

## COMMENTARY

## Abusing the elephant: pseudo-specification and prognostication in ancient elephant lore

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This review of mine will restrict itself to a few observations - I fear, not of a very favourable nature - on some old manuscripts on elephants which have gathered together folklore once prevalent in India and Sri Lanka, but which, perhaps from sentimental reasons, have so far not been shown up by scholars for what they really are - a lot of baloney! I will look at these works from two aspects - firstly, their attempt to distinguish elephants, not on the zoological basis of genus and species, as should be, but on a pernicious classification into caste familiar to India and our society, and secondly, their concern with the animal's anatomy, not out of a biological or physiological interest, as we find in Aristotle several centuries before, but from pseudo-scientific pretensions that by its peculiarities it could presage the destinies of men and empires. I will however both enter and exit from my cursory review of these texts with brief etymological exegeses which could be of some relevance to elephants in this context.

Though elephants, including the now extinct *Mammuthus* ranged the plains and forests of the world with the first men, who, as you know, either avoided or fled them, or on occasion surrounded and hunted down individual beasts, the nomenclature by which the animal is identified, is not merely of relatively recent origin, but has an interesting etymology in the Greek. For, with the Greeks *elephas* originally applied not to the animal himself but to "ivory" or "tusk", which came to them as an item of commerce, which they procured and crafted long before they had any idea of the nature of the beast which produced it. For, by the time the poets, Homer, Hesiod and Pindar were using it in that sense in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.<sup>1</sup> the Syrian (an *Elephas maximus*) and the Egyptian (a *Loxodonta africana*) were both extinct in those lands, the former by the 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the

latter, even before the dynastic period of Egypt (pre 3200 B.C.). Greek travellers of the like of Hecateus, Hellanicus, Skylax and Herodotus had still to begin visiting distant lands. Nor had the Greeks started sending out colonies to places where they could have encountered people coming from elephant countries, who could give them a clear notion of the source of the ivory they called *elephas*.

Of recent times there has been a certain amount of conjecture on the etymology of "elephant" itself (the word for the animal that passed into many of the European languages) and naturally also on "elephas" (ivory) that made its appearance in Greek before Homer. The closest of these is that *elephas* comes from the Semitic *aleph*, which also gives us, through the Phoenicians, the first letter of the Greek and Roman, hence other European alphabets. The only difficulty is that without qualification it simply referred to "ox".<sup>2</sup> The Arabic *fil*, with the article *al* prefixed has been suggested (hence *al-fil*)<sup>3</sup>, but of greater likelihood is the Hebrew *ibah*, which itself strongly recalls the Sanskrit *ibha(s)*, and with *el*, the definite article in Semitic (hence *el-ibah=el-ibhas(s)*) gives a convincing phonetic equivalent of the Greek *el-ephas*.<sup>4</sup> As for the *ant* in *elephant*, which unaccountably bothered Sri Emerson Tennent and led him to consider Pott's suggestion that it is possibly derived from "hindi", i.e. "Indian",<sup>5</sup> I have shown that it comes simply (and quite meaningfully at that) from the genitive case in Greek of *elephas*, i.e. *elephantos*.<sup>6</sup>

If then Greek *elephas* for "tusk" or "ivory" which gave rise to the word "elephant" and which the Greeks themselves used to cover the two extant species (they did not observe a distinction) of the sub-family Elephantinae, i.e. the *Loxodonta africana* (the African elephant-which Herodotus mentions) and the *Elephas*

*maximus* (the Asian elephant - which Aristotle examined), this etymology, pursued a bit further has an even more interesting possibility re elephants *a propos* tusks - and nowhere else than in our Sri Lankan scenario. For, in the same way that the Sanskrit *ibhas*, with Arab *el* prefixed passed through the Arab trade in Indian ivory into Greek to give *el-ephas*, *al-ibha(s)* could have given rise to the word *aliya* as is used among us. Evidence of this is the fact that *aliya* is of late appearance in Sinhala (c. 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). The regular words for elephants had been such as *hasti*, *gaja*, *atha*. Besides, *aliya* would have, like the Tamil *aliyan*, which is derived from it, originated in the region of the Wannu where from antiquity Arabs and their descendants, the intrepid panikkeas, trapped and traded in elephants and ivory,<sup>7</sup> and hence would have employed this new term for the purpose (for them most useful) of distinguishing the tuskless of the species from the tusker.

