FactsDid you know

The Ankam duel in traditional Kerala

In traditional Kerala, people and families settled unresolved deadly offenses through a formal duel called an Ankam. The law allowed this duel.

The parties did not fight in lawless street combat. They made a formal contract before the local chieftain, who acted as umpire. The main parties had to deposit a large battle wager, up to 1,000 fanams (around 250 rupees). This money went directly into the chieftain's treasury as a recognized source of state revenue (ankam). It was a lucrative right sometimes attached to and transferred with feudal land holdings.

The disputing parties rarely entered the ring themselves. They hired professional champions to fight for them. Custom held that combatants had up to twelve years of specialized training to learn their weapons for the arena. Custom said the contest could only end with the death of one combatant. Both champions settled all their affairs before they stepped into the arena to fight to the finish.