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# SIGIRIYA



By

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Sketch showing layout of Sigiriya  
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*Cover block :*

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# Sigiriya

“ At Sigiri, of abundant splendour, situated in the island of Ceylon, we saw in happy mood, the rock which captivates the mind of people . . . ”

—*from a ninth century graffito at Sigiriya.*

## Introductory and historical

It is rarely that man matches the marvels of his handiwork to the wonders of nature with such signal success as at the famous ancient city of Sigiriya. The remains of this once glorious city lie some five miles off Inamaluwa on the Dambulla-Habarana Road. The site is roughly on  $7^{\circ} 57'$  North latitude and  $80^{\circ} 45'$  East longitude.

Such freaks of nature as occur at Sigiriya are unusual in the extreme. A rock of gneiss rises almost sheer to a height of 600 ft. from the surrounding land. A straggling pile of nondescript boulders lie at its foot in picturesque confusion. In its primeaval state too the scene at this plot of land would have been spectacular. (For a view of the rock from the north *see* Plate I).

It was in or about the 2nd century B. C. that this site was first noticed as a fit place to live in—not in comfort as is the wont of kings, but in seclusion as recluses do. A number of caves, not less than twenty, located among the boulders which cluster round the rock of Sigiri, some with short inscriptions on them, bear testimony to this early occupation of the site. Some of these caves carry several layers of painting on the ‘cave-roofs’ and it is quite possible that the bottom layers of painting on these are contemporary with the time when religious recluses first made their abode in the caves. As nature made it, this site was suitable only for recluses who shunned the world, ~~but a man came along~~ who turned it into a dream-city, magnificent and fabulous. Only



the barest vestiges of the structures which graced Sigiri in its heyday have survived but these furnish sufficient evidence to the grandeur and the marvel the city had been.

Sigiri (the lion-rock) earned its present name in the 5th century when King Kassapa (477-495 A.D.) put his prodigious building operations into effect and set up an immense lion of brick and stucco to guard the entrance of his palace. Before that, when the caves at the site were dwelt in by men of a different order, who shunned comfort and pomp, Sigiriya had another name which has, however, not survived.

We are told that Sigiri was passed on to the *Sangha* (the community of Buddhist monks) after Kassapa. At the beginning of the 7th century Sanghatissa II (618 A.D.) and his son fleeing for their lives, disguised as monks, were apprehended on the way, brought to Sigiriya and executed. Sanghatissa's successor, Mugalan III (618-623 A.D.) too was put to death somewhere near Sigiri.

From documents super-imposed on slabs containing earlier inscriptions Professor Paranavitana has recently recovered further information relating to Sigiriya. Somewhere in the 10th century A.D. the Chola king Virarajendra landed in Ceylon with a powerful army. A sixth Mahinda, of whom so far little has been heard, was holding away at Anuradhapura at the time. An army of this King commanded by a Pandyan Prince closed in with the forces of Virarajendra and defeated the latter at a place near Sigiriya. The defeat however was only temporary and the Cholas once more rallied their ranks. Sometime later and after other engagements elsewhere, this same Pandyan prince met the main Chola army in another encounter near Sigiriya and on this occasion dealt a crushing defeat.

These references of the 7th and 10th centuries to Sigiriya seem to indicate that Sigiriya lay on the road from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruwa, at the time, and that Sigiriya was still a place of much importance.

As the *Mahavamsa* (*Vide* Chapters 38 and 39) would have us believe, Sigiri was the work of a man over whose head the sword of Damocles hung ever so threateningly, of a man who sat, as it were,

on the crater of a volcano. The remains at the site, however, meagre and ruinous as they are, proclaim more eloquently than the written word that Sigiri was the result of impulses far removed from fear.

Kassapa was no ordinary person. He was a man who tore himself away from the traditional capital of Anuradhapura and beat out a path of his own. He was a lover of pleasure and an aesthete who dared conjure the most fantastic of dreams and succeeded in translating it into a magnificent reality.

The glory of Sigiri endured only for eighteen years, the duration of the rule of Kassapa—a fleeting moment in the context of time. After that, as has been said before, Sigiri once again became the abode of Buddhist anchorites, who though they probably utilized some of Kassapa's buildings, would not have had the resources for their maintenance.

The graffiti on the mirror-wall flanking the gallery of the pathway to the summit, ranging from about the 5th to about the 13th century, point to the fact that Sigiri was a place of attraction for eight hundred years after Kassapa and to the possibility of its having been known abroad. Through these eight centuries the mirror wall and its precincts would have been kept tidy, though in ruin, by some devoted hands, probably by the Buddhist monks who abode there. Through these centuries Kassapa's edifices would have continued to crumble and large chunks of masonry would have hurled down time and again as the guardians looked on helplessly. By the time the graffiti ceased to be written the ruin would have been complete. Of the graffiti more anon.

To appreciate the immensity of Kassapa's architectural and engineering achievements the remains at Sigiri have to be seen. The residue could furnish evidence only to part of the achievements and it is very probable that we may never come to know of many of the problems which the builders contended with and surmounted. In some instances we see a problem solved but are at sea as to the manner of its solution. For instance the total weight of bricks now found at the summit of the rock which is but a fraction of what was originally used, should be reckoned in tons. The quantity of bricks originally used at the summit, the innumerable limestone steps and flagstones which are yet on the summit, the large quantity



of timber used for the doors and windows of the structures there, had all to be hauled up from the bottom of the rock. How this was achieved, baffles the imagination.

No other building operation in Ceylon, in historical times, demanded such feats of engineering as the works at Sigiri. The comfortable ascent which had been provided to the summit, the successful incorporation of the boulders at the foot of the rock into a building scheme and the utilization of the boulders themselves for rearing the buildings on, the provision for the collection and disposal of water both at the summit of the rock and at its base, the decorative purposes for which water had been pressed into service, all these and more are evidence of the highest engineering and technical skill. The coating of the entire western face of the rock of Sigiriya, and perhaps the boulders below, with a carefully prepared lime plaster, the painting of the frescoes thereon and the rendering of a glossy finish on the mirror-wall, which even today after fifteen centuries of exposure to the elements retains an incredible sheen, bespeak the immense pains lavished on the work.

### Western defences

The Archaeological Department has opened up a new road to the city, which, at a point near the Maha Naga Pabbata Vihara (see page 18) branches off at right angles from the road which, till recently served as the Inamaluwa-Sigiriya road. This road which takes the visitor through the main entrance of the city, overlaps the ancient road at its eastern extremity. The defences on the western side of the city has had two moats. The first of these is crossed by a causeway which has its sides retained by walls of rough-cut stone. The causeway is 76 ft. broad and has two drains through which the water is led from the northern section of the moat to that on the south. At an earlier stage when the causeway here was only 34 ft. in breadth there have been three drains one of which had been closed up in widening the causeway. This causeway and the first moat which could not be made out as such, sometime back, have now been conserved. The next line of defence on this side is a brickwall through which an entrance is provided. On either side of this entrance there appears to have been a guard-house. This wall is 7 ft. thick at base and has a total length of some 360 yards.



Beyond this brickwall, a second moat, more substantially constructed than the first, bars the way. This moat, unlike the first, forms the three sides of a rectangle. A part of this moat recently conserved by the Archaeological Department, makes a very impressive contrast with those parts of it which have so far been left alone. At least in the part conserved the moat runs dead straight and it may not be by a coincidence that a person standing at the northern extremity of the western main moat sees a needle-pointed mountain peak in the distance in line with the centre of the breadth of the moat (*see* Plate II). This moat is faced on the sides with coursed rubble, the facing on the outer side being so made as to form a ten-foot ledge at the middle of its height. The moat which here is 14 ft. deep and 82 ft. broad at top is likely to be of the same dimensions elsewhere too, and should be as long as the rampart (*see* page 6). Of the rampart which occurs immediately after the inner moat only the thirty-foot earth-work base now remains. Time has taken toll of the brick-faced stonework which once rose over it. This rampart which is the innermost line of defence of the city is also in the form of a rectangle. The rampart clearly defines three sides of this rectangle and a little at either end of the fourth while the rock and the difficult terrain at its foot makes up the deficiency in the fourth side.

### Eastern defences

A similar but smaller and less substantially constructed rampart, also girt by a moat, lies to the east of the rock. The rock is most inaccessible on this side. No excavations have been done within this rectangle and no structural remains are seen over the surface. This evidently were the poor quarters of the city where lived the hewers of wood and drawers of water. The hands that built Sigiri must surely have been on this side while the brains which conceived the Palace in the sky would have been in the other. The humble dwellings of the people here being of transient material have mouldered away leaving hardly a trace. Yet there is bound to be some important clues here to the happenings at Sigiriya in search of which the archaeologist may have to use the utmost patience and diligence.

## **The Reservoir**

The gap between the western and eastern ramparts at the southern end of the rock is, for the most part taken up by the reservoir of Sigiriya. (These reservoirs are locally known as tanks.) The tank whose eastern bund is nearly two miles long, was intended to submerge an area of more than 1,000 acres.

## **Structures on the north**

There seems to have been some means of communication to the lion's plateau from this side. The protective walls on the eastern and western edges of the lion's plateau are continued down in the same direction while there are also walls to bound the northern edge of this plateau.

The terrain north of the lion's plateau (see page 13) consists of terraces with flights of steps leading down. After some distance, is encountered a boulder which has a perpendicular face on the northern side. Cuts on the sheer face of this boulder and large circular and square sockets on the flat rock below indicate that there has been a strong wooden stair case here. After this stage too the retaining walls have a gap which furnish evidence of an entrance. The buildings here so far interpreted as a ' guard-house of sorts ' now appear to be those of an approach to the lion's plateau. Closer investigation has to be made here to determine the exact nature of these structures.