Thus it is that with no zoological difference, a distinction has been struck between two animals of the same species on the basis of what is no more than an "accident" - the possession and non-possession of tusks. As is well known, the value of the tusker over the non-tusker is both utilitarian and cosmetic - tusks are valued as merchandise, the animal himself for ceremonial - and both (as far as the Asian elephant is concerned) have depleted their number, either by killing them off or withdrawing them from reproduction in the wild.

With this distinction of *aliya* from *atha* in the Sri Lankan and indeed Asian context, and considering that around 94% are tuskless as against 94% being tusked among African elephants, there arises the question - what are its tusks to the elephant, an evolutionary perk, with which the *aliya* has sadly not been gifted, or an evolutionary relict, which the *aliya* is well rid of? Here however we must leave this question well alone as it is of no direct relevance to the present discussion<sup>8</sup>

Of the *Loxodonta*, two species are scientifically acknowledged, the *L. africana africana*, or bush elephant the largest living land mammal, and the *L.*

*africana cyclotis* or forest elephant, a smaller animal once exploited by the Cathagenians for war, and to which surely belonged those elephants which Hannibal brought over the Alps into Rome in 218 B.C. not to mention that formidable battle-elephant with just one tusk (*alter dente multilato*) whom the Romans nicknamed Surus, or "the Stake".<sup>9</sup> Like these sub-species of the African, the three sub-species recognized of the Asian i.e. the Sri Lankan *Elephas maximus maximus*, the mainland *E. maximus indicus* and the Sumatran *E. maximus sumatranus* manifest little difference except in size, pigment or hirsuteness, and so are popularly designated in terms of the habitat countries. Despite this, one now and again sees a palaeontologist or zoologist resorting to scanty or frivolous evidence (even pictorial, as from prehistoric cave-paintings), to identify new subspecies when such difference can sufficiently be accounted for on the basis of climate, terrain, fodder or some hereditary or genetic aberration, as much as if found among human beings.<sup>10</sup>

Still, to the extent that such overspecification claims to be grounded on science, however subtle the considerations be, they can well be left to elephantologists to agree or disagree. As far as I am concerned, and here, the issues of overspecification based on dubious claims directs my attention to a bunch of elephant lore from India and Sri Lanka, which, likewise basing themselves on such trivia or accidental features of the elephant's physiognomy, assigns castes to each and every animal, going even beyond this to read off them such things as the animal's psychology, intelligence and longevity, culminating in an esoteric exercise of making prognostications on the owner, his wife, his son, even his wretched mahout,- and that too to an amazing degree of pinpointedness!

To this range of pseudo-sciences may belong whole corpus of elephant *mantrams*, the wanted *nila sastra*<sup>11</sup> and perhaps a good deal of the so-called *ali vedakama*, including its pharmacology, which are still held in dumb admiration by a credulous public from a failure on the part of researchers to test them out for what they are worth. For, in my opinion, it may be that by posing as true knowledge, it was this kind of heresiology that kept a true science of the elephant

from evolving in this country and India, the like of which one saw possible in the studies of Aristotle, Aetius and others in classical Greece, even when the animal was so alien to the land. It may be equally true that such bigotry even deprived the animal himself of the true understanding and sympathy he really deserved in countries where his service to mankind during their long history has been inestimable. For, as will be seen, quite apart from misreading signs and symptoms which they manifest or develop, often enough elephants have been deemed to presage misfortune to people and indeed as often to be deemed to be the cause for them!

