records from the VOC, the family archive of Van Eck and the Royal Archives (KHA) provide us with concrete evidence that connects the pihya to the Kandyan-Dutch war of 1762-1766?

5) What route did the pihya take through the Dutch collections?

The research was conducted in collaboration with experts from the Sri Lankan National Museum in Colombo and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Object analysis

The *pihiya*, recorded as NG-NM-7114, has an engraved crystal hilt set with gold. Two-thirds of the blade is covered with elegantly worked gold. The wooden sheath is embossed with a golden plate, the edges are decorated with filigree, ending in a curl in the bottom.¹ The length of the knife is 29,5 cm. The Colombo National Museum has assessed 75 similar types of knives in their museum collection, and shows that NG-NM-7114 stands out by its crystal handle, the usage of gold and its decoration.² This is also the case for the four Kandyan knives that are at present in the collection of the Royal Asian Art Society in The Netherlands (on loan in the Rijksmuseum), as well as in the collection of the Dutch National Museum of World Cultures: these are all of a coarser type than NG-NM-7114, both with regard to the craftsmanship and material used.³



Photo 1: Kandyan knife. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.no. NG-NM-7114).

¹ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Behandelingsrapport NG-NM-7114, [no date].

² Presentation Senerath Wickramasinghe, "Ancient swords, daggers, and knives in Sri Lankan museums," *Expert meeting Sri Lankan objects Rijksmuseum*, 27 August 2021. Please note that the documentation on this presentation will be available via the Documentation folder of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from April 2022

³ Email Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, former curator South and South-East Asian art, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 21 June 2021; See also collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv.no. AK-MAK-195, K-MAK-1514, AK-MAK-1683, NG-1982-18.

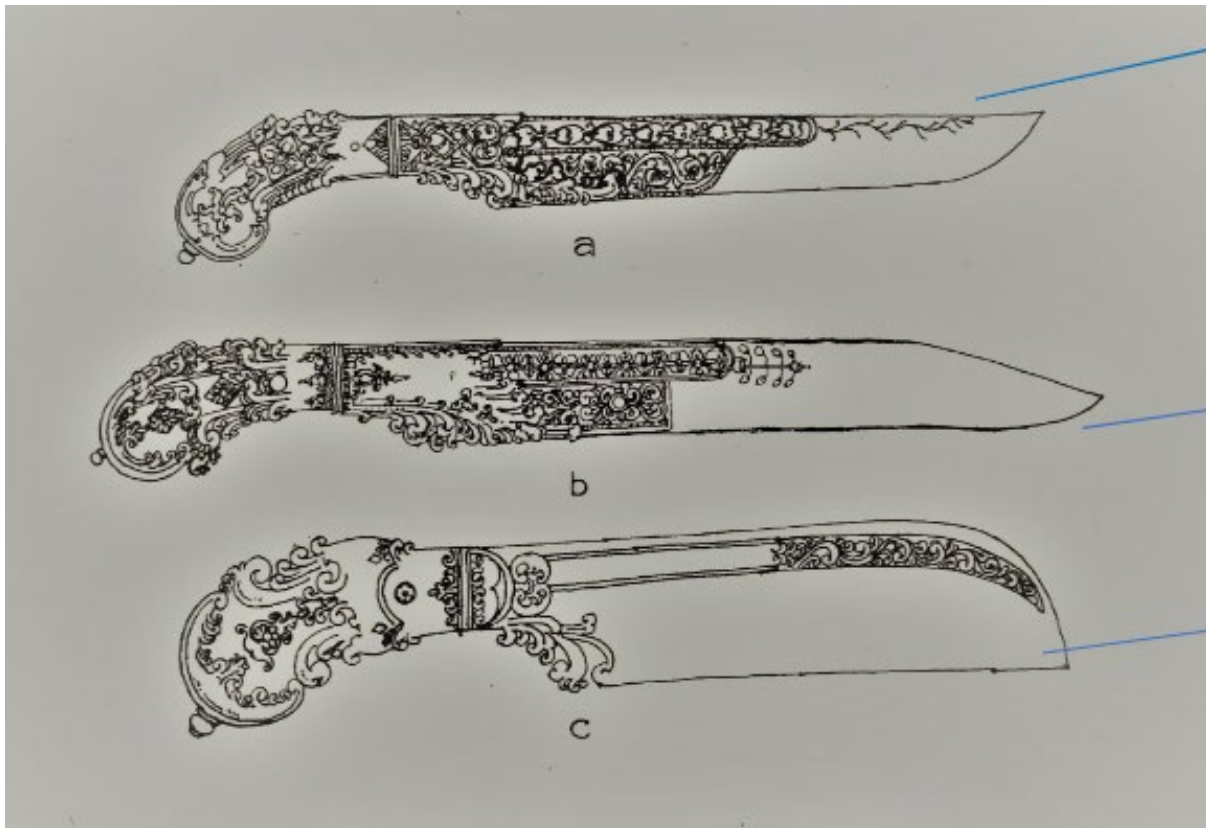


Photo 2: Three main types of blades in Kandyan knives. P.H. D. H De Silva and Senerath Wickramasinghe, *Ancient Swords, Daggers, and Knives in Sri Lankan Museums* (Colombo: Dept. of National Museums, 2007): fig. 62.

Senarath Wickramasinghe, a weapons expert and Director (Cultural) of Sri Lanka's Department of National Museums points out that the proper name for this type of Kandyan knife is *pihiya*, rather than *piha-kaetta*. He identifies it as type B (photo 2) as it has a reverse edge blade. The blade of type B is generally larger than the straight-bladed type A and 'has the reverse edge about one-fourth of the length from the tip sloping diagonally towards the cutting edge to meet at the midlevel or a little below this point, almost a clip point.' In contrast, type C is short-handed and has a very heavy wide blade. It is a heavy knife with a very wide blade of almost uniform width with a straight cutting edge and with the reverse edge sloping almost vertically downwards to meet a cutting edge at the level of the cutting edge to from the point.⁴ Type C is what is commonly called a *Pihiya kättha* (chopper – plural *Piha-kaetta*).⁵

Very ornate knives like the golden *pihiya*, were made in the Kandyan King's *pattal hatara* (Four Workshops), a guild to which only the leading craftsmen belonged. These craftsmen worked almost exclusively for the court and their positions were hereditary.⁶ The Four Workshops were divided, respectively, into the "jewel," "crown," "golden sword," and "throne" workshops. In addition to

⁴ Presentation Wickramasinghe, 27 August 2021. See also: P. H. D. H De Silva and Senerath Wickramasinghe, *Ancient Swords, Daggers, and Knives in Sri Lankan Museums* (Colombo: Dept. of National Museums, 2007), 194-207.