## **Western enclosed area**

The ramparts on the west have a total length of over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles and encloses more than a hundred acres. There were three openings one on each side of the ramparts. Of these, the main entrance is at the middle of the western side. In ancient times at this point, a draw-bridge spanned the main moat. Here the breadth of the moat was narrowed for the draw-bridge. The causeway on the outer moat, the gap in the first brickwork defence, the draw-bridge over the moat and the entrance through the rampart are all in a line. The path continues to be straight even within the rampart right up to the limit of the first of the terraces into which the land at the foot of the rock is made up. Beyond this the ancient path is not clear but portions of it are being discovered and conserved just now.



The level of the western enclosed area is higher than the level of the draw-bridge and access is gained to the former through two flights of steps. The remains of the complex of structures found within the western ramparts appear to be those of a pleasure garden than of any residential quarters. Our path cuts through the middle of a brick walled square area which with an additional brick built enclosure at each of its northern and southern ends becomes a rectangle. There are small projections at the centre of the southern and northern sides of this rectangle. The boundary brickwalls here are very thick. In the walled-in square area are four ponds, with brick built sides, so disposed as to leave out between them a cruciform space spreading out of a central square of land. Our path runs through two of the continuous arms of this cruciform and the other two arms also were paths which led north-wards and south-wards respectively. The circumscribing brickwall of the four ponds has had gateways at the cardinal points. Of these, the most important one is on the west (*see* Plate III). On this side there are two smaller entrances on either side of the main entrance, and beside these on the inside of the wall on each side and incorporated with the brickwall are two thrones made of limestone (*see* Plate IV).

The four ponds referred to have several flights of steps disposed around their brims. In each of the ponds at the northwest and at the southwest, in addition, is found a more or less hidden entrance the possible purport of which it is difficult to guess. In one of the ponds, a boulder which occurs within, has been made the base for a small structure. In another the north-east pond a similar boulder appears to have been left free standing and shows over the water when the pond is not quite full. A bush which grows on the boulder at present adds much colour to the scene, and it is quite possible that in ancient times too the boulder was used for achieving the same picturesque effect. One noteworthy feature of the building scheme of Sigiriya is that no effort has been made to remove boulders which interfered with the plan. On the contrary such boulders have been somehow put into excellent use in the building scheme.

At the far ends of the brick-enclosed rectangle here, that is, north and south of the square enclosure of the ponds, are some structures more or less symmetrically arranged. On each side



were two structures which were some sort of houses, the brick bases of which remain. Each of these had a limestone paved area all round. In each of the brick-walled plots of land which contain these structures were also two wells built of brick, disposed at the outer corners of the rectangle. In both these sections there were long narrow sunken areas paved with limestone slabs. It appears that water was made to circulate through these limestone pavings, not excluding those around the houses.

We revert to the continuation of the path from the main entrance. When the path leaves the rectangle enclosed by brickwalls, it traverses through the middle of a strip of land consisting of two terraces bounded on either side by a brickwall. The land on either side of the path here is boggy and some-way towards the eastern end of the lower terrace of this strip of land are vestiges of structures where water was used for decorative purposes. Shallow troughs for water, narrow meandering underground channels through which water was led and slabs with holes ranged in circles sited at the head of stone paved areas, bear testimony to the fact that the hydrostatic principle was harnessed to beautify a Sinhalese king's pleasure garden in the 5th century A.D.

On each side of this strip of land is a natural mound enlarged by the construction of stone built retaining walls. Both these mounds are surrounded by moats. These mounds once had buildings reared on them. A photograph of the pleasure garden taken from the gallery (referred to later) is at plate V.

The strip of land bounded by brick walls referred to above gives way to a rectangle of greater width on a higher plane which had some structure on it. The nature of the structure is not clear. From this rectangle the path leads to another rectangle on the same plane. Of the structures in this rectangle, one is a brick building whose base, at least, was octagonal. The base of a circular structure too is found here.

At the northern end of this last rectangular area is a pond bounded by an octagonal brickwall. This pond washes the sides of a large boulder on which there are some cuts and sockets. The manner and direction of these cuts and sockets seem to indicate

that some board was fixed horizontally on the boulder about 10 feet above the water. Could this be the evidence of a diving board in ancient times ?

Beside the boulder of the octagonal pond is a passage leading to a cave which had been converted into a room by building up the sides in brick. This room is so constructed that it is cleverly hidden from view. Remains of a smaller room constructed of brick are found at a point beside the boulder of the pond, before the passage referred to is entered. We have already noted secret entrances into ponds. Here we find rooms which appear to have been purposely built for secrecy.

The octagonal pond is balanced on the south by another pond of comparable dimensions which, however, does not have a boulder at its margin. Above the position of this pond, under a cave, is a brick structure based on the bed rock in a hollow situation. Here under the painted surface of the rock is an *āsana* (throne) stone beautifully modelled of crystalline limestone. This *āsana*, unlike the others at Sigiriya appears to have been a vacant *āsana* set up in place of a statue of the Buddha.

### Area of the boulders

From this point upto the foot of the main rock the rising terrain is very rugged and uneven. As has been already said the land in this area is made up into several terraces retained for the most part with dry laid walls of rubble.

On the north, perpendicular face of a boulder to the north-east of the structure with the *āsana* just discussed, are the very clear-cut marks of the outlines of, a guardstone, a balustrade and the floor level of some structure. The floor level of this structure was nearly 8 feet above the present ground level at this point.

The remains of another Buddhist vihara are found in a cave to the south of the path after the terraced area is entered. At this site the legless and armless torso of a Buddha statue survives. A terra cotta drain pipe emerges from underneath the rock of this cave and is led out beneath the north brickwall of this structure.



How the ancient path wended through the terraced area is not yet clear. The department has, however, improvised a pathway for this area, up to the point where a part of the ancient path is joined. When the ancient path is regained it goes in several flights of steps, through a small gap between two large boulders. The path through the boulders and beyond is made tortuous, perhaps intentionally for strategic reasons, because one man of dauntless courage, a Horatius on the bridge, could have defended the passage against an army! The pick and shovel of the archaeologist continue to be plied on the trace of this path.

The underside of the two boulders on either side of the passage have caves in them. This passage appears at first blush to be a *cul-de-sac*, and in fact the illusion and enchantment would have had greater effect when the brickwalls here were entire. Even now, in its ruined state, this passage looks like one borrowed from fairy-land. It is around here that so many large boulders are found scattered promiscuously. Cuts and grooves made on almost every one of these boulders show that they were used as bases for buildings. At the point where the path steers clear of the passage through the gap in the boulders, small paths, sometimes provided with flights of steps, branch off to the buildings on some of the neighbouring boulders.

One boulder near here had naturally split in twain and one part of it fallen. On the fallen fragment which too is of immense proportions a chastely modelled throne of stone is provided. Either side of this throne are *ovolo* backed continuous seats cut out of the rock, which after some distance turn at either end to run at right angles. The floor of the boulder is levelled. A portion of the boulder which did not come within the area provided with seats, originally had a roof, though no evidence is now available of a roof over the throne and seats (see Plate VI). A wooden flight of steps originally led to the top of this stone from the north eastern side. Very probably we have here the earliest known council hall of ancient Ceylon. Stone seats are found in various places among the structures at Sigiri. Below the boulder of the stone throne is another throne slightly smaller in size and cut out of the living rock.



The cistern at the top of the other half of the split boulder is partly cut out of the rock and partly built up (*see* Plate VII). No trace survives of the ancient flight of steps which led to it. Two steps placed inside, against one of its shorter sides, provided for getting into the cistern. Provision also had been made to empty the cistern through a hole at its bottom. Its supply of water had been probably through a conduit which connected it to a stone built cistern located towards the south-western quarter of the base of the rock of Sigiri. This cistern would in turn have had its water supply through a pipe line let down from the summit. The vertical groove on the western face of the rock of Sigiri may be indicating the position in which this pipeline was placed.

Under the boulder of the cistern is a rock-cut throne hemmed in by the three sides of a raised stone rectangle with an *ovolo* moulding on the inside, with an opening at the middle of the front side. Opposite to this under the cave of the boulder of the stone throne is also a stone seat.

Somewhat below the position of the boulders dealt with above is a boulder which is now popularly called the Cobra-hood cave. Of the two horizontal faces of this rock the lower still contains traces of paintings. The 2nd century B.C. inscription on the brow of this cave, the one which is at present most accessible to the visitor, reads *Parumaka Naguliya lene* and means 'the cave of the chieftain Naguliya'. From the analogy of other similar inscriptions elsewhere we know that it was Naguliya's donation to the Buddhist monks.

In the north of the area of the boulders is a large boulder with an almost level face sloping east. This rock which had at least two seats and has numerous mortice-holes on it, is now referred to as the Preaching rock (*see* Plate VIII).

The boulder below the north-western corner of the Lion's plateau (referred to later on) appears as if poised on props of stone and is popularly referred to as the *galdunna* (catapult). The name arises from the belief that the stone could easily be tipped over and sent

hurtling to the chasm below and that it has been so set up for use in war. This boulder, however, had been secured from beneath with a strong concrete and a building reared on it.

In the area included by the so-called catapult, the western retaining wall of the lion's plateau and the face of the main rock here, on the lower ground, are the remains of brick structures. Here too the ubiquitous long limestone-paved sunken area is in evidence. The situation is not one in which any substantial building would have been reared. This too, then was a bit of a garden.

Buddha images which have been dug up out of the caves in the area of the boulders are obviously those of the subsequent occupation of the site by Buddhist monks. The upper layers of painting on the 'cave-roofs' too may belong to this period.

### **Gallery and mirror-wall**

The continuation of the flight of steps which leads through the gap in the boulders and another flight of steps, which began somewhere to the south of it, converged at about the middle of the western face of the main rock where the rock rises sheer. Commencing from where the paths converge is a concavity on the face of the rock, some 50 feet or so above the ground, which runs to a length of about 160 yards. The gallery and its parapet, the mirror-wall, have been constructed here. A portion of the gallery, at its commencement, some 64 feet in length, is now lost and even the southern end of the mirror-wall as it now stands is a restoration by the Archaeological Department. It is obvious that where the rock itself did not provide the ledge for the construction of the gallery, the latter would have been based on the solid ground at the foot of the rock. The portion of the gallery so made, which came after the pathway had rounded the north western corner has completely disappeared. An iron bridge now does duty here for the gallery. This iron bridge joins again with a flight of steps, also partly reconstructed, which leads to the plateau of the lion.