Pernicious as the caste system has been among men, it seems even more baseless and perverse to have foisted it on elephants, as in fact it has been done in India and Sri Lanka. Besides, caste is not, in the case of elephants, derived from their heredity - for nearly all elephants have been captured from the wild, and of those few born in captivity itself from already pregnant females, only the mother could be known with certainty. (This perhaps is the reason why we are told of Dutthagamini's royal mount, Kandula, that his father was seen and recognized as a Chaddanta when he brought him and left him by a watering place at the birth of the prince).<sup>12</sup> In general however the assignation of caste is to individual animals, and made upon casual features and a pretentious wisdom concerning them.

The Indian *Gaja Sastra* distributes elephants into three castes - *Bhadra*, which is the highest, *Manda* the next, and *Mirga*, the lowest, identifying each by a distinctive set of physical and psychological qualities. So far so good. But then it goes on to admit mixtures of two of these primary castes, calling the result *Misra*, and of all three of them, calling them *Sankirma*. Thus it is possible that, as Deraniyagala's evidence shows,<sup>13</sup> an animal may be in the chimerical plight of possessing the point of one caste anteriorly, those of another posteriorly; others may have the head of one caste, the belly of second, the hind quarters of a third, while in yet others the head and back may be of those of one caste, the trunk, belly, limbs and tail those of another. Recognition of caste features is based on

surface anatomy, and the scrutiny is effected by dividing the elephant's body horizontally and vertically into a grid of nine segments.

This is all very well as when a butcher carves a carcass into "cuts", or when one tries to spot the points a cross-bred dog has inherited from either parent, perhaps even the features a child had genetically come by from this side and that - here in the case of elephants even using the mythological prototypes for the identifications. But to grade them in general as superior or inferior on the mode of arrangement of the parts reflecting one or the other caste is scientifically meaningless and totally prejudicial. For example we are told:

"Those with *Bhadra* characters in front, *Manda* characters in the middle and *Mirga* posteriorly are good. If the animal is *Manda* in front, *Mirga* in the middle and *Bhadra* posteriorly, the animal is mediocre, and if *Mirga* anteriorly and *Bhadra* mesially it is inferior."<sup>14</sup>

How ridiculous such caste-based schemata are seen if *mutatis mutandis*, they are applied to the Indians themselves - a man's head might be *Kshatriya*, his chest *Brahmin*, belly *Sudra* and his limbs *Vaisya*. Or to look at it from the caste system in our own country - head *Karava*, chest *Govi*, belly *Salagama*, limbs etc. some other. Such men might be deemed superior, while a reshuffling of caste and parts might render them mediocre or inferior!

Making confusion worse confounded are the further Indian divisions of elephants according to seven *amsa* - *Brahma*, *Indramsa*, *Varuna*, *Chandra* etc, each with its own characteristics and attributes, and again into ten *satvas* (e.g. *Deva*, *Kshatriya*, *Sudra*, *Sarpa* etc.), also with their own distinctive physical qualities and behavioural tendencies.<sup>15</sup> Of the *Vaisya satva* elephants it is said that the are,

"patient, endure heat or cold equally well, eager to eat flesh, drunkards, mischievous, cowardly, very willing learners,"<sup>16</sup>

and of the *Sarpa satva*,

"gait zig-zag like the track of a snake, will attack a friend without provocation. Continually hisses like a snake, will not feed when in rut. Odor bad, resembling sponge, toddy, mud, or flesh."<sup>17</sup>

Cutting across these bases of categorization come yet others, this time classifying elephants according to colour, smell, ability to transport loads, patience and locality of capture.<sup>18</sup>

"Good elephants smell like lotus, khus-khus or jasmine. Bad ones smell like mutton, crow, tortoise, fish, toddy, rut water, perspiration, saliva, urine and dung."<sup>19</sup>

