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BOOK REVIEWS

found today. Included here is the imperial mon of the chrysanthemum (or the Mitsubishi emblem) and quite a few cities that have adopted a mon as their municipal emblem.

Spelling mistakes are usually not something worth criticising, however, a few mistakes have to be pointed out, especially when it comes to Japanese or the wrong blazon of a *mon*: p. 29: figure 32F is actually figure 33F; p. 33: the examples concerning “facing in” and “facing out” have been allocated the wrong way; p. 36: wrong designation for figure 51D; p. 45 *hitatsu* (sic!) instead of *hitotsu* (meaning “one” [quantifier]; see also p. 90, same mistake); p. 67, nos. 106 and 107: the example of the stylised plum blossom, to my knowledge, is not *umeboshi* 梅干 (pickled and dried plums) but *umebachi* 梅鉢¹²; p. 109, footnote 1: Minamoto, not Miramoto. Besides avoiding mistakes such as these, for those who study mon it is vital to master the Japanese language at least to some extent to provide Japanese characters for clarification in cases such as on p. 38, where *tsuru* means ‘vine’ 蔓 and *not*, as usually, ‘crane’ 鶴.

As a basic guide this book is excellent value for money. While it does not add much new to our understanding of the Japanese mon and the flags whereupon mon were displayed, it was not the aim of the authors to explore how mon were inherited, assumed and bestowed. These are interesting aspects that might shed light on function and usage. If we are to really understand mon, a cultural historical approach is required. What the present volume has shown once again is the sheer complexity of the Japanese mon.

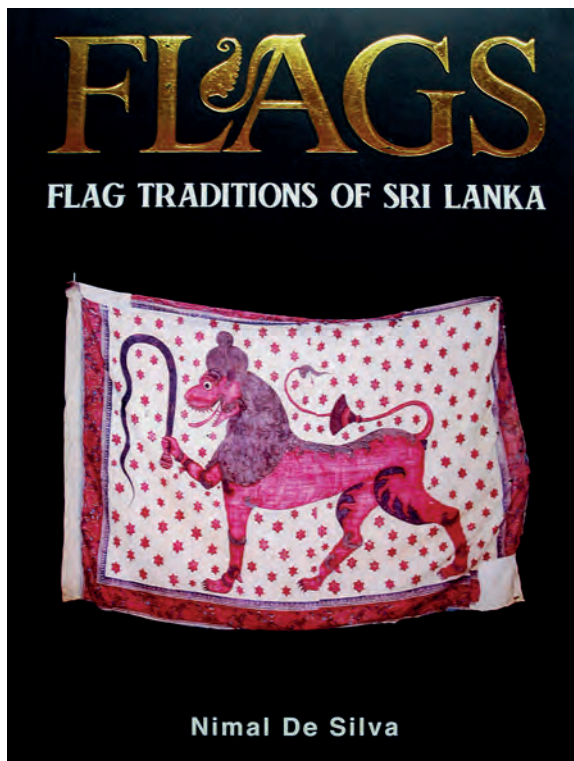
Julia E. Hartmann

Nimal de Silva, *Flags: flag traditions of Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Padmapani Publishers, 2012, iv + 248 pp. Hard cover. ISBN 978-955-51235-1-8. 51 LKR.

This excellently produced, large format, and beautifully illustrated volume was an excellent airport purchase, being an authoritative and exhaustive treatment of a specialised area of heraldry and vexillology. The book is divided into five chapters detailing the tradition of flag use in Sri Lanka, flags used for specific purposes – administrative, religious and caste flags, and finally the art and culture of flag design. Many flags can be described due to the initiative of the Colombo museum, the director of which initiated the collection of flags and information on them in 1812. These were published as memoirs of the Museum, and brought together by E W Perrera in 1916. In addition to these and other existing sources, Prof de Silva discovered over 300 original flags preserved in the National Museum, in private collections, and in Buddhist temples.

Models in gold, silver and bronze including depictions of flags have been found in Sri Lanka dating back to the 2nd century BC. In addition there are many literary texts describing the design and use of flags, and a Buddhist text of the 5th century AD goes into great detail on the design, dimensions and ways of fixing flags (p 203). There were eight named types of flag categorised by size and colour. Other documents describe processions, and list the flags displayed in royal and religious events. The principal charges, particularly those of an animal or mythological nature are described. Influences in flag design came from southern India, and from Europe from the 16th century, as a

¹² Cf. Hartmann p. 106.



result of successive Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisation. A 17th century flag of Zeeland, depicting a lion holding a sword and a sheaf of arrows is invoked as having been influential (pp 29–30, 150).

The chapter on administrative flags begins with royal standards, including an account of the rediscovery of the flags of the Kandyan kingdom captured by General Robert Brownrigg, and hung in the Royal Hospital at Chelsea. Brownrigg received this flag as an augmentation of his arms in 1815. The account of Dutch flags includes the 12 coats of arms assigned by the Dutch to the cities they held. The colonial flags were subject to local interpretation. A good example is a 19th century flag showing the lion and unicorn supporting a crowned lotus shield (p 65). The section on British rule includes the arms of 15 Governors General of Ceylon from 1815 until the republic of Sri Lanka was declared in 1972. This is followed by a catalogue of flags of the administrative regions and *Rata* of the Kandyan kingdom.

The religious flags are accompanied by commentary which often gives background information on the complex mythological themes depicted. The description of caste flags also includes summaries of the history of castes and clans within Sri Lankan society.

The many high quality colour photographs of historical flags, and drawings of flags ancient and modern are a joy in showing the range, variety, imagination and colour of a flag tradition little known in the west.

Tony Wilmott