## Plateau of the Lion

The plateau of the lion measuring roughly  $36 \times 72$  yards is retained with a stonewall faced with brick. The Department has conserved parts of the wall but other parts keep crumbling. As it tries to retrieve the stones of this retaining wall from the abyss below the department gets an inkling of the immensity of the labour the 5th century work at Sigiri would have involved.

The Lion's plateau is so called because the brick and stucco lion which gave Sigiriya its name, sat there. The lion had been so made as to appear seated couchant in his lair with only half the body emerging. Much of the beast is now gone but its fore paws remain to indicate of what colossal proportions it had been (see Plate IX). The access to the summit had been through the lion's mouth by a zig-zagging stairway, relieved at intervals, by landings. Above the lion's paws the brickwork has been rebuilt in the early days of archaeological activity in Ceylon, but this rebuilding neither indicates what the original shape was nor rises as high.

## The Summit

We can imagine that the pathway was carried up above the position of the lion. Cuts on the rock some distance further up indicate that bricks and stones were keyed on the rock to provide the pathway to the summit from that point.

The summit of the rock is nearly three acres in extent but there would have been more space on it in Kassapa's day due to the fact that the walls of the palace and its appurtenances which came at the edge of the rock were commenced some way lower down where the rock jutted out beyond the edge line at top. This device would have made the walls appear as the continuation of the rock. If the rock was built upon for reasons of military strategy the construction of the walls in this manner may have been calculated to deny much foot-hold to an invader. It would similarly have left very little room for the defender for deploying soldiers in

sufficient numbers to stave off an attack. If Kassapa desired to build an impregnable fortress he must have placed sole reliance on the fact that the rock was wellnigh unscalable.

The summit was entirely built upon but it is now impossible to make out the separate functions of the buildings. These buildings were placed at varying levels due to the uneven nature of the top of the rock (*see* Plates X and XI). There are a large number of flights of steps leading from one terrace to the other, and also a number of the long and narrow sunken areas paved with limestone slabs of the type already referred to. Also at the summit is a throne cut out of the living rock. This throne faces east and once had a roof over it (*see* Plate XII).

In the south-eastern segment of the summit is a large pond with three flights of steps descending into it. The floor of this pond too was paved at least partly with limestones. At the northern end of the summit is a brick-built cistern with the bed rock as the base, and with a corbelled channel leading into it from the east. Another more or less similar cistern, but minus the channel, is located in the south-eastern quarter of the summit. A cistern, completely cut out of the rock and having a groove running on the levelled rock all round, some distance from its brim, is at the south-western quarter. Another rock-cut cistern with brickwork rising from the sides of the rock-cut portion is at the southern end of the rock (*see* Plate XIII).

The massive building project of Sigiri shows as if the expenses or the energies spent did not worry the builders, but the manner in which a depression at the south end of the summit has been filled in with the chips of stone from the places where the stone was fashioned, shows that economies were practised wherever possible.

H. C. P. Bell, a former Archaeological Commissioner, was of opinion that there were two stages of work at the summit. If any one other than Kassapa was responsible for one stage of the work, we do not know his identity.

From all evidence it appears that all structures above floor level had been done in brick and wood. The roofs were of timber and were covered with flat tiles. No evidence remains at Sigiriya to indicate what picture the elevation of its many mansions presented.



Since the rock was daubed with white plaster and profusely covered with frescoes it may have been that the walls of the buildings too were similarly treated or else the exterior of walls may have been of a cream tint like that on the mirror-wall. The houses in the foreground and the rock would together have created an unforgettable picture.

Plate XIV shows how Mr. Bell, a former Commissioner of the Department viewed the frescoes before the present access was provided to them.

### **Graffiti and frescoes**

There are two subjects which excite the interest of the visitor to Sigiriya in a special manner. They are the graffiti on the mirror wall and the so-called frescoes surviving in a sheltered pocket of the rock. These frescoes are more or less over-head at the point where the gallery begins, and according to the present arrangement access to the frescoes is provided at this point by means of a spiral staircase. The main attraction at Sigiri in former times was these paintings. It appears that what was once the preserve of royalty was made accessible to a wider circle after Kassapa's day. The elite of society in the country at the time, Kings and queens, princes, high officials of the court, teachers, merchants, monks and poets are among those who indited the graffiti. Only about half the verses inform us the status of the writers and it may be that those who did not indicate their status had none to indicate. If as could be suspected, men of ordinary clay were also among the writers on the gallery-wall, then the rate of literacy in Ceylon at the time was high.

Even today, after the exposure to the elements for fifteen centuries the mirror-wall catches the reflection of objects. No wonder then that people of former times were attracted to it. The graffiti give us the information that the name of Sigiri was unique in Ceylon and that the site attracted visitors through the centuries up to about the 13th century. Quite early in the day, some where in the fifth century, somebody thought of leaving a memento on the mirror-wall and started a practice which has proved a boon to the student of Sinhalese because it is our main source of the oldest known samples of the language. Some one, probably the monks

in the caves below, controlled matters here and perhaps supplied the metal stylus for incising the writing on the wall. The graffiti range in date from about the 5th century to about the 13th century. Apart from the verses written in Sinhala characters there are others indited in other characters. These, however, are exceedingly few in number and count among them verses in the Nagari script of about the 9th century, those in the Tamil script of about the 11th and 12th centuries and others in other scripts known in Ceylon and South India in the 7th or 8th centuries. A total of 685 of these graffiti dating between the 8th and 10th centuries have been deciphered, translated and edited by Paranavitana in his monumental work *Sigiri Graffiti* (2 volumes), Oxford University Press, 1956. 14 graffiti were discovered in the cave under the cistern rock in 1965 in the course of removing the upper layer of plaster, left blank for the most part. These graffiti were in the under layer of plaster thus exposed. One of these graffiti is in the later Brahmi script and has been ascribed to the 5th or 6th century A.D. (Vide *Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, Annual Report 1964-65*).

As at present the frescoes contain figures of 21 females, some in pairs and others single. Of the pairs, one female is fair and the other dark in complexion. All the figures are profusely decked in jewellery and are cut off below the waist by clouds. It is very difficult to figure out whether the fairer females are in "top-less" attire or in some diaphanous dress. The darker ones, however, wear a breast-band. Some of the females are shown as carrying trays of flowers and others as either holding flowers or scattering them (see Plates XV to XIX).

One graffito indicates that some 500 years after Kassapa's day the frescoes were deteriorating. The rot may have started much earlier. The whole or the greater part of the western face of the rock had been furnished with frescoes, of which, what now remains is a mere fraction. Traces of plaster are seen on the rock in places much removed from the surviving frescoes. The graffiti refer to figures different from those which survive. The figure with a lute in hand and another with a string of pearls and a piece of chinese silk are among those which have been lost.



Traces of painting have now been recognized on most of the caves on the western escarpment of the rock. The under layer exposed at the cave of the cistern rock contains physical evidence of paintings similar to those in the fresco-pockets. The upper layer had black and white line drawings on a blank background. A reference to a fair damsel in one of the newly discovered graffiti from this cave is further evidence pointing to the fact that frescoes similar to those surviving on the main rock were also on the boulders.

Several interpretations have been given as to the identity of the figures in the paintings. Bell says that the paintings depict Kassapa's queens and their handmaids wending their way to the temple at Piduragala (Vide *ASCAR* 1905). According to Ananda Coomaraswamy they represent heavenly damsels (*Apsarā*) (Vide *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*). Paranavitana thinks that the dark and fair damsels in the paintings represent rain clouds and lightning respectively (Vide *India Antiqua*, Leyden 1947.)

### **Finds from Sigiriya**

The most important finds from Sigiriya are a collection of 1667 coins all but 12 of which are Roman coins. These coins, very worn obviously from long use, reveal to us the interesting information that Roman coins were much in use in the country about the 5th century A.D.

A jar coated with a blue glaze, found at Sigiriya, is now at the Colombo Museum.

### **Other ancient sites in the vicinity**

#### **MAPAGALA**

About a quarter mile to the south of the rock of Sigiriya is a large hillock called Mapagala, 'the rock of the heir-apparent'. These premises are encircled by a wall of cyclopean proportions, built with big boulders with one fairly level face. Very probably this too was part of the building scheme of Kassapa's day though we are unable to name the prince who dwelt here. This site too had substantial buildings on it, of which only vestiges remain.

## PIDURAGALA

About a mile to the north of the rock of Sigiriya is a hill on which there is an ancient Buddhist vihara. Here a long cave, the gift of Sumana-devi, a lady of high lineage, to the Sangha, has been divided into compartments in one of which is found a brick and stucco recumbent figure of the Buddha 45 feet in length. Ancient paintings are found in one of the compartments of this cave. On the plain below is a dagoba 50 feet in diameter built on a square brick platform with side 80 feet. This dagobā has been dug into by treasure hunters, and from its debris were recovered fragments of a copper relic casket in the shape of a stupa, a badly corroded Roman coin and a square copper earring. Inside the niche of the west wall of the relic chamber were fragmentary sculptured marble plaques some with Buddha figures and others with Bodhisattva figures, in relief. Close to the dagoba is a pillared site with some forty monolithic pillars *in situ*. Each of these pillars is  $11\frac{1}{2}$  feet high. Scattered inside the jungle here, are also other ancient remains. A date as old as the second century B.C. is claimed for this site too. The brick and stucco statue referred to may date from the 5th century A.D.

## MAHANAGA PABBATA VIHARA

Where the new departmental road branches off from the main road and on the farther side of the latter, can be seen the main dagoba of the Mahanaga Pabbata Vihara (in the area now called Ramakale) endowed to the Elder Mahanaga by Mugalan in the 5th century A.D. In the jungle beyond are other remains including another dagoba and a structure with large monolithic pillars.