"Elephants suited for war or the hunt possessing brown hair all over, especially on the face and emitting a body odor resembling Kalagaru occur in the Eastern Punjab and Thaneshwar."<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the life of the individual elephant itself is divided into twelve ten-year periods (*dasā*), each period manifesting different characteristics, while the first *dasā* is even treated year by year. Of the eighth year of this first *dasā* (i.e. when the animal is eight years old) the description is:

"Penis often erect, will stand beside females. Passion causes them to injure their trunk and limbs. Rut water will ooze from their temples. They have a high immunity from disease, wounds heal rapidly. Temper serene, fit for all types of work but not for arena combat."<sup>21</sup>

Such detailed testimonia would sound almost like astrological analyses and forecasts, did they not pose off as the result of scientific observations. By themselves and simply, they may pretend to be something of the latter, but taken together with the kinds of accompanying projections we have seen, which have their own respective qualities, *caste*, *amsa*, *satvas* etc. the elephant presents itself as a giant jig-saw puzzle in which similar (sometimes identical) pieces of five or six lesser jig-saws are all mixed up, not just physical ones but also psychological, behavioural and indeed, (as we shall see), even prognostic.

*Gajah 20 (2001)*

Not to be outdone by Indian elephant lore are the Sinhala treatises of some antiquity such as the *Gajayoga Satakaya*, the *Hasti Lakshana Vidyawa*, the *Gajatu Lakshanaya*, the *Maha Gaja Lakshana Sangarahava* and the *Atunge Lakshana*, which make even more fantastic claims of reading the elephant, starting with caste and graduating to a charlatan science that renders the animal a walking oracle-more often than not, a walking calamity.

The first four of these texts distribute elephants into ten castes, assigning them names such as *Gangeia* (Gangetic or rivery), *Tambara* (coppery), *Pingala* (*tawny*), *Mangala* (*auspicious*), of which the *Chaddanta* (six-tusked) was surely the noblest. This last is described as follows:

"Body and eyes golden in colour, nails resemble light-coloured sealing wax, eyes elongate, limbs of medium length, hands and feet elongate, not very hairy; trunk, penis, tail touch the ground; age 200 years."<sup>22</sup>

and in the *Maha Gaja Lakshana Sngarava* as:

"Trunk and tail elongate, tall or medium-sized body, forehead and bump slope upwards, tusks thick, ears curved, hair appears like golden chains upon the body, nails shaped like the waxing moon. Does not lose temper even when molested, fond of dainty food; span of life 120 years. Brings fame and honour to the king."<sup>23</sup>

Descriptions of this nature sometimes border on the poetic, lifting the elephant out of the world of reality and into a demesne like that of the *Chaddanta Jataka* (No 514), in which fantasy reigns. The *Maha Gaja Lakshana Sangarahava* alludes to a psychology of the breed and indeed to a prognosis concerning its owner - the sort of thing Indian lore also dabbled in, and of which the *Atunge Lakshana* abounds. For, this last mentioned work gives a catalogue of *subha lakunu* (propitious characteristics) and *asubha lakunu* (unpropitious characteristics) which may be found in elephants, much as if they were lines on the palm of one's hand of planetary positions determined by one's horoscope, which go on to presage, not only about the

elephant himself (sometimes that he will soon die) but about the king who owns him, his queen, his sons, his ministers, has country or even the lowly mahout.<sup>24</sup> For example one finds among the *subha lakunu*:

"Elephants having reddish lips, tongue and mouth. Thin eyes similar to those of the house sparrow, perfect mouth, long and straight tail; and the elephants having a large frontal bump (*kumbasthala*), two broad ears and perfect mouth, will bring wealth to your Majesty" (No.2)

"O king, elephants answering the following descriptions are suitable for you to ride on - Right tusk having elevated tips, face and long trunk covered with reddish coloured spots. Unseen limb joints and well-formed hind part of body." (No.3)

"Soft tusks and nails. Long tail and trunk. Eyes like emeralds. Reddish spotted face and trunk. Elephants possessing the above characters will live long." (No.4)

