



Hugo Miguel Crespo and Annemarie Jordan Gschwend

# The “Pangolin Fan” An Imperial Ivory Fan from Ceylon

*Artistic Confluence and Global Gift Exchange  
between Sri Lanka and Renaissance Portugal*

This richly illustrated book presents a definitive study of nine imperial ivory fans from Renaissance Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), carved between 1542 and 1551, in the royal workshops of the lost kingdom of Kōṭṭē. These rare ivories, which display a mix of Hindu and Buddhist iconography, are today dispersed amongst public and private collections in Europe. They were commissioned by King Bhuvanekabāhu VII (1521–1551), at the height of his reign, as political gifts for high-ranking members of the Portuguese royal family. Five intricately carved Kōṭṭē fans were earmarked for the Portuguese Queen, Catarina of Austria (r. 1525–1578), a Habsburg infanta and youngest sister of Emperor Charles V.

Bhuvanekabāhu’s exceptional ivory fans represent globalization and cross-cultural transfers between Asia and Europe in the sixteenth century. These ivories bridged Ceylon and Portugal in a unique way, illustrating the extraordinary diversity, ingenuity, and quality of Sinhalese craftsmanship at this date. These fans visually symbolize Luso-Sinhalese relations at the height of the Portuguese maritime trade empire, and underscore the special nature of Portugal’s artistic, cultural, and political ties with this island. As exotic showcase pieces, these fans came to represent the extent and power of the Lisbon court in the mid-sixteenth century, and qualify as some of the most important *Kunstammer* pieces ever collected by the Avis, Habsburg, and Farnese courts in the Renaissance.

New research and documents discovered in archives in Portugal, Spain and Austria map out for the first time the multiple histories and trajectories of these splendid Kōṭṭē fans.

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Ivory folding fan, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), Kōṭṭē, c. 1540-1551; carved ivory, horn, copper, and cotton thread. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer, inv. KK 4751 © KHM-Museumsverband