Of three pillar inscriptions which probably have been recovered from this area, one is very fragmentary. A second broken in two is very worn and yields little more than its date given in the regnal years of King Kassapa IV (898-914 A.D.). The best preserved of these, is an immunity grant to the Mahanaga Pabbata



Vihara by Mahapa Kassapa (Kassapa V 914-923 A.D.) also dated in the reign of Kassapa IV. This inscription has been edited in the *Epigraphia Zeylanica* (Vol. V. pp. 345-355) by Dr. C. E. Godakumbura. All three inscribed stones are exhibited at the Archaeological Museum, Sigiriya.

The Maha Naga Pabbata mentioned in the *Mahavamsa* in connection with certain convocation (*uposatha*) halls erected by King Aggabodhi I (A.D. 575-608) may be this same institution.

#### ILUKWEWA

About 3 miles south-east of the rock of Sigiri is an area called Ilukwewa, so-called after the ancient reservoir of that name found there. Several terracotta figures, relics of a fertility cult collected from this site have been recognized as belonging to the Tabbowa-Maradammaduwa culture. Some of these finds are dealt with in the booklet *Terracotta Heads* of the Archaeological Department.

### THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF KASSAPA'S ACCESSION

In order that the reader may not be biased against the builder of Sigiri in assessing his feats of architecture and engineering we have so far kept out of the story the manner of Kassapa's accession to the throne as recounted in the chronicle, an episode well known in Ceylon and which usually finds early mention in any book on Sigiriya.

The *Mahavamsa* records that Kassapa being Dhatusena's (A.D. 459-477) son by a consort of lesser birth was not the real heir. Dhatusena's daughter was married to the Commander in chief, who was none other than the king's own sister's son. The king was once incensed at finding that his daughter had been whipped by her husband and by way of reprisal had the latter's mother burnt at the stake. The Commander in Chief had his own revenge by ousting the king in league with Kassapa.

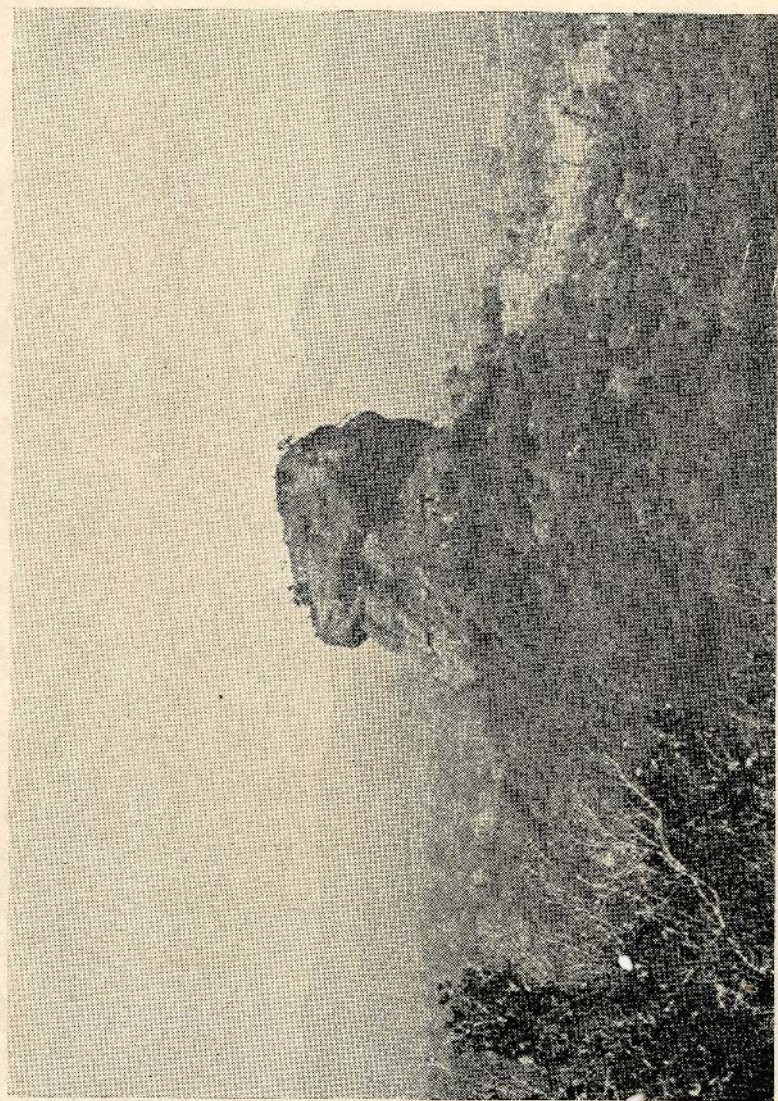
On having wrested the sceptre Kassapa incarcerated the deposed king, his father, whom he later killed.

These in a nutshell are the circumstances of Kassapa's parricide as related in the chronicle.

As the *Mahavamsa* has it, Kassapa built Sigiriya through fear of his half-brother Moggallana (A.D. 495-512) who was the real heir to the throne. The remains at Sigiriya, however, do not bear this out.