To this list is added a subscript, and quite sensibly, saying, "Out of a thousand there cannot be found even one possessing all the above qualities and no single elephant will possess all these characters." For my part, I feel that many of these aberrations and symptoms deserve the speedy attention of a vet. Instead, in the recounting of the *asubha lakunu*, there are a whole lot more of this nature.<sup>25</sup>

"The elephant whose colour is similar to that of a red earthworm will bring disaster to the kingdom through fire. Also elephants having conspicuous testicle area and white and multi-coloured spots on the body will bring disaster to the country." (No. 3)

"A double-nailed elephant should be discarded immediately. It will bring disaster to the king and the entire court." (No. 7)

"There will be continuous sorrow and weeping in the house of the owner of an ugly elephant from whose eyes tears trickle down always." (No. 13)

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"The possession of an elephant with a narrow right cheek will result in the owner having frequent quarrels with his sons." (No.21)

"If the left cheek is narrow, then the king will disagree with his ministers." (No. 22)

"A dumb elephant will cause lack of rain." (No 23)

"A deaf elephant will cause loss of wealth and induce fear through enemies. (No.24)

An elephant with a single tusk will ruin the king's people." (No. 35)

"O King, the elephant that casts no shadow will cause trouble to your friends." (No. 25)

"Any elephant with a rough scrotum will ruin its owner's tribe and destroy the king's wealth." (No. 31)

"The possession of an elephant with a small penis, spots of itch on its body, smellers, nails and trunk, will result in the death of the owner and his relations through want of food." (No. 32)

"An elephant with hair on his head and tail and a charred-looking skin will result in the destruction of his mahout's house by fire." (No.15)

This time I would like to add my own subscript: "What would the situation be if the king, or anyone else for that matter, possessed several elephants at the same who possessed diverse characteristics presaging contradictory happening?"<sup>26</sup>

A great deal of this *hasti astra* is, it will be seen, based on a belief in sympathetic magic and is nothing more than gross superstition. Information of the nature that we have here could only have been gathered by scientific experiment, repeated observation, divine dispensation or simply fetid imaginings. It is for elephant scientists (if indeed they would consider it worth their while!) to take a few of these and test them for their

degree of veracity, and this is what I suggest be done, as I would in the case of the *nila* hypothesis. The results would declare whether our ancients were in possession of some remarkable knowledge of elephants or had been gulled, and gulled others all these centuries with a farrago of stupidities that gave pretence as knowledge acquired by a serious science of elephantology in this island. On the other hand, if they are what I think they are, all these ancient works that have provided this information are only a literature of make-believe, with in some cases adverse repercussions on the innocent elephant. It is only by inquiry, however cursory that be-that this literature will be seen in its true perspective, rather than by letting it survive uncommented upon out of a misplaced sense of patriotism - or whatever. It is even possible that, as with some Sinhala folk beliefs re elephants that have how been established scientifically;<sup>27</sup> there may be a degree of factuality (as some claim for the *nila* theory) in at least one or two items that have drifted to our times with this great deal of floatsam and jetsam, that are worthy of our notice.

As I stated at the outset, I would like to conclude on an etymological note. This time it is on the name of one of the castes the Sinhalese identify in elephants, in fact the most well known of them for having also a mythical dimension - I mean the *Chaddanta*. For Wilhelm Geiger translates *chaddanta* when he refers to Kandula, the most famous of the breed and perhaps the most famous elephant in all history, whom King Dutthagamani road to victory over the Damilas in the first century B.C. as "of the six-tusked race", even though the realistic tradition makes him very much a two-tusked animal.<sup>28</sup> This ambiguity inherent in the name also looks back to that much-loved of jatakas I referred to, the *Chaddanta Jataka*, in which the Bodhisatta, born as a majestic elephant of that breed, lived with his herd close to a lake also called "Chaddanta", and was killed for his resplendent tusks.

Now, it is quite unlikely that the herd got its name from the lake - for whoever heard of a six-tusked lake? If, on the other hand, the lake was named after the elephants who frequented it, the name of the breed or caste must be older than the fourth/third century, B.C.,

when the majority of the jatakas were composed and inspired probably by Airavanta, four-tusked and winged elephant of Indian mythology, the king of elephants and mount of the god, Indra.<sup>29</sup> the scholiast on the *jataka* explains the Pali *chabbisāna* (Skt. *shadvishāna*) "six tusked" as *chabbanna*, meaning six-coloured perhaps, as H.T.Francis says, "more completely to identify the hero of the story with the Buddha."<sup>30</sup> But this is awkward, as the tusks are at the same time being called "white without flaw" (*seta subhāseta*). So we are left with a six-tusked elephant, of which the queen in the story wanted a pair, or simply a two-tusked animal, the origin of whose *kula* - name goes way beyond the *jataka* itself, and to a different origin.

This I find in a simpler and more ready-at-hand explanation of *chaddanta*, only it takes the romance out of this particular variety of elephant and makes him just another elephant. This is to take the more immediate meaning of *chaddanta* as "six-toothed". For tusks or tusks excepted, the Asian elephant manifests a total of six teeth - two molars on the upper jaw which grind against four on the jaw.

However, in his *History of Animals* Aristotle, directing his attention to the elephant's teeth, had observed:

"The elephant has four teeth on either side, by which it munches its food, grinding it like so much barley-meal; and besides it has two large teeth (or tusks)"<sup>31</sup>

*Ho d' elephas odontas men echei tettaras eph' hekatēra, hois katēgazetai tēn trophēn (learner d' hōsper krimna), chōris de toutōn. allous duo tous megalous.*

By Aristotle's reckoning the elephant would then have (beside the tusks) eight teeth-or to put it differently, four molars on the upper jaw which grind against four on the lower jaw. As may be guessed, the error has arisen from Aristotle's unawareness of the phenomenon of molar succession and the fact of having had but one animal or two for his study.<sup>32</sup>

So then, if by *chaddanta* was meant "six-toothed", not "six-tusked", credit may be recovered for Indian antiq-

uity through the right reckoning of the elephants dentistry - only, it renders not just one caste of elephants as *Chaddanta* but every single animal - a lesson from elephants a caste-ridden society could profitably turn upon itself!

Little then is left of the *Chaddanta's* description if its poetic quality of gold-coloured body, hair and eyes, nails of sealing-wax colour resembling the waxing moon and a few other distinctive qualities are excepted. It is not even an exceptionally large animal, notwithstanding the epithet *saddanta* used in Sinhala for an extra large person. All that we would in the circumstances be left with for the *Chaddanta* would be from our classic example, Kandula, which are probably the psychological quality of self-control under pain, as when he was scalded by molten lead at the siege of Vijithanagara, and the psychic quality of bringing fame and honour to the king who rode him.<sup>33</sup> And both these, belonging as they do, to that mass of folklore that I have just focused attention on this paper, brings us back to where we began - the need to comb through such literature to determine what material has resulted from realistic inquiry or observation worthy of science, and what needs to be swept away as superstition and fantasy.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Liddell and Scott *Greek - English Lexicon* s.v.
- <sup>2</sup> Hence the old Latin *bos Lucas* i.e. "Lucanian ox" (Lucr. v. 1301) as Pausanias calls the rhinoceros *tauros aithiopikos*.
- <sup>3</sup> Bochart; see J.E.Tennent *Ceylon. An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical*, vol. II part VIII 'The Elephant', London (1860) ch. 1p. 271 n.1
- <sup>4</sup> And refers to the elephant itself without the ambiguity of a derivation from the purely Semitic *eleph* ("ox"). Supported by Benary, see Tennent *loc.cit.* See also Liddel and Scott *loc.cit.*
- <sup>5</sup> On the parallel of *tamar-hindi* = "indian date" i.e. tamarind. See Tennent *loc.cit.*
- <sup>6</sup> Like Gk. *gigas - gigantes* - giant, or *Aias - Aiantos* = Ajax, See my 'A note on the Etymology of Elephant', *Journal of the R.A.S. (Sri Lanka)* vol. XXXVIII p.164 - 168.
- <sup>7</sup> The Sinhala *aliya* makes its first appearance in the *Yogaratanakara*, dated to the 16th century, and afterwards in the 18th century *Sangarajasadadhuchariyava*. For Tamil *aliyan* and its derivation from Sinhala, see S. Gnanapragasar publ. *The Etymological and Comparative Lexicon of the Tamil Language*, Chunnakam (1938) p. 153. Tamil too used it for the tuskless elephant. Elsewhere in Asia the tuskless bull was called a *mukna*. On the panikkeas, see Tennent *op.cit.* p. 335, also p. 336-337
- <sup>8</sup> See however my "The Irony of Ivory" *Loris* vol. XX, no. 2, (Dec. 1993) p. 56-60
- <sup>9</sup> See Pliny *N.H.* viii. 11 who mentions the bravery of the animal. A pun on his name is found in a verse of Ennius - *unus surus surum ferre, tamen defendere possent*, while a humorous description of Pseudolus posing off as a slave called Surus in Plautus' comedy *Pseudolus* (vs. 1218 f.) emulates that of an elephant.
- <sup>10</sup> See Richard Carrington *Elephants* Pelican Books (1958). Each of these two species (African and Asiatic) shows local variations in structure and habits in different regions, and these are sometimes accompanied by important differences in external appearance. If the variations are very marked, scientists regard the animals as a distinct subdivisions of the species, and a third name is added to the specific name to distinguish it". (p.25). "Subspecies of both these elephants are recognized, but only the African forest elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) has any special claim to importance." (p.28). "The differences between the various Asiatics subspecies are in any case so trivial that it will not be necessary ..... to make further distinction between them." (p.28)
- <sup>11</sup> See my "Nila in Elephants: Physical Fact or Human Input", *Loris*, vol. XIX, No. 6, (Dec. 1992) p. 199-203

- <sup>12</sup> *Mahavamsa*, xxii. 60-63.
- <sup>13</sup> For the contents of the Ancient and Medieval Indian and Sri Lankan texts referred to in this article I rely completely on the English summaries given of them by P.E.P. Deraniyagala in *Some Extinct Elephants, their Relatives and the Two Living Species*, Govt. Press, Ceylon (August 1955). Appendix I and II p. 130-139. On nila, see p. 140-142, on medicaments p. 142-146 and on charms, p. 146-147.
- <sup>14</sup> Deraniyagala *op.cit.* p.130. The elephant, according to Indian folklore, is a devolution, not evolution - and from Iravata (Ariyavanta), a four-tusked winged male, and Abhramu, a tuskless winged female. The *Manda* caste resulted from the curse of a sage whose hermitage was wrecked by falling branches when a Bhadra elephant perched on a tree above it! Deraniyagala *op.cit.* p.132.
- <sup>15</sup> Deraniyagala *op.cit.* p. 133-134.
- <sup>16</sup> Deraniyagala p. 133: *Satvas* no. 5. Elephants do not eat flesh. The idea possibly have risen from the sight of an elephant holding a torn limb in its mouth. Carrington *op.cit.* p. 81 ("The fear of rouge elephants has even on occasion caused them to be branded man-eaters.") and my 'Man-Eating Elephant: Reply', in *Loris* vol. XXII no. 1 (June 1985) Letters p. 30. But a flesh-eating elephant is nothing surprising here - among the *asubha lakunu* is one which does not cast a shadow!
- <sup>17</sup> Deraniyagala *loc.cit.* *Satvas* no. 9. The parallelism in this case, as in the elephants equated to other *satvas* (living beings) is obvious. Cp. *Deva*, beautiful, shiny, strong, or *Sudra* ..... wil eat garbage and dry twigs, emit a smell like black scorpions etc.
- <sup>18</sup> Deraniyagala, p. 134-135.
- <sup>19</sup> Deraniyagala, p. 134 item (b).
- <sup>20</sup> Deraniyagala, p. 132 item (5)
- <sup>21</sup> Deraniyagala, p. 132 (eighth year)
- <sup>22</sup> Deraniyagala, p. 136 item (10)
- <sup>23</sup> Deraniyagala, p. 137 item (10)
- <sup>24</sup> The Medieval *A tunge Lakshana*, says Deraniyagala, was sent to him by Mr. N.G. Ikangantileke. For the *subha lakunu*, see Deraniyagala *op.cit.* p. 137-138.
- <sup>25</sup> Deraniyagala, *op.cit.* p. 138-139.
- <sup>26</sup> Compare the ancient Greek and Roman practice of reading the entrails - especially the liver of a sacrificial victim, or the flight, direction and cry of birds. Here however only a single and otherwise undisclosed omen was read in any given crisis.
- <sup>27</sup> For instance the popular belief confirmed by T.A. Bongso *et.al.* 'Estimation of shoulder Height from Forefoot Circumference in the Asian Elephant, *Elephas maximus*' *Ceylon Journal. of Sci.* (Bio.Sec.) vol. 1 XIV nos 1 & 2 (April 1981) p. 79-82. (This had already been checked in 1881 by a Mr. Mitchell, Secretary, on a single female in the Regents Park Zoo) (see Tennent *op.cit.* p.337 footnote). Also the folklore preserved in *An Historical Relation of Ceylon*, p.22 on the elephants' care of the young and allomothering, the last of which was recently researched on African elephants by P.C. Lee ('Allomothering among African Elephants' in *Animal Behaviour* vl. XXXV. p. 278-291)
- <sup>28</sup> *Mahavamsa loc.cit.* In a freak case, an elephant may develop a split tusk; see Carrington *loc.cit.* Prehistoric Gomphetheridae has tusks on both upper and lower jaws. One wonders whether (leaving his wings alone) the conception of the mythological Airavanta as a four-tusked elephant was not all imagination but owed itself to Gomphotherid fossil - find in antiquity. (Shortly after I wrote this note, my attention was drawn to a similar conjecture expressed by Bob Bloomfield of the Natural History Museum of London that Cyclops, the one-eyed giant of Horner's Odyssey. could well have been imagined from the fossilised head of a dwarf elephant)

- <sup>29</sup> See n, 28 above. Interesting Pictet (see Tennent *loc. cit.*) sought to derive the word "elephant" from *Airavanta* (or *Ailavanta*). But it is hardly likely that the Greeks or anyone else would have rummaged in Indian mythology for a word for elephant when there would already have been one easily available in the ordinary parlance of the Indians.
- <sup>30</sup> E.B. Cowell transl. The *Jataka* vol. London (1975) p. footnote.
- <sup>31</sup> *H.A.* ii. 5. 50lb 30-33. Aristotle goes on to say that the male's tusks are upturned, while those of the female, which are small, turn downwards. He adds that when the young are born they already have teeth - which shows he had seen one or more at birth as well.
- <sup>32</sup> It is possible that in the elephants studied by Aristotle the succeeding upper jaw molars had already come into play as in a skull of an elephant examined by me recently at the temple at Aukana.
- <sup>33</sup> For the Vijithanagara episode see *Mahavamsa* xxv. 28-40. As for the wisdom of fighting from elephant-back, history is not all supportive. Certainly some kings did have their reservations, and fighting from horseback, lived to fight another day-even prince Dutthagamini himself upon his Sindhi mare Dhigathunika, in which episode Kandula did not come off well (see *Mahavamsa* xxiv. 12-21 and my 'Kandula: Elucidations on the Sinhala War Elephant' *Journal R.A.S. (Sri Lanka)* vol. XXX (N.S) (1985 - 86) p. 47f.)