⁵ Knives like number B are also often indiscriminately referred to as *pihā-kaetta*, since they were mentioned as such by H. Parker in 1909: Henry Parker, *Ancient Ceylon* (Asian Educational Services, 1981), 531; De Silva & Wickramasinghe clear up the matter in their book *Ancient Swords, Daggers & Knives in Sri Lankan Museums*

⁶ 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): 54-59.

these men, there were other, lower divisions of craftsmen who performed annual services for the king. They were organised in a Public Works Department, called the Kottalbada Department. Their foreman was from the Four Workshops.⁷ Very ornate knives formed part of the costumes of aristocracy. In addition to knives, chains, rings, and *kasthāné* were part of their special outfit.⁸ This specific example (NG-NM-7114) is finished with very refined filigree work around the borders, containing typical Kandyan floral motifs.

From the work P.E.P. Deraniyagala, the first Sri Lankan director of the Colombo National Museum, we know that the quality of craftsmanship and the value of the material used, correlated to the status of the owner of the object. The elegant engraving in the crystal grip and the golden mounting so richly embellished point at the ownership of a king.⁹ Senarath Wickramasinghe further explains that the golden *pihiya* from the Rijksmuseum should be understood as royal waist knife. It was part of the king's official attire. It was worn at the front of the waist jacket.¹⁰

Senarath Wickramasinghe has compared the golden *pihiya* to the waist Knife of the King Sri Wickrama Rajasinha (r. 1798 -1815) and provided us with the following information: 'Another similar waist knife (so called *pihiya* or knife) which belonged to king Sri Vickrama Rajasingha (1798 -1815) is now exhibited in the Sir John Kotalawela Defense Museum, Ratmalana, Colombo Sri Lanka. This knife was among the spoils of war by the British at the Kandyan-British war in 1803.'¹¹ The waist knife of King Sri Vickrama Rajasinha returned to Sri Lanka when Queen Elizabeth II gifted it to Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Sir John Kotalawala (1953- 1956).

⁷ Arnold Wright, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (Asian Educational Services, 1999), 182; *Pivot Politics: Changing Cultural Identities in Early State Formation Processes* (Het Spinhuis, 1994): 198.

⁸ Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'Een pronkmes uit Ceylon', *Aziatische Kunst* 26/1 (1996): 54.

⁹ P.E.P. Deraniyagala, "Sinhala weapons and armour," *Journal Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch* XXXV (1942): 95, 110-111. "The handles of the daggers are of wood, metal, stone, buffalo or rhinoceros horn or ivory, decorated with precious metals and gems. The dagger was not only used in fighting but for more peaceful purposes and the small *Ul pihya* of most delicate workmanship was carried in an ornate scabbard, which also contained a Pan hinda or 'stylus' for writing on palm leaf. With progressive evolution the dagger came to denote rank, the lower officers wearing less ornate weapons than the higher, the commoners simply using wooden scabbards and plain weapons. Mohottalas wore small daggers with wooden handles covered with silver; ornate daggers were presented to individuals as tokens of royal esteem, while the Mahāvamsa mentions the dagger as one of the royal weapons." During our research we came across a Kandyan knife that might be identified *Ul Pihya*: See NMvW Museum Volkenkunde RV-360-6017 and 6019 (knife and sheath). RV-360-3018 was described as a "priem," possibly referring to a stylus that accompanied the knife in the manner described above, but it appears to have been lost in the collection or to have disappeared. [Information via Tom Quist, Provenance Researcher NMvW Museum Volkenkunde, 7 October 2021]

¹⁰ Report Senerath Wickramasinghe, Director (Cultural) Department of National Museums, Sri Lanka, 'Assessment of the draft provenance report of the three objects', 10 February 2022. Please note that documentation on this will be available via the Documentation folder of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam from April 2022.

¹¹ Report Wickramasinghe, 10 February 2022.



Photo 3: Royal waist knife of king Sri Vickrama Rajasinha . From: P. H. D. H De Silva and Senerath Wickramasinghe, Ancient Swords, Daggers, and Knives in Sri Lankan Museums (Colombo: Dept. of National Museums, 2007), 135.

This knife is further described as follows: 'The blade is fitted to the hilt by a circular projection of about 1cm in diameter which is visible where the crystal has not been overlaid with metal ornamentation. The crystal is further attached to the grip of the hilt by a band of gold ornaments with a flowing vakadeka (liyavela or double curved vine motif). Its scabbard is made of buffalo horn. It is heavily overlaid with sheet silver relieved by fillets. Its total length is 39.4 cm.'¹² Senarath Wickramasinghe emphasizes the similarities in decorative motives, material and shape between this royal waist knife and the pihya NG-NM-7112 that is now in the Rijksmuseum.

The object analysis thus leads us to conclude that it is highly likely that the Rijksmuseum's golden pihya was a royal waist knife made in the royal 'four workshops' and belonged to the king of Kandy. The identification with Kirti Sri Rajasinha is primarily based on literary and archival evidence that has previously been used in the literature and by curators of the Rijksmuseum. This will be further discussed in the following sections.

¹² Report Wickramasinghe, 10 February 2022. For a discussion of this knife see also: P. H. D. H De Silva and Senerath Wickramasinghe, *Ancient Swords, Daggers, and Knives in Sri Lankan Museums* (Colombo: Dept. of National Museums, 2007): 135-136.

Present knowledge regarding provenance available in the Rijksmuseum and literature

The golden *pihiya* is a well-known object and is described in various Rijksmuseum catalogues and specialist publications on Sri Lankan and South Asian arms and armour.¹³ The various authors consistently suggest that the *pihiya* was personal property of king Kirti Sri Rajasinha and was part of the spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war and that it was presented as a gift to the Dutch stadtholder by the executors Governor van Eck's estate. Where does this information come from?

The *pihiya*, together with the gold and silver *kasthāné* (NG-NM-560 and NG-NM-7112), became objects of research for the first time in the 1960s, when two near-simultaneous exhibitions were being prepared: one in the Dutch National Archives (then called Algemeen Rijksarchief) on the history of the VOC in Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon) (*Ceylon-Nederland in het verleden 1602-1797*), and one memorial exhibition on the royal collections: *150 Jaar Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen, Koninklijke Bibliotheek en Koninklijk Penningkabinet*.¹⁴ Professor Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, who was affiliated with the Rijksmuseum worked on the latter.¹⁵ Correspondence between the Rijksmuseum and the Dutch National archives in 1965 show how both parties were looking for archival evidence on the provenance of these three objects, in addition to their search for extra information on Lewke's cannon, which already had been an object of research.¹⁶ The Dutch National Archives provided the museum with copies from the VOC archives regarding the spoils of war, dated at 22 October 1765 (though misread at the time as 22 December 1765).¹⁷ Copies from the estate of Governor van Eck from his family archives were also added as evidence of the objects' provenance. It was on the basis of this documentation that the curators concluded that together with the cannon, the golden *pihiya*, and the two other objects, the golden *kasthāné* NG-NM-560 and the silver *kasthāné* NG-NM-7112 were spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war. It was subsequently described as such in both exhibition catalogues.¹⁸

¹³ Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Een pronkmes uit Ceylon" "Jan van Campen et al., *Aziatische kunst* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2014): 11, Lodewijk J. Wagenaar, *Cinnamon and Elephants: Sri Lanka and the Netherlands from 1600, Rijksmuseum Country Series* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2016): 121-123; Th.H Lunsingh Scheurleer, *150 Jaar Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Koninklijk Penningkabinet: herdenkingstentoonstelling in het Mauritshuis*, 1966 ('s-Gravenhage, 1966): 74; Ravinder Reddy, *Arms & Armour of India, Nepal & Sri Lanka: Types, Decoration and Symbolism* (London: Hali Publications, 2018): 195.

¹⁴ M.A.P Roelofs and Marius Petrus Henricus Roessingh, *Ceylon-Nederland in het verleden, 1602-1796: tentoonstelling in het Algemeen Rijksarchief, 's-Gravenhage, mei-sept. 1965* ('s-Gravenhage: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1965); Lunsingh Scheurleer, *150 Jaar: Herdenkingstentoonstelling*.

¹⁵ Earlier Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer had already traced back NG-NM-1015 as spoil of the 1765 Kandyan-Dutch war to the collection of Stadtholder Willem V and the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, cf. Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden en zijn betekenissen voor het Rijksmuseum," *Oudheidkundig Jaarboek* 13 (1946): 50.

¹⁶ Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, file with object information NG-NM-7114, D004812. Documents referred to were: National Archives The Hague (NL-HaNA), 1.04.02, inv.no. 3143 Ceylon, 'Resolutien genomen in raden van politie zeedert 5 Januarij tot 31 December 1765' [Resolutions taken in the boards of Police, from 5 January to 31 December 1765], dated 22 October 1765, f. 2882; NL-HaNA, 1.10.65.01, 'Inventaris van het archief van de familie Van Panthaleon van Eck, 1398-1946' [Inventory of the family archive of Van Panthaleon van Eck, 1398-1946], inv.no. 60. 1, "Brieven betreffende overlijden en regeling der nalatenschap van Lubbert Jan van Eck, heer van Overbeek, gouverneur van Ceylon, door de executeurs van diens testament te Colombo aan de erfgenamen gericht. Met bijlagen." [Letters regarding the death and settlement of the estate of Lubbert Jan van Eck, Lord of Overbeek, Governor of Ceylon, addressed to the heirs by the executors of his will in Colombo. With attachments], dated 1765; NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, inv.no. 3138 Ceylon, "Copia secreete brief van den gouverneur alleen aan generaal en raden" [Copy of secret letter by the Governor, only addressed to the General and Boards], dated 10 November 1765, f. 367.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lunsingh Scheurleer, *150 Jaar: Herdenkingstentoonstelling*, 74. Meilink Roelofs, *Ceylon-Nederland in het verleden, 1602-1796* (Den Haag 1965), 23

In 1975 P. H. D. H. de Silva, the director of the National Museum in Colombo, undertook the laborious task of identifying all Sri Lankan objects and manuscripts that were kept in collections outside Sri Lanka. His overview was published under the title *Antiquities and Other Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Abroad*.¹⁹ This has become a classic reference work and in 1980 De Silva's catalogue formed the basis of a large restitution request of the Sri Lankan government, which was unsuccessful. Among the Sri Lankan objects in the Rijksmuseum we also find NG-NM-7114, De Silva stresses the elegance and uniqueness of the object:

N.M. 7114 – Kandyan dagger with scabbard. Hilt made out of crystal, with gold ornamentation and set with rubies. Scabbard fluted, encased in gold covering and ornamented. Filigree work near mouth of scabbard. Length 29.5 cm. Very impressive.²⁰

Researchers who published on this group of objects more recently, such as Lodewijk Wagenaar, Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, and Ebeltje Hartkamp-Jonxis did not question the assigned provenance of the golden pihya and the golden and silver kasthāné.²¹ In the most recent publication, *Cinnamon and Elephants*, Lodewijk Wagenaar writes that these three objects were gifted, together with the cannon (NG-NM-10150) to Duke Louis Ernest of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, who transferred them to Stadtholder Willem V. The dagger, as well as the silver and golden kasthāné, would have been taken by the Dutch army in Kandy.²²

Since 2015, the Rijksmuseum label has described this group of objects as follows:

Following an unsuccessful invasion of Kandy in 1764, the VOC troops nevertheless succeeded one year later in penetrating the king's centre of power. Peace negotiations failed and the troops plundered the palace and the city. The booty included many costly jewels and arms, including these three ornate weapons that were probably the king's personal property.²³

What we want to underline here is that the information gathered in 1965 has circulated ever since as unquestioned fact. It appears that subsequent researchers have not looked up the original documentation in the Van Eck estate, nor in the VOC archives. This is evidenced by the recurring references in the literature of 22 December rather than 22 October 1765 as the date when the looted objects collected by Van Eck were first listed.²⁴ The documentation gathered in 1965 therefore requires further scrutiny. How were the objects from the lists in the VOC archives and the Van Eck family archives identified? Where the objects indeed gifted to the stadtholder (via the Duke of Brunswick) in conjunction with the cannon? How and when did these objects, including the golden *pihya*, arrive in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in the first place? And what was known about them at the time? These questions will be dealt one by one in the sections below.

¹⁹ P. H. D. H. de Silva, *A Catalogue of Antiquities and Other Cultural Objects from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) Abroad* (Colombo: Department of government printing, 1975).

²⁰ Silva, *A Catalogue*, 376. We are not sure what his remark on the rubies on the hilt is based on, as these are not present now. However, there is a historic precedent to this, which we will discuss in the next section.

²¹ Wagenaar, *Cinnamon and Elephants*, 121-123; Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Een pronkmes uit Ceylon," 52-58; Jan van Campen and Ebeltje Hartkamp-Jonxis, *Aziatische Weelde: VOC-Kunst in Het Rijksmuseum* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2011); 86.

²² Wagenaar, *Cinnamon and Elephants*, 123. Lodewijk Wagenaar adds though that it is not certain if they were taken from the palace of the king of Kandy.

²³ Collection Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, NG-NM-560, NG-NM-7112, NG-NM-7114.

²⁴ Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, file with object information NG-NM-560, D010291; NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, inv.no. 3143 Ceylon, "Resolutien genomen in raden van politie zeedert 5 Januarij tot 31 December 1765" [Resolutions taken in the boards of Police, from 5 January to 31 December 1765], dated 22 October 1765, f. 2882.

The Kandyan-Dutch war 1762-66 and the spoils of war

The association between Lewke's cannon and the silver kasthāné, the golden pihya, and the golden kasthāné is very strong. This was also the ground on which they were connected with the Kandyan-Dutch war in 1765 and to the estate of Governor van Eck. What exactly is known about the objects that were obtained in the war? What information is provided in the VOC archives and the family archives of Van Eck? And can we indeed identify the golden pihya in Van Eck's estate?

The Kandyan-Dutch 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. Before we move to a more detailed assessment of the archival records that have been used in previous research, we provide a brief description of the war, and the circumstances under which objects were taken from the palace. The *Cūḷavaṃsa*, a royal historical chronicle from the island, describes how the King of Kandy decided to support popular resistance against the VOC. "[His] dignitaries set forth with the people living in Lanka, fought the fearful battle with the Olanda people, destroyed the foe, burned down the strongholds and terrified him in every possible way."²⁵ Conflicts between the Dutch and the local inhabitants of the Dutch occupied areas had started in 1759/60, but in 1761 the restrained relations between the Dutch in Colombo and the King of Kandy led to open warfare.²⁶ VOC Governor Lubbert Jan van Eck got hold of the Kandyan low lands in 1762 and 1763, whereupon he decided to invade the town and palace of Kandy, located up in the mountains. The first campaign of early 1764 failed completely.²⁷ Even after the Dutch VOC troops invaded the city of Kandy on 19 February 1765, the Kandyan defense used guerrilla tactics, by retreating quickly after an attack and using the rainy season to their advantage.²⁸

During the days before the invasion of Kandy, the king brought to safety his family and the treasures of Kandy Palace and Temple of the Tooth.²⁹ An eyewitness, a Dutch soldier who worked as surgeon in Kandy, described the situation as follows: "The King, with tears in his eyes, had caused the most precious objects to be removed from the Palace, and had then given leave to his troops to take what they wished of the remainder [treasures]."³⁰ This was not in vain as the Temple of the Tooth, the most important Buddhist shrine on the island, was targeted by the Dutch army, and when they forced their way into the town, the palace and temple were razed by the troops and they "destroyed the sacred books and everything else."³¹ The court was desecrated due to the slaughtering of the holy cows and the destruction of the Buddha statues and the palace was set on fire when the Dutch troops eventually retreated from the city due to strong resistance and a lack of food on 31 August 1765.³²

²⁵ Wilhelm Geiger and C. Mabel Rickmers, *Culavamsa: Being the More Recent Part of the Mahavamsa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996): p. 266, line 115

²⁶ R. Raven-Hart, *The Dutch Wars with Kandy, 1764-1766*, Ceylon Historical Manuscripts Commission. Bulletin. No. 6. (Nugegoda, 1964): 3.

²⁷ Wagenaar, *Cinnamon and Elephants*, 121.

²⁸ Raven-Hart, *The Dutch Wars with Kandy*, 114; Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, "The Many Faces of the Kandyan Kingdom, 1591-1765: Lessons for our Time?" 23rd April 2014, Colombo, Princeton University lecture, p. 36-37.

<http://www.thesapri.org/pdf/lecture.pdf>

²⁹ Wilhelm Geiger and C. Mabel Rickmers, *Culavamsa: Being the More Recent Part of the Mahavamsa* (Delhi: Motilal Culavamsa, p. 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."

³⁰ Raven-Hart, *The Dutch Wars with Kandy*, 98-99; Sri Lanka National Archives, 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).

³¹ *Culavamsa*, p. 267, line 122-126.

³² Ibid; Lorna Dewaraja, "Thailand's Sublime Gift to Sri Lanka: The Services rendered by UPĀLI MAHĀ THERA and his associates," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka* 48 (2003): 88.

The troops invading the city on 19 February 1765 were explicitly instructed not to plunder, but upon arrival in Kandy, the Dutch troops had found the warehouses partly emptied by the retreated Kandyan troops, who were allowed to do so by the king.³³ The looting that followed spread from the warehouses to even the apartments of the king himself.³⁴ Among the objects taken were linen, fabrics, furniture, some silver works, curiosities, and copper coins.³⁵ Officers, soldiers, and slaves alike went looting. For instance, it is recorded that back in Kandy one officer had taken “silverworks, diamonds, and rings with and without stones”.³⁶ This officer had defended himself later in Colombo by saying that he had bought the objects from two soldiers, just as Governor Van Eck himself had done. In fact, Van Eck had also bought several valuable and rare objects from the spoils. “Those objects might have been sold for give-away prices to ‘Moors’ [muslim traders] who were waiting to buy it”³⁷ he wrote. Indeed, a great deal of the spoils of war was sold or left behind by the soldiers in Kandy or during their trip back to Colombo.³⁸

Governor van Eck died some weeks after the conquest of Kandy and in his estate ten Kandyan objects were identified as spoils of war. These ten objects were described as follows:

- A golden container with a golden ola as well as a small bag with small golden balls attached
- A Buddha statue made of tombac
- An ivory machine with underneath a metal disk, that has an engraving in it
- A small canon piece inlaid with silver
- A fine decorated bow with golden mounting, together with an equally decorated quiver and arrows.
- A sword with golden grip and its sheath with golden mounting together with a part epee [sword knot] with silver mounting
- A red-lacquered baton of command with on both ends golden studs
- A fine decorated belly-knife with golden mounting
- A silver gold plated machine as a clock with underneath a fitting bottom piece
- A kind of palate/canopy with pillars of gold but overlaid with gold and silver.³⁹

³³ SLNA, Lot 1, inv.no. 4881, "Report of the military campaign," f. 223

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, 3138, Copia secreete brief van de leeden van het geheime committe aan generaal en raden in dato 31 Maart 1765 [Copy of the secret letter of the members of the secret committee to the General and boards, dated 31 March 1765], f. 463b-464.

³⁶ 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: "De kannekappel [scribe] van La Baume die hier voor een ordentlijk man te boekstaande schillie Christoffel Fernando, waar op La Baume zich, als zijne slaagen vijand, beriep heeft verklaard, dat hij veele gouden ringen met en sonder steenen, zoo ook veel ander klein zilverwerk bij La Baume gezien had, waar van de kostbaarste ring aan den Her Kommandeur Mooijaart, toen ter tijd op Kolombo zich bevindende, voor 80 Rijkst door hem kannekappel verkocht was."

³⁷ Ibid, f. 366b.

³⁸ Ibid, f. 369.

³⁹ 'Zegge een goude koker daer in een goude ola benevens een zakje met goude bolletjes daaraan

1. " Een Boedoes beeld van Tambak

1. " Een ijvoore machine van onder met een metaale schijff, waar in gegraveert is

1. " Een kleen kanonstuk met zilver ingelegt

1. Zegge een fraaij gewerkte boog met goud beslag, benevens gelijke pijlkoke en pijlen

1. " Een zwaart met goude greep en dies scheede met goud beslag mitsgaders part epee met

These ten objects were delivered to the big cash register [grootte geldkas], which was commissioned by Hoofdadmirateur Daniel Burnat. By then, the decorated cannon had already shipped to the Netherlands (on 15 November 1765), as the late Governor Van Eck had wished. It was sent as a gift to Duke Louis Ernest of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, the guardian of Willem V. On 13 May 1766 the headquarters of the VOC in Batavia gave permission to send the Kandyan objects that were left of Van Eck's estate to his heirs, provided that court in Kandy would not demand restitution.⁴⁰ Two objects from this list, namely, the Cover of the Tooth of Buddha (the silver-gilded machine) and the accompanying *howdah* (the canopy) were indeed returned in 1767 to the king of Kandy as a result of the peace negotiations.⁴¹ The golden container with golden ola was returned to the 'owner' from whom Van Eck had taken it, but for which he had never paid as he had promised.⁴² In 1768 there were six objects left described as "curiosities that were found [*gevonden*] during the conquest of the Palace of the King of Kandy and looted [*buitgemaakt*]." These were sent to the heirs of Van Eck on the ship *Vrouwe Petronella Maria* in a box with the initials VE.⁴³

From the objects on the list the "fine decorated golden belly-knife [*buiksteeker*]" might be identified as the golden *pihiya*. The word *buiksteeker* was not commonly used in the Dutch Republic at the time, but we found a reference from Bengal in the same period, explaining that it was a dagger carried around the waist.⁴⁴ We know of this object that it was indeed captured in Kandy [tot buit bekomen] by a soldier, and van Eck had promised to pay him 100 rix-dollars (around ca. 2,400 Euro's at present⁴⁵) for the 'belly-dagger' in the Netherlands. After Van Eck's death, Governor Falck wrote on 10 November 1765 that he had written a promissory note for the soldier that could be converted in Amsterdam.⁴⁶ In Van Eck's 1769 inventory for his heirs, this belly-dagger is again found. The accompanying letter states that these were "some goods that were worn by the deceased lord himself and other [objects] captured in Kandy, [all this is] sent to the heirs as a remembrance."⁴⁷ In the family inventory, the objects are described once again and in more detail. In this inventory, the sheath of the belly-dagger with gold-mounting is now described as being set with small stones. This additional description problematises the identification: the sheath of the *pihiya* in the Rijksmuseum

zilver beslag

1. " Een staff van kommando met rood verlakt en aan beide enden met goud beslag

1. " Een fraai gewerkte buiksteeker met goud beslag

1. " Een zilver vergulde machine bij wijze van een klok met een daar onder passend onderstuk

1. " Een soort van verhemelte met pielaaren van goud dogh overhouts met een goud en zilverovertogen.'

NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, inv.no. 3138, "Copia berigt van de Candiasche rariteiten die in de grootte geldkas overgebracht zijn" [Copy of message about the Kandyan curiosities that has been handed over to the big cash register], f. 875.

⁴⁰ SLNA, Lot 1, inv.no 2232, "Correspondence with Batavia and Holland 1766-1767," dated 13 May 1766.

⁴¹ NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, inv.no. 3174, "Instructie voor den oppercoopman en secretaris van politie Van Angelbeek in dato 28 Januarij 1767 gaande als gesant naar 't hof van Candia" [Instruction for the chief merchant and the secretary of the police Van Angelbeek dated 28 January 1767, who went as an ambassador to the Kandyan court], f. 1454b-1455.

⁴² NL-HaNA, 1.10.65.01, inv.no. 66, "Inventarissen van de nagelaten goederen van Lubbert Jan van Eck etc." [Inventories of the estate of Lubbert Jan van Eck etc.], dated 20 March 1769.

⁴³ NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, inv.no. 3200, "Origineele missive van den gouverneur Falck en den raad aan de vergadering van 17 in dato 27 Januarij 1768" [Original letter from the Governor Falck and Boards [in Colombo] to the Council 17, dated 27 January 1768], f. 262. '[V]an de Hooze indische Regeering, bij secrete Missive van den 13 Mai 1766 voor de erfgenaemen afgegeeven de volgende Rariteiten bij het veroveren van het Palijs des konings van kandia daar in gevonden en buit gemaakt.'

⁴⁴ Stavorinus, J. *Reize van Zeeland, over de Kaap de Goede Hoop, naar Batavia [...] in de jaaren MDCCCLVIII tot MDCCCLXI. Deel V Aanmerkingen over Bengalen*. (Leiden 1793): 58

⁴⁵ This is a rough calculation, based on this historic currency converter: <https://iisg.amsterdam/nl/onderzoek/projecten/hpw/calculate.php>

⁴⁶ NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, 3138, Copia secrete 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. 367b.

⁴⁷ NL-HaNA, 1.10.65.01, inv.no. 66, "Inventarissen van de nagelaten goederen van Lubbert Jan van Eck etc." [Inventories of the state of Lubbert Jan van Eck etc.], dated 20 March 1769. "Van eenige gereede goederen door de overleeden zelfs gedragen en ander bij de verovering van Candia buitgemaakt, door de heere expecutereun ter gedagtenis van de erfgenamen overgesonden."

does not contain gems or other stones.⁴⁸ However, we also noted above that even in 1975 the pihya was described as being set with rubies.⁴⁹ We are still not sure how to explain these two deviations. Another point of concern is that this inventory only connects one object, namely the cannon, to the collection of the Dutch stadtholder: it is explicitly referred to as not among the objects received from Colombo, because it was sent directly to the Duke of Brunswick. The inventory states: "It is now part of the cabinet of rarities of the Stadtholder in The Hague."⁵⁰ Clearly the cannon travelled a different route than the golden pihya and the other objects.

The unrecorded arrival of the Pihya in the collection of the Dutch Stadtholder

Our analysis of the history Van Eck's estate showed that the pihya arrived in the Dutch Republic in 1768, separately from Lewke's cannon. This means that it could not have followed the same trail into the stadtholder's collection. We have therefore tried to reconstruct the moment of the pihya's arrival in the collection of the Stadtholders: first through an analysis of the eighteenth century inventories of this collection and second by searching for correspondence with the heirs of Van Eck in the years after the arrival of the pihya and the other objects from his estate.

Our search through the eighteenth-century inventories of the collection of Stadtholders Willem IV and Willem V did not yield any result.⁵¹ Only one entry pointed at a gold mounted dagger, a description that might have matched our golden pihya, but that object has been identified by Tom Quist as a Malay dagger, that presently carries the number RV-360-6021.⁵² In fact, none of the other five Kandyan objects were found in these eighteenth century inventories either, including the Lewke's cannon. Nor did we find any letters from the heirs of Van Eck relating to the pihya or the two kasthāné. A better understanding of the collection history and archives might help explain the silence with regard to the golden pihya and the other Kandyan objects.

⁴⁸ NL-HaNA, 1.10.65.01, inv.no. 66, "Inventarissen van de nagelaten goederen van Lubbert Jan van Eck etc." [Inventories of the estate of Lubbert Jan van Eck etc.], dated 20 March 1769. Attachment. "Een Fraije gewerkte Buijksteeker met goud beslag en dies scheede met steentjes beset."

⁴⁹ Silva, *A Catalogue*, 376.

⁵⁰ Idem. 'Een kleijn Canon stuk met zilver ingelegt, was door den overleeden gedefineert te senden als een present, aan den heere hertogh van Brunswijk Woeffenbuttelt Veltmarschalk van den Staat en is dienvolgens voor de Heere Execteuren over gezonden, en staat nu op de Rarieteits Camer van den Heere Erfstadhouder in S'Hage.'

⁵¹ 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 Kunst gemaekte Zeldsaemheeden...' [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.

⁵² Tom Quist, PPOCE Provenance report RV-360-6021.

Because the descriptions of the objects in the estate of Van Eck are quite generic, and because of the longstanding tradition in Kandy of bestowing diplomatic gifts to governors and governor generals, we also looked more broadly into the Stadtholder's correspondence regarding objects arriving from Asia. The cabinet consisted of the collection that Willem V and his wife, Wilhelmine of Prussia, inherited from Willem IV and his wife, Anna van Hannover. The acquisitions made subsequently reflect their personal tastes, while the objects they received as gifts reflect their relations, networks, and socio-political positions. A considerable part of Willem V's cabinet was formed by gifts from the territories exploited by the West India and Dutch East India Companies.⁵³ Indeed the archive of Willem V does show several instances of donations of art-historical and natural-historical objects, as well as weapons and other personal belongings to the stadtholders. Several letters from or about Governor-General P.A. van de Parra (1761-1775) inform us for example that he donated a great variety of objects, including weapons, to the collection of Willem V and also to the family of the stadtholders themselves.⁵⁴ Yet, there was no golden pihya among them or anything that might resemble it.

As a final step in our search for evidence regarding the arrival of the pihya in the collection of the Stadtholder, we looked at contemporary descriptions of the display at the Cabinet for Curiosities. The cabinet can be considered as the first public museum in the Netherlands. The cabinet attracted many visitors.

Indeed we found that Kandyan objects do appear in a written account from the German traveller Carl Heinrich Titius from 1777. When Titius visited the Cabinet of Curiosities of Willem V, 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 PPOCE Provenance report). Titius further remarked that other weapons are exhibited in that same room.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

To conclude, the estate of Van Eck indeed lists an object (a gold mounted 'belly-dagger' or waist-knife) that could possibly be identified as the golden pihya. Yet, we have not been able to find direct evidence of the transfer of this object to the collection of Stadtholder Willem V. We have explained though that this by no means excludes the option that it was gifted by Van Eck's heirs to the Willem V for the simple reason that the archival recording of objects in the possession of the Dutch stadtholder was incomplete. The eyewitness accounts reveal that the curator of the Cabinet made explicit reference to the Kandyan-Dutch war and that besides Lewke's cannon, other armour from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was at display at the time.

⁵³ Edwin Van Meerkerk, "Colonial Objects And The Display Of Power. The Curious Case Of The Cabinet Of William V And The Dutch India Companies," in *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, ed. Siegfried Huigen, Elmer Kolfin, and Jan L. de Jong (Brill, 2010): 415-416: 422.

⁵⁴ See for example, NL-KaHV, A31, William V Batavus, Prince of Orange-Nassau (1748-1806), Inv. No. 1798, P.A. van de Parra 1767-1775, dated 27 July 1772; NL-KaHV, A31, William V Batavus, Prince of Orange-Nassau (1748-1806), Inv. No. 1799, J. van Riemsdijk 1776-1777.

⁵⁵ 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 übersogen, 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).

⁵⁶ *Guide ou nouvelle description de La Haye et de ses environs* ('s-Gravenhage, 1785), 257
<https://www.delfpher.nl/nl/boeken/view?coll=boeken&identifier=dpo:5469:mpeg21:0250>.

When was the object first recorded and what route did it make through the Dutch collections ?

The archival silences regarding the arrival of the pihya in the collection of the Dutch Stadtholder urged us to further scrutinize the museum documentation. In this section we focus on two questions: when was the object first recorded as part of a Dutch collection? And what route did it take through the collection? Our method was to work backwards in time through the museum documentation, this exercise included the decoding of the somewhat complex historical numbering of the object.

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. This history starts with the object number that is assigned to the golden pihya: 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 number of NG-NM-7114 stands for, Nederlandsch Museum. In 1927 the objects from this collection were incorporated in the Rijksmuseum and became part of the Dutch History collection, Nederlandsche Geschiedenis, hence the additional NG.⁵⁷

At the time this inventory card of the Nederlandsch Museum was first created, no mention was made of the place of manufacture at all and it was probably not identified as Sri Lankan. At that point in time, knowledge of Kandyan armour and craftsmanship was apparently absent at the museum. For example, the two Kandyan kashāné that are now exhibited together with the pihya, were at the time interpreted as Malay (the gold mounted kashāné) or from Mainland Southeast Asia (the silver mounted kashāné).⁵⁸

The information on the inventory card of the Nederlandsch Museum from 1885 is thus very basic:

Gold-setted dagger with a crystal as well as gold-set hilt. Sheath covered with gold leaf.

Dagger 29.5 long, sheath 21 cm.

From the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden No. 6026

Later, the following provenance information was added:

On loan Koloniaal Instituut. Received back in 1937

And in 1816 transferred by King Willem I to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden.⁵⁹

In 1875 the first objects (among which NG-NM-560) were transferred from the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden to the Nederlandsch Museum. Asiatic objects from that collection were distributed

⁵⁷ Van Campen, *Aziatische kunst*, 8-11.

⁵⁸ See Alicia Schrikker and Doreen van de Boogaart, PPOCE reports NG-NM-7112 and NG-NM-560.

⁵⁹ Inventory card Rijksmuseum Amsterdam NG-NM-7114: 'Rijk in goud gevatte dolk met kristallen eveneens in goud gevat gevest. Met bladgoud overtrokken scheede. Dolk lang 29.5 scheede 24 cM. Afkomstig van het Kon. Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden No. 6026. In bruikleen Kol. Instituut. In 1937 terug ontvangen. En in 1816 door Koning Willem I aan het Kon. Kab. van Zeldzaamheden overgedragen.'

among the Nederlandsch museum and 's Rijks Etnografisch Museum (NMvW Museum Volkenkunde). From this collection however, a specific group of objects were allocated to the Nederlandsch Museum to illustrate the ceremonial function of Stadtholder Willem V as highest director of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). His son Willem I inherited it and transmitted it in 1816 to the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden (KKZ).⁶⁰

Correspondence between Professor Lunsingh Scheurleer and the Director of the Rijksmuseum van Volkenkunde, P.H. Pott, from 1966 reveals more about the history of NG-NM-7114 in the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden. Pott noticed that the numbers 6014-6029 in the catalogue were (almost) completely copied from the list of the objects King Willem I transmitted to the KKZ from his father's collection. Some of these ended up in the museum Volkenkunde, while others went to the Rijksmuseum. Pott was able to trace back almost all the numbers from the list in the two museums. In the Rijksmuseum these were renumbered, ranging from NM-7053 to -7121.⁶¹ And so, number 6026 in the KKZ became NM-7114 in the Nederlandsch Museum. In fact, all the KKZ numbers 6014-6029, have a colonial Asian background.⁶²

KKZ number 6026 was described in 1878 as follows:

A richly set golden dagger, with swept or cut crystal hilt also set with gold and a gold-leaf overlaid sheath.⁶³

The golden pihya and the two kasthāné were not the only Kandyan/Sri Lankan objects in the collection of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden. Over the course of the nineteenth century, their Sri Lankan provenance was forgotten, but in 1823 this was not yet the case: in 1823 the contemporary director of the Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, R.P. Van de Kastelee, described that desk 13 in the fourth room presented a range of Asiatic objects. Among them were a treatise in Sinhalese and a decorative belt with a snake motif, worn by the people of Ceylon.⁶⁴ Van der Kastelee explicitly stated that these objects originated from the cabinet of Stadtholder Willem V. On desk 15 in the same hall, the objects were exhibited which we now identify as the golden kasthāné together with the silver kasthāné, the golden pihya and another silver Kandyan knife which is now in the Wereldculturen collection (or: NG-NM-560, 7112, -7114 and RV-360-6017). In addition, two olas (palm leaf manuscripts) with Tamil and Sinhalese script were exhibited together with a copper plate with Sinhalese letters and an "Eastern writing pen," presumably a stylus, used to write on the palm leaves.⁶⁵ A conclusion we can draw from these records is that the golden pihya was exhibited as part of a group of objects that originated from Sri Lanka. Over time, however, the knowledge about this group of objects had faded.

⁶⁰ Van Campen, *Aziatische kunst*, 11

⁶¹ Museum Volkenkunde (NL-LdnRMV), Archive series 360, letter from P.H. Pott to T.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, 9 September 1966.

⁶² Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Twee Oosterse Sieraden Uit de Stadhoudelijke Verzameling," *Bulletin van Het Rijksmuseum* 44 (1996): 15–26. Other examples from this series are the jewels of Steyn van Gollennesse and two jewels with an unknown provenance have been researched before by Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer

⁶³ NL-HlmNHA, 476, inv.nos. 876-877, "Inventarissen van kunst- en andere voorwerpen, 1878-1882 876" [Inventories of art pieces and other objects] no. 6026. "Een rijk in goud gevatte dolk, met een gemeden of geslepen kristallen, eveneens in goud gevatte gevest, in een met bladgoud overtrokken scheede."

⁶⁴ R.P. Van de Kastelee, *Handleiding tot de bezichtiging van het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden op Mauritshuis, in 's Gravenhage* (The Hague, n.d. [1824], 97-101. "Eene onbegrijpelijk kunstige van zilverdraad gevlochten slang, de kop en de staat schijnen daar naderhand aangemaakt te zijn; zonder deze is het een versiersel van een volk op Ceilon, wordende als een gordel om het lijf gedragen, wanneer aan de einde sluitingstukken zijn. Weegt 5 ons, 16 eng. Of 268,411 wig." We have not yet identified this object in the collection.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The golden pihya seems to have been among the objects transferred from the cabinet of Stadtholder Willem V: The golden pihya seems to have been among the objects transferred from the royal collections by Willem I to the Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden in 1816: the descriptions of numbers 6014-6029 on the inventory list of the KKZ of 1878, were a direct copy of the descriptions on the list of transferal from 1816 by King Willem I.⁶⁶

The “List of objects transferred to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague on the orders of King William I,” number A. 155 ... 11 has the following description:

A dagger, very richly encased in gold, with a modelled crystal hilt also encompassed in gold, in a gold-covered sheath. Apparently an East-Indian work.⁶⁷

The original copy of this list is kept in the National Archives and it contains objects from the collection of Willem V that Van de Kastele had received from de *hofraad* Hoffman. According to Jan van Campen, this list referred to the objects that Willem V took with him to England when he was exiled in 1795.⁶⁸ However, Tom Quist has suggested that this list is a copy of Hoffman’s inventory on the weapons and walking sticks, written in German. In Tom Quist’s view, the listed remained at Oranienstein Castle. This had been the residence of Willem V since 1801.⁶⁹ We have not been able to obtain further information on this question, but in any case it is very likely that the golden pihya and other objects on the German-language list were transferred to England or Germany or both, and returned to the Netherlands in the period 1813-1816 when the monarchy was established, with Willem V’s son, Willem I. From the museum documentation we can thus conclude that the golden pihya must have entered the collection of Willem V, at any moment prior to his exile in England and Germany in 1795.⁷⁰

Discussion

The decorative elements of NG-NM-7114 points at it being a royal knife, pihya, and it is likely that it was made in the Four Workshops of the king of Kandy because the most ornate weapons were made there, and experts describe the golden pihya as such. The golden pihya travelled from Kandy to the Dutch royal collections at some point before 1795. The archival evidence that has been used until now to substantiate the conclusion that NG-NM-7114 was taken in Kandy by Governor van Eck and gifted by him to Willem V, turned out to be less straightforward than had thus far been assumed: the descriptions of the dagger in the estate of Van Eck deviate somewhat, as it describes its sheath as set with gems. Moreover, there is no record found of any of Van Eck’s heirs gifting the dagger to the

⁶⁶ This is what P.H. Pott also concluded in 1966. Museum Volkenkunde (NL-LdnRMV), Archive series 360, letter from P.H. Pott to T.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, 9 September 1966.

⁶⁷ “Een dolk, zeer rijk in goud omvat, met een gesneden kristal, eveneens in goud omvat gevest, in een met goud overtrokkene schede, naar het schijnt oostindisch werk.” NL-HlmNHA, 476, inv.no. 843, “Lijst van voorwerpen op last van Koning Willem I overgedragen aan het Kon. Kab. v. Zeldzaamheden te ‘s-Gravenhage” [List of objects transferred to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague on the orders of King William I], 1816.

⁶⁸ Jan van Campen, *De Haagse jurist Jean Theodore Royer (1737-1807) en zijn verzameling Chinese voorwerpen* (Uitgeverij Verloren, 2000): 215.

⁶⁹ Tom Quist, PPOCE report RV-360-6021.

⁷⁰ This stay rejects the thesis in the Rijksmuseum documentation that NG-NM-7112 as well as NG-NM-560 were the two weapons that, like NG-NM-1015 (Cannon of Kandy), were presented as one of the five objects, the “Vaderlandsche gedenkstukken” to the new Batavian Parliament, as symbols for a new Netherlands in 1795. Among them was the sabre of Michiel de Ruyter and a cannon ascribed to de Ruyter. The cannon can be identified as NG-NM-1015, see the respective PPOCE report, but the sabre cannot be linked to NG-NM-7112.

stadtholder. Yet we have not found any archival evidence that would contradict the matter either, even though we explicitly looked for other possible leads in the Dutch Royal Archives as well as in the VOC archives.⁷¹ The archives simply remain silent about the moment of arrival of this object in the collection of the stadtholder. For a more extensive discussion of this archival silence, see PPOCE Report NG-NM-7114.

It is on those grounds that we still consider it most likely that the Kandyan-Dutch War of 1762-1766 was the moment of involuntary transfer of the royal knife into VOC hands. However, a more unlikely provenance as being a gift from the Kandyan king or another more peaceful provenance cannot entirely be excluded.⁷² Perhaps more systematic research of the collection history of the cluster of objects from Sri Lanka that were on display together with the pihya in 1823 could provide us with further information on its earlier history and route into the collection of the Dutch stadtholder.

A final point worth underscoring is that for more than fifty years now the Rijksmuseum has maintained that the golden pihya was part of the spoils of the Kandyan-Dutch war of 1762-1766. Together with the Kandyan cannon, the golden and silver kasthāné, they have come to symbolise the moment of plunder and destruction of the Kandyan palace. This in itself is an important part of the object's history.

⁷¹ See note 52; NL-KaHV- A31, "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], Laura Smeets, "Door kunst gemaakt. De verzameling zeldzaamheden van Stadhouder Willem V," (MA Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2010); During the PPOCE research a start was made with mapping the culture of gift-giving between the VOC and Kandy in the 1740s and 1750s, as well as to what happened to the objects after they were in VOC hands. A draft document 'Gift giving, Embassies and Collections' will be available in the documentation folders of this object from April 2022. An elaboration on this research went beyond the object of the PPOCE research, but future elaborate research on the practice of gift giving, flows of gifts, as well as the afterlives of these Kandyan gifts in Sri Lanka, the Netherlands and the rest of the world could provide more insight. The draft documents can be consulted as a starting point for future research.

⁷² This would require a more extensive analysis of the practice of gift-giving in Dutch-Kandyan diplomacy and the afterlives of these objects. We noted that knives were sometimes donated as gifts during embassies. For example, Governor General Mossel received a knife with a golden hilt (mes met gouden hecht) in 1754, but there is no indication that this knife would have been of the same material and artistic quality as the golden pihya. See: Hugo 'sJacob, *Generale Missiven van gouverneurs generaal en raden aan heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie. Deel 12, 1750-1755*. (Den Haag 2007) 463. Online access via: <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vocgeneralemissiven>