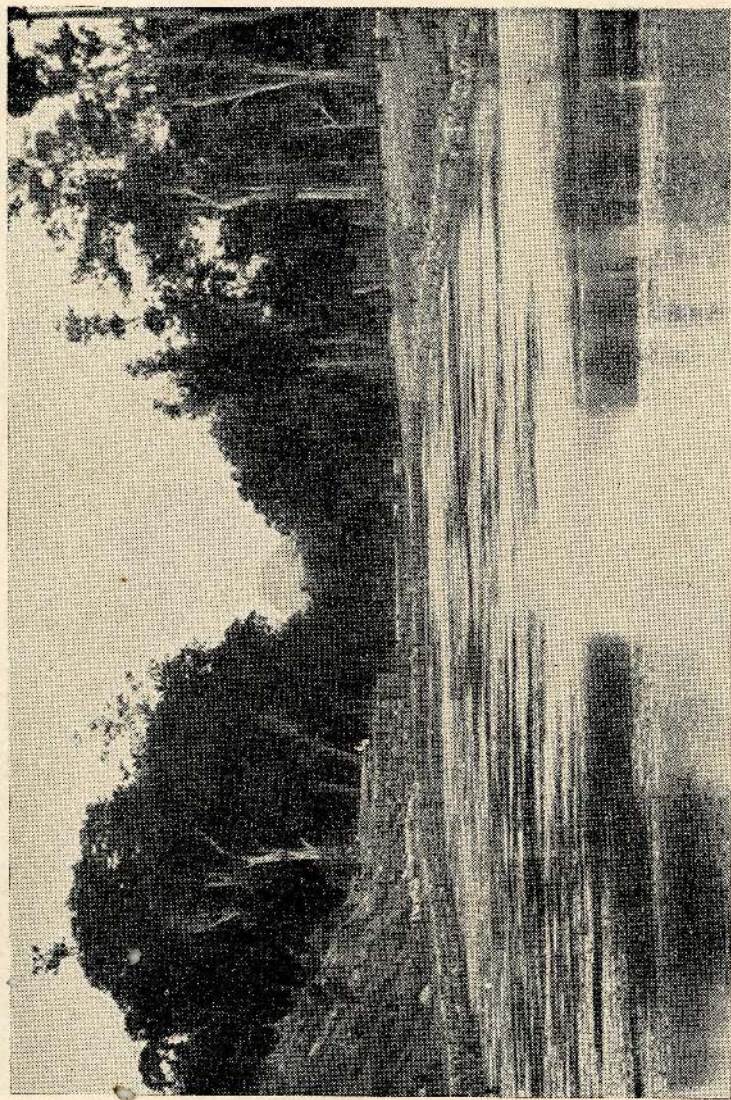






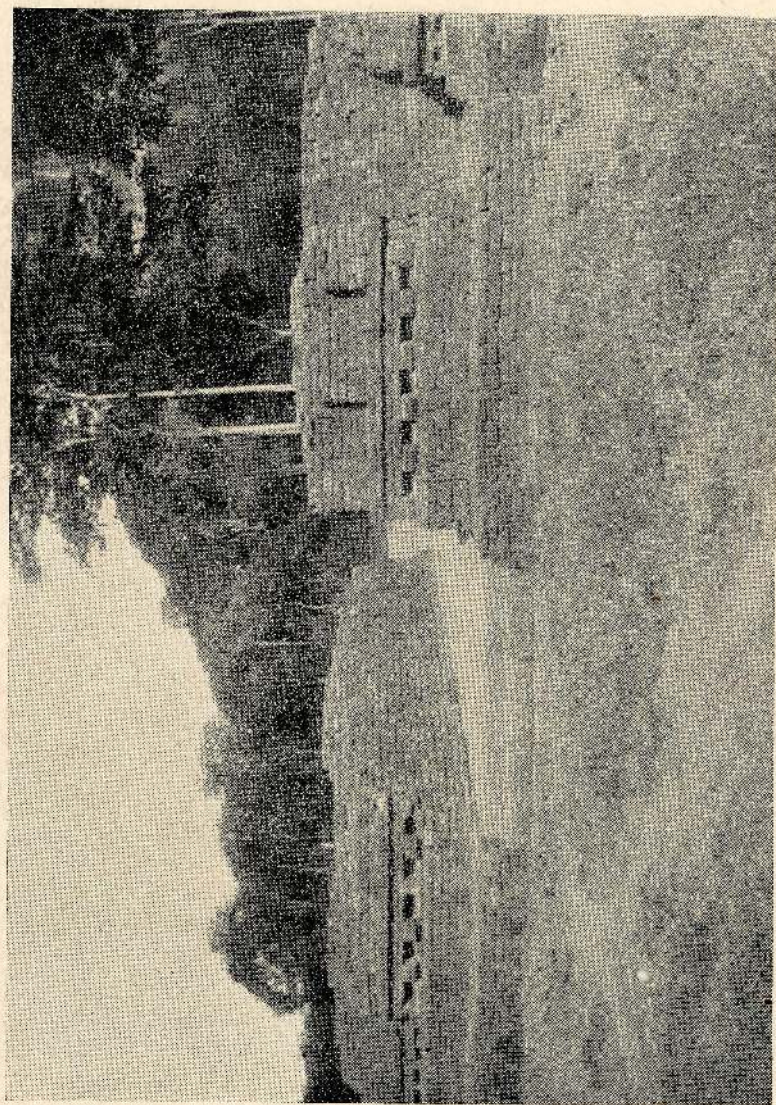
VIEW OF SIGIRIYA FROM PIDUPALGALA





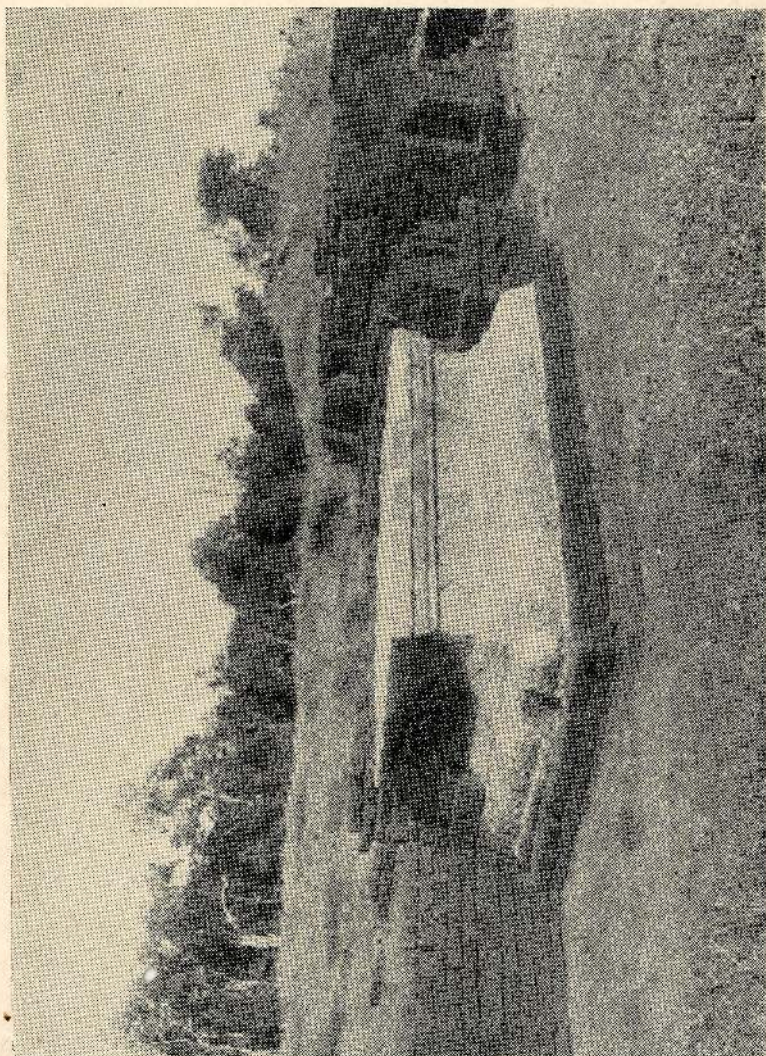
INNER MOAT SIGIRIYA, CONSERVED





MAIN ENTRANCE TO THE AREA OF THE PONDS



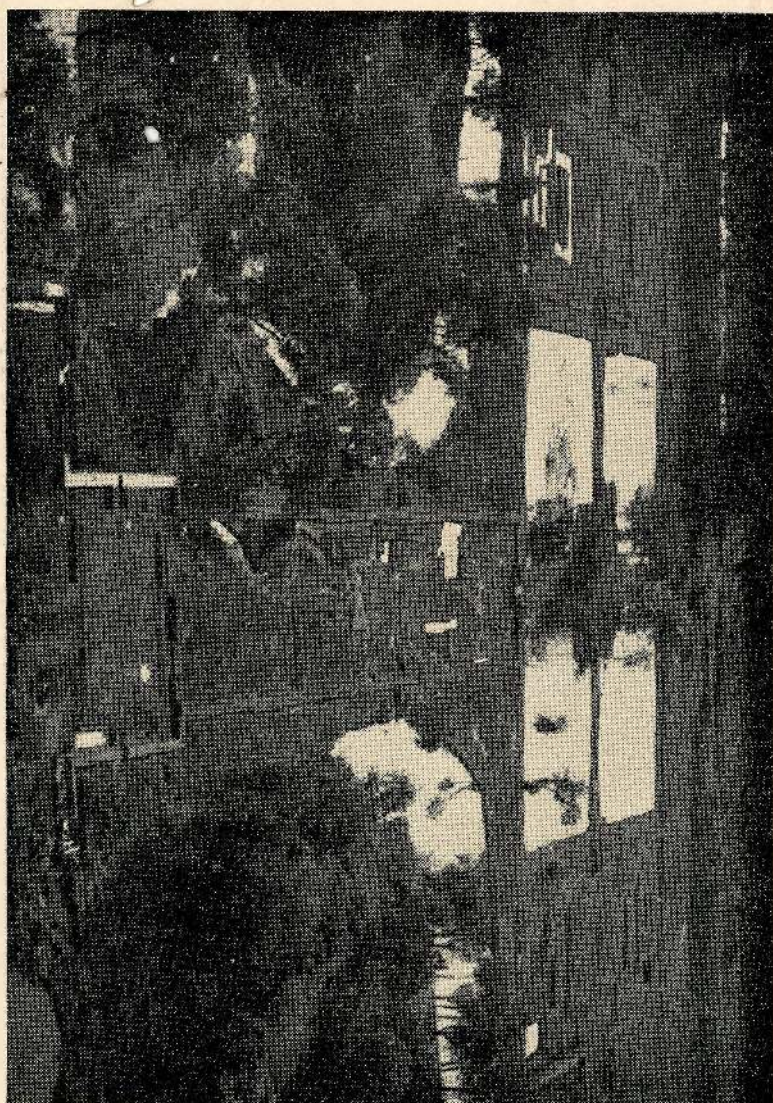






