

GOLDEN ROCK TEMPLE OF DAMBULLA



ANURADHA SENEVIRATNA

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CAVES OF INFINITE BUDDHAS

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CAVES OF INFINITE BUDDHAS

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**UNESCO-SRI LANKA
CULTURAL TRIANGLE PROJECT
CENTRAL CULTURAL FUND
MINISTRY OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
SRI LANKA**

1983



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FOREWORD

As the Minister of Cultural Affairs the work of the UNESCO-SRI LANKA project of the Cultural Triangle comes directly under my purview. The conservation of the historic Dambulla Viharaya is one of the important works contained within the three main centres of the Cultural Triangle; namely Anuradhapura, Polonnaruva and Kandy. There are six archaeological projects and these are the Abhayagiri Vihara and Jetavana Vihara at Anuradhapura, Alahana Pirivena at Polonnaruva, the Palace and Four Devalas at Kandy, the Water Gardens at Sigiriya, and the Cave Shrine at Dambulla.

Recognising the importance of these religious centres and having undertaken the conservation work it was also decided to document and publish books on such important sites. This is the fourth in the series of books so planned and I am grateful to Dr. Anuradha Seneviratna of the University of Peradeniya for kindly accepting our invitation and writing this descriptive booklet on the Dambulla Vihara, to sustain the interest of all concerned about this hallowed place.

On this occasion, I also wish to express my gratitude to UNESCO and the Member States for their generous gesture and their esteemed co-operation in the work of the Cultural Triangle.

E. L. B. Hurulle

Minister of Cultural Affairs

Ministry of Cultural Affairs,
212, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,
Colombo 7.

3rd September, 1983.

PREFACE

This book deals with the foremost Buddhist Cave temple of Sri Lanka. Its history can be traced back to the dawn of the Christian era. Well known for its hundreds of Buddha images and thousands of paintings belonging to a large space of time, the Golden temple of Dambulla deserves the attention of both scholars and the laymen alike.

I am grateful to Mr. Roland Silva, the Director-General of the Central Cultural Fund for inviting me to write this book for the UNESCO-SRI LANKA Cultural Triangle Project.

Conservation of the historic Dambulla *viharaya* is one of the five major projects undertaken by the Cultural Triangle of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Sri Lanka. Therefore, the necessity of a book explaining its history and the importance of the *Viharaya* needs no further explanation.

Several persons helped me in this work. Reverend Palipane Chandanada, Mahanayake Thera of the Asgiri Mahaviharaya, Kandy, Reverend Udugama Buddharakkhita, the present Trustee of the Viharaya and his pupil Reverend Inamaluwe Sumangala, Reverend Madugalle Sobhita, the former trustee, Reverend Erawula Somaratana of the Valagamba Pirivena, Dambulla are among the community of Sangha. Mr. Lanka Gunawardhana, the Project Manager, Dambulla, Mr. P. B. Mandawela the Project Manager, Kandy, Mr. Gamini Wijesuriya, Assistant Commissioner of Archaeology (Architecture) and Mr. S. U. Deraniyagala, Assistant Commissioner of Archaeology (Excavations) are among others who helped me.

The photographs included in this book are by Mr. I. S. Madanayake, Ter Ellingson and Linda Iltis. I am especially thankful to the last two for having read the manuscript and the proof as a gesture of friendship. The cover design is by Mr. H. K. A. Gunasekara and the plans are by Design Consortium Limited.

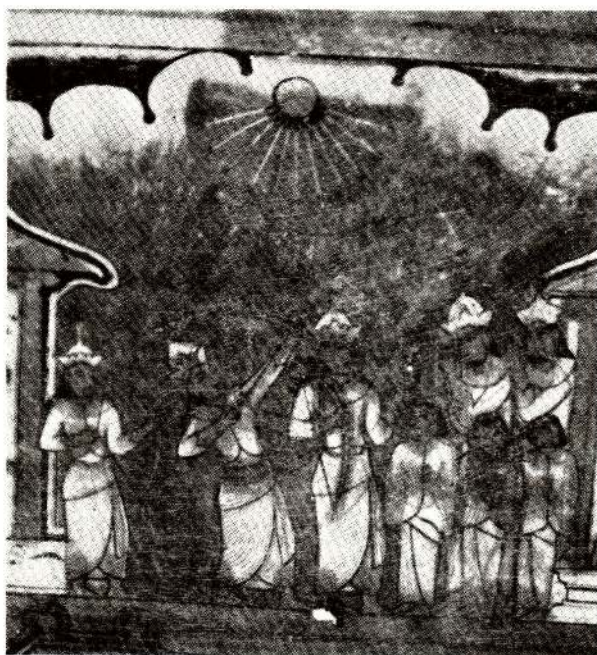
The copies of Dambulla paintings included in this book are prepared by Kushan, Manjusta and Mandalika, the son and two daughters of Late Manjusri, the famed artist.

The book was published by the Central Cultural Fund.

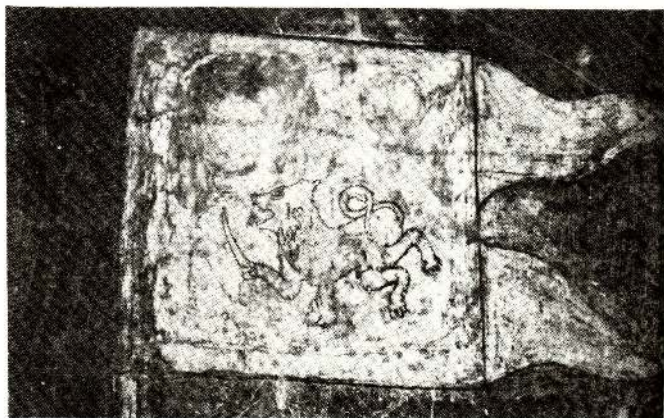
To all these friends and organisations I owe a deep sense of gratitude.

Bhagirathi,
78, Ihala Gammedda,
Kahalla,
Katugastota.
May 26th, 1983.

Anuradha Seneviratna



Prince Siddhartha's
skill in archery
Painting – Cave 2
Maharajalena.



Lion flag of King Dutugemunu (Cave 2)

INTRODUCTION

Scene from the top of the Dambulla rock.



INTRODUCTION

DAMBULLA *Viharaya* is a cave temple of infinite Buddhas. Over the course of several centuries it has provided shelter to millions of pilgrims who have come in search of peace and salvation from the bonds of *Samsara*. Thousands of images of Buddhas in sculptures and paintings in the cave temple have been created by skilled Sinhalese artists and craftsmen of centuries gone by. It is the most celebrated and venerated Buddhist cave temple of Sri Lanka. Dambulla *Viharaya* is also a unique art gallery to the student of Buddhist iconography and paintings. It is a gateway to emancipation to the Buddhist devotee who falls at the feet of Buddha to free himself from the misery of life. Whichever one may choose, the Golden rock temple of Dambulla is supreme.

Dambulla is situated at the centre of the triangle formed by the three ancient capitals of Sri Lanka: Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa and Kandy. It is forty-seven miles north of Kandy and ninety-two miles north east of Colombo. Twelve miles from Dambulla is the mighty Sigiriya rock, with its magnificent paintings dating from the fifth century, and nearly a thousand Sinhalese verses on the 'Mirror Wall' dating from the sixth century to the tenth century.

On the rock hill 1118 ft. above sea level, covered with greenery and surrounded by the plains of Kurunegala on one side and the magnificent Sigiriya rock and Ritigala mountains on the other, is the ancient Buddhist cave temple popularly known among the Sinhalese as *Rangiri Dambulu Viharaya*, the Golden Rock Temple of Dambulla, and *Dambulu Rajamaha Viharaya*, the Great Royal Temple of Dambulla.

The rock rises to a height of over six hundred feet above the surrounding plains. The caves are scattered in an area of about fifty acres. Built underneath an enormous rock outcropping or gneiss nearly five hundred feet in height and about two thousand feet in length, this beautiful cave temple takes us by surprise to a remote past to tell us of a long and complex history.

Pilgrims climb the rock





Dambulla Viharaya from the eastern side

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

THE present Sinhalese name Dambulla is believed to have been translated into Pali as *Jambukola* by the author of the great chronicle *Mahavamsa*. There is also another Jambukola referred to in the same chronicle, identified as the name of a northern sea port in Sri Lanka, where the Sacred Bo-tree of Anuradhapura was brought onto the island from north-east India.

The *Mahavamsa* refers to this temple for the first time as *Jambukola Vihara* in the reign of Vijayabahu I (1055–1110 A.D.). It is also called *Dambulu-lena* renamed *Svarnagiriguha*, in an inscription caused to be engraved at Dambulla by Kirti Sri Nissankamalla (1187–1196 A.D.).

Although the early history of this cave temple is not found in the great chronicle, numerous inscriptions found at Dambulla supported further by oral tradition suggest that this temple was built in the first century B.C. by Vattagamini Abhaya, or Valagamba as he is popularly known among the Sinhalese. A thirteenth century Sinhalese literary work known as *Pujavaliya* says that King Valagamba converted the caves at Dambulla into temples which gave him shelter and a hideout for twelve years during a troubled period of Tamil invasion by having made drip-ledges in caves.

Mahavamsa, speaking of this king Vattagamini Abhaya (103 B.C.; 89 – 77 B.C.), describes the wars that he had to face with the seven Damilas (Tamils) who landed with their troops.

Thereupon the Damilas made war upon the King; in a battle near Kolambalaka (near Anuradhapura) the King was vanquished. As a Nigantha (Jain monk) named Giri saw him take he cried out loudly: 'The great black lion is fleeing'. When the great King heard that he thought, 'If my wish be fulfilled I will build a Vihara here. He took Anuladevi (his brother's wife) with him, who was with child, thinking: 'She must be protected', and Mahacula (Brother's son) also and (his son) the prince Mahanaga also thinking: 'They must be protected'. But to lighten the car the King gave to Somadevi (queen of Vattagamini Abhaya) his splendid diadem – jewel and let her with her own consent descend from the car.

6417

Dambulla



over leaf
Cave No. 3
Maha Alut Viharaya



When going forth to battle he had set out full of fears, taking his little son and his two queens with him. Being vanguished he took flight and, unable to take with him the alms bowl used by the conqueror, he hid in the Vessagiri forest. When the thera Mahatissa from Kupikkala (Vihara) saw him there, he gave him food, avoiding thereby the giving of untouched alms. Thereon the King, glad at heart, recording it upon a Ketaka-leaf (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) allotted lands to his Vihara for the use of the brotherhood. From thence, he went to Silasobbhakandaka and sojourned there; then he went to Matuvelanga near Samagalla and there met the monastic elder (Kupikkalamahatissa) whom he had already seen before. He entrusted the King with due carefulness to Tanasiva, who was his attendant. Then in the house of this Tanasiva, ... the King lived fourteen years, maintained by him.

Of the seven Damilas one fired with passion for the lovely Somadevi made her his own and forthwith returned again to the further coast. Another took the almsbowl of the (Mater) endowed with the ten miraculous powers, that was in Anuradhapura and returned straightway, well contended, to the other coast.

But the Damila Pulahattha reigned three years making the Damila named Bahiya commander of his troupes. Bahiya slew Pulahattha and reigned two years; his Commander-in-chief was Panayamara, Panayamaraka slew Bahiya and was king for seven years; his Commander-in-chief was Pilayamara. Pilayamaraka slew Panayamara and was king for seven months; his Commander-in-chief was Dathika, And the Damila Dathika slew Pilayamara and reigned two years in Anuradhapura. Thus the time of these Damila - kings was fourteen years and seven months.

When one day, in Malaya (mountainous region), Anuladevi (queen of Vattagamini) went to seek her (daily) portion, the wife of Tanasiva struck against her basket with her foot, and she was wroth and came weeping to the King. When Tanasiva heard this he hastened forth (from the house) grasping his bow. When the King had heard what the queen said, he, even yet the other came, took the two boys and his consort and hastened out also. Putting the arrow to his bow the glorious (hero) shot Siva as he came on. The King proclaimed (then)

his name and gathered followers around him. He obtained as ministers eight famous warriors and great was the following of the King and his equipment (for war).

The famous (King) sought out the thera Mahatissa of Kuppikala and commanded that a festival in honour of the Buddha be held in the Acchagalla Vihara. At the very time when the Minister Kapisisa having gone up to the court yard of the Akasa-Cetiya to sweep the building, had come down from thence, the King who was going up with the queen saw him sitting by the road, and being wroth with him that he had not flung himself down (before him) he slew Kapisisa. Then in anger against the King the other seven ministers withdrew themselves from him, and going whither it seemed good to them they were stripped of their possession on by robbers on the way, and they took refuge in the Vihara Hambugallaka where they sought out the learned thera Tissa. The thera, who was versed in the four nikayas (*Digha, Majjhima, Samyutta* and *Anguttara Nikaya*), gave them as he has received it (as alms), clothing, sugar and oil, and rice, too, in sufficing measure.

When he had refreshed them the thera asked them: whither are you going? They made themselves known to him, and told him this matter. But when they were asked afterwards: 'With whom will it be possible to further the doctrine of the Buddha? With the Damila or with the King? They answered: 'By the King will this be possible'. And when they had thus convinced them the two theras Tissa and Mahatissa took them forth from thence and brought them to the King and reconciled then one to another. The King and the ministers besought the theras saying: 'If of our undertaking has prospered then must ye come to us when a message is sent to you'. The theras agreed and returned each one to his place.

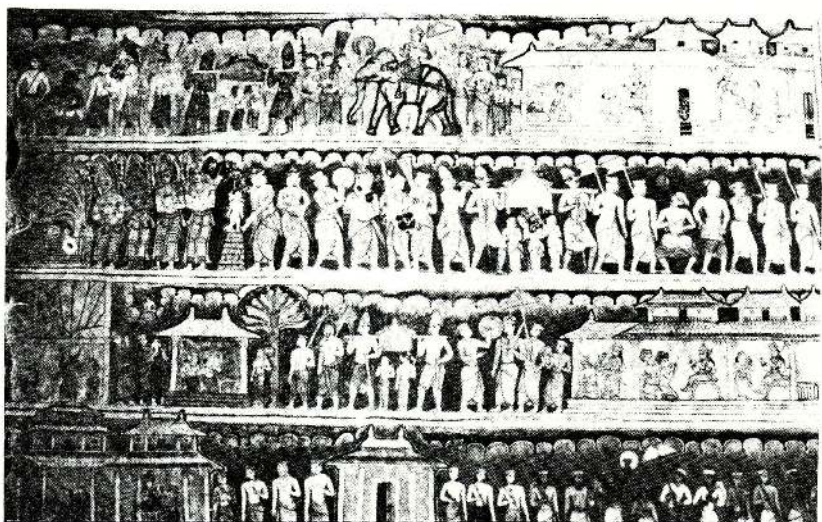
When the renowned King had come to Anuradhapura and had slain the Damila Dathika he himself assumed the government. And forthwith the King destroyed the *arama* of the niganthas and built there a *Vihara* with twelve cells. When two hundred and seventeen years ten months and ten days had passed since the founding of the Mahavihara the King, filled with pious zeal, built the Abhayagiri Vihara.

The *Mahavamsa* further goes on to describe a number of religious buildings that the pious King built during his reign. Referring to one of the religious activities of the King the author of *Mahavamsa* says:

The text of the three *pitakas* and the *Atthakatha* thereon did the most wise bhikkhus hand down in former times orally, but since they saw that the people were falling away (from religion) the bhikkhus came together, and in order that the true doctrine might endure, they wrote them down in books.

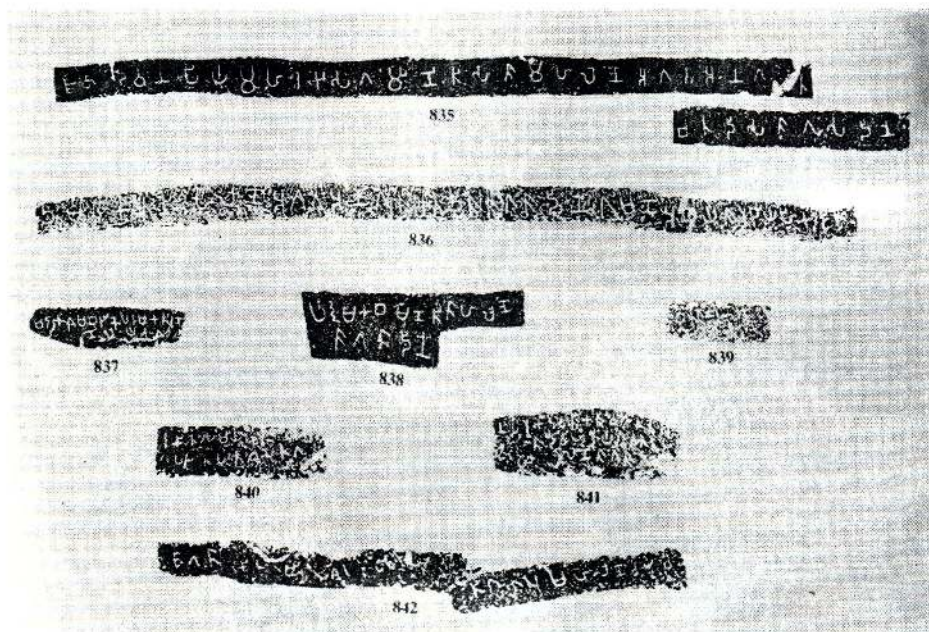
Thus did the King Vattagamini—Abhaya reign twelve years, and at the beginning five months beside (before the Damilas dethroned him).

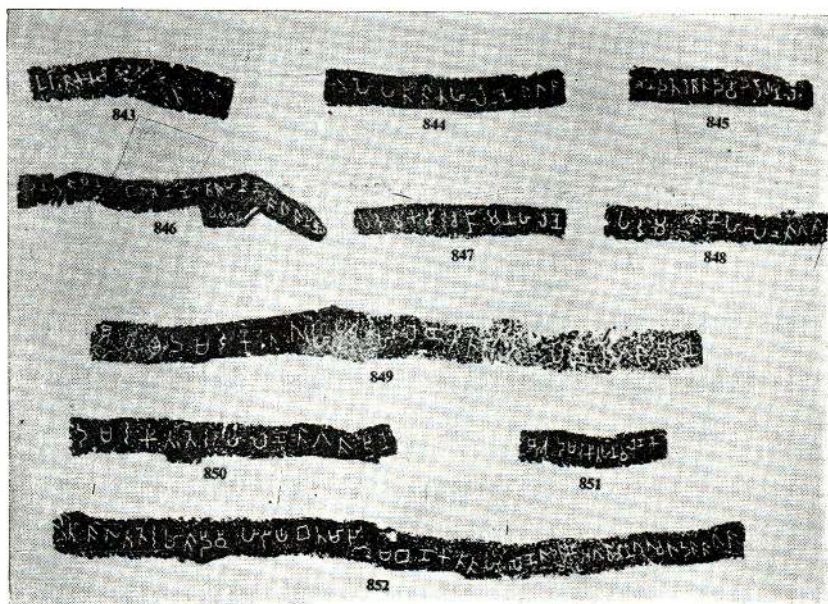
Painting on the ceiling (Cave 2)



There is no specific mention in these accounts about Dambulla, or Jambukola as it was then known or translated into Pali, in the course of Vatthagamini Abhaya's hiding out. However, a large number of Brahmi inscriptions found in the Dambulla caves date back to the pre-Christian era and speak of its past history. The place names mentioned in *Mahavamsa* in the account of Vatthagamini Abhaya and the preceding Sinhalese Kings Thulathana and Saddhatissa, are also found in these inscriptions. Let us therefore at the beginning ascertain the importance of Dambulla cave inscriptions.

Brahmi Inscriptions





Brahmi Inscriptions

The caves are donated to the Buddhist monks as dwelling places by various persons such as Kings, Chiefs, Buddhist monks and nuns. Among the large number of cave inscriptions so far discovered, the following are important for understanding the history of Dambulla.

- (1) Devanampiya—maharajhasa Gamini—Tisasa maha—lene agata—
anagata catu—disa sagasa dine.

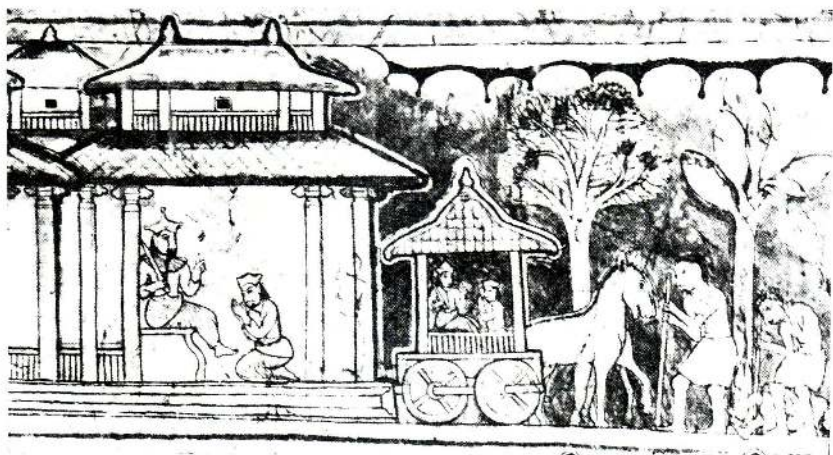
The cave of the great King Gamini Tissa, the friend of the Gods, (is given) to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent.

- (2) Damarakita—teraha lene agata anagata catu—disa—sagasa
dine Gamini—Abayasa rajhiyahi karite.

The cave of the eider Dhammarakkhita (is given) to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent. (the cave) fashioned in the reign of Gamini Abhaya.

- (3) Matuka—gama bujhike parumaka Ti[sa] gutiya lene.
The cave of the Chief Tissagutta, the proprietor of the village of Matuka.
- (4) Parumaka—Bamana—Tisaha lene sagasa dine.
The cave of the Chief Tissa the Brahman is given to Sangha.
- (5) Upasika—Ramaya lene sagasa.
The cave of the female lay-devotee Rama [is given] to the Sangha.
- (6) Anada—terasa sadivihariyana lene.
The cave of the disciples of the elder Ananda.
- (7) Tisaguta—teraha sadivihariya bata Majhima—banaka—Tisaha lene Sudasane agata—anagata Catu-disa sagasa.
The cave of Lord Tissa, the reciter of the Majjhima [Nikaya], disciple of the elder Tissagutta, [is given] to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent.
- (8) [Ma] caka—Samani [ya] lene Sagasa. Ima lenaha sa[ta]da dhana—labe.
The cave of the nun [ma] cchakka . . . [is given] to the Sangha. To this cave there is an income of money of half a hundred.

Siddhartha seeing the four omens



Two royal names occur in the above inscriptions. They are found in Nos. 1 and 2 in the above examples, numbered as 835 and 836 in the *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, Vol. 1, edited and translated by the late Professor S. Paranavitana. The first name refers to a Devanampiya Maharaja Gamini Tissa as the donor of a great cave. The other is King Gamini Abhaya in whose reign a cave was granted to the Sangha.

According to Paranavitana, the above, Gamini Tissa, who is also described as Devanampiya or the friend of the gods, is identical with King Saddhatissa who ruled the country from 137–119 B.C. Commenting on this identification, Paranavitana says:

The occurrence of this title does not preclude the inscription being attributed to Devanampiya Tissa (during whose time Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 2nd century B.C.) Nether tradition, nor the chronicles, associate the name of Saddhatissa or Devanampiya Tissa with Dambulla, the history of which place before Vijayabahu I is a blank, so far as the present name is concerned. The identification of the King in this inscription with Saddhatissa may for the present be allowed to stand, though it is based on hardly anything more than conjecture.

Therefore, on paleographic grounds, while dating this inscription to the early Christian era, we may safely conclude that the epithet *Maharaja* indicates that he was at least one of the early Kings, if not Saddhatissa himself.

The second inscription under discussion falls within the reign of King Gamini Abhaya, whose identity is questionable. But taking the account given in *Pujavaliya* and in oral tradition, Paranavitana says that this inscriptional record referring to the reign of a Gamini Abhaya may well have been (indicated) in his (Vatthagamini Abhaya's) reign. However, he says that "one cannot altogether exclude Kutakanna Abhaya (41–19 B.C.) Bhatika Abhaya (B.C. 19–9 A.D.) Ananda Gamini Abhaya (22–31 A.D.) and Culabhaya (34–35 A.D.) when considering the identity of this Gamini Abhaya figuring in the inscriptions for every member of the first dynasty of Sinhalese kings could have used the title Gamini".

The *Parumakas* or chiefs mentioned in the early Brahmi inscriptions seem to have been engaged in various occupations, and some of them held high offices of state while being donors or relatives of

donors. Among the chiefs mentioned in our records are Tissagutta, the proprietor of the village of Matuka (837), Tissa a Brahmin (838), Cirece Sumana (847), Sona (848), wife of the chief Pussadeva (853) Verali (854) and Cuda (856).

Among the cave donors there were also the *theras* or elder monks, *Samaniya* or nuns, and *upasikas* or lay devotees:

The cave of the elder Gutta, disciple of the elder Sivagutta, resident of Uparikada (is given) to the Sangha. (841).

In another inscription,

The cave of the female lay devotee, Rama [is given] to the Sangha. (843).

“Nine caves of lord (Bata) Dhammarakkhita” are also mentioned in inscription 851. In another inscription,

The cave of lord Tissa, the recitor of the Majjhima [Nikaya], disciple of the elder Tissagutta [is given] to the Sangha of the four quarters, present and absent. (852)

The nun Maccakkha also donated a cave, together with its income, to the Sangha. (857).

The early inscripational records found at Dambulla are interesting because they help us to ascertain the importance of the place. They show that a high degree of interest was taken by both the rulers and the ruled to see that the monks were provided with dwelling places and other basic needs in their constant pursuit of truth and enlightenment.

An interesting paper on “*Dambulla in Ancient Times*” by Professor Paranvitana after his compilation of *Inscriptions of Ceylon* was published by the Department of Cultural Affairs in 1969. In this paper, the author attempts to identify the ancient name of Dambulla and the significance of Dambulla in relation to the political and religious beliefs of the time. In one of the caves on the hillside to the west of the Dambulla rock, there is an inscription that could be identified paleographically as belonging to the first century, engraved on the rock wall, about a century or more after the original dedication of the cave. This inscription, hitherto unpublished but listed as No. 1145 in the Register of the Archaeological Department, records the building of a Stupa named *Catavanaceta*, and the donation made to it by a Thera named *Sedadeva*.



Inscription that records the construction of catavana chetiya.

Commenting on this, the learned scholar says that:

The name *Cata-vana-ceta* received its name from that of the place at which it was located and can be taken as incorporating the ancient appellation of Dambulla. The last member of the compound *Ceta* means *Caitya* or *Stupa* the second member *Vana* means forest. The forest at the place then must have (been) known as *Cata-vana*.

A place name *Chata pabbata* occurring in *Mahavamsa* (Chap. XI, V. 10) is identified by Paranavitana as the ancient name of Dambulla. It was here that three wondrous bamboo shoots or stems (*yatthi*) grew up at the time of consecration of Devanampiyatissa (250–210 B.C.). *Vamsatthapakasini*, the commentary written on the great Chronicle says that the Chatapabbata was to the south-east of Anuradhapura at a distance of 'over two yojanas ahead'.

Paranavitana, however, falls into difficulty when the commentary refers to two yojanas which can be only 16–18 miles from from Anuradhapura; whereas the exact distance of Dambulla

is considerably more than that. Therefore he says that the "Commentator does not give the information about *Chatapabbata* as knowledge of which he was certain as that which he had been told by others". An error, he believes, could therefore have crept into the information before it was reported to him. In order to get away from the difficulty he cites Codrington when the distance of a *yojana* has to be ascertained. He says:

As Codrington has pointed out, the *yojana* of the table of linear measure given in the lexicon *Abhidhanappadipika* (12th century), was much longer than that of the *Mahavamsa*. If the *Aratni* (riyana) was the same as the architects cubit, the *yojana* could have been 15.46 miles. If the *yojana* given by the Commentator in this context was the longer one of later times, the actual distance from Anuradhapura to Dambulla could have been covered by the two *yojanas* and more .

There are two other issues that Paranavitana discusses in his paper on Dambulla:

1. The importance of Chatapabbata as a religious place as mentioned in the *Mahavamsa* commentary and in the inscriptional records, and
2. The importance of Dambulla as the ancient Vessagiri founded by King Devanampiyatissa.

It was hitherto believed that the ancient Vessagiriya is the place covered with a mass of ruins adjoining the Isurumuniya Viharaya in Anuradhapura. The *Mahavamsa* commentary has a reference to a *Vihara* found at *Chatapabbata* by King Saddhatissa. In this regard Paranavitana identifies Gamini Tissa in the first inscription given above (No. 835) as Saddha Tissa (137–119 B.C.) who donated a cave to the Sangha of the four quarters. If we are to accept Paranavitana's identification of Dambulla with ancient Vessagiri monastery he also commits us to accept the monarch named Devanampiya—Maharajha Gamini Tissa, mentioned in the inscription given above (No. 835) as King Devanampiya Tissa (250–210 B.C.) the first Buddhist King of Sri Lanka.

Paranavitana's account of the identification of Dambulla with the ancient Vessagiri is interesting. He says:

The story given in the *Mahavamsa* of the appearance of the miraculous bamboo stems (*yatthi*) at the foot of the Chatapabbata taken together with the statement of the Commentator that rulers of ancient Ceylon (Sri Lanka) before Devanampiya Tissa inaugurated their reigns with the assumption of a new staff; indicates that Chatapabbata occupied an important place in the religious beliefs and the political ideology of the Sinhalese people in the period before Buddhism became their religion. This is in accord with references to Dambulla in documents incised in small characters on earlier inscriptions, that I have recently deciphered. When Dhatusena accepted the advice of a Maga Brahmana and decided to acquire the status of a *Parvata-rajā* by residing in a palace built on the summit of a rock, he inquired from his adviser where a rock suitable for all that purpose could be found. The Maga Brahmana replied that a suitable rock, i.e. The one called Sigiri today, exists five *gavyutis* to the north-west of the palace called Yavakola which in ancient times was known as Visvagiri. It is the name *Yavokola* that has become Dambulla today through the intermediate form of *Jabokola*, *Jabola* and *Dambulla*. The maga Brahmana continued that it would have been preferable if it was possible to have the palace built on the rock known in ancient times as Visvagiri. This name has the meaning of "Cosmic Mountain". "It was however not possible to have the palace for Dhatusena built on Visvagiri, for on the summit of that rock as well as at the foot, there were monastic residence". "In Visvagiri, we can recognize the Sanskrit form of the Pali name Vessagiri. According to the *Mahavamsa* (Chap. XX, VV. 15 and 20) a monastery of this name was founded by Devanampiya Tissa; but the chronicle does not give any indication of its situation. The chronicle has stated that Vessagiri received its name as five hundred Vessas dwelt there after having received entry into the Sangha at the hands of Mahinda therā. This explanation reflects a popular belief which must have been deliberately implanted in the minds of the faithful by early Buddhist teachers. Names suggestive of religious beliefs which prevailed among the people before they embraced Buddhism were explained in a different way by Buddhist teachers, so as to make the people forget their earlier beliefs which were not in accord with the tenets of Buddhism.

If we accept the tradition that was prevailing in the fifth century that the Vihara at Dambulla was the Visvagiri (Vessagiri) of ancient times, we have also to accept that it was Devanampiya Tissa who founded this monastery. In that case the monarch named Devanampiya–Maharajha–Gamini Tissa who is mentioned in the inscription in the great cave as its donor can very well be identified with the first Buddhist King of the island. The title *gamini* was applied to Uttiya, the younger brother of Devanampiya Tissa, and there is no reason to suggest that it could not have been used by the latter.

If we accept that the *Vihara* at Dambulla was the ancient Vessagiri, the traditions which associate the place with Vattagamini Abhaya will be found to be based on historical facts. For we are told in the chronicle that Vattagamini Abhaya, after he was defeated by Tamil invaders, spent some time at Vessagiri in hiding, together with the members of his family. Dambulla is at a safe distance from Anuradhapura which was under Tamil occupation. It was also within easy reach of the hills of Malaya to which the fugitive King could further retreat if the enemy became aware of his hiding place and pursued him there.

Vatthagamini Abhaya's refuge as given in the great chronicle was Silasobbhakkhandaka which, according to the commentary, was situated to the south of Vessagiri near the Pabbatavihara. From Silasobbhakkhandaka, the king is said to have moved to Matuvelanga near Samagalla. According to the commentary, this place was then known as Moragalla. Paranavitana identifies this place as the present Moragalla in the Kandapalle Korale of the Matale district.

In order to avoid any confusion regarding the name given by Nissankamalla in his inscription at Dambulla, Paranavitana says that:

The name of Visvagiri by which Dambulla was known in ancient days seems to have been remembered in the twelfth century, for Nissankamalla has referred to the cave at Dambulla as Svarnagiriguha, the cave of the golden mountain i.e. *Meru*, the cosmic mountain.

There are two factors that weaken Paranavitana's theory on Vessagiri. They are:

- (1) Not giving us the exact source (in documents incised in small characters on earlier inscriptions) from which he has drawn his material for the identification of Dambulla as Vessagiri.
- (2) The derivation of Dambulla from Yavakola, which name is not found in any known epigraphic or literary sources of the Island.

Therefore it seems rather difficult for one to accept Professor Paranavitana's theory of Vessagiri unless further evidence in support of it is found.

The Meghagiri Viharaya mentioned in the Pali *Dathavamsa* is considered to be the present Isurumuniya Viharaya in Anuradhapura. In the first and tenth century inscriptions, we find references to a monastery called Isirimana and Isurumenu – that which gladdened the hermits. These (and possibly the Isurusamanaka mentioned in the great chronicle) are identified to-day as the modern Vessagiriya, also situated in Anuradhapura. Thus, the actual Vessagiriya to which king Vatthagamini Abhaya escaped and hidout from the Tamil invaders is certainly not located in the city of Anuradhapura itself, but must be a site further away. (See *Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. 11 pt. 1. pg. 49; Ceylon Journal of Science, Section G. Vol. 11. pg. 182.*). In this context Paranavitana's argument on the identity of Dambulla as ancient Vessagiri is interesting. But this can be accepted beyond doubt if an inscription with the name Vessagiri is discovered from Dambulla itself. Semantic and etymological arguements on Vessagiri alone will not strengthen the case though certain names of places near Dambulla are identified with the help of *Vamsatthapakasini*. At present the earliest name of the Dambulla Vihara site seems to be Catavana.

On the other hand, Paranavitana's more recent study of Dambulla strengthens the case for origins reaching far back into the period of Devanampiya Tissa the first Buddhist King of Sri Lanka. Paranavitana who formally believed that the king named Gamini Tissa at Dambulla Cave inscription to be Saddha Tissa later identified him as Devanampiya Tissa.

A recent study on the History of Kingship in Sri Lanka has shown that the title *Devanampiya* is borne only by the kings belonging to the main lineage of Anuradhapura beginning with Devanampiya Tissa in the third century B.C. and ending with Mahadathika Mahanaga in the first century A.D. Therefore Devanampiya Gamini Tissa in the above inscription under discussion may well be taken as the first Buddhist king of Sri Lanka, if he is not King Saddha Tissa. Further more the *Mahavamsa* Commentary says that king Saddha Tissa (137 – 119 B.C.) built a *Vihara* at Chatapabbata. An inscription recently discovered at Dambulla Confirms that the name Catavana was applied to the *Chetiya* there. A close similarity of the names Catavana and Chatapabbata associated with the religious establishment suggests that Dambulla may be the site of the *Vihara* founded by Saddha Tissa in the second century B. C. In view of these possibilities we cannot ignore the traditional belief supported by the thirteenth century Sinhalese literary work *Pujavaliya* that Dambulla cave temple was associated with Vaththagamini Abhaya in the first century B.C. The same is confirmed by *Rajaratnakaraya*, a work of the 18th century. Lack of evidence in our historical or literary sources on Dambulla from that early period of the Christian era up to the eleventh century does not necessarily mean that the rock caves were not in use by the monks. King Vijayabahu I (1055–1110 A.D.) according to *Culavamsa*, had renovated this temple. This evidence beyond doubt confirms that Dambulla was a place of sanctity during a long period of several centuries running through the Anuradhapura period, and reassumed its past glory at the beginning of the eleventh century after Anuradhapura was abandoned by the Sinhalese Kings due to South Indian Chola invasions. It is fair to assume that even Dambulla temple too was neglected or abandoned, like the many places of worship in Anuradhapura. It is quite clear from history that it was during the period of rule from Polonnaruwa (11th and 12th centuries A.D.) that the Kings paid much attention to rennovating Buddhist shrines in Anuradhapura and elsewhere which were ruined by the Chola invaders.

The Chola invasion and the ravages it caused, followed by the South Indian Magha's invasion at the beginning of the eleventh century, definitely retarded the intense religious activities of the

Kings of Anuradhapura. The University History of Ceylon, speaking of this period says:

During the preceding period of nearly a century of foreign invasion, war and internal turmoil, the country had become seriously impoverished. Institutional Buddhism also naturally declined, and apart from acts of repression and pillage by the Cholas and the decay of temples and the diminution, by neglect or lapse, of temple revenues, the *Sangha* had suffered so severely in its membership, by natural loss and lack of new monks of quality to replace the loss that it became impossible to assemble a full chapter for the ceremony of ordination and other necessary acts.

At long last, after a childhood of travail and seventeen years of warfare against greatly superior forces, during which his will to conquer never weakened despite bitter defeats and disappointments, treachery and revolt, Vijayabahu (1055–1110 A.D.) stood victorious at Anuradhapura. After a stay of three months at Anuradhapura, he moved to Polonnaruwa. Having established himself in the new capital of Polonnaruwa he built a Tooth Relic Temple".

Among the more important temples which the King restored were the Relic Shrines and the two Thuparamas at Mahagama, the Bodhi Tree Temple at Anuradhapura, Girikandaka Vihare near Trincomalee, Jambukola-lena (Dambulla), Madalagiri Vihara, Sandagiri Vihara at Tissamaharama, Mahiyangana Vihara, Velgam Vihara and many others. We are not informed exactly of the nature of the restoration carried out at Dambulla temple by Vijayabahu I, but it is apparent that Dambulla was not only a cave dwelling for the monks but was also a *Vihara* or monastic shrine at the time.



Kirti Sri Nissankamalla (Cave 2)

The next reference to this great cave temple comes to us from one of Nissankamalla's (1187–1196 A.D.) inscriptions at Dambulla. It is engraved on the rock to the right immediately after passing the *Vahalkada* in the courtyard of the temple, and consists of twenty five lines. The last lines of this inscription read:

He reconciled the clergy of the three Nikayas that had been separated for a long time, honoured the word of the Buddha (as contained) in the Tripitaka and promoted science. (He also restored) the Viharas and Dagabas which had fallen into ruin in consequence of the calamities that (had) befallen (the land) during the days of former Kings . . . (Moreover) he built many Viharas in Anuradhapura, Devi Nuwara, Kelani, Miyugune etc. and made donations of vast riches.

He caused (the reclining, sitting and) standing statues (of the Buddha) in the cave of Dambulla to be gilded...celebrated a great puja at a cost of seven lakhs of money and is thus recorded upon this stone, gave (to the cave) the name of Swarna Giriguhava Golden Rock Cave).

Two important points of information on Dambulla temple are found in this inscription of King Nissankamalla:

- 1 He caused the reclining, sitting and standing statues of the Buddha in the cave of Dambulla to be gilded, and celebrated a great puja at a cost of seven lakhs of money.
- (2) And gave this cave the name of *Svarnagiriguha*, the Golden Rock Cave.

It is not unusual for a student of the history of Sri Lanka to reserve a certain amount of doubt about such references to the various activities of this King, as it has been found that he has sometimes unreasonably taken credit for things that he was not at all responsible for. He has taken full credit for the construction of sites where his only proven contribution was that of attending to minor repairs. In this instance, he has only gilded the Buddha statues at Dambulla; and it is therefore reasonable to assume that these Buddha images mentioned in this inscription already existed during the time of Nissankamalla.

Pujavaliya, referring to Dambulla, says that King Nissankamalla covered the Vihara with plates of gold, overlaid seventy-three large images with gold, and called it *Rangiri Dambulla*. This reference, too, tells us that Nissankamalla was only responsible for applying gold on seventy-three Buddha images and covering the *Vihara* with gold plate. This action alone made him name this cave *Swarnagiriguha* or Golden Rock Cave.

The *Pritidanamandapa* inscription and the *Galpota* inscription of the same King at Polonnaruwa further confirm his activities at the Dambulla Viharaya. According to the *Pritidanamandapa* inscription, he caused to be built at Dambulla seventy-three reclining, sitting and standing Buddha statues and *dagabas* and *viharas*, and applied gold on them and made offerings to the value of seven lakhs. (EZ II, p. 170). The *Galpota inscription* speaks only of gilding the Buddha statues. (EZ II, p. 106).

The *Mahavamsa*, too, has a reference to Dambulla concerning the same King, and says:

“The *Jambukola Vihara* resplendent with walls and pillars shimmering in gold and silver, where the floor was of red lead and the bricks of the roof were of gold and the wise (monarch) had rebuilt and placed therein seventy-three golden statues of the Master”. (80:22–23).

Thus our sources regarding Nissankamalla's work at Dambulla unanimously agree on seventy three Buddha statues being gilded. This action is further supported by two *Dambulu Vihara Tudapatas* of 1726 A.D. and 1780 A.D.

The *Dambulu Vihara Tudapata* given to the temple by Sri Veeraparakrama Narendrasinha in the year 1726 A.D., contains the history of the cave temple and other details such as descriptions of the statues, the lineage of monks who looked after the temple, and the land granted by various Kings for the maintenance of the *Viharaya* and for the monks who resided there.

According to this *Tudapata* (a copy of a land grant certified by a subsequent King) the cave temple and the statues of Buddha and gods were founded by King Vattthagamini Abhaya. It says:

On the Kings' making inquiries touching the recesses of rocks and forests, an archer who resided there informed him of a cave in the rock Dambulugala. On the information, the King, being moved with holy ardour, repaired to the cave accompanied by four hosts of military array and having cleared forest which was some ages old, and having caused the cave in the rock which was 140 cubits in length to be brought into shape, and walls to be built, completed it by causing to be made a stone image of Buddha of 18 cubits, in a reclining posture, upon a throne of lotus and three other images in a sitting posture near its head an image of Buddha and one of Vishnu close to its feet and a statue of the priest Ananda in the partition called Deuraja, after which in the middle enclosure of the partition called Maharaja Vihara, which is 94 cubits in length and 45 in breadth, he caused to be made a stone image of 7½ cubits with fifty-eight others of Buddha, and also the images of Maitri Buddha with those of the gods Natha, Vishnu, Saman, and a statue of the King himself, and further he caused to be made

in the middle of the same Vihara a dagoba. Having thus completed the works of the Maharaja Vihara, he caused to be made in third partition, called Pachchima Vihara, ten images of Buddha and a dagoba. After this he also caused to be constructed the great dagoba named Soma. And to ensure the long duration of this Vihara, and that the rites and ceremonies might be continued in the future, fields and villages were dedicated to it to correspond in number to the parts of the stone images in a reclining posture aforesaid .

... Moreover, having made arrangements that no negligence might occur in time to come in the performance of the rites and ceremonies, granted the Vihara to the priest Jayamangala Sumana.

The same *Tudapata*, speaking of Nissankamalla, further says that the King, "causing his own statue to be erected therein, restored the performance of the ceremonies after the manner appointed in the days of king Valagamba (Vattagamini Abhaya) and gave it in charge to the priest Ratna, who was descended from the pupils of Sumana". This adds further details to what is said in Nissankamalla's own inscription regarding the work carried out at Dambulla.

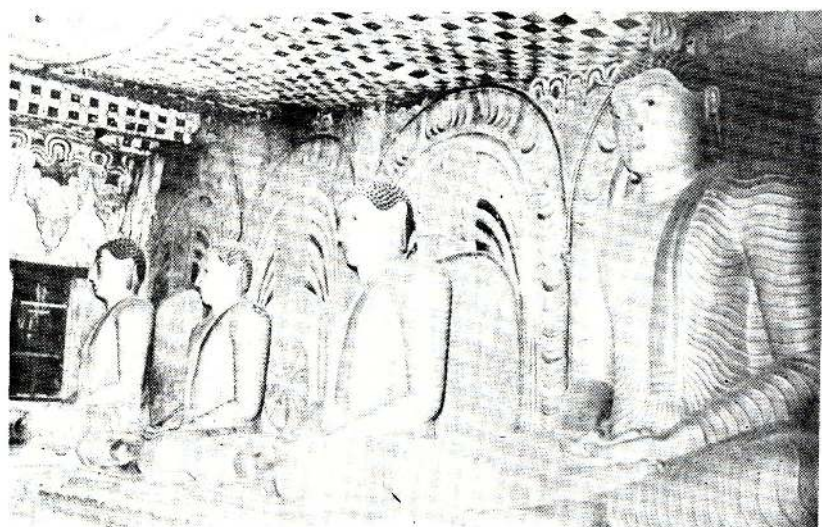
This document further goes on to make reference to King Buwanekabahu (1372–1408) A.D., King Vikramabahu III (1375–1375 A.D.) Rajasinha I 1581–1591 A.D.) and Vimaladharmasuriya I (1592–1604 A.D.) and tells about the incumbency of the temple from time to time and the interest taken by each King in the affairs of the temple. During the time of Vimaladharmasuriya I, the temple was in dilapidated condition. This was brought to the notice of the King, who forthwith commenced its repairs, but was prevented by death from bringing it to a close.

On the accession of King Senarath (1604–1635 A.D.) to the throne of Kandy, these circumstances having been brought to his notice, he kindly inquired into the particulars; and being much grieved at what he heard, appointed Melpitiye Abesinha Mudiyanse of Nuwarakalaviya and ordered him to make repairs to the Vihara, employing the people of Matale as extra helpers for the repairs. At the completion of the repairs, which took three years, the King, on the occasion of the festival of painting of the eyes of the images of Buddha, proceeded to the temple accompanied by the three queens and three princes.

After the festival was over, the King stood on the semi-circular stone threshold of Maharaja Vihara and called on the priests there assembled to nominate a person fit to be appointed incumbent of this Vihara, now that its sixty five images including the one in a reclining posture, had been painted and finished. Reverend Kahavan-dala Tanhankara was appointed high priest of the temple. By officially demarcating the boundaries, several additional pieces of land were granted to the temple.

The Dambulla Tudapata of 1726 A.D., essentially a record of pupillary succession (sisya parampara, succession from teacher to student) to the incumbancy of the temple, is a document which is important from the point of view of the *Sangha* who performed due rites and ceremonies with a dedication to the *Buddha Sasana*.

Numerous Buddhas (Cave 3)



The next *Tudapata* document of the temple comes to us from Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747–1781 A.D.) in the year 1780. This gives us in brief the history of the *Viharaya* with certain details not found in the earlier document. The length of the Dambulla cave is mentioned here as one hundred and forty cubits and it consists of three partitions namely.

1. *Devaraja Viharaya*, also called *Deuraja Viharaya* (The present cave number 1.)
2. *Maharaja Viharaya*, (Cave number 2), and
3. *Pacchima Viharaya*. (Cave number 4).

As per both documents, the following details are given concerning the work carried out by each King.

I **King**: Valagamba or Vattagamini Abhaya (89–77 B.C.).

A. **Place**: Devaraja Viharaya (Cave No. 1.), the easternmost Cave.

Details of Work Carried Out:

1. Caused the construction of the cave and walls.
2. Caused to be made of stone. image of Buddha of 18 cubits in reclining posture, upon a throne of a lotus.
3. Three other images in a sitting posture and an image of Vishnu near its head.
4. And a Statue of Buddha and the statue of the priest Ananda near its feet.

B. **Place**: Maharaja Viharaya (Cave 2), the larger enclosure, which is 84 cubits in length and 45 in breadth.

Details of Work Carried Out:

1. A stone image of $7\frac{1}{2}$ cubits with 58 statues of Buddha.
2. Image of Maitreya Buddha.
3. Images of gods Natha, Upulvan and Saman.
4. And a Statue of the King himself.
5. A *dagaba* in the middle of the same *Viharaya*.

C. **Place**: Pacchima Viharaya (Cave 4), the western Cave.

Details of Work Carried Out:

1. Built ten images of Buddha.
2. A *dagaba*.
3. The great *dagaba* named Soma.

In addition, fields and villages were dedicated to the *viharaya* to ensure the long duration of rites and ceremonies.

2. **King**. Nissankamalla (1187-1196 A.D.)

A. **Details of Work Carried Out.**

1. Seventy three images of Buddha in the cave temple were gilt and the temple was renamed Svarnagiriguha.
2. Caused his own statue to be erected.
3. Restored the rituals and ceremonies of the temple.

3. **King**. Senarath (1604-1635 A.D.)

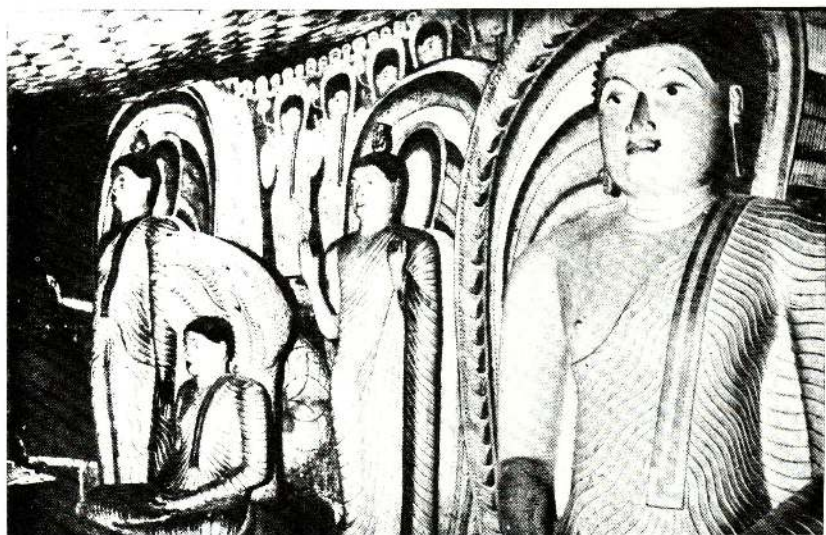
Place: The entire cave complex

A. **Details of Work Carried Out:**

1. Took three years to repair the temple.
2. Sixty-five images of Buddha, including the one in a reclining posture, had been painted and finished.
3. On the festival of paintings of the eyes of the images of Buddha, proceeded to the temple accompanied by three queens and three princes.
4. Defined the four boundaries of the village donated by the earlier King and ensured the continuity of rites and ceremonies of the temple.

The *Tudapata* of King Narendrasinha is actually a copy of a *Sannasa* or a copper plate inscription originally granted by King Senarath, as the original was lost. The present King makes no mention of any work done by him at Dambulla. The *Tudapata* granted by Kirti Sri Rajasinha in the year 1780 says that King Valagamba caused to be made seventy-three statues of Buddha. But we have seen that the number of figures caused to be built by Valagamba and mentioned in the *Tudapata* of 1726 does not tally with this number. The number of Buddha figures mentioned in the inscription of Nissankamalla is seventy-three; and it is therefore seen that this number actually existed during the time of that King, and that the temple was an important place of worship. Whether the work of seventy three statues is by King Valagamba or by another has to be decided on further evidence. However, a remarkable omission from the *Tudapata* of Kirti Sri Rajasinha is the work executed by King Vijayabahu I, and by Senarath as stated in the *Culavamsa*.

According to the document of 1780 the work at Dambulla by Kirti Sri Rajasinha was commenced on an information given by



Colossal Buddha figures in varying attitudes (Cave.2)

Dance of the daughters of Mara (Cave 2)



the incumbent monk of the Dambulla Viharaya to the effect that the temple was in a dilapidated condition. The King was on his way to Anuradhapura via Dambulla.

The pious King having heard this sad news, feared that this temple had been neglected to such an extent that even the daily offerings to Buddha could not be performed because the monks could not find a King for the renovation of the temple. He felt that it was not proper to have a temple remain in such a condition while a pious King like himself was ruling, and so decided to renovate it in keeping with the tradition of ancient Kings. The detailed work of this King according to the *Tudapota* is as follows:

4. **King:** Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747–1781)

A. **Place:** Devaraja Viharaya. (cave 1.)

Details of Work Carried Out:

1. Repaired the five reclining, sitting and standing Buddha statues, and the statues of Ananda and of god Upulvan (Vishnu).
2. Performed the *Netra pinkama* in the year 1755 A.D.

B. **Place of Work:** Maharaja Viharaya (Cave 2).

Details of Work Carried Out:

1. Painted the Statue of Buddha which is five cubits high, seated against the outer granary under the *Mi Makara* Arch, and the forty-six other Buddha statues,
2. The statues of Maitri and Natha,
3. The statues of Upulvan and Saman and the statues of Valagamba and Nissankamalla.
4. He performed the *Netra Mangalle* in this Vihara, in which the ceiling is decorated with one thousand three hundred figures of Buddha.

C. **Place of Work:** Pacchima Viharaya (Cave 4).

Details of Work Carried Out:

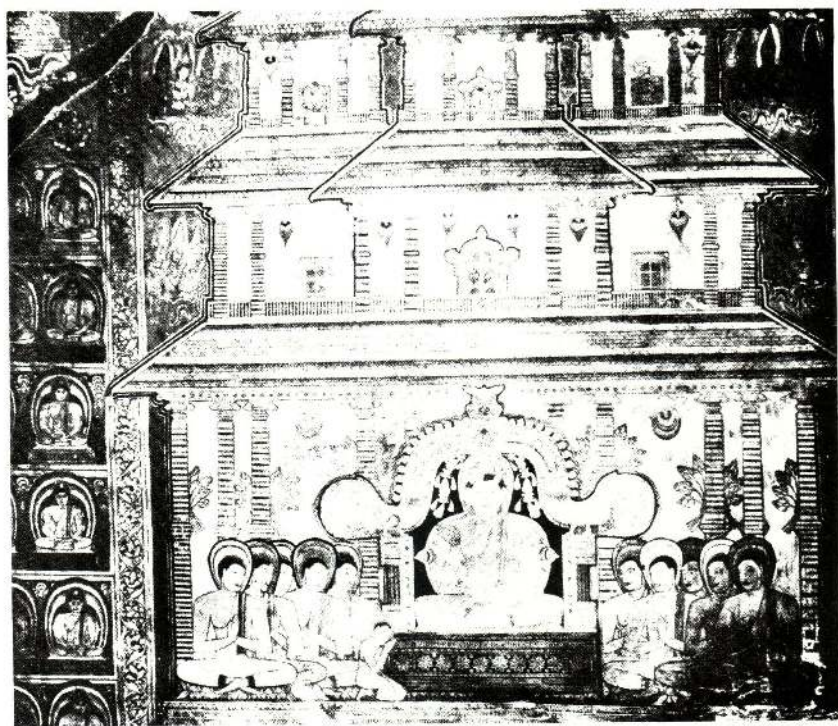
1. Furnished ten Buddha statue and completed paintings on the ceiling in the Pacchima Viharaya, performed the *Netra Mangalle*.

Maitreya Bodhisattva in Tusita heaven (Cave 3) ▷

D. **Place of Work:** Alut Viharaya. (Cave 3).

Details of Work Carried Out:

1. In the stone cave between Pacchima Viharaya and the Maharaja Vihara which was so far unattended by any King, made repairs and cleaned the floor, and constructed a retaining wall, and two doorways made from cut stone.
2. constructed fifty Buddha statues and painted the ceiling with images of Maitreya Bodhisattva and thousands of Buddhas and decorated it with various designs.
3. Erected a statue of himself and further performed a *Netra Mangalle* in this cave.
4. Made all arrangements for the daily rituals to be performed in the future.



Thus, during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha, many repairs and paintings on ceilings were done. Also a new cave which had been previously neglected was completely established as a new shrine. Thus, by his time we have four major caves that comprise the Dambulla Vihara Complex. They are at present known as *Devaraja Lena* (cave 1), *Maharaja guha* (cave 2) *Maha Alut Viharaya* (cave 3) and the *Pacchima Lena* (cave 4). The new cave founded by Kirti Sri is called the Maha Alut Viharaya, or the New Great Temple.

Sometime during the following century a fifth cave was added. This is the present cave number 5 known as *Devana Alut Viharaya* or the Second New Temple. When and by whom it was founded are not known. We know it was renovated in 1915 A.D. by Tolamba-golle Korala of Ehelepola: But it apparently did not yet exist as a major shrine at the time of John Davy's visit in 1819 A.D.

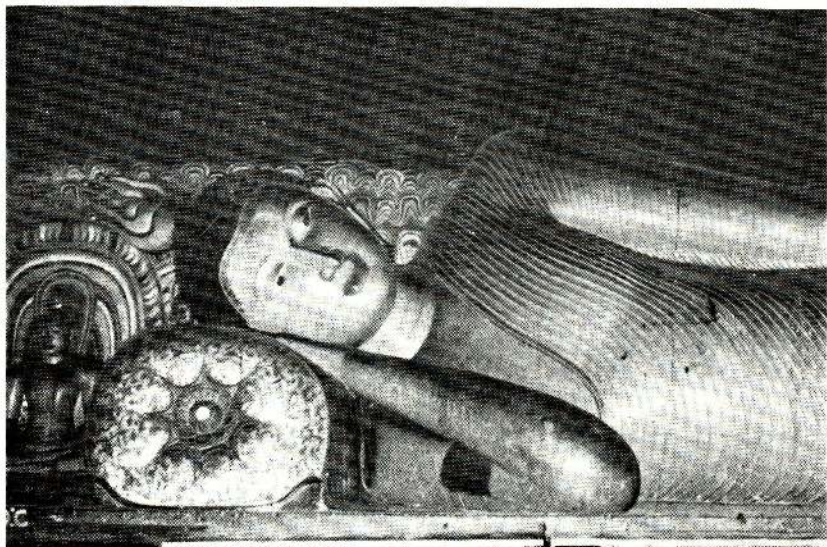
John Davy was one of the first Englishmen who visited this temple. He has given us a vivid description of the temple as it was then, more than one hundred and sixty years ago. His description is as follows:

The temples, which give this place celebrity are parts of a vast cavern in the south side of the rock, at the height of about 350 feet above the plain. The approach to this is up the eastern shelving extremeity of the rock, and through an archway of masonry of apparently modern construction, and a long narrow platform of solid rock open to the south, enclosed by a low wall, shaded by trees, and containing in its area a cistern holding rain water, a very small temple, and a *bo-gaha*. The interior of the temples is hid externally by a wall rather more than 400 ft. long perforated with a number of doors and windows, and sheltered and defended, not only by the overhanging concave surface of rock, but likewise artificially by a rude verandah, consisting of a thatched roof supported by wooden posts.

The approach platform and front raised our expectation very little and did not at all prepare us for what we discovered on entering the temples. The vihara we first explored is the last in order from the entrance. It is about 54 feet long and 27 wide; and its shelving roof, which dips rapidly inwards, where most lofty is about 27 feet high. It contains ten figures of Buddha, and a neat dagaba about 12 feet high. The figures are well

executed and brilliantly painted, and most of them are as large or larger than the ordinary size of man. The roof and sides of the rock and the front wall are painted of the brightest colours and illuminated with a number of figures chiefly of Buddha. The general effect of the whole is exceedingly striking and pretty.

Lying Buddha image (Cave 3)



The next vihara, called the Alut Vihara is separated from the preceding partly by a cutting rock and partly by a wall of masonry, in which there is a door of communication. Its principal entrance is by a door in front. We were taken by surprise on entering this temple. We were astonished by the great size the brilliant effect of an immense surface of rock painted of the richest colours, and by the numerous figures of Buddha which it contains, in different attitudes and groups, all coloured in the most lively manner. It is about 90 feet long, 81 feet wide, and its shelving roof, where highest, is about 36 feet high. The figures which it contains are fifty in number. One statue of Buddha, in the recumbent posture, its head on a pillow resting on its right hand, is of gigantic size, about 30 feet long and well proportional; its face is handsome, and its expression of countenance remarkably placid and benignant. Seven other statues of Buddha in the standing attitude are about 10 feet high, and all are as large as life, or very little less. Most of them are coloured bright yellow; two or three have red robes. Towards the western end of the temple there is a well-executed figure of King Kirti Sri, the last great benefactor of Dambulla, in his robes of state, which very much resemble those worn by the last King.

Between this temple and the next there is no direct communication; I believe they are separated from each other by a stone wall. The portal by which you enter is in front; it is a lofty archway, guarded on each side by figures in stone, intended to represent janitors. This temple, called the Maha-*raja* vihara, almost as much surpasses in size and effect the last, as that does the first described. It is about 190 feet long, about 90 feet wide, and 45 feet high, where highest; nor does obscurity add to its grandeur; for it is perfectly well lighted through numerous windows and several doors in front. It contains altogether fifty-three images, and a handsome dagaba, about 14 or 18 feet high, the broad circular pedestal of which is ornamented with four figures of Buddha, each facing a different quarter, each seated on the coil of a cobra *do capello*, and shaded by its expanded hood. As in the two preceding temples so in this the images are arranged in a row at a little distance from the sides and inner walls of the room but not grouped; and as in the last none are placed near the outer wall, with the exception of the statue of two kings.

At the western end of the temple the figures are arranged in a double row. The majority of the statues are Buddha of different dimensions and in different attitudes; many of them larger, but none of them much, if at all, smaller than life. Besides forty-six figures of Buddha, there is, in company with them one of Maitri Deiyo Rajjuruwo, who, it is imagined, will be the next Buddha, the successor of Gautama; and of each of the three gods Vishnu, Saman, and Natha; the first in blue robes, the second in yellow, and the third in robes of white. The statues of the two kings alluded to above, as standing apart against the outer wall are those of Walagambahu and Nissanga, at opposite ends of the temple; the first representing the earliest benefactor of Dambulla, is the rudest figure in every respect, and its dress is the simplest and least ornamented; the ears are long, and drawn in the Malabar fashion; there is a double-headed snake about the neck, the body of which serves as a necklace and the heads as ear pendants. At the eastern extremity of the temple there is a little recess formed by a high projecting rock, the walls of which are covered with paintings illustrating the history of Ceylon, beginning with the earliest and most fabulous period, and continued down to the introduction of the Bo-Tree and the Sacred relic.

The next and last temple, called the Dewaraja Vihara (because the god Vishnu is supposed to have aided in the construction of its principal image), is very inferior in every respect to either of the preceding, especially the two last. It is about 75 feet long, 21 wide, and 27 high, and so dark that I had only a very imperfect view of it, even with the aid of a lamp. It contains six images of Buddha and one of Vishnu, all of them of ordinary size, with the exception of that just alluded to as the principal figure, which is a gigantic recumbent Buddha about 30 feet long.

Whether the cavern in which these temples have been formed is altogether natural, or partly natural and partly artificial, it is not now easy to determine. The probability is that it is principally natural, and that man has had very little to do in excavating it.

These temples are attached to the Asgiri Vihare, and are under the care of seven resident priests. It is pretended that all the country round, as far as the eye can reach from the summit

of the rock, is jungle property, and a priest offered to produce a Sannas to prove it. At present the priests can command, or rather I should say demand, the services of about forty people only, the inhabitants of twelve villages that belong to their establishment.

We are also fortunate to have references to this *Viharaya* by other foreign writers such as J. Forbes (1840), J. E. Tennent (1859), A. C. Lawrie (1896), H. W. Cave (1908) and J. P. Lewis (1915). Nevertheless Davy's account of the Dambulla viharaya is so descriptive and authentic that further explanation would be redundant. It is interesting to note that for the last century and half not many changes have taken place in the temple, so that it has preserved its ancient grandeur.

Dambulla is again mentioned in 1848, in connection with a rebellion in the Kandyan areas by the Sinhalese against the unreasonable taxes imposed by the British government. The new tax system so introduced by the British helped their Coffee plantations. This new plantations and the network of roads built in connection with it gradually destroyed the privacy and the traditional life pattern of the Kandyans. The Buddhist monks and the Kandyan Aristocracy, the two most influential groups in the Kandyan society were alienated by the British. Though the outbreak of disturbances at Matale and Kurunegala began with the introduction of new taxes in 1848, soon other reasons followed for greater and broader demands. The rebellion brokeout as a result of the British administration failing to understand the feelings of the Kandyan people. The peasants, some of them hailing from the low country, took the lead, in the rebellion. They all wanted a complete change in the administration and preferred the old Kandyan system of government.

A pretender named Gongalegoda Banda (Peliyagoda David), accompanied by Puran Appu (Francisku) and Dingirala and party, proceeded to Dambulla from Nalanda; where, on the night of 26th July, 1848, Gongalegoda Banda was crowned under compulsion at the ancient vihara as the King of Kandy by Giranagama Thera.

The British, having quashed the rebellion, took into custody all the rebels and their monks of the Dambulla *Viharaya*. They were

charged with treason because they had officiated at the ceremony of coronation of the Pretender.

The British examined the Nayaka Thera at Kandy on 12th August 1848, on the visit of the pretender and his coronation at the Dambulla Viharaya. The Nayaka Thera explained his role in the coronation and pleaded his innocence.

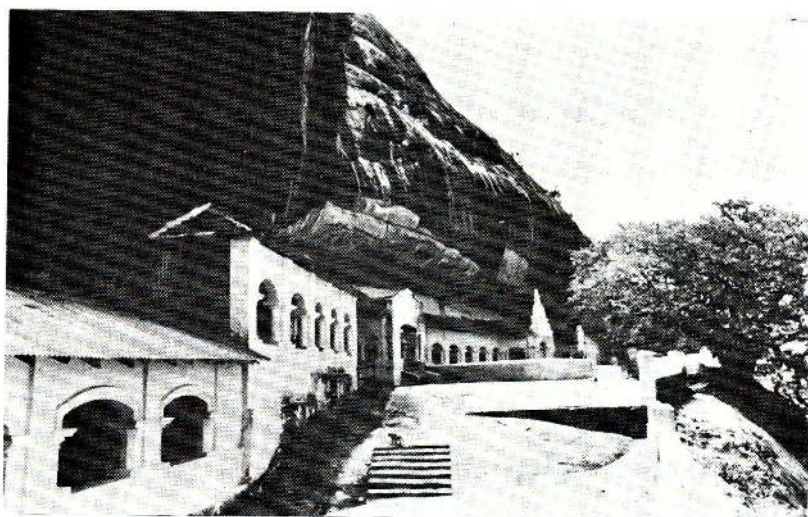
On the 6th of November 1848, Lord Torrington reported to the Secretary of State:

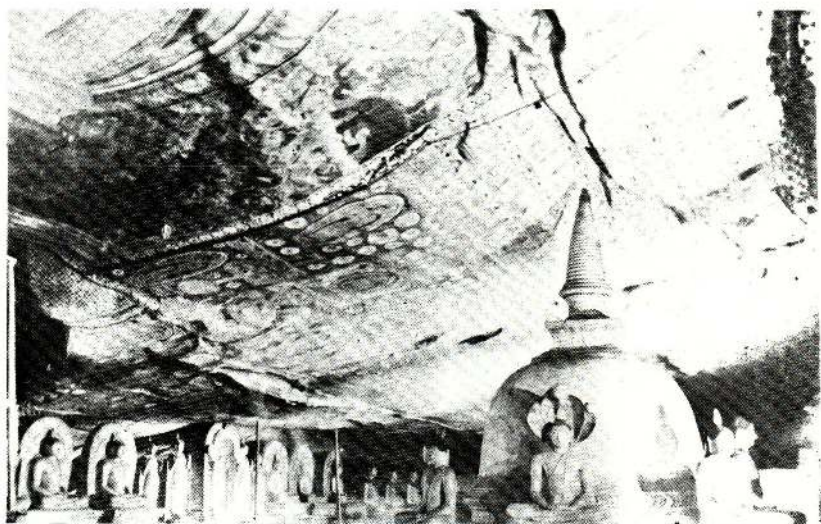
The keys of the temple at Dambulla have already been restored to the priest of the establishment and their landed property belonging to it, together with that of another temple in the neighbourhood, is in process of restoration to the legitimate temple tenants.

Dambulla *Viharaya* was looked after and the ceremonies and rituals associated with it were performed for generations by the monks belonging to the Asgiri Maha Viharaya in Kandy. In the early days, the incumbency went from teacher to pupil; a system known as *Sisyanu Sisya Paramparawa* or pupillary succession. The names of many such successors to the incumbency of the *viharaya* are recorded in the above mentioned two *Tudapatas*. During the reign of King Senarath, the incumbency fell vacant. It is stated in the *Tudapata* of 1726 A.D. that the King stood on the semi-circular Threshold stone of *Maharaja Viharaya* and called on the priests there assembled to nominate a person fit to be appointed incumbent of this Viharaya. The priests, in response to the call, stated that Kahavandala Tanhankara was fit to be incumbent, being also a lineal descendant of the priests who had been appointed in the temple since the days of Valagamba. However in 1835, when the office of Chief Priest of Dambulla viharaya fell vacant by the death of the chief incumbent, the Government Agent of Kandy summoned a meeting of the principal priests of Malwatta and Asgiri Mahavihara and some lay chiefs to recommend a candidate.

Today this great Temple at Dambulla is under the direct control of the *Mahanayaka* of the Asgiriya *Maha Viharaya*, and the *Maha Nayaka* Thera in consultation with the *Karaka Sanga Sabha* or the Executive Council of the Chapter, appoints the incumbent monk from time to time whenever a vacancy occurs.

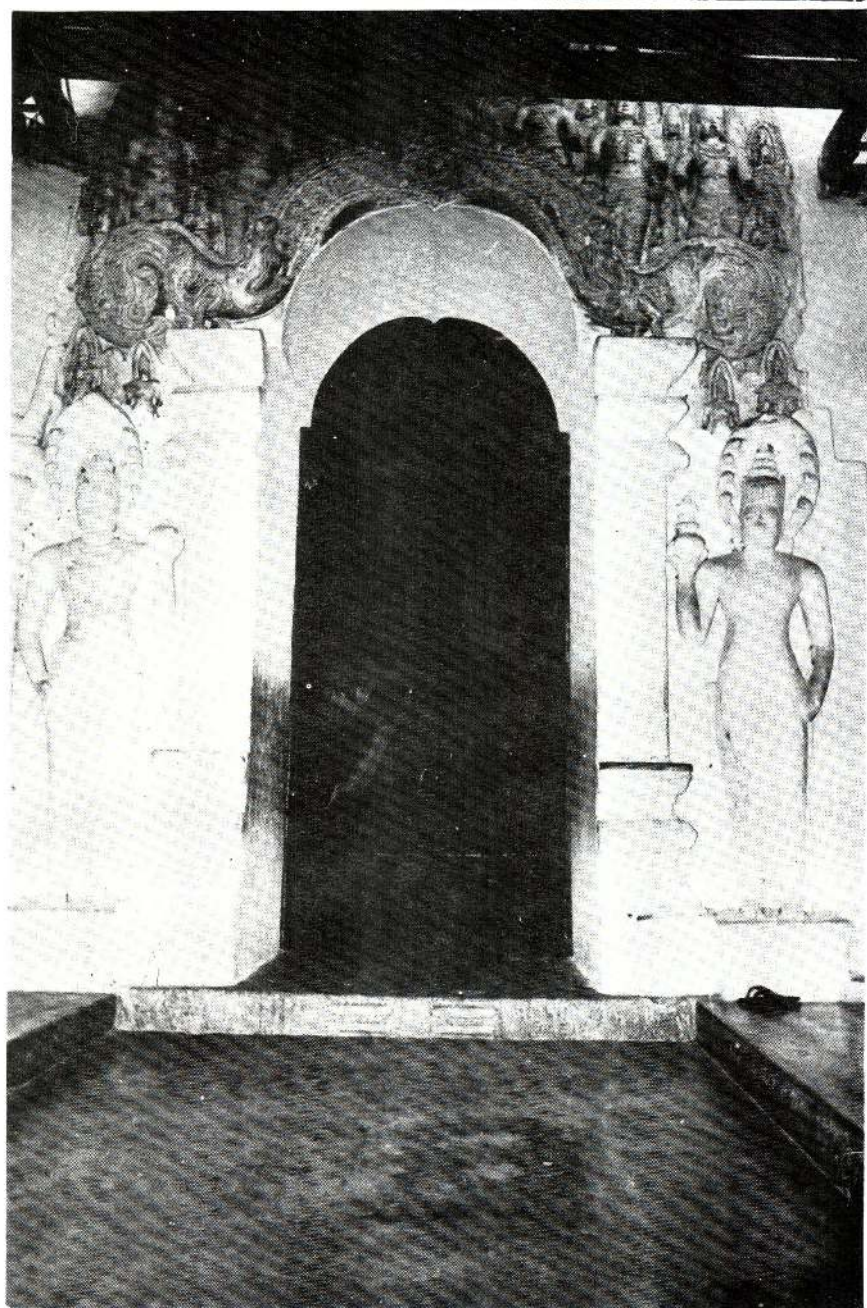
Dambulla Viharaya as you enter from the western side.





Chaitya (Cave 2)

DAMBULLA VIHARAYA TODAY



DAMBULLA VIHARAYA TODAY

This complex of caves at Dambulla is one of the most impressive Buddhist temples in the world. With its great number of Buddha and Deva images and paintings on the inner surface of the caves, its origin extends back to a remote period of Buddhist history. Though many of the images found in this temple are old, the paintings seen today may be the work of artists of the last generation of Kandyan kings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. However, Dambulla Viharaya should attract more attention from art historians and archaeologists, and not only from the Buddhist pilgrims who have been the main patrons of the viharaya up to the present time.

Dambulla viharaya provides an abundance of valuable material for the study of the evolution of Sinhalese Buddhist paintings and sculpture from the earliest times up to the late eighteenth century. Such vast material in one place, combined with a long history, is a rare find anywhere.

The *viharaya* on the top of the monolithic stone mass can be approached by the path cut into the living rock of the hill itself at periodic intervals, interspersed with stone staircases and level landings. The sprawling, overgrown temple trees covered with ever blossoming *Araliya* flowers (*Plumeria Acuminate*) provide the shade to the pilgrims who flock to the temple daily, season after season, to pay their respect and veneration to one of the holiest Buddhist shrines in Sri Lanka. For the convenience of many who have taken to modern transport, a new road has been built almost up to the temple. But the pilgrims go their hard way climbing the rock with devotion, while the affluent and the tourists may climb halfway up the rock by motor cars.

The Dambulla vihara complex of today comprises five major caves. Entering the *viharaya* through a newly built *vahalkada* or a gateway one will encounter the very first cave.

Cave No. 1. Devarajalena

This first cave is known as *Devaraja lena*. In this cave lies the painted stone image of a colossal Buddha in the sleeping posture, regarded as the Buddha in the *Parinibbana mancaka*, or in his final passing away; he is attended by his lifelong attendant and devout disciple, Venerable Ananda, at his feet. Three other Buddha images are seen in the sitting posture with a statue of Vishnu near the head of this image and another figure of Buddha near its feet. All these seven statues found in the *Devaraja lena* are traditionally considered to be the work of King Valagamba in the first century B.C. However, students of Sinhalese art and sculpture will know that the Buddha image does not go back to such an early period, and must be a work of a much later period. The name *Devaraja lena* given to this cave can be explained by the presence of the image of Vishnu, who is considered here as the Lord of Gods, by whose divine power the construction of Dambulla caves was made possible. The naming of the caves must have taken place in a much later period, as is evident from the Tudapata of 1726 A.D., where the names occur for the first time.

The cave is comparatively small in size and the space provided is fully taken up by the statues. Paintings on the walls and ceiling of this cave are faded almost beyond recognition due to smoke caused by incense burning and lighting of oil lamp by the devotees.



There is a *Vishnu Devale* attached to this cave from the outside, and the god worshipped there is the same as the image of this god found in the cave. Day after day, we see a large number of devotees from and around Dambulla flocking to this place for the redress of their sufferings and for divine intervention.

According to a popular belief in the south of Sri Lanka, it was this statue of Visnu that was brought to Dambulla from the Visnu devale at Devundara. It is also believed that this same statue which was originally at Devundara was also kept at Alut Nuvara devale in Hatara Korale and later at Maha Saman devale in Ratnapura before it was finally taken to Dambulla.

Cave No. 2: Maharajalena

We will move on to the second cave, which is partitioned off from the first by a thick wall. This cave temple is known as *Maharaja lena* or the Cave of the Great King (s), a name obviously given to this cave because of the presence of the images of Kings Valagamba and Kirti Sri Nissankamalla. This cave is one hundred and twenty-two feet long, and seventy-five feet broad, and twenty one feet high near the front wall, gradually tapering towards the rear.

Maharaja lena or the Cave of the Great Kings, is the most important and impressive cave out of all. It is important because this cave has the largest number of sculptures, both religious and secular. It is impressive because of the thousands of colourful paintings all around the cave walls and above, on the ceiling.

There are nearly sixty statues in the cave. Among the notable sculptures are the seated, lying and standing Buddha images; the images of the four gods Natha, Maitreya, Upulvan and Saman; and the statues of the Kings Valagamba and Nissankamalla.

As you enter the cave through the Makara Arch, you encounter on the left hand side a statue of the so-called King Valagambahu (Vattagamini Abhaya), the founder of the cave temple at Dambulla. Life-size sculptured in wood and painted over, it has a *Makuta* or a head-dress. The upper part of the body is bare. The right hand is in the *Vitarka Mudra*, while the left hand (which was broken and repaired) is in the *Varada Mudra*. This statue might well be taken as a statue of a Bodhisattva – king.



The main Buddha statue in the cave is directly in front as you enter the cave through the left hand gate. This life size Buddha image is beautifully carved in the standing posture under a *Makara Torana*, (an archway depicting dragon-like creature) with the left hand holding the uplifted hem of the robe about to release it, and the right hand in the *Abhaya mudra*. This statue resembles in some characteristics the colossal standing Buddha statues of the Anuradhapura period, such as the one at Ruvanveli Dagaba. The proportions of the body of the Dambulla statue are pleasing, being not so stocky as its Anuradhapura counterpart. But the face is not as expressive and serene as the Anuradhapura Buddha, which may be due to late renovations. The delineation of the folds of the drapery is shown as ridges. Though this image is freshly painted, one can still see patches of gold underneath the new paint. It is thus possible that this might be one of the statues supposed to have been gilded by King Nissankamalla.

On the two sides of this standing Buddha statue are images of Mahayana Bodhisattvas, Maitreya on the left and Natha (Avalokitesvara) on the right. This pair of figures standing in one place in sculptured form is a unique finding as we have no such example elsewhere. Fa-Hsien, who arrived in Sri Lanka about the year 400 A.D. mentions an image of Maitreya Bodhisattva. Chroniclers also mention the worship of this god. Since the Theravada also recognised Maitreya as a Bodhisattva the practice of worshipping him seems to have continued in Sri Lanka. The worship of Natha, who is identified as Avalokitesvara, was very popular from the end of the Anuradhapura period. The statues at Buduruwagala, Kustarajagala and Situlpauva are examples. All these statues are similar in that they are white and the faces show serenity. His characteristic symbol, the lotus, is held in the left hand. The right hand is in the *Varada Mudra*. The Natha statue at Dambulla, which is also painted white has a head-dress with the figure of Buddha Amitabha. Both the figures are dressed as princes. The Natha figure has the *Sinha-Mukha* (lion face) hanging from his ear lobes. The right hand of both these statues is in the *Vitarka Mudra* instead of the *Varada* and the left hand in the *Kataka Mudra*. The body posture of both is *Samapada-bhanga*.



King Valagamba (Cave 2)

Just behind these statues are two more colossal standing statues of gods, traditionally known as Upulvan and Saman, who are considered to be Buddhist Gods. As his name suggests, the colour of the God Upulvan is blue while that of Saman is gold. Like Maitreya and Natha, both of these statues also have the *Samapadabhangha* body pose, and their hands are in the *Vitarka* and *Kataka mudras*. They likewise wear similar head dresses. The two statues are the same in height and size, and differ only in colour and facial expression.

As you enter the viharaya, in the right hand corner is a statue of King Nissankamalla, which is similar in most respect to the statue of King Valagamba mentioned above. This image of the king reminds us of the figure on a slab of stone at the cave of Bhagavalena where one of his inscriptions is engraved recording his visit and donation to *Sripada*, the mountain of the sacred Foot-print.

Apart from these few figures of gods and kings the rest at the statues of this cave are all Buddhas of varying sizes and poses. Arranged in rows all around the spacious cave, these Buddha figures add much charm and serenity to the cave. Colossal seated Buddha images in Samadhi (meditation) pose, and colossal standing images displaying *Vitarka*, *Varada* and many other *mudras*, and a colossal reclining Buddha amidst other similar but smaller images, are a serene sight for the visitor, and evoke the joy of seeing Buddha.

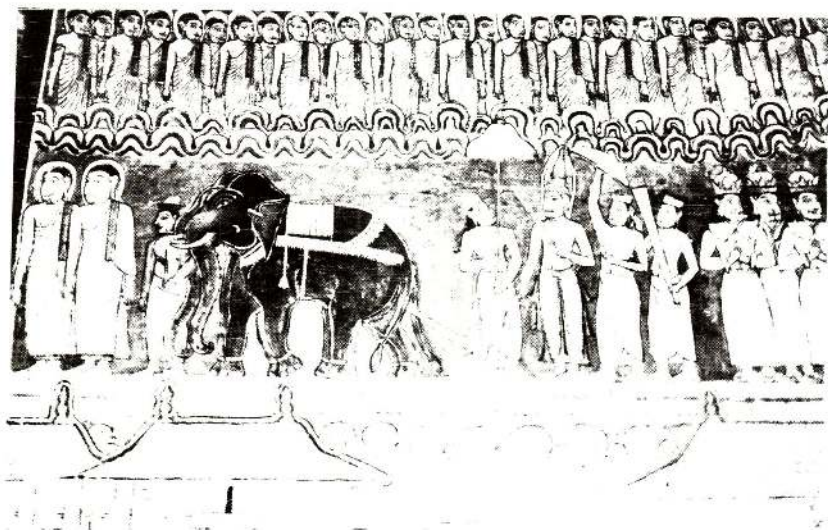
The Maharaja guha also has a painted stupa, surrounded by eleven seated Buddha statues. Two of these Buddhas incorporate a representation of the snake king Mucalinda who gave Lord Buddha shelter during the sixth week after he attained enlightenment. There are altogether sixteen standing Buddha statues and forty seated statues of Buddha in this cave, made out of either brick, stucco granite or wood.

Amidst these numerous images, the eyes of the visitor cannot escape the site of thousands of murals on the walls and ceiling of this cave. In the murals painted in the right-hand corner of the cave behind the row of Buddha images near the right-wall, one will see some important events in the early history of Buddhism and in the history of Sri Lanka. Near the top of the series of paintings behind the Buddha images, we see king Devanampiyatissa with bow and arrow hunting a deer who led him to meet Arahant Mahinda Thera the son of the great India Emperor Asoka, who together with other Buddhist monks brought the Buddhist teaching to Sri Lanka. This meeting is depicted in the scene above the hunting scene. To the right of the scene showing their meeting, we see the king dedicating the Mihintale hill with its caves as a residence for the monks. Mahinda Thero, is depicted here in the seated posture of a Buddha as he is in the scene below, where he preaches his first sermon to the king in his palace. Further down the wall, on the left we see the king walking with a plough behind the two royal elephants demarkating the boundaries of Anuradhapura to establish its new identity as a Buddhist centre. Near by in the same scenes of paintings, we see the other two great events of Devanampiyatissa's reign; the bringing of the bodily relics of Buddha and enshrining them in the first stupa in Sri Lanka and bringing and planting the Bo-tree. To the right a long procession



King Suddhodana visits his son the Buddha to be (Cave 2)

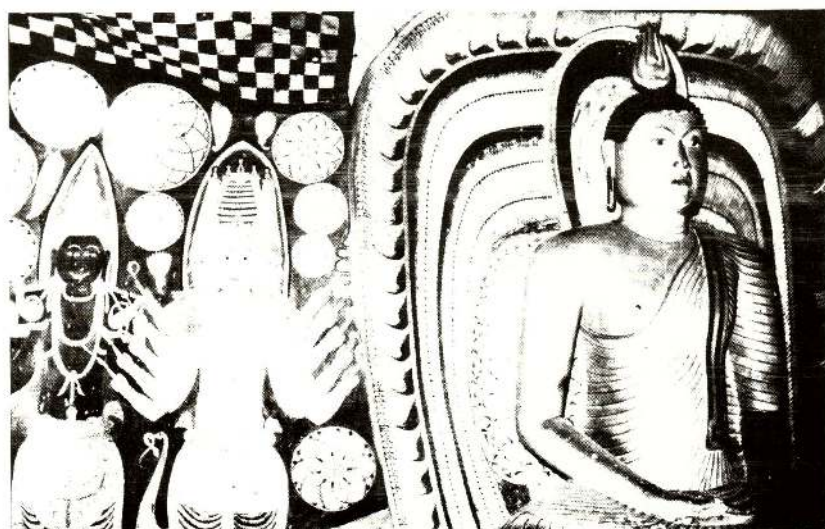
Demarcating the boundaries at Anuradhapura (Cave 2)



of officers and musicians carries the stupa-shaped relic casket to the king who receives it from them and in the scene just to the left places it on a pedestal under a white umbrella in his palace and pays homage. A Stupa, is erected in a pavillion (Thuparama) and the king carries this smaller relic casket to it. Just to the left of this scene, the king receives the Bodhi Tree sapling from the nun Sanghamitta places it on his head and has it planted. Before being planted the Tree rows in to the sky displaying its miraculous qualities.

The history of the country is depicted with the advent of Vijaya, and the war between King Dutthagamini and Elara mounted on elephants. Most of the scenes have become completely obscured due to smoke of incense and oil lamps. The portraits of Vibhisana (Ravana's brother), Skanda and Ganesa are also beautifully painted on the walls.

God Skanda and Vibhisana on the wall behind the seated Buddha figures



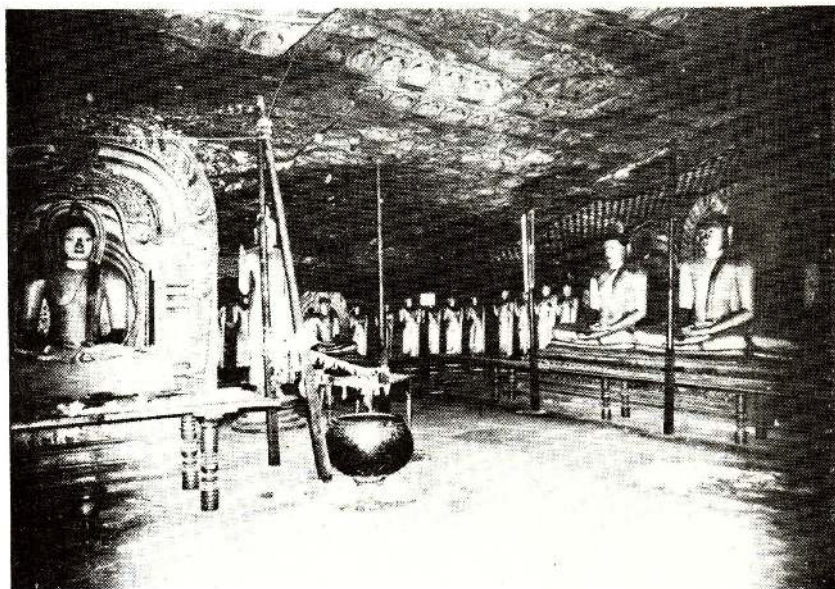
On the left hand side of the ceiling are a series of murals depicting the *suvisi vivaranaya*, or twenty-four enunciations; and tusita Heaven, birth of Prince Siddhartha, his education, renouncing the household life, attaining Buddhahood, certain important events of his life as Buddha, the final passing away, the cremation and the building of stupas enshrining the Buddha relics, and the first great Buddhist Council. In the middle of the Cave ceiling are two large murals depicting the struggle of Mara, the lord of illusion to prevent Buddha's enlightenment. In the left hand mural, the largest in the cave Mara on his elephant leads his demon army against the unperturbed meditating Buddha. In the right hand mural Mara sends his beautiful daughters to perform their sensuous dances and again Buddha remains undisturbed.

Between all these scenes are various designs to fill in the blanks. One important aspect of these mural paintings is that in some places one can see that these paintings have been done over older paintings. This suggests that the paintings have been executed several times throughout history before assuming their present form in the eighteenth century.

A bowl placed within a square wall towards the right hand corner of this Cave is something that a pious visitor to Dambulla Viharaya will not miss. Even today, Buddhists believe that the drops of water falling into this bowl will never stop even during a severe drought, which is considered to be miraculous feature of this sacred cave temple. Having witnessed this wonder, we will now go to the third Cave.

Cave No. 3 – Maha Alut Viharaya

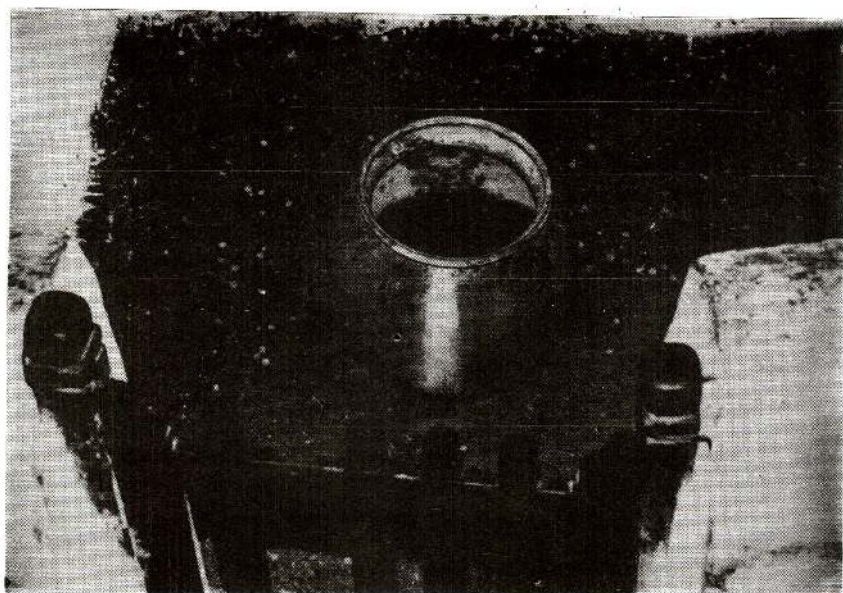
Maha Alut Viharaya, the New Great Temple, is so named because it was built recently by one of the last Kings of the Kandyan Kingdom, Kirti Sri Rajasinghe. He had it constructed in the eighteenth century on the advice and guidance of Rev. Potuhera Ratanapala, the then Mahanayake Thera of Asgiri Maha Vihare in Kandy. In all respects this new cave temple is only second to the *Maharajalena* (Cave No. 2). The account of its construction and the nature of the work carried out by the pious King is recorded in the *Dambulla Tudapata* of 1780 A.D. given by the King. The Cave is about ninety feet long, eighty one feet wide and about thirty-six feet high at the entrance.



Maha Alut Viharaya

The great King, having had the site of the new *viharaya* cleared erected retaining walls and built the *viharaya* with two entrances. These two doorways ornamented with the *Makara Torana* are still seen to day. He also built a colossal reclining Buddha statue almost thirty feet long on the left hand side of the temple, against the wall that separates this Cave from the fourth cave. He built a seated Buddha figure under a *Makara Torana* in the middle of the temple, surrounded by fifty other Buddhas. Today you will see fifty seven statues, of which fifteen are in the seated pose and the remaining forty-two standing.

The middle *Vajrasana* statue of the Buddha under a *Makara Torana* facing the entrance is flanked by two standing Buddha images. This Buddha image resembles in every respect the Kandyan Buddha images under *Makara Toranas* found in many parts of the old Kandyan Kingdom. The large size seated Buddha images on the right hand corner of the cave are also superb sculpture.



The water pot that is never empty (Cave 2)

An image of the King Kirti Sri Rajasinha himself, shown in life size and distinguished by his full beard and royal robes is also seen in this cave. Just behind three Buddha images on the right hand-side of the front wall as you enter is a large mural on the wall depicting the *Anotattavila* (Anavatapta lake).

On the ceiling are murals of thousands of Buddhas all in the same seated style, in a unique all over pattern. The two big murals on the ceiling are of *Maitreya Bodhisattva*. One depicts him in Tusita heaven, and the other obtaining *Vivarana* in his very first existence. This event is also recorded in the above named *Tudapata*. We will now visit the adjoining Cave.

Cave No. 4 : Pacchima Viharaya

The word *Pacchima* means western; But this is not actually the westernmost cave, since the present Cave No. 5 was constructed afterwards to the west of it. This Cave temple is about fifty four

feet long, twenty-seven feet wide, and twenty-seven feet high at the entrance level.

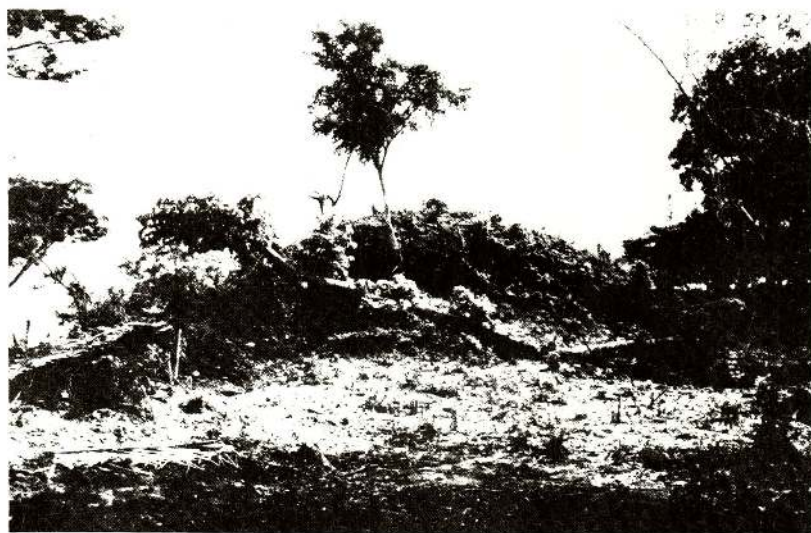
A small but beautiful Cave with figures of Buddha, it has a seated image of the Buddha showing *dhyana mudra* under a *Makara Torana* as the main image. In the middle of the cave is a painted *dagaba* or *stupa* of a small size, which was broken into by thieves recently to rob the valuables thought to be contained inside. It is traditionally believed that this *dagaba* contained the jewellery of Somawathie, the queen of King Valagamba. Hence it is called *Soma cetiya*. It also had partly worn murals of Buddha painted on it. We will now move on to the Cave which is apparently the newest of the five.

Cave No. 5 : Devana Alut Viharaya

This Cave which is comparatively new, was formally used as a storehouse before being converted into a cave temple. It was later called the *Devana Alut Viharaya* or the Second New Temple. The date of its construction and by whom it was constructed are not known.

There are altogether eleven Buddha statues, with a colossal reclining Buddha as the central figure. There are also five small standing Buddha figures and five seated Buddha figures near the head and feet of the reclining statue. Of the seated Buddha statues, two have Muchalinda Naga spreading his cobra hood over their heads, thus depicting the sixth week of Gautama's enlightenment. It is worth noting that in this cave also includes images of the gods Vishnu, Kataragama (Skanda) and a local god known as Devata Bandara. Some painted writing on the wall states that the *vihara* which was dilapidated, was repaired in the year 1915 A.D. by Tolambagolle Korala of Uda Walauwa, Ehelepola. All the images are apparently constructed out of brick and plaster.





Somawathi Chetiya (Catavana Chetiya?)

◁ Cave 5. Devana Alut Viharaya.

INSCRIPTIONS, OTHER CAVES AND RUINS

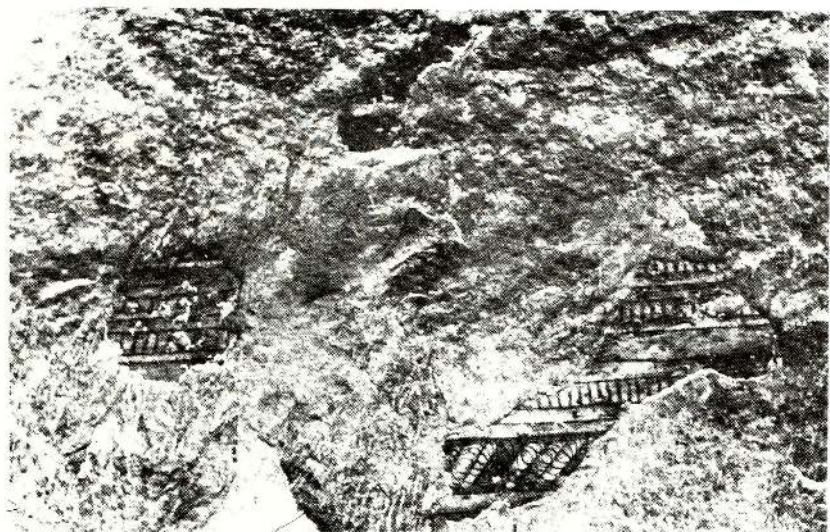
INSCRIPTIONS, OTHER CAVES AND RUINS

Considering the distribution of caves and other ruins at Dambulla, it is apparent that Dambulla *Viharaya* complex included a large area covering at least fifty acres.

For a fuller understanding of the Dambulla *Viharaya* complex we should know something of the rock inscriptions and other caves, as well as some of the new discoveries of the Cultural Triangle Project.

One will observe in some places close to the drip-ledges of the main caves a number of Brahmi inscriptions dedicating these caves as dwelling places to the Buddhist monks in the pre and early Christian era. At the entrance to the *viharaya* on the right-hand side of the rock is the famous inscription of King Nissankamalla of the twelfth century. A large number of Brahmi inscriptions are seen engraved near the drip-ledges of the smaller caves scattered around the main caves of the Dambulla *viharaya*. Most of them were donations to the pious Buddhist monks as dwelling places.

The large number of paintings which are seen today in the Dambulla *viharaya* might lead one to think that the paintings were executed only within the inner cave temples. But vestiges of plaster with paintings on them can still be seen under the drip ledge just outside the caves. This shows that the Dambulla caves at one time were a continuous gallery of paintings, extending from deep inside all the way up to the overhanging drip ledges.



Fragments of old paintings under the drip ledges

A Brahmi inscription (No. 1145 in the Register of the Archaeological Department) in one of these small caves below the rock on the western side is undoubtedly one of the very important recent discoveries, because it may throw light on the history of the *Cetiya*s (stupas or dagabas) recently discovered close to this cave. A stampage of the inscription which I was able to examine had four lines of letters. It is preserved in good condition and the first line reads: Hail. Thera Sedadeva the disciple of Naga Mahadeva Thera, constructed a Chetiya at Chatavana.

The rest of the lines refer to a donation made to the Viharaya derived from the income of a lake called Catavavi belonged to theras Sadadeva. On palaeographic grounds this inscription belongs to the first century A.D.

However, the word *Catavanaceta* is interesting because it may be the name of the cetiya recently discovered and mentioned in the inscription. Catavana is identified by Professor Paranavitana as the *Catapabbata* mentioned in the *Mahavamsa*; and its commentary, too, mentions that King Saddhatissa (137–119 B.C.) built a *vihara* there which is an obvious reference to Dambulla rock temple. People of the area also have traditionally recognized the heap of earth there as possible *chaitya*, and called it the *Somawathie Chaitya*. The identification requires further investigations. However, It is quite possible to assume that the *Catavana chetiya* of this inscription may be the present *Somawathie Chaitya*, as the inscription mentions the construction of the *chetiya* and the donation made to it by a monk named Sedadeva. Since this inscription is found engraved in the small Cave just in front of this chaitya, it is quite possible to assume that it refers to the same.

An old path called Rajamawatha which includes a flight of carved stone steps, extends from this area through the old *Avasaya* and the *Poya-ge* or Congregation Hall, up to the cave shrines.

Caves beneath the rock

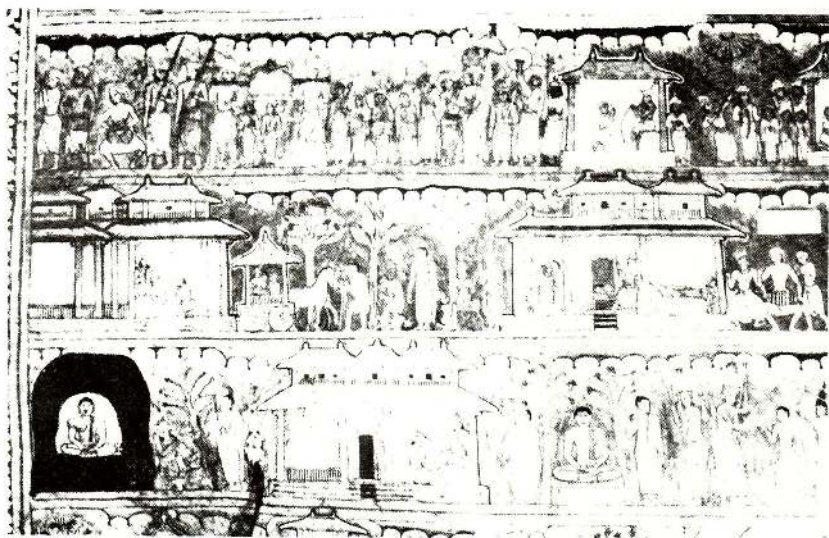


Short records are seen incised by the side of these rock-cut flight of steps leading to the great caves on the western side. Some of these are by ancient kings. One such record says that the 'Lord of men, King Kutakanna Abhaya (41-19 B.C.) was responsible for making thirteen steps of the flight'. The royal path (*rajamawatha*) that led to the sacred cave shrines and constructed by ancient Sinhalese Kings tells us the ancient way to the rock from the bottom where the ruins of Catavana *chaitya* and the Cave dwellings of many monks.

Sri Lankave Kadayimpota, a Sinhalese work of the fourteenth century which explains the boundaries of Sri Lanka, refers to Dambulla as Dambulu Nuvara or the City of Dambulla. *Tri Sinhale Kadayimpota*, another work of the same nature written in the seventeenth century gives the boundaries of the *Pihiti rata* (Pali Patittharattha), the northern division of the three main division of the country, includes Matale and Dambulla in this northern division. *Sri Lankave Kadayimpota*, as well as the above mentioned works, also include Matale area in the *Pihitarata* which shows that Matale was the southern boundary of the *Pihitarata*, with the other two divisions being *Maya* (mid country) and *Ruhunu* (the southern country).

The vast storehouse of historical data contained in the Dambulla complex has only begun to be explored. Even at the present stage of investigation, however, we are beginning to appreciate the significance of this data for understanding not only Dambulla itself, but also for helping us to interpret many aspects of the history of the entire country at various stages of its evolution.





Scenes from the life of Buddha (Cave 2)

◁ Seated Buddha Statue under Makara Torana (Cave 3)

SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

The primary focus of the Dambulla *Viharaya* is undoubtedly its Buddhist sculpture and painting. Our earliest known records speak of seventy three seated, standing and lying images of Buddha existing during the period of King Nissankamalla (1187–1196 A.D.) in the twelfth century, one thousand three hundred paintings existing during the reign of the last Sinhalese king Narendrasinha (1707–1739 A.D.), and an additional one thousand paintings existing during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747–1782 A.D.) of the eighteenth century.

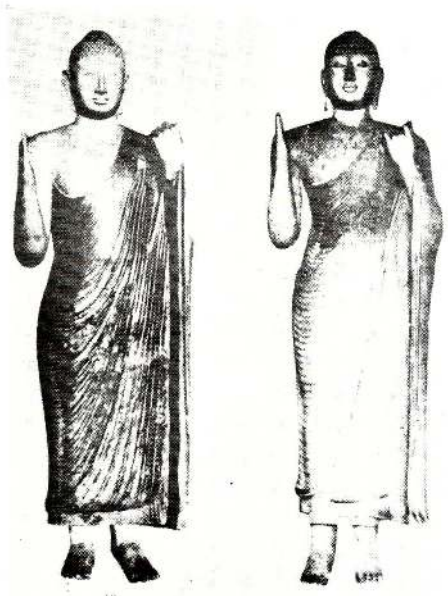
The Dambulla *viharaya* of today has developed and changed to such an extent that we have almost double the original number of statues and new paintings now replace the older paintings mentioned in historical documents.

There are two types of sculpture in the Dambulla *viharaya*: religious and secular. Of the religious sculptures, the majority are Buddha images of different sizes in seated, standing and reclining attitudes. A few images of gods and Bodhisattvas such as Vishnu, Upulvan, Saman, Natha and Maitreya are also found. These figures are in standing posture, richly ornamented with crowns and jewellery, and distinguished by attributes such as *mudras* and colour. Secular sculptures include three images of Kings who had given patronage to this temple, identified as Valagamba, Nissankamalla and Kirti Sri Rajasinha.

Some of these statues found here are traditionally recognized as belonging to the period of King Valagamba (89–77 B.C.). But this is hard to believe, as we do not have concrete evidence to prove such a claim. On the other hand there are a number of statues that certainly resemble those of the Anuradhapura period on stylistic grounds, such as the colossal Buddha figure in the standing attitude under a *Makara Torana* facing the main entrance to the *Maharajalena* (2nd Cave). As discussed above in Chapter Three, it has stylistic resemblances to the stone statue found at Ruvanveliseya (3rd century) and to the bronze Buddha statue from Medawachchiya (2nd century A.D.) now found in the Anuradhapura museum. One may also at the same time compare the similarities between this and the Kandyan Buddha statues, like the one in the same pose at Gangaramaya.

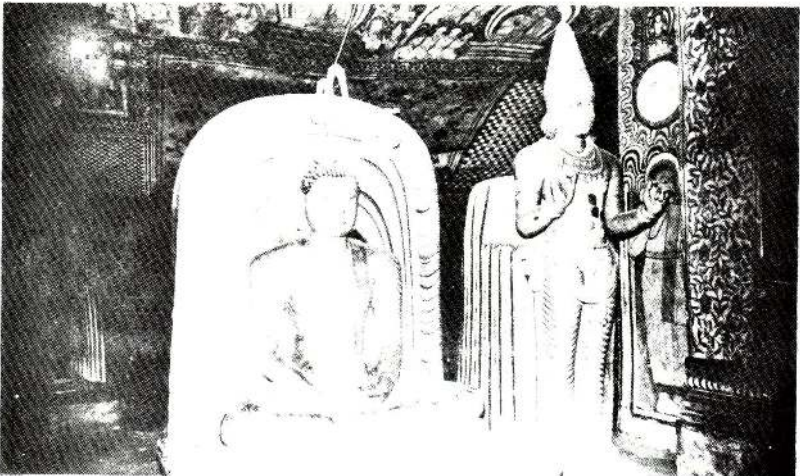
Number of seated Buddha figures resemble the Buddha images in stone belonging to the Anuradhapura period, but the painting and plastering done on these during a latter period have completely distorted the original forms. This may be true of the colossal Buddha images in the reclining attitude as well. There is also an unusual image of the Buddha in the second Cave with crossed hands placed on the chest. This statue reminds us of the famous Galvihara statue at Polonnaruwa the identification of which is a subject of controversy. The *Tribanga* posture (flexed at three points) combined with the facial expression of the Polonnaruwa image makes it aesthetically superior to the image at Dambulla. But it also helps us to identify both as statues of Buddha.

In the third Cave, the recumbent Buddha image with its head resting on a pillow with the right hand is a unique piece of sculpture



56 1. & 2. Colossal Buddha Images of Anuradhapura (Anuradhapura).

Colossal Buddha images at Ruvanveliseya Buddha and Bodhisattva Cave 3.



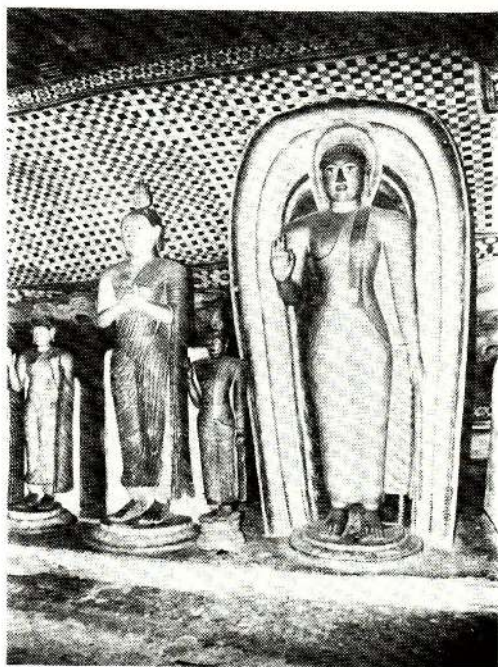


Image of Buddha with crossed hands. Cave 2.

belonging to the eighteenth century. The figure is well proportioned, and the face expresses kindness, peacefulness and lovingness (*maitri*, *karuna* and *mudita*) befitting the qualities of Buddha.

Among the seated Buddha images, the main Buddha image facing the entrance to the third cave is remarkable as it resembles, in character and style, the contemporary Buddha images under *Makara Toranas* found in many Kandyan temples in and around Kandy.

The figures of two important Bodhisattvas, Natha and Maitreya, on either side of the standing Buddha, are unique. Dambulla is the only place where the three statues of Buddha, Natha, and Maitreya are found together. The importance of Natha and Maitreya in the Buddhist worship is discussed above.



God Natha (Cave 2)

Commenting on these statues, Nandasena Mudiyanse says:

The circumstances which brought about the influence of Mahayanism into this region is a matter for conjecture. The discovery of a statuette of Manjusri at Elahera Matale and the existence of a shrine of Trantric worship at Nalanda speak of a spread of Mahayanist ideas into this part of the Central Province sometime about the 8th century.

However, figures of two gods in a marble slab similar to these statues were found in a small stupa at Pidurangala close to Sigiriya. It is believed that these two figures are of two *Bodhisattvas*.

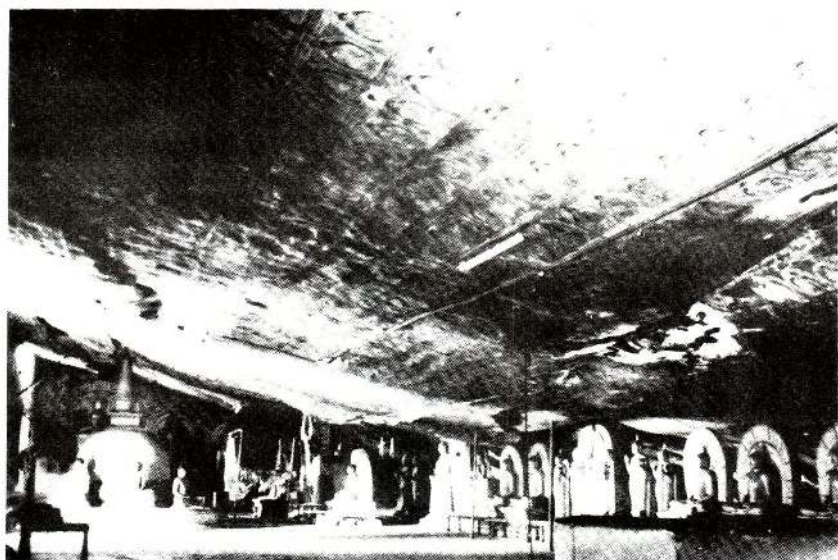
Iconographically above images may belong to the eighteenth century. The other two images just behind them of Upulvan and Saman, are unique again because such statues are not found anywhere in such close proximity to the Buddha. Belonging to

God Upulvan and Saman (Cave 2)



God Saman

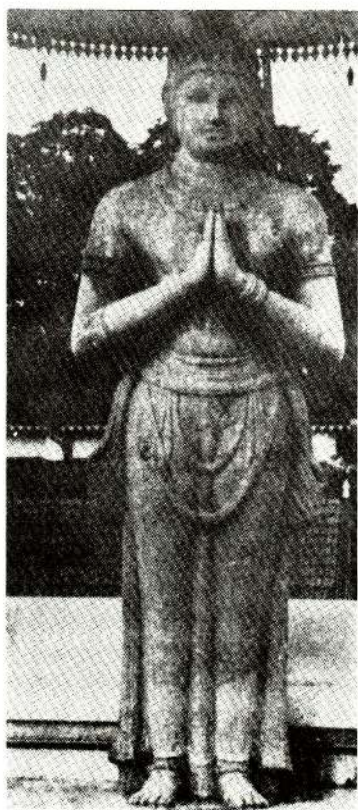




the same period, the style is more similar to the other two statues of Natha and Maitreya, and the identity of each god is known only by colour and head dress in the case of Natha, by the head dress with a figure of Amitabha.

To find so many Buddha statues of varying sizes, attitudes, and styles together in one place is a rare opportunity for a student of Buddhist iconography. The secular statues add yet another level of interest. Of the three images of Kings, the statues of King Valagamba and Nissankamalla are similar in style, and may be influenced by the colossal images of Bodhisattva kings found at Ruvanveliseya in Anuradhapura belonging to the fifth century. Most of the original images at Dambulla have been subsequently renovated for glory and glamour, without an understanding of the resulting historic and iconographic damage this causes. On a similar kind of restoration on the images of kings at Ruvanveliseya, Professor Paranavitana says;

The limestone statue of more than life size found on the platform of the Ruvanveli Dagaba in Anuradhapura is shown in Plate 83 (*Art of the Ancient Sinhalese – Senerat Paranavitana Colombo, 1971*) as it was originally found. The same statue after it had gone through the hand of the restorer is shown at 84. The discerning reader will be able to estimate what great loss has been created to the artistic heritage of the people of the well-meaning but ill-advised persons who, in the name of religion, have exploited the ancient shrines at Anuradhapura to their own advantage .



Gone through the hands of the restorer



Kirti Sri Rajasinha (Cave 3)

The same can be said with regard to many statues, paintings and even the buildings at the Dambulla *viharaya*. The original verandah with wooden pillars, covered by a traditional roof with *peti ulu* or flat tiles and hanging arc tiles (*vadimbu ulu*), was replaced with an arched gothic type building covered with Calicut tiled roof. A similar brick wall at the entrance constructed at the same time is now replaced by a somewhat better constructed *Vahalkada* or a doorway with a roof covering the beauty of the Cave temple when approached from a distance.

The statue of King Kirti Sri Rajasinha with his royal attire is striking, though it seems somewhat out of proportion. Except a few images, the third Cave has not escaped the hands of the restorer.

The images at the Dambulla Cave temple are sculptured from either rock, brick, or wood, and then plastered over and painted. Some of the damaged images help us to date the original work and the renovation. Some statues have a wooden framework plastered with mud and lime. Some of the colossal statues have a cotton robe over the plaster, on which the paint was applied. Most of the statues are painted with golden yellow, and a few statues also have a red coloured border on the robe.

The *siraspatha*, or nimbus and the *prabhamandalaya*, or halo are both visible in all the Buddha statues at Dambulla. The open eyes, round face, and stiff body posture are characteristic features of Buddha images of this period.

The mudras or the hand gestures most commonly shown are *abhaya* and *vitarka*. The seated Buddha figures are sculpted with one leg resting on the other, so that the Buddha sits in *virasana* attitude. The standing and reclining Buddha images are found on a *Padmasana*, or lotus pedestal. Some statues of Buddha are cleverly sculptured with perfect proportions and serene facial expressions, which show they are the works of master artists.

Paintings

The Dambulla *viharaya* has the largest number of wall and ceiling paintings found anywhere in the country. The paintings cover an area of roughly twenty thousand square feet. The subject of these paintings vary from stories relating previous births of the Buddha to incidents connected with the present life of the Buddha, and also include stories from the early history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In addition, there are pictures of popular gods, and geometric designs to fill in the gaps between the paintings. Of the five caves the most interesting examples of Kandyan paintings of the 18th century are found in the Caves Nos. 2 and 3 respectively known as *Maharajalena* and *Alut viharaya*.

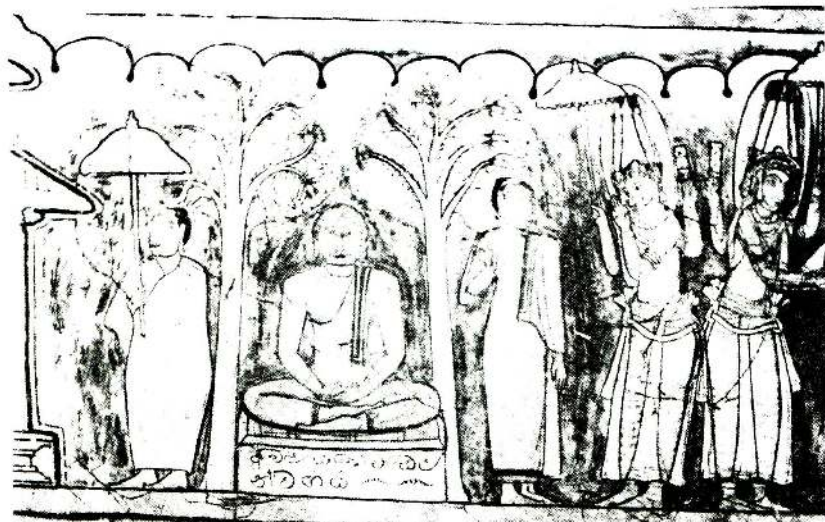
Paintings of this period are also found in several Buddhist viharas in Kandy and its suburbs, such as Degaldoruwa, Gangaramaya, Medawela, Suriyagoda and Ridi Viharaya in the Kurunegala district and Dodantale in Kegalle district. Degaldoruwa is particularly interesting because the Nilagama *Sittara* artists who were responsible for the paintings at Dambulla also worked with others at Degaldoruwa. The four *Sittara* painters who worked at Degaldoruwa

during the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha included Nilagama Patabendi, the chief artist, assisted by Devaragampola Silvattena, an unordained priest of the *achari* caste who also worked at Ridi viharaya, by Koswatte Hittaranaide, and by another artist whose name is not known.

There are a great deal of similarities between the paintings of Degaldoruwa, Gangaramaya, Ridi viharaya, Suriyagoda, Medawela and Dambulla. In some places the same picture is found exactly the same in two places. Such similarities are found at Degaldoruwa and Gangaramaya. In style, technique and colour, they have so much in common that one could conclude that it was the work of a few families of *Sittara* artists that carried out the work in all the *viharas* built or renovated by King Kirti Sri Rajasinha in the eighteenth century. Where several artists belonging to different family traditions were involved in the painting of a certain *Viharaya*, a slight difference in the painting can also be observed, as in Degaldoruwa paintings. The same must be said about Dambulla. It certainly cannot be the work of only one *Sittara* family.

In the style of painting of this period, it was customary for our art historians to name the Kandyan style of painting as 'Folk' and not the work of "great artists" such as those of Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa. This is absolutely nonsense. The artists of the Kandyan period too are great in their own way. A change of style of the old does not in anyway indicate that they are inferior to the former. The painters of this period who worked in the temples were royal artists and by no means inferior. What, then, are the characteristics of Kandyan paintings? Ananda Coomaraswamy one of the most renowned and celebrated art historians and critics of the twentieth century, has the following to say:

The idealism of Kandyan art is part of its inheritance from India: but as we have already observed, Kandyan art does not represent Indian art at its greatest or even at a very great period, but rather Indian art at the level of a great and beautiful scheme of peasant decoration. Kandyan art as we see it represents a tradition handed down from the earliest stratum of Indian art, modified and enriched by subsequent influences but in many ways primitive; just as the original manner of building in wood, and of making images in impermanent materials, survives in spite of the work in stone of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.

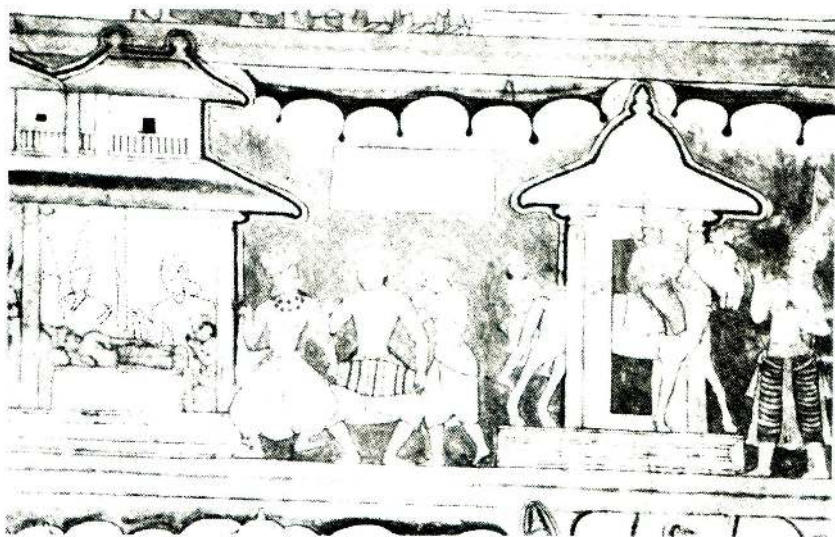


Buddha's visit to the Mango grow (Cave 2)

This India-centered model of evolution used by Ananda Coomaraswamy is what has influenced our own English-educated art critics and historians to label the great temple paintings of the Kandyan period as 'Folk'. Kandyan paintings are unique in their own way and are a product of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture; and judging them in terms of any other style or art form does not take us very far towards appreciating them for what they are. Kandyan art has its own style; it has its own story to tell; it has its own colour and line to express the ideas that were conceived in the minds of the artists; and it is vividly expressed, which is all we are concerned with. By looking at these temple paintings with an open mind, the sensitive *rasika* will not come to the conclusion that 'Kandyan painting is not a grand display of talent and virtuosity' because there is no comparison.

The subject of Dambulla paintings has been explained by others. According to *Nilagama Panivida Panata* of 1855 A.D. and *Dambulu Santiya*, a poetical work of the nineteenth century, used in the *Bali* ceremony there had been a number of *Jataka* Stories like the *Vessantara*, *Thēmiya* and *Ummagga* in the Maharajalena which are no longer extant. It is possible that there are many layers of paintings which were painted over with new paintings during the renovations in later times. A number of outlines of the old paintings underlying the new are still visible. The above two documents are interesting as they give us details of paintings and sculptures with their numbers and proportions. Whether these details are authentic is a matter that we cannot decide at the moment. The *Dambulu Padavi Sannasa* and *Nilagama Panividapanata* also give us these details in almost the same manner. Therefore, these details have a common origin which is hard to trace without further evidence.

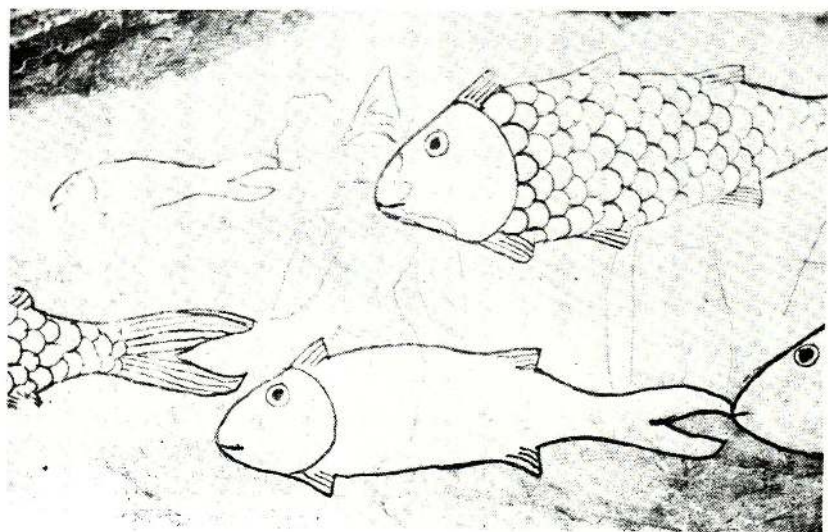
Great renunciation, a new painting over the old (Cave 2)

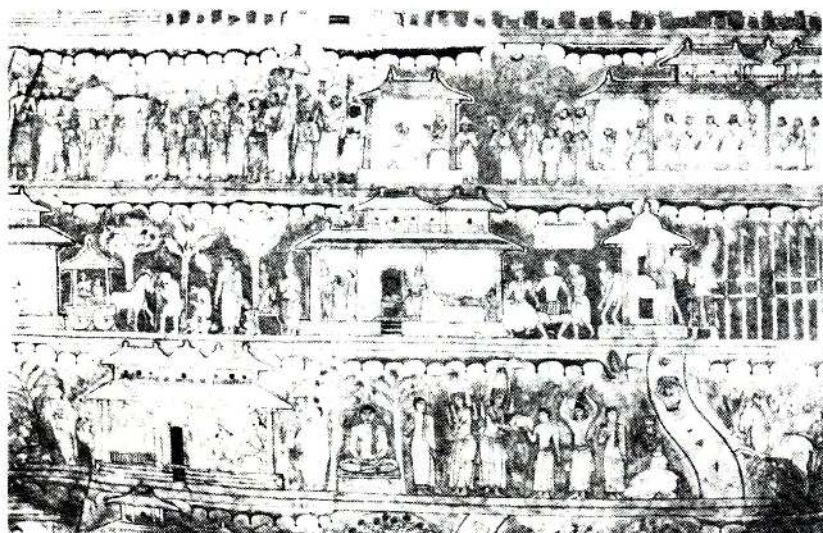




Paintings are retouched (Cave 2)

New painting over the old.





Paintings on the ceiling. Cave 2.

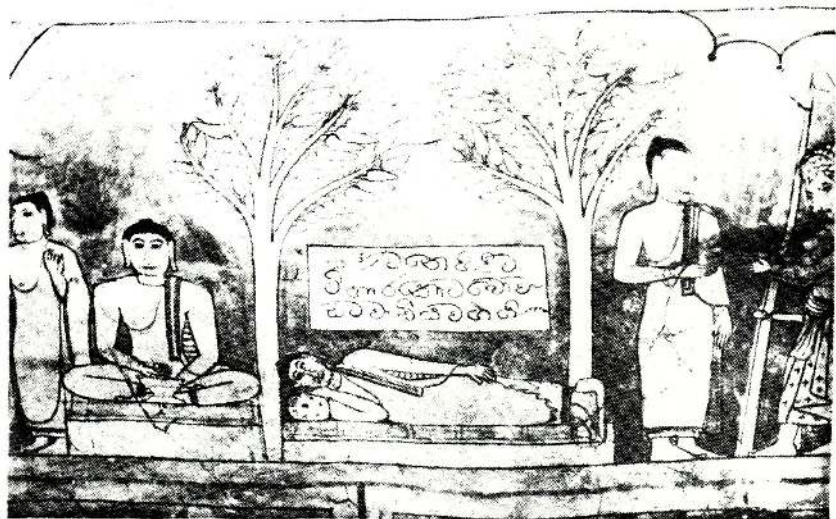
The main objectives of the artists at Dambulla were to show to the pious Buddhist the greatness of Buddha, their own proud history, and to show their ongoing preservation of the doctrine of Lord Buddha. Therefore, a devotee who enters the Dambulla *viharaya* will be moved in the first instance with the numerous images of Buddha, and secondly be proud of himself for having been born a Sinhalese to preserve the *Buddha Sasana*. This is why one could say that the Dambulla *vihara* frescoes depict the aspirations of the common man.

The frescoes at Dambulla do not differ in this respect from the Polonnaruwa Tivanka Pilimage paintings, though the latter lack episodes from the history of Sri Lanka. Jataka stories depicting the previous births of Buddha and important events in the life history of Buddha are the most common themes of both the Polonnaruwa and Kandyan painters. The mention in historical sources of certain Jataka stories at Dambulla, even though there are not seen today, in addition to scenes from the life of the Buddha, makes the artist's intention clear. The difference is only in the style and technique of painting.

Episodes, whether from the stories of Buddha or from the history of Sri Lanka, are all depicted in panels in continuous narration format. The wall surface is divided into horizontal strips. In each strip is depicted a major scene which is continued in the next scene moving either from left to right or right to left, and further continued in the scenes of the next strip below, or sometimes even above.

The episodes depicting the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka are also narrated in the same manner, but the strips are not of the same size throughout the wall. For example, the battle between Elara and Dutugamunu (Cave No. 2) are depicted on a larger strip than the others. A very common feature seen in the Kandyan painting is the caption underneath each painting which describes what the picture is about. While this is seen in Dambulla, too, the sections dealing with history are left uncaptioned. This may be due to the artist being under the impression that every Sinhalese Buddhist would recognise such a picture as soon as they saw it.

Lord Buddha resting in the Sal-grow





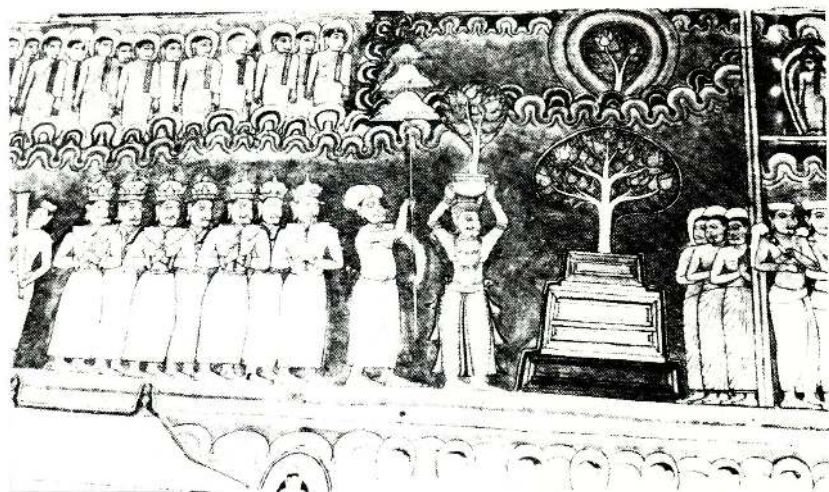
Arahant Mahinda meets King Devanampiya Tissa.

Noting a similarity between the Kandyan style of painting and that of a few other Asian countries, Siri Gunasinhe says:

It would be interesting to note that paintings in a style similar in some ways to that of the Kandyan murals can be seen in parts of India (Mattancheri, Tirupparutikundram), Burma, and Thailand; it is quite possible that Sri Lanka's political relations with the South Indian kingdoms on the one hand and, on the other, the religious intercourse with Burma, and Thailand may have introduced the local *Sittara* painters to the artistic practices popular in those countries though there is no clear evidence on this point. Nevertheless, one cannot exclude the possibility that, at a time when there was continuous political and commercial intercourse with the mainland, some South Indian craftsmen might have arrived in the island to carry on a lucrative practice.

While a speculation to this effect is possible it is hard to believe that the temple paintings of the Kandyan period were a product of a foreign influence, Sri Lanka has witnessed the tradition of temple paintings (even in the relic shrines of Dagabas) from a remote period. There is abundant literary and historical evidence to prove that Buddhist painting was intergrated with publicising and teaching of the *Buddha dhamma*. The Kandyan paintings should be taken as having evolved from the earlier tradition of Sinhalala-Buddhist tradition of paintings. In this regard various changes such as style, technique and other qualities have to be expected. We would have been much luckier if we had evidence of paintings between the 12th and 17th century, so as to witness the mode of change. Absence of such paintings belonging to this gap of five centuries have contributed to such speculations.

Planting of the Sacred Bo-Tree (Cave 2)

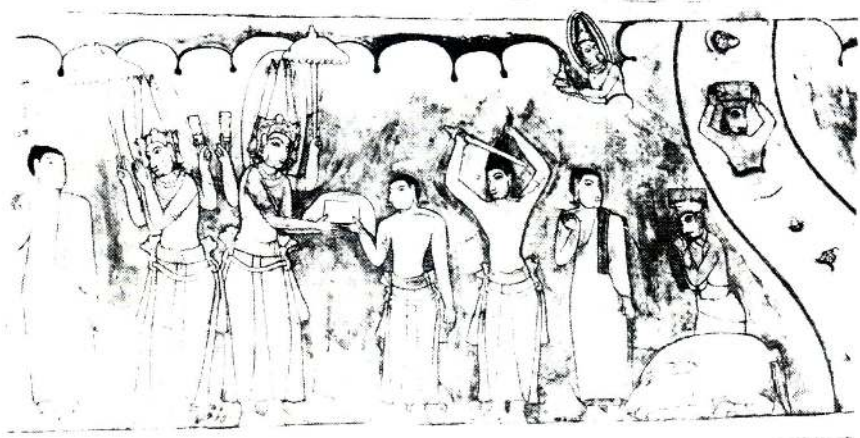


However, at Dambulla a careful examination of the large number of paintings will reveal that they even represent various styles within the same period. This may be due to renovations and touch-ups as well as to new paintings executed in the new Viharaya (No. 3), in addition to differences between family traditions. An analysis of such variations at Dambulla is possible when one compares the 2nd cave with the 3rd.

A remarkable difference in the murals of the Polonnaruwa and Dambulla paintings has also been observed. As Siri Gunasinghe says:

Polonnaruwa murals display elements of the 'classical' tradition without, however, the same monumentality or dynamism, while the Kandyan paintings remain altogether innocent of such sophistication. The difference between the two schools is further emphasized by a very strong inclination noticeable in Kandyan painting towards ornamentation and the use of purely decorative motifs with no narrative function, a characteristic altogether absent in the art of Polonnaruwa. This predilec-

Brahma offers robes to Siddhartha.



tion for the use of painting as a decorative medium apart from distinguishing the two schools, gives further evidence of a particular role of the craftsman or painter in the development of Kandyan painting; it also provides a clue to the sources from which the style acquired those features which give it its particular character.

Certainly the overpaintings, touch-ups, and renovations at Dambulla viharaya in subsequent times have also ruined the original paintings to a great degree. The new colours look somewhat gaudy. The old line drawings are modified, and the new look crude. The figures exhibit less sharpness although the designs are traditional.

The characteristics of Kandyan paintings are discussed at length by Ananda Coomaraswamy in his work *Medieval Sinhalese Art*. A few of the characteristics he notes which have special relevance to Dambulla will be cited here for the information of the reader:

1. The entire absence of perspective and shading.
2. The objective is to narrate a story in an epic format.
3. Figures are represented in full, three-quarter or side face, never as seen from behind.
4. The off eye is foreshortened in three-quarter face presentation, but the near eye is drawn as if seen in front view, and the same is true of profiles.
5. Rendering of *Jataka* stories.
6. The figures have a good deal of vivacity and dignity.
7. Idealisation, the most important aspect of artist's conception of all things.

Idealisation is certainly the most important characteristic of Kandyan paintings, where the artist's conception of a given object is transferred to a rhythmic line which is sometimes a design, abstract or pictorial. The tree of the Kandyan artists is not a realistic or natural one, but abstract, with variations in leaves and branches further distinguishing one kind of tree from the other. It is likewise with flowers, animals, or even gods and men. The abstract drawing then becomes more valuable than a 'realistic' natural form. Ananda Coomaraswamy analyses this in a very simple way:

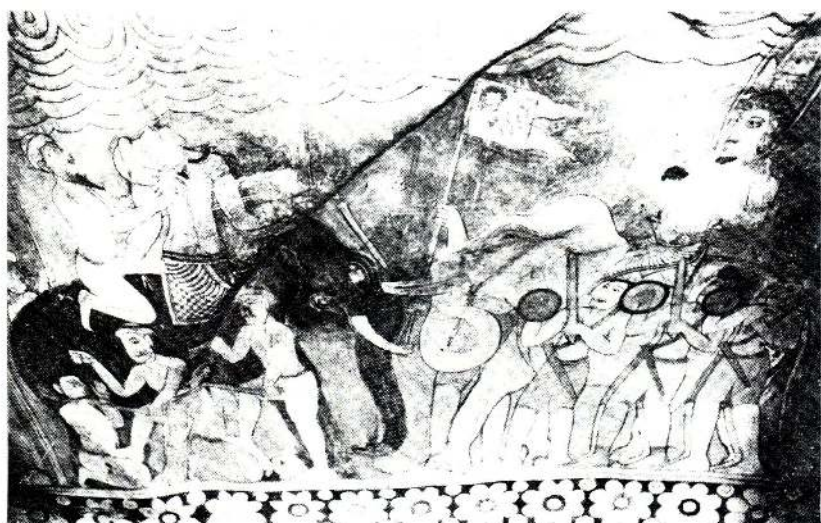
We are not told, and do not want to be told what the animal itself was like, but what it meant to the men who painted it, what it was like for them, and so what they were like. The artists lion

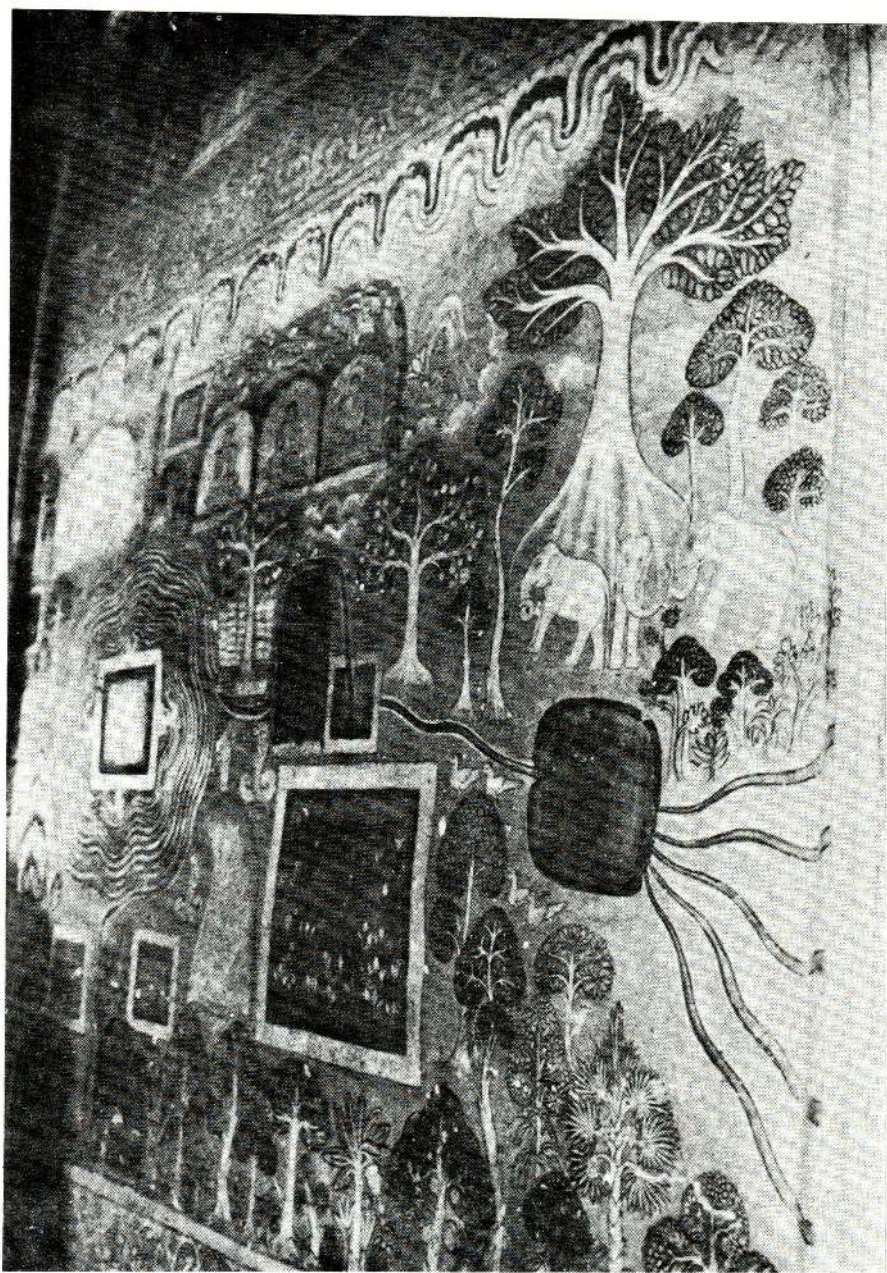
need be like no lion on earth or in any zoological garden; the artist is not preparing the plates of a work on natural history, but makes his lion at once a portrait of the universe and an expression of the whole theory of his national existence.

This whole point can be explained briefly with a single example from the third Cave of the Dumbulla *Viharaya* where a painting of the *Anotattavila* (Anavatapta lake) on the wall just to the right of the statue of Kirti Sri Rajasingha. *Anotattavila* is considered the foremost of the seven lakes in the Himalayas. It is so named because the water in it does not heat up by the rays of the sun. It is 150 yojanas long by 50 yojanas broad and deep. It is also surrounded by the great mountains Sudarshana, chitra Kuta, Gandhamadana and Kailasha. The water is pure. There are four water spills which flow out of it as four great rivers.

There are very many stories of this lake connected with the life of Buddha. The Buddha, Pacceka Buddhas, Arahants, and rshis bathe in this holy lake. Anotattavila is also considered as one of the auspicious signs of the foot print of Buddha; and the story of Anotatta is common knowledge to all Buddhists.

Battle between Dutugemunu and Elara (Cave 2)







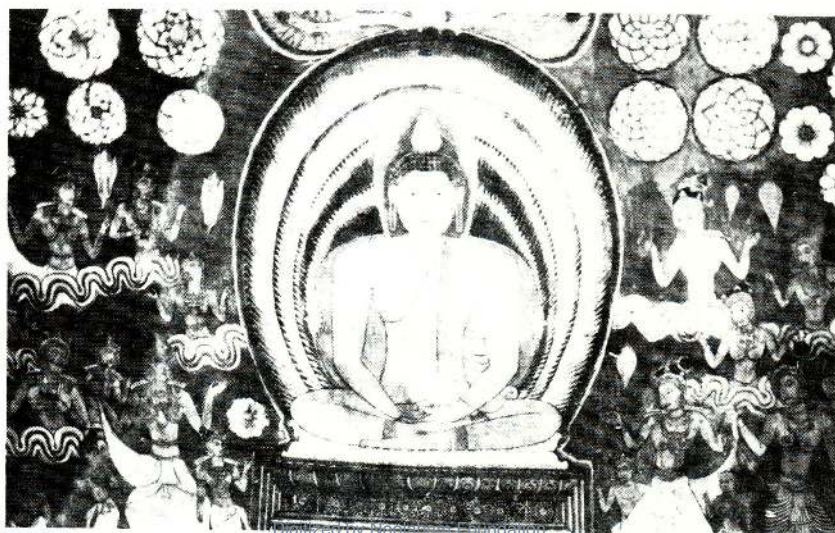
Anotatta vila – Cave 3.

This common knowledge is depicted in a highly stylised manner rather than by a literal or realistic rendering of the traditional description of this lake. Anotatta lake is transformed into a perfect geometrical square, with gateways at the four cardinal directions: namely *Sinhamukha* (Lion's face), *Hastimukha* (Elephant's face), *Asvamukha* (Horse's face), *Vrsabhamukha* (Bull's face) the names of four animals representing the four quarters. Each direction is inhabited by one of the above animals. The over-flowing waters in the east, west and north circumbulate thrice around the lake without mixing together and flow into the ocean. The waters of the southern sluice likewise flow thrice around the lake, hit the *Tiyaggala rock* flow into the lake by that name, and again flow out of the lake and hit against the *Vindhya* mountain, and finally flow out as five rivers the *Ganga*, *Yamuna*, *Aciravati*, *Sarabhu* and *Mahi*. The picture of the *Anotatta* that we see at Dambulla with the lake, mountain and rivers quite agree with the description given in *Butsarana* a classic Sinhalese literary work of the 12th century. The description is apparently based on the *Potaliyasutta* of the *Attakanipata* of the *Anguttaranikaya*.

In the same painting at Dambulla, we also see a King Cobra with a monk, and three figures of Buddha in the background seated in caves. As we know *Anottata* lake is guarded by Yaksas (demon) and Nagas (Cobras). it is the story of the novice *Sumana* related in the *Piṭṭavaliya* that is depicted in the scene of Anotatta. The name of the powerful King Cobra who guarded the lake was *Pantaka*. According to this story, this young Sumana just seven years old visited this lake twice to fetch water; once for his ailing teacher Anuruddha, and the second time for Buddha to wash his feet. On his first visit, he had to conquer the Cobra King with his miraculous powers to obtain water; and, on the second visit, just fetch the water, as the King Cobra was already conquered. This theme of the Samanera Sumana fetching water for his teacher and the Buddha is depicted freely from the viewpoint of the artist in his imagery. Figures of three Buddhas, the elephants in the southern part of the water-way that gave emergence to the five rivers and the mountains surrounding the Anotatta lake are all depicted in the mural.

Another important mural of this nature is found on the ceiling of the third cave. That is the story of *Mara Vijaya* or the conquering of the Lord of Illusion Mara on the eve of attaining Buddhahood, a popular theme of the Kandyan paintings every where.

Attaining Enlightenment - Cave 2.





Buddha and the Mara (Cave 2)

Here again the common belief of Mara and his retinue trying to prevent Gautama from attaining Buddhahood is depicted with the artists imagination and idealism. *Mara* is depicted on an elephant called *Girimekhala*. Mara is supposed to have five hundred heads, and *Girimekhala* thousands of tusks, and thousands of weapons are brought by the armies of *Mara*

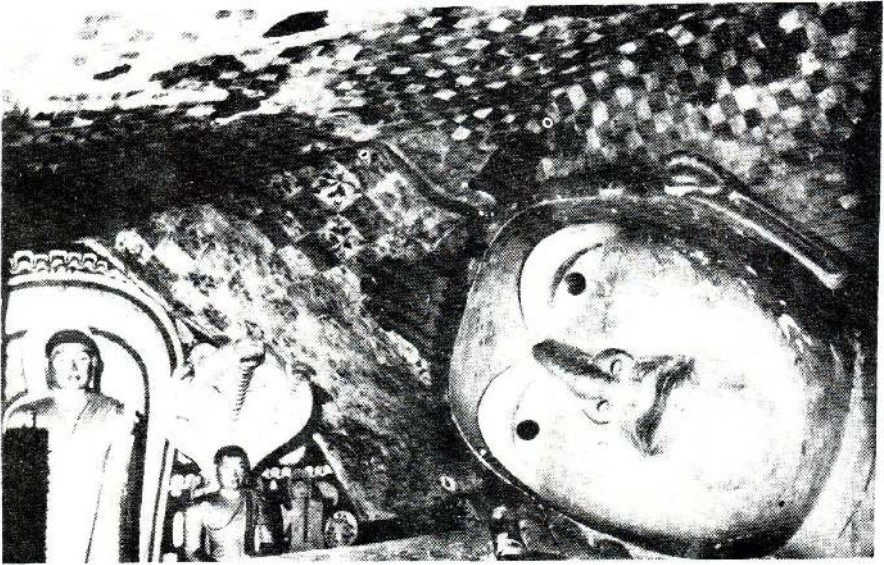
The colours and materials are also an important aspect of Kandyan paintings worthy of our attention. The outlining of all forms is in black. The background is painted with bright orange-red. Other colours such as reds, yellows, blue, green and brown are used very sparsely, in high lighting. Black and white are used mainly for outlines and for minor details. The paint are made mainly from local raw materials such as from clay, saps from certain trees, lamp black, leaves, orpiment, oil of certain trees such as *dorana* (*diptero carpus glandulosus*) and *Kekuna* (*Cannarium zeylanaricum*).

The materials and techniques of Kandyan paintings are also interesting. The above mentioned *Dambulu Padavi Sannasa* speaks of few raw materials used for the paintings at Dambulu *viharaya*. They include *Gokatu*, tree sap (*Garcinia morella*), *Makul*, a white gritty clay (Hydrous magnesite), *Divullatu*, the germ of the wood-apple tree (*Ferenia elephantum*), *Nil hiriyal*, blue orpiment and *Sadilingam*, Cinnabar. The brushes for paintings are made out of cats or squirrel's hair, and the varnish is made with powdered *dummala* (rosin) mixed with boiled *dorana* oil.

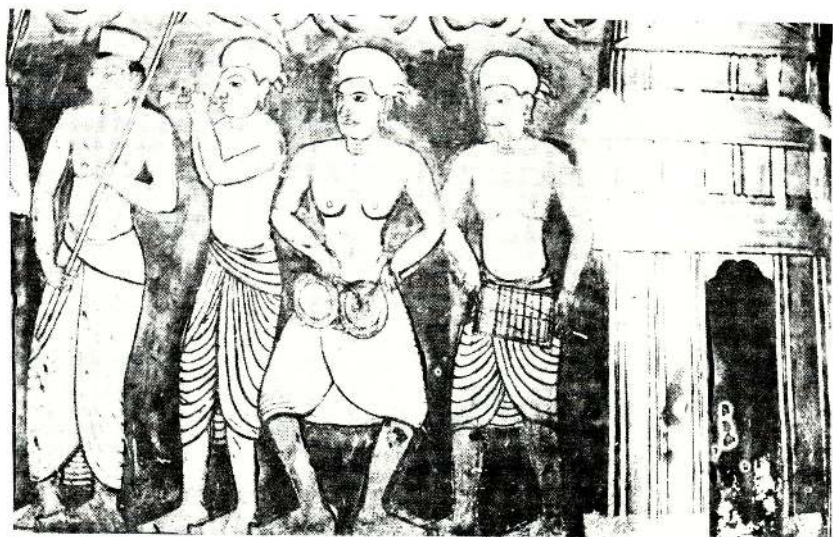
Dambulla *viharaya* is a treasurehouse of traditional Sinhalese Buddhist *Sittara* art. A deep and scientific study of these large number of paintings will not only reveal the Kandyan art and technique, but also the art of much earlier period surviving at Dambulla. The UNESCO-Sri Lanka Cultural Triangle Project, which has undertaken conservation of Dambulla *viharaya*, has as one of its aims the restoration of the paintings. It is hoped by both historians and art lovers that this restoration will greatly enhance our present knowledge of Kandyan paintings.

The paintings at Dambulla *viharaya* are said to have been executed by *Nilagama Sittara Paramparava*, or the succession of artist families of Nilagama, a village close to Dambulla. The descendants of this family still live in this village, taking pride in their unique contribution to the *Sittara* art in this country.

An important festival which is very often mentioned in our sources is the *Netrapratishthapana Mangalyaya* or ceremony of painting the eyes of an image, held at every interval after new workmanship or restoration was completed. This ceremony, in a way, is really the dedication of the temple with the images in it by the King. The artificers were provided with food and cloth while the work was carried on, and presents, too, were offered to them at certain stages of the work. When the ceremony of painting the eyes was held the artificer was rewarded by the patron. The ceremony itself was held at an auspicious time with many elaborate rituals. Ananda Coomaraswamy explains the proceedings of this ceremony at length in his work *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*.



Recumbent Image of Buddha (Cave 5)



Drummers and the flute player (Cave 2)

MAINTENANCE AND SERVICE

MAINTENANCE AND SERVICE

THE patrons of Buddhism in the history of Sri Lanka were the ruling Kings of the country according to the norms of *Dasarajadharma*, the Code of a Righteous King. The main objective of the king of those days was to ensure the spiritual and material well being of the people. For this purpose the kings built tanks for irrigation of lands to cultivate so that the country would be self-sufficient in food crops. To obtain peace and happiness, in this birth and in the next, they built *viharas* and *dagabas* for the uplifting of the *Buddha sasana*. Thus the *Veva* or tank and the *Dagaba* or pagoda became symbols of Sinhalese civilization.

The early dwelling places of monks who gave up their worldly life in quest of emancipation were the Caves in solitary forests. As time passed, the pious and virtuous kings built *Avasas* or dwelling houses for the monks, as well as *Viharas* and *Dagabas*. Lands had to be offered to the monasteries for the maintenance of the *Viharayas* and for the four requisites of the monks. Certain services had to be provided; and for this purpose, certain people were employed with land grants as a token of payment in return. Sometimes lands were also granted to families and villages so that they would collectively perform specified duties, such as repairs of the monastery, conducting rituals such as drumming or supplying utensils necessary for repairs and rituals.

Some of the cave dwellings as we see at Dambulla viharaya were dedicated to the *Sangha* of the four quarters by the Kings, minor rulers, chiefs, and others who were interested in Buddhist activities. When the community of the *Sangha* increased in number and spread all over, the early kings as one of their main duties and obligations constructed dwelling places along with religious shrines, and further offered various ways of deriving income for their maintenance. Sometimes a lake or a field was offered to the monastery as a source of income. Naulpota inscription has a description of such offerings to a *Viharaya*. Sometimes, land, lakes and even streams belonging to the king were also offered to the *Sangha* and the *Viharaya*, or even the right of taxation. The Perumayanikulam inscription speaks of a grant of this kind. By the fourth century A. D., the community of *Sangha* still increased, and renovations to temples were also felt to be necessary. As a result, income to the *Viharas* was increased. One such way to provide income by this time, as revealed by the Tonigala inscription, was to allow the monks to receive the interest on money or on some other item deposited in a specified institution.

The monks were thus burdened with not only looking after themselves and the suffering people but also with maintenance of their *Viharas*. From the fifth century onwards, even donations of servants or labourers were made to the *Viharas*. The Vessagiri and Nilagama inscriptions furnish proof of such offerings. The disciplined minds of the monks were thus undisciplined by the unnecessary administrative burden put upon them. As a result, as time went on, more rules and regulations were also needed to discipline the monks. Such rules of discipline are found in a few inscriptions belonging to the late Anuradhapura period, in places such as at Jetavanarama, Abhayagiriya, and Mihintale in Anuradhapura, and also in a Sinhalese text of the late ninth century called *Sikhavalanda Vinisa*.

This system of making various grants to *Viharas* was continued throughout the history of Sri Lanka. From the beginning of the Kandyan period in the sixteenth century, we witness various land grants, documented on copper plate inscriptions offered to the *Vihara* in the event of new construction or on an occasion of renovation. Such Copper plate grants are still seen in many temples. In the event that the original documents were lost, there was also a system of making a new copy incorporating the earlier events

with the new. The *Dambulla Tudapata* of the year 1726 A. D. is one such copy.

According to this document, the lands that originally belonged to the Dambulu *Viharaya*, donated by the earlier kings but lost during the reign of Rajasinha I (1581–1591 A.D.), were re-donated by King Vimaladharmasuriya I (1592–1604 A. D.) to Reverend Kahavandala Tanhankara for the maintenance of the monks, as well as for conducting the daily rituals of the *Viharaya*. The lands in the form of villages so donated included Sirasgomuwa, Nalalkumbura, Giryakumbura, Velamitiyawa and Padeniya. Again, during the reign of King Senarath (1604–1635 A. D.) the pious King, having renovated the temple, demarcated the boundaries of the villages previously donated. And further,

Lands extending to the east from Urumigolla ulpata in Ratmalgaha elakanda, from the summit of Ratmalgaha-elakanda to Bandigala at the termination of Bintemburukanda, from the said stone and Minihindigala to Kabaragalpotta and the extremity of Nalalkumburakanda and this side of Maha elamagala in Nalalkumbura Kanda and Hambaragale-ela on the south this side of Kendalanda galhiriya, Purangelehinne midande-ela on the south this side of Kendalanda-galhiriya, Purangelehinne midanda-oya and Dambulu-oya; on the west this side of Sabaratta-ela-demodara in the said Dambulu-oya; and on the north this side of the said sabaratta-ela, Nawagashinna, Timbiriattawela in Mirisgoni-oya Waukona in Kandalawewa and the extremity of Ratmalgaha-elakanda first mentioned including high-land low-lands, dwellings, gradens, jungles, and ponds within the said four boundaries were also gifted to the temple. For the above and Koholana 4 *amunas* and Daraluwa 18 *amunas*, in all 22 *amunas* in Welamitiyawa and their appurtenances, high and low lands, jungles, and ponds, he, the King granted a *Sri Sannasa* in order that the rites and ceremonies in the Dambulla *viharaya* might be continued to be performed duly, and that this *viharaya* benefice might permanently continue in the *Sisyanuparamparawa* (pupillary succession) of Reverend Kahawandala Tanhankara.

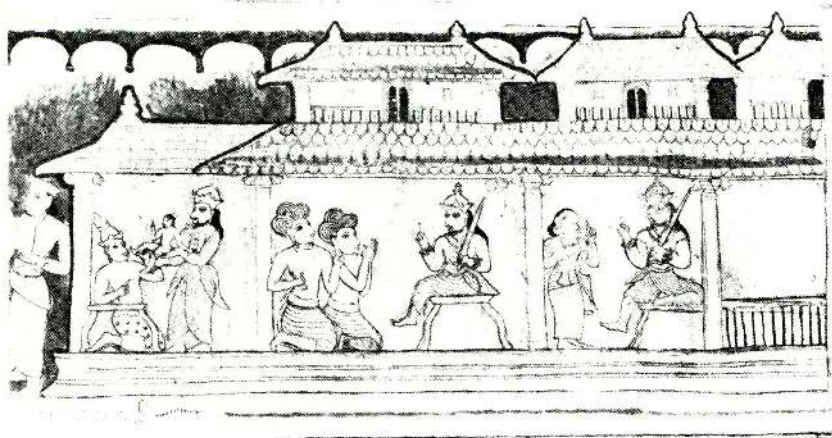
Showing how those lands were developed for further use, it is revealed by the same document that Reverend Tanhankara II built seven tanks at Ratmalgaha-ela, Yapagama, Moragolla-wewa,

Binkumbura, Pilagammana, Medamulla, Ratmalagolla and irrigated the paddy land to an extent of 20 *amunas*. In this manner, the Viharaya was endowed with many high and lowland areas by every succeeding ruler.

The land thus given was sometimes specifically entailed with a service also. Melpitiye Abeysinha Mudiyanse, who carried out the repairs of the Dambulla *Viharaya* on the orders of King Senarath, was also granted land and other necessities.

The king directed Abeysinha Mudiyanse to have dormitories built in the village Lenawela, and allowed him for his expenditure 30 *amunas* of seed paddy from Akuramboda, thirty pieces of iron, ten buffaloes from the fold of Dumbukolagama, ten oxen that were brought laden with sacks of sand from Kandalama, ten cows with calves from Bowatta, and ten she buffaloes with calves from the gabada village Kaduruwela.

Sage Asita's visit to the palace of Suddhodana (Cave 2)



The Lenawela village had been donated to the pupillary succession of Reverend Kahawandala Tanhankara by King Senarath to enjoy the benefits thereof in regard to the four priestly requisities, and to perform the rites and ceremonies to the *Viharaya*. Reverend Tanhankara II, during the reign of Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687–1707 A. D.), appointed tenants of the *Viharaya* "land of the seven tanks", subjecting these to perform various services to the temple.

On one occasion, in remuneration for the repairs and labour carried out at the *viharaya* and for fixing bells on the rock in front of Maharaja *Viharaya*, a smith named Mahena Galladda was given a (large) field (being) one *amuna* in extent and 200 fanams.

Kirti Sri Rajasinha, having completed the work of the new *Viharaya*, also donated a field to an extent of nine *amunas* of seed paddy as a remuneration for any repairs to be carried out in the future. He also appointed men for various services in the temple, such as suppliers of flowers, water, wood, and other necessities that are required for the services in fifteen places of the four *Viharayas*. The *Nilagama Panivida Panata* of 1855 A. D. also endows land for the artists residing in the village of Nilagama for any future repairs on the temple. Thus, we see that not only lands were given to the temple by the Kings, but that they were also tied up with certain services. These lands are called *Viharam*. A petition No. SLNA No. 18/3441, dated 5th July 1904, of the Kandy Kachcheri, now in the National Archives, reveals to us that according to the *Maha Nayaka* and *Anu Nayaka Theras* of the Asgiriya *Maha Viharaya*, the Dambulla *Viharaya* has been endowed with about 18,000 acres of high and lowlands. It is difficult to say how much land is now left over out of the total amount and it is also difficult to say how many of the people with traditional service obligations still perform their duties to the temple as many changes have taken place in society since the donation of these lands to the temple by the pious Kings.

On 6th November 1848, Lord Torrington, the Governor of Sri Lanka, sending a report to the Secretary of State speaking of the property belonging to the Dambulla *Viharaya*, said:

I am not aware of the extent of paddy lands with possession in their own hands, which the incumbents of the Vihare own. There are certainly several acres of *Muttettu* (lands cultivated on account

of the proprietor). The tenants of the Vihare hold 143 *pangu* (shares) consisting of nearly 400 acres of fields (191 a. 1 p. 2. 1.) 36 acres garden land (19a Op. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ 1.), and about 2,500 acres high land (1,214 a. 2 p. 1 1.). The service of the tenants might be committed for Rs. 1,753.60.

These (lands) lie in twenty one villages: Ambewela, Bintemburuwela, Etabendiwewa, Karandagollewewa, Kapuwewela, Kiralessa, Kolongolla, Medamulla, Moragollewa, Nayakumbura, Nigollewa, Padeniya, Puwakkattawela, Ratmalgaha-ela, Siyambalawewa, Wategammedda Welamitiyawa, Yapagama. The services due are of the usual description, to repair the *Vihara* and *pansaias*, to decorate at festivals, to keep guard at the *Vihara*, to present gifts at the new year, and at times to carry the palanquins of the chief priest and to accompany him on journeys; many of the tenants are bound to give betel, honey, oil and vegetables; many pound paddy; some give rice. There are tom-tom beaters, and are set of tenants in Nayakumbura supply the iron work needed throughout the year; the tenants of Udawela are the washermen of the Vihare. Many *pangu* are held for the service of feeding the priests during *Vas*.

The Vishnu *Devala* attached to the temple also own several lands in the Pahalawewa in Kandapalle Korale. It has lands in Kongolla Galkandegama, Henewa, Mawidalupota and Dambe in Seven Korales. The service due to the *devale* as reported by Lawrie are commutable for Rs. 858 per annum.

One will be able to observe from these records that not much has changed today. The income to the *Viharas* either remains the same or nothing at all, because no action could be initiated against the default of payments or service under the present rules and regulations governing the temple lands. In this way, a number of so-called wealthy *Viharas* of earlier days suffer today without a proper income for maintenance, rituals, and ceremonies.

One other aspect of service needs mention here. Our sources and documents also speaks of pupillary succession to the incumbency of Dambulla *Viharaya*. The first information of a monk who was an incumbent of the above *Viharaya* come to us from the *Tudapata* of 1726 A.D., and from the *Dambulu Padavi Sannasa*. According to the *Tudapota* of 1726 A.D. the first incumbent of the Dambulu



A painting that depicts Arahants

Viharaya at the time of the founding of the *Viharaya* in the 2nd century A.D. was one Jayamangala Sumana Thera. Again during the reign of Nissankamalla it was the Reverend Mangalaratana, who was a pupillary descendant of the above-mentioned Sumana Thera. During the reign of Bhuvanekabahu of Gampola (1372–1408 A.D.) the incumbency fell on Mahantegama Siddhartha Thera, a descendant of the Mangalaratana Thera. During the reign of Vikramabahu of Senkadagalapura (1469–1511 A.D.), a grand-nephew of Siddhartha a who was ordained as Mahadeva, succeeded to this post. Thereafter, one of his nephews who became a priest by the name of Desavasa became the incumbent of the *Viharaya*. When Vimaladharmasuriya I succeeded the throne at Kandy in 1592 A.D., a great nephew of the last mentioned monk, named Kahavandala Tanhakara, was appointed to the incumbency at Dambulu *Viharaya*. After the death of this monk, the property belonging to the monk was divided among the factions, who were again the relatives of the former. During the reign of Vimaladharmasuriya II (1687–1707 A.D.), a relation of this lineage named Tanhankara II succeeded to this post. Thereafter, during the reign of Narendrasinha (1707–1739 A.D.), two monks who were related to the above – named Attadassi and Piyadassi were appointed to the incumbency.

According to the *Tudapata* of Kirti Sri Rajasinha, the chief high priest of Asgiri Maha *viharaya*, named Nawinne Thera, carried out renovation at Dambulla during the King's reign; and, on his death, his pupil Potuhera Ratanapala has succeeded to this post by the wish of the King. At the same time, according to *Dambulu Padavi Sannasa*, he also became the chief High priest of Asgiri Maha *Viharaya*.

It is thus apparent that the succession to the incumbency of this temple was based eventually not on *Sisyanusisya paramparawa* or pupilary succession (succession from teacher to student) but on *gnatisisya parampara* or relative-pupilary succession (passing to a male descendant of a sibling).

Lawrie quoting from the records of Colonial Secretary (Vol.1. : 261) says that:

In August, 1835, the Office of the Chief Priest of Dambulla was vacant by the death of Nikawella Maha Nayake, and the Government Agent of Kandy called a meeting of the principal priests of Malwatta and Asgiriya and some lay chiefs to recommend a candidate. The nine priests resident at Dambulla were ignorant of Pali and were held to be unqualified. The chief priesthood was conferred on Wattegama Maha Nayaka of Asgiriya, but the offices are not in future to be deemed inseparable. Two of the younger members of the Dambool fraternity were to be sent to the Asgiriya Temple to be properly instructed. The resident pupils of the deceased Chief Priest Nikawella were to be entitled to maintenance.

It is evident from the *Tudapata* of 1726 A.D. that the appointment of an incumbent to this temple was made by the King himself. During the reign of King Senarath, the King himself appointed Reverend Kahavandala Tanhankara as the chief incumbent of the Dambulu *Viharaya*, in the presence of other monks agreeing with his choice at the *Vihara* premises itself. The above minute of the Colonial Secretary show a breakdown of the tradition. However, at present the incumbency of the Dambulu *Viharaya* has fallen on the Maha Nayake Thera of Asgiriya Maha *viharaya* in Kandy, who in turn appoints a Trustee to this temple in consultation with the *Karaka Sangha Sabha* or the Council of *Sangha* of the Chapter. Whatever the implications are, one must recognise the

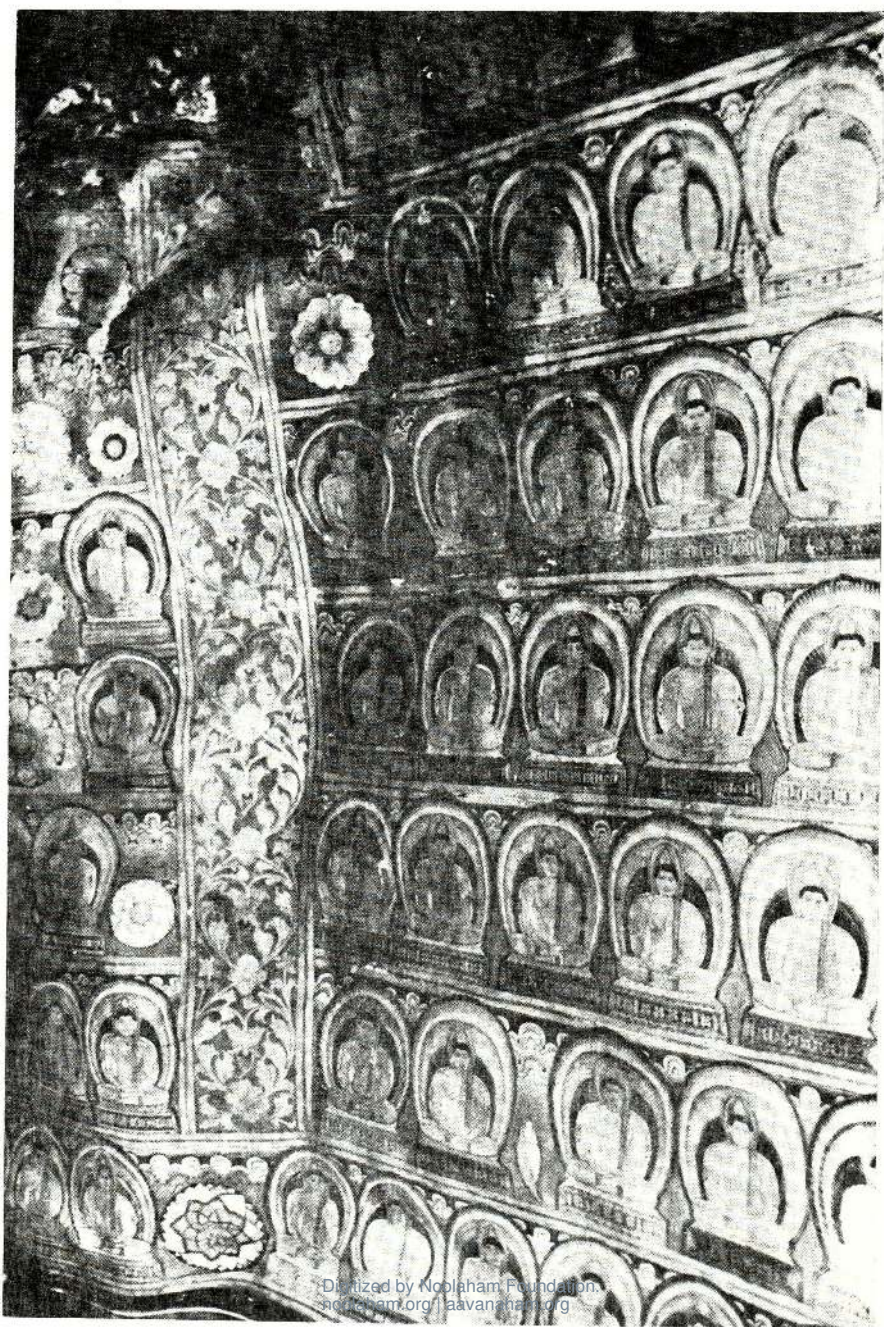
benefit of this type of appointment from the point of view of the interest and care that the monks take on a *viharaya* when it becomes hereditary. Unfortunately, with the fall of the ancestral incumbency to the Dambulu Raja Maha *Viharaya*, it also faced several disasters. To illustrate this we are in a position to cite an example. In the year 1871, when the Commissioners on Buddhist Temporalities examined Dullewe Loku Banda, the then Adigar of Nuwara Kalaviya, he complained

“that in the large tracts of forest belonging to the Dambulu *Viharaya*, the chief priest had, three years before, sold all the halmilla trees”, and that when he examined the *Vihare* he found “the pansala of the high priest in ruins falling down in fact and in the temple the colour of the rice offering was very bad, and in three of the bowls there was no curry at all . . . the lowest estimate of timber cut would be about £. 300; the land has been denuded of all valuable trees . . .” and so on.

Lawrie says that: “this and similar complaints led to the passing of the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance”, which vested temple lands in trustees. Under the present laws, the trustees are unable to exercise such ancient rights of *Vihara* property without an approval from the Public Trustee of the government of Sri Lanka.

Mara's army (Cave 2)



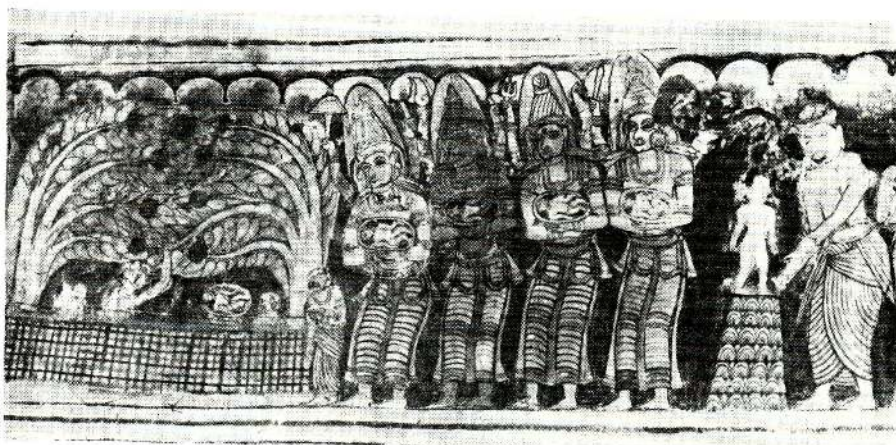


Rituals and ceremonies are very important events. Three daily rituals are performed at Dambulla: morning, mid-day and evening. Besides, four annual festivals are also celebrated in this temple. They are 1. *Agas Mangalle* or *Alutsal Mangalle* which is the new rice festival held in January, 2. *Avurudu Mangalle* or the new year festival held in April, 3. *Nanumura Mangalle* or the festival of anointing held on the full moon day of Vesak in May, and 4. *Kartika Mangalle* or the festival in Honour of God Kartikeya held on the full moon day *il* in November. In addition to the above four, an *Esala Perahera* was also started recently which is held either in July or August every year.

The *Agas Mangalle* or the new rice festival which is one of the four great festivals of the Kandyan kingdom is held even today at the temple of the Tooth Relic, the Four Devalas and other ancient temples in Kandy, as well as elsewhere in the Kandyan areas. At Dambulla the main celebration of *Agas Mangalle* takes place at Lenawala where the ripened paddy pods from the temple fields are collected and are brought in a procession to Dambulla *Viharaya*.

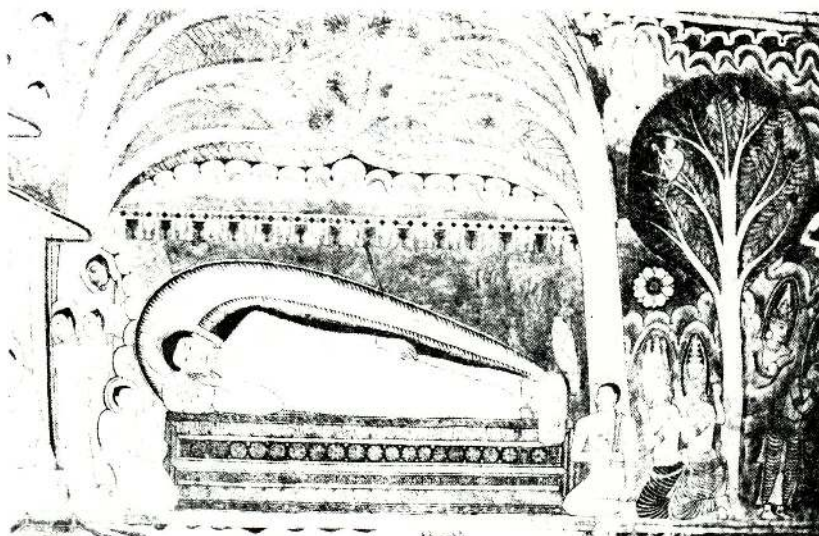
The *Avurudu Mangalle* is celebrated in the Vishnu *devala* of the *Viharaya*, where a special offering is made to the presiding god by the *Kapurala* or officiating priest. After this, the doors of the *devalaya* will be closed till they are opened again on the full moon day of Vesak.

The *Nanumura Mangalle* or anointing festival is performed on the full moon day of Vesak in the *Devraja Viharaya*. Another interesting event takes place on the Vesak full moon day. That is the bringing of the keys of the *Viharas* in a procession called the *Vattoru Payindaya*. All the monks of the five *Viharayas* who perform the daily rituals visit together the chief high priest of the temple in his *Avasaya* or residence, and bring him and the keys of the temple in a procession to the *Vihara* premises. In front of the *Devraja Viharaya* the chief monk is given the key to open the door of this *Viharaya*. When that is done, the chief high priest hands over the five keys to the respective monks to put them in charge of the five *Viharayas* and perform all the rituals for another year. It is on this day that various other minor temple officials, such as *Vidanes*, *Gamaralas' Kapuralas* and others, are appointed to perform their due services to the temple. The Vishnu *devala*, which was closed on the new year day, is also opened on the Vesak full moon day.



Birth of Prince Siddhartha (Cave 2)

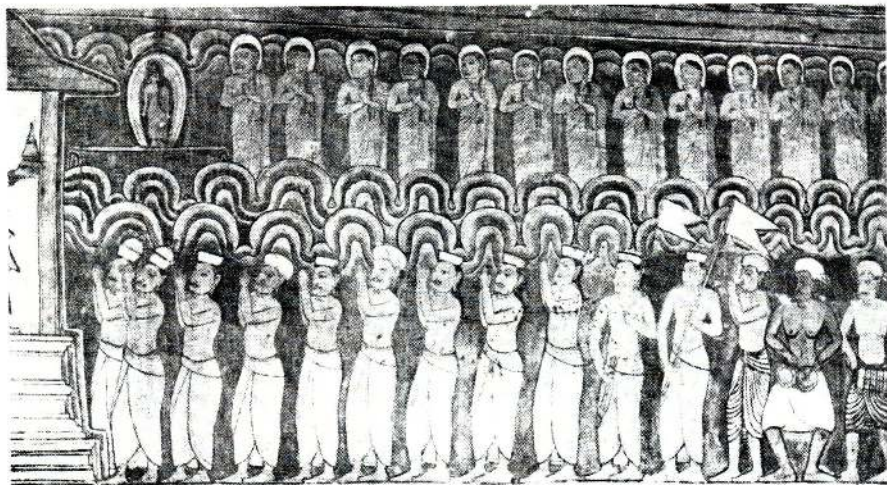
Passing away of Lord Buddha (Cave 2)



The *Kartika Mangalle* is performed on the full moon day of the months of *il* (November) by lighting lamps as a offering to God Kartikeya, that is, Skanda.

We are still fortunate enough to see at least a few of the old customs being observed at Dambulla temple. The *Vihara rajakariya* and *devala rajakariya* service system is still performed with the participation of a few of the many people under service obligation who enjoy the benefits of the *Vihara* and *devala* lands.

The *Vihara* and *Devala* lands are allocated for various services. The lands enjoyed by the service people in Nayakumbura are supposed to supply iron utensils to the temple, such as knives, sickles, arecanut cutters, mummities (hoes), chunam boxes (lime storage), bowls etc. The temple lands enjoyed by the service people living in Etabendi veva and Ratmalagaha veva are supposed to perform Hewisi drumming. