

2.32 Cultural Heritage- Treasure Hunting in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The rich history of Sri Lanka is made up of movable and immovable remains scattered all over the country. While examining literary and archaeological sources the ancient rulers of this country took various measures, made laws, and used systematic methods to safeguard our ancient heritage. As a result of this a reasonable amount of archaeological remains survived even during the Civil War, calamities and unavoidable circumstances.

The criteria required by the Antiquities Amendment Act (1998) were that any cultural or national phenomena, which was 100 years or more remain a legal archaeological ruin. Although the country owns a good collection of archaeological remains, media and other sources always tend to report its ruin and destruction. The media points out various methods employed for this destruction. Out of these, the theft of artefacts remains the highest mode of destruction to archaeological remains. According to press reports and Archaeological Department information the highest number of artefact theft occurred from temple premises and private owners.

The ultimate goal of stealing these artefacts was to export them to foreign markets, in order to obtain valuable foreign exchange. It was clear that illegal trade organizations were behind this. The ultimate result is the increase of the volume of illegal trade.

Thus the aim of this paper is to cover the following areas of study:

- i. To find out the causes of the increase in the stealing of archaeological remains/antiques
- ii. The nature of the causes
- iii. To minimise the situation

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