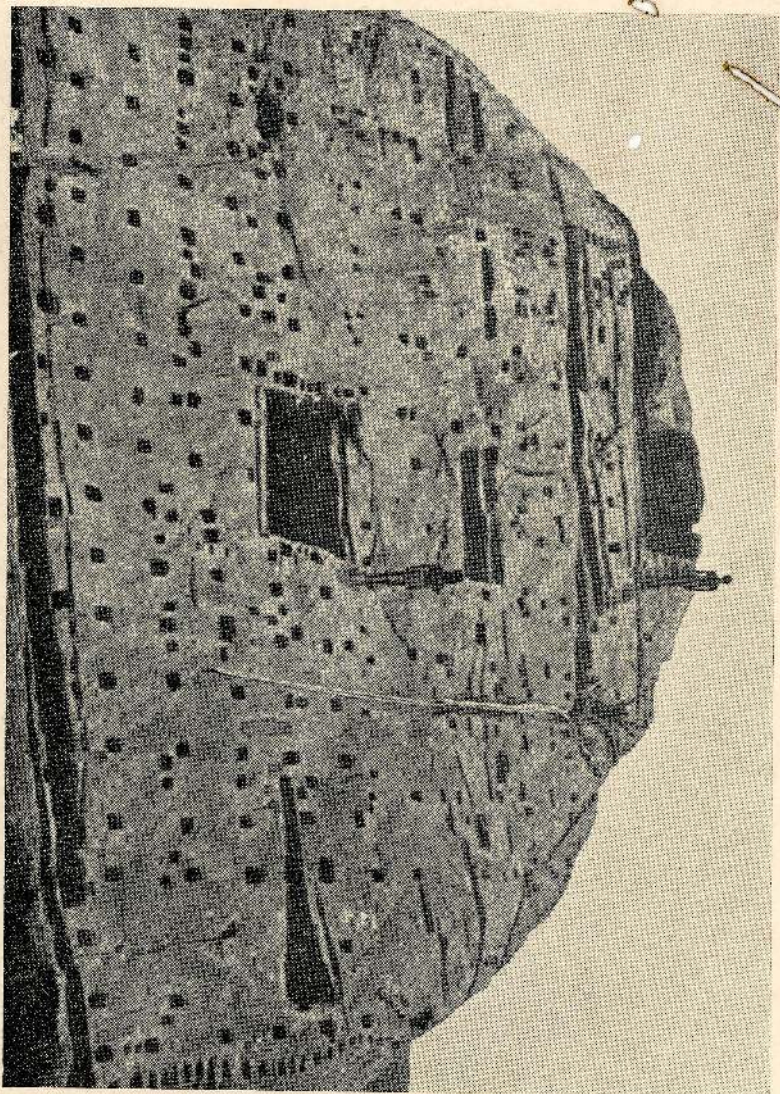
THRONE ON TOP OF BOULDER



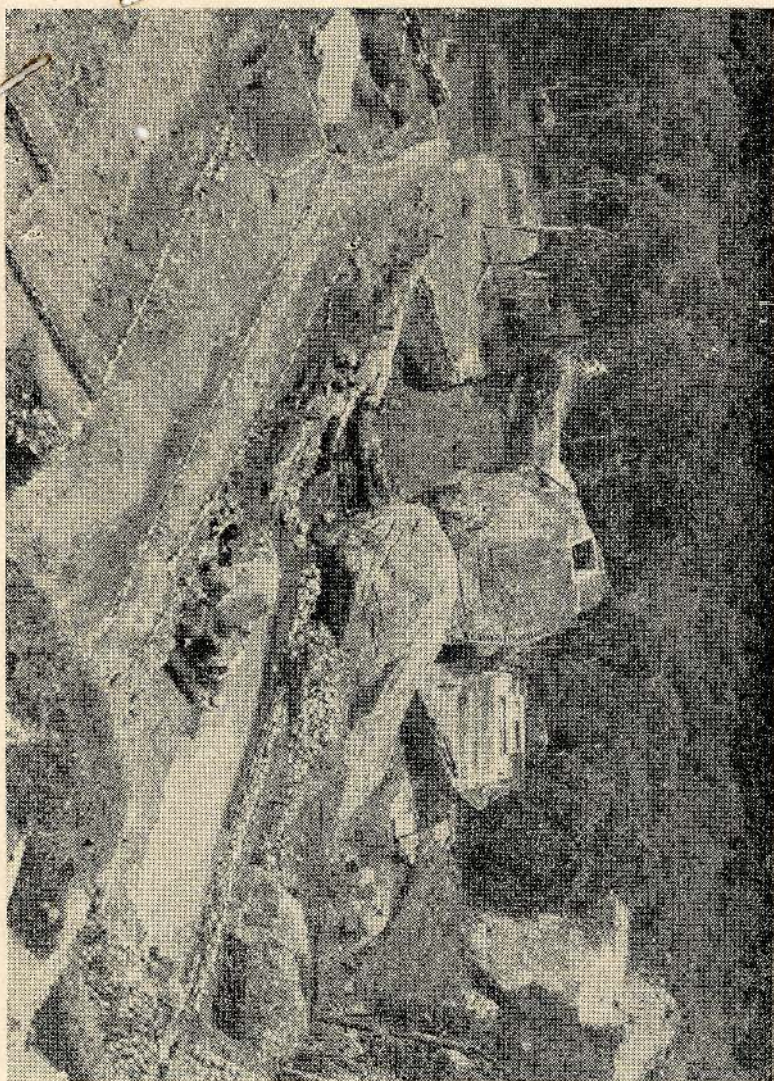


VIEW OF PLEASURE GARDEN FROM GALLERY

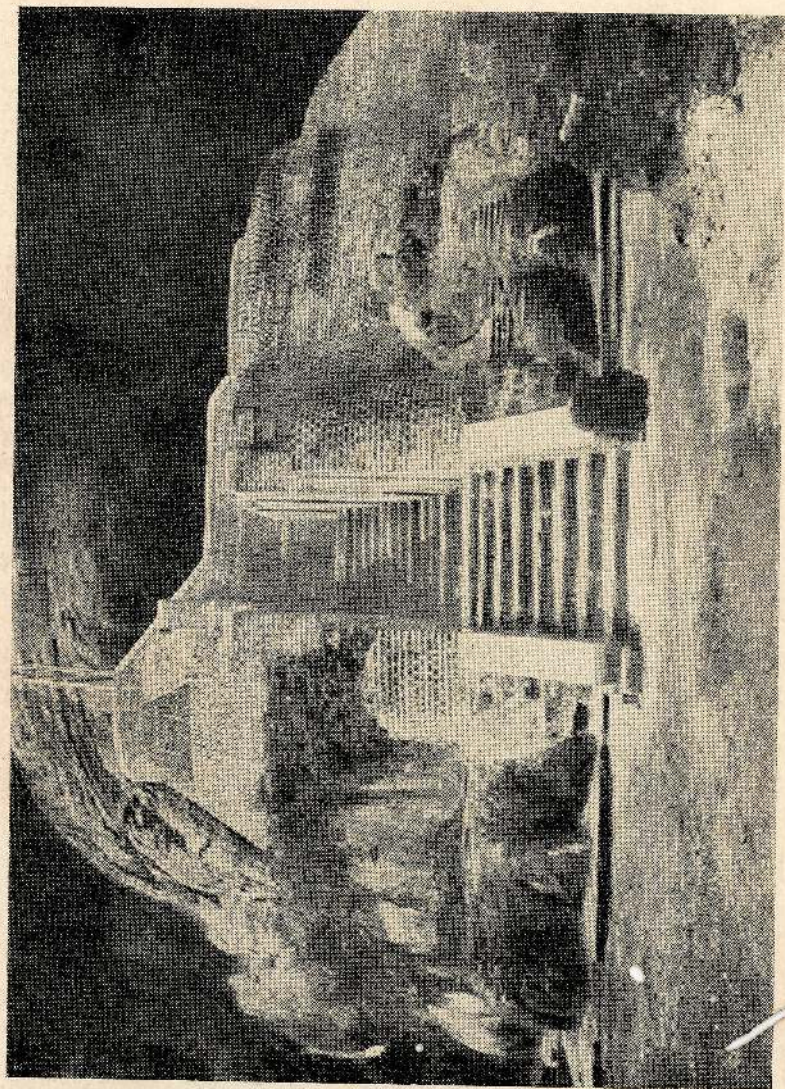




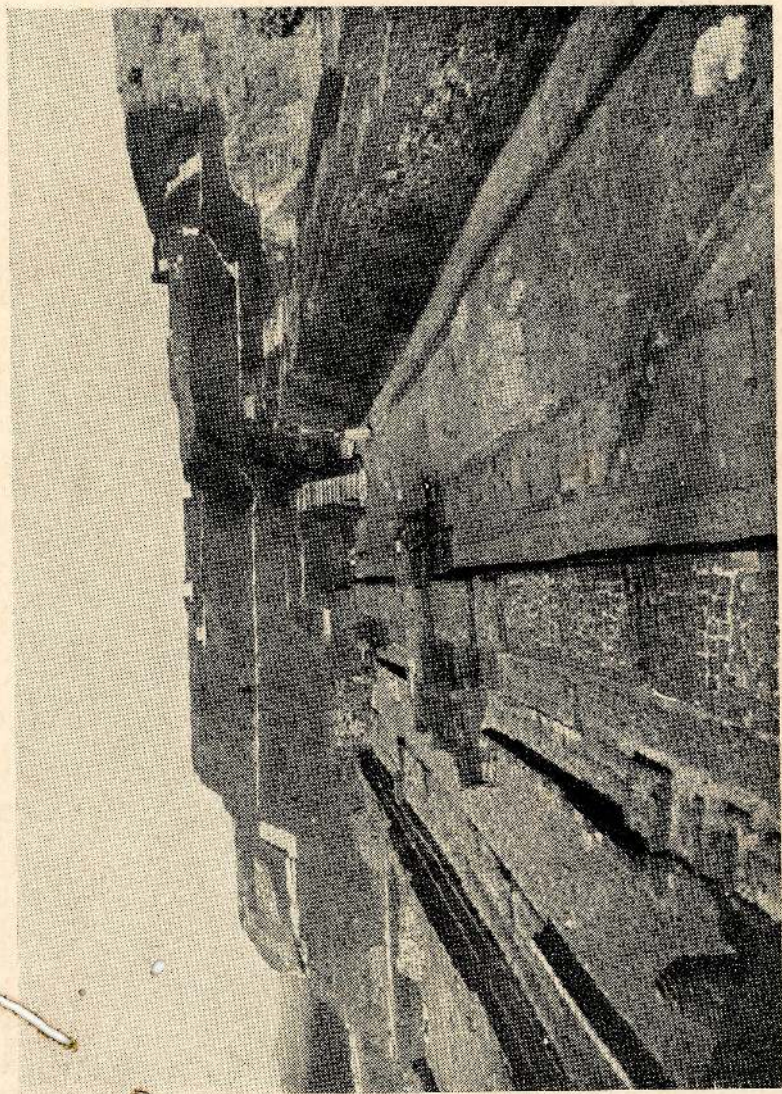






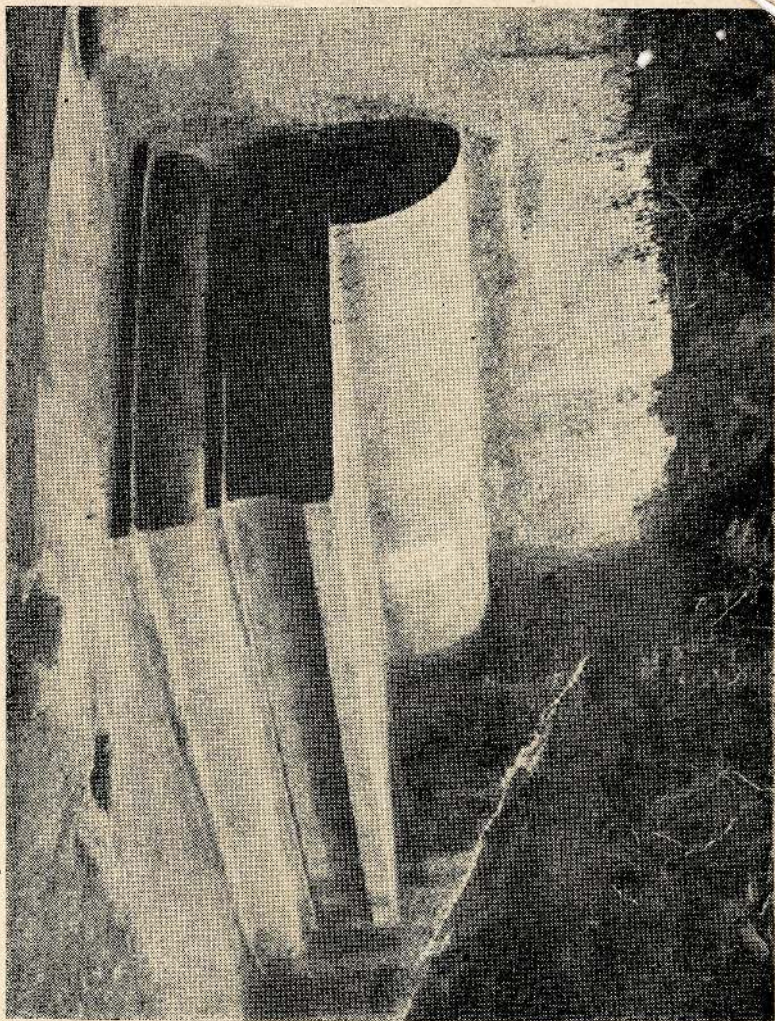




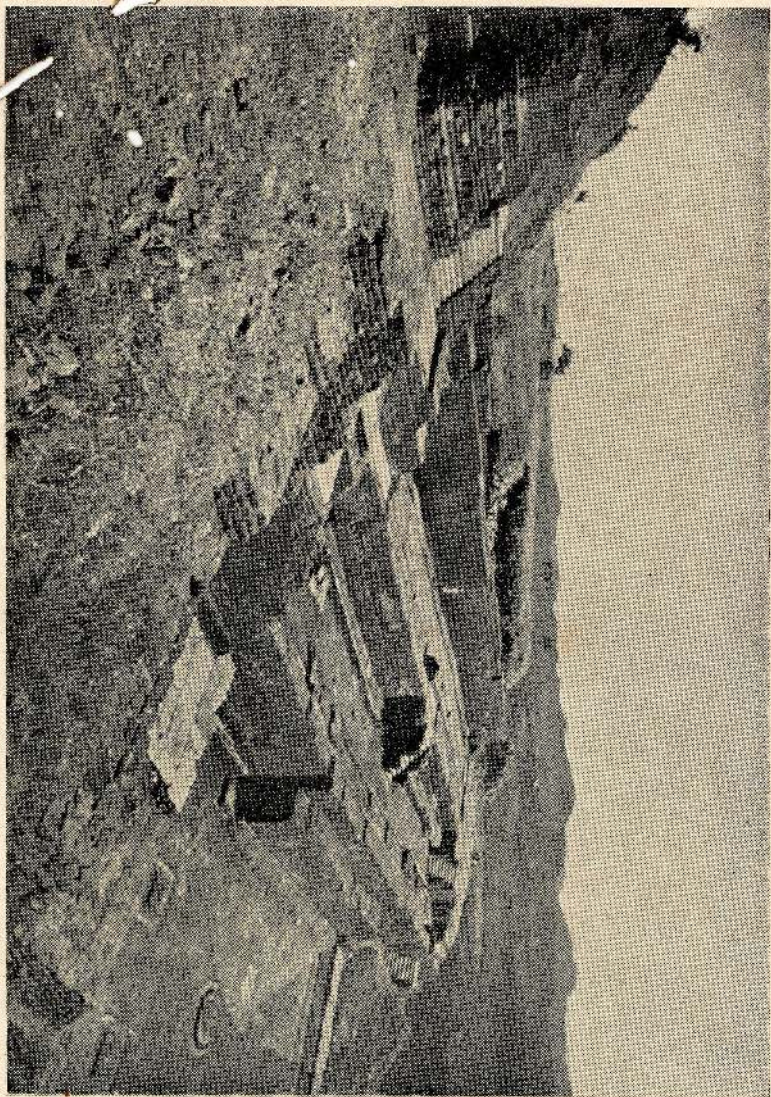


REMAINS OF BUILDINGS AT SUMMIT



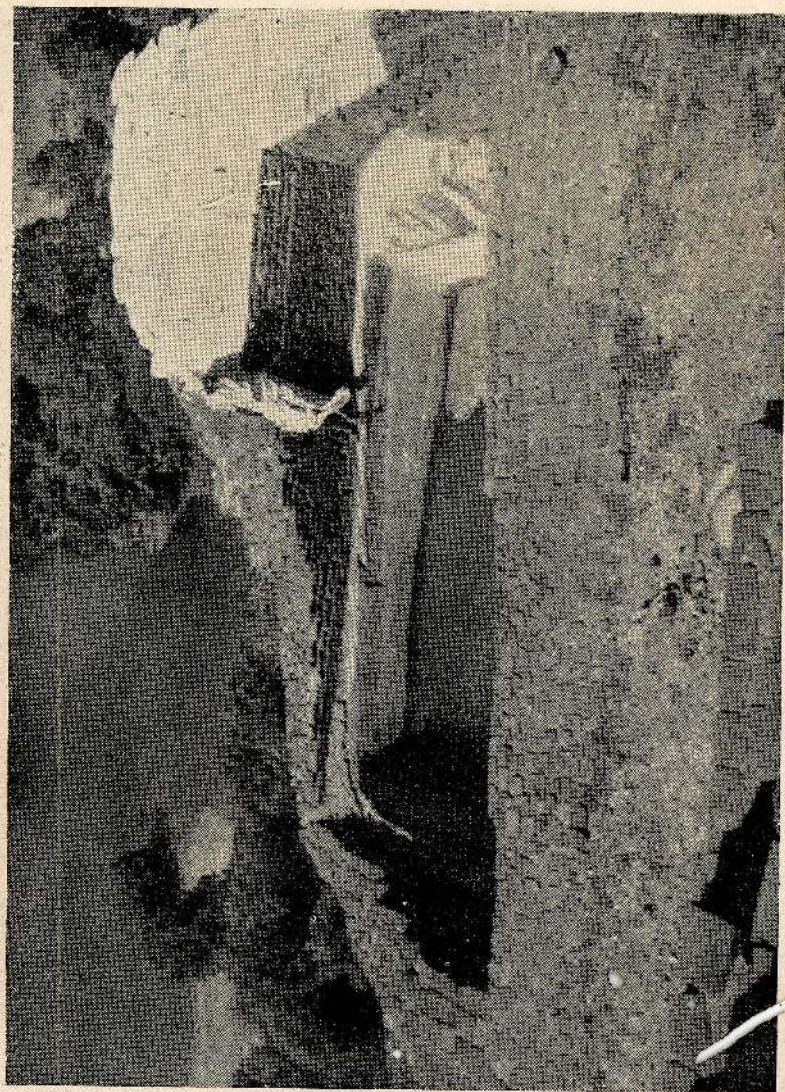




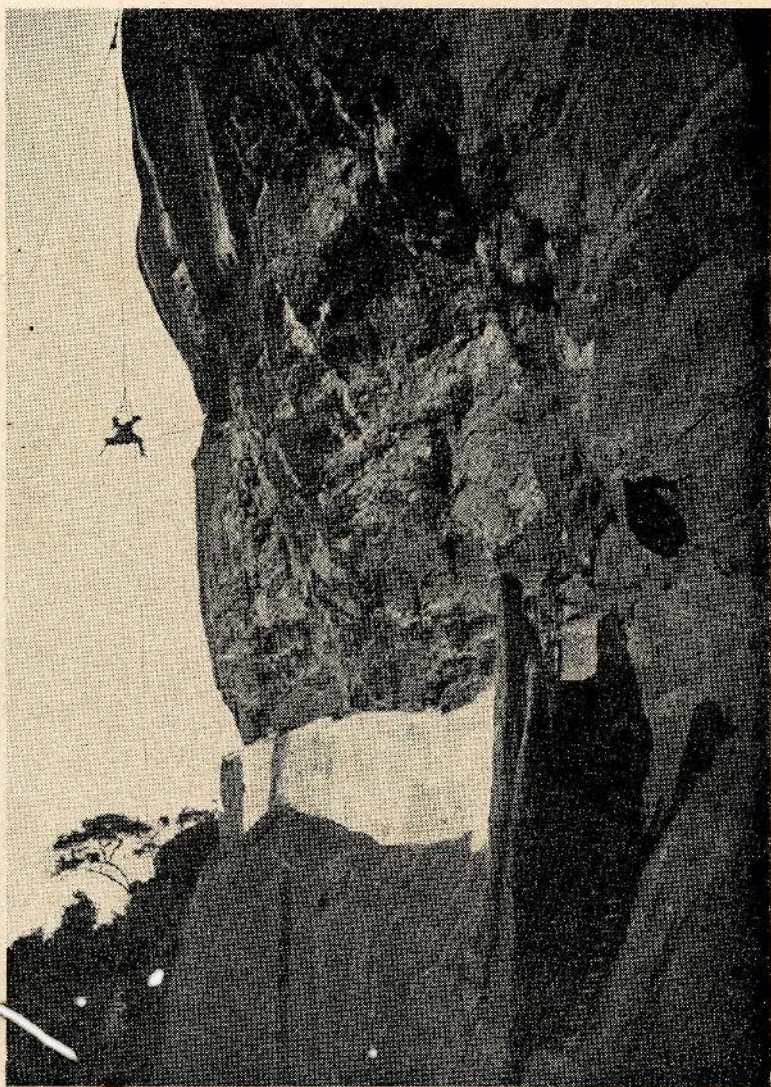


REMAINS OF BUILDINGS AT SUMMIT









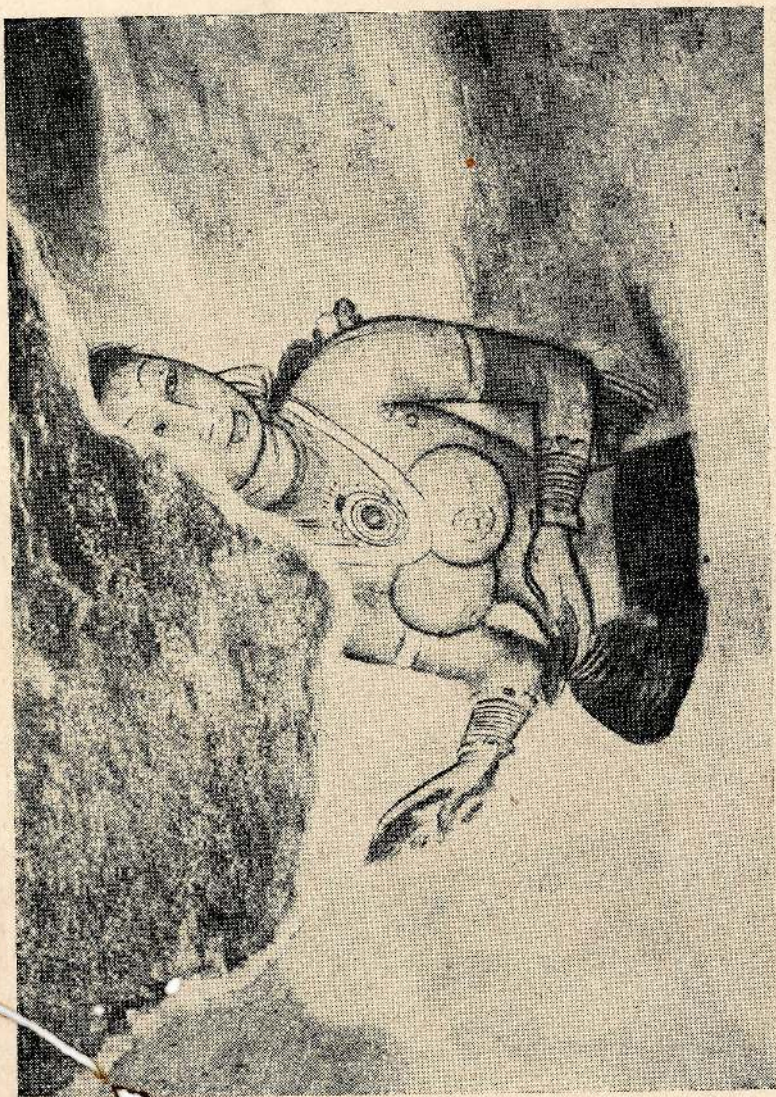
MR. BELL VIEWS THE FRESCOS





"FRESCO" PAINTING





"FRESCO" PAINTING





"FRESCO" PAINTING





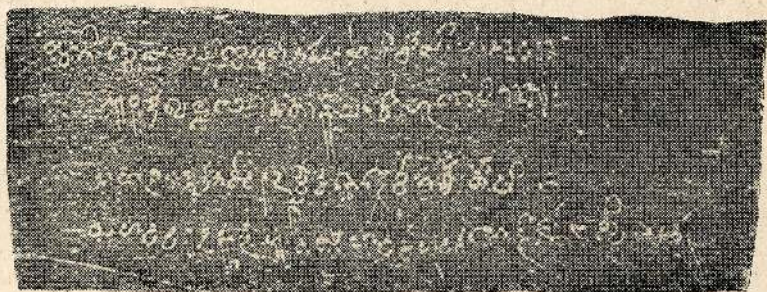
“FRESCO” PAINTING





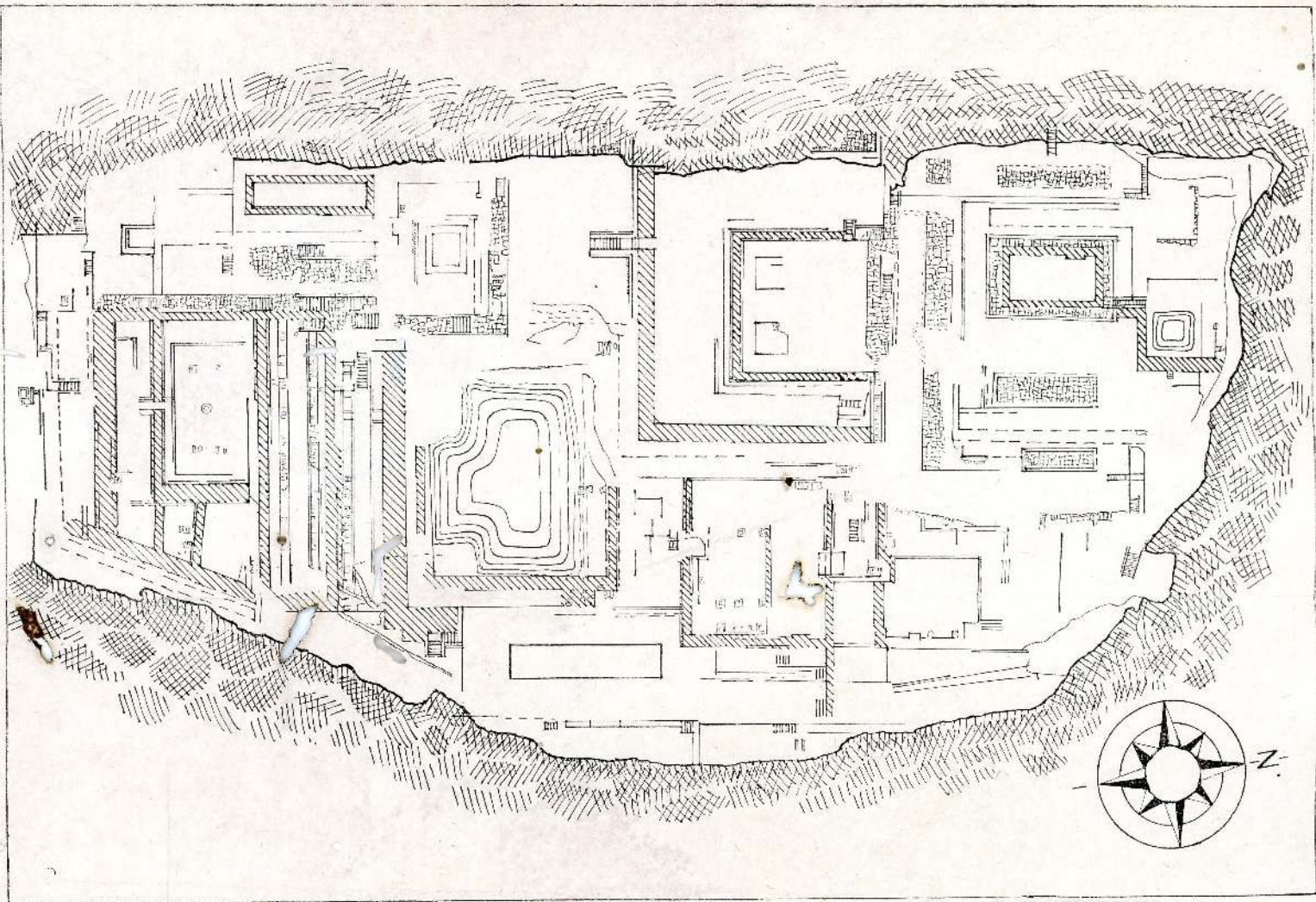
"FRESCO" PAINTING



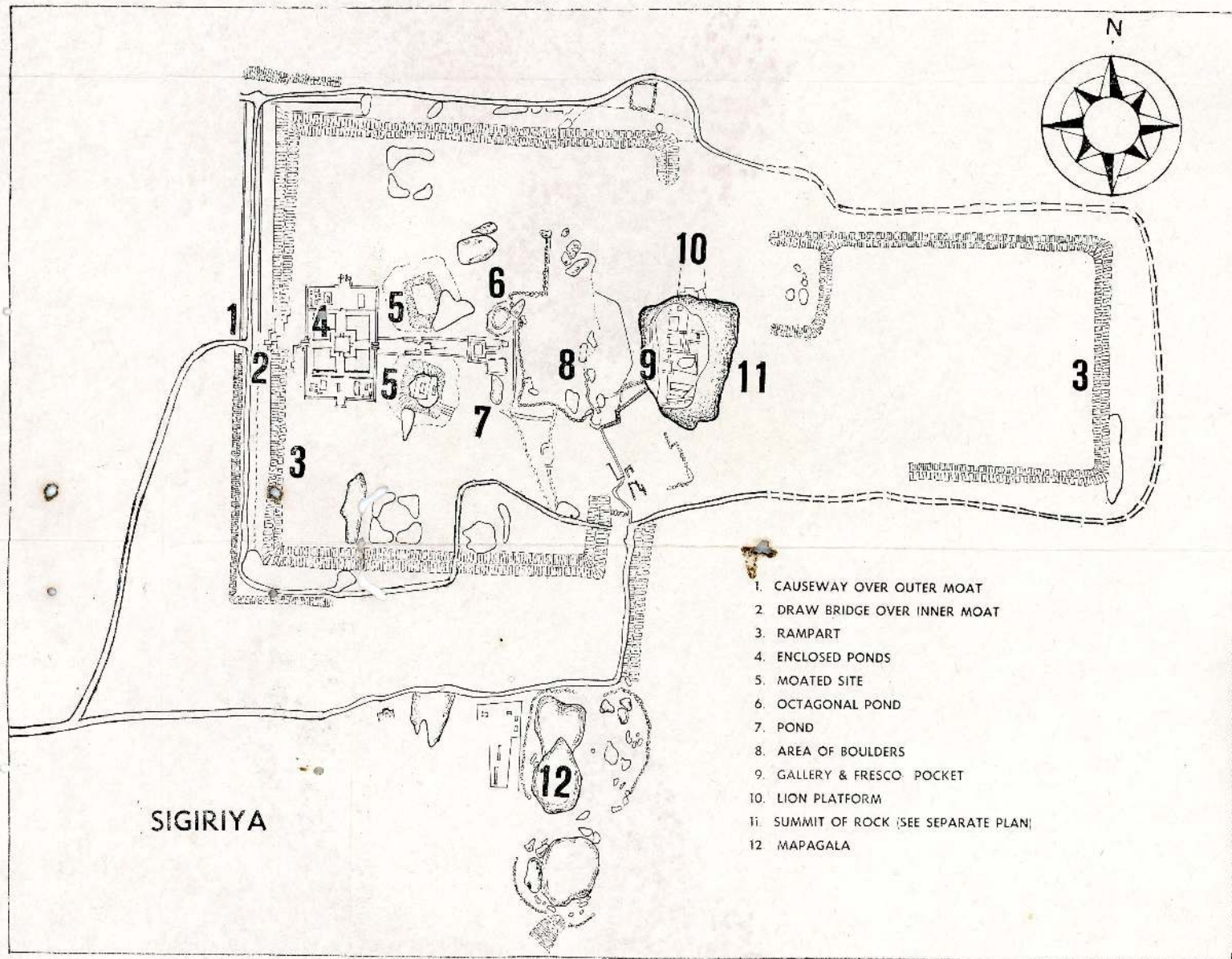


A GRAFFITO ON THE MIRROR WALL. (No. 75—*Sigiri Graffiti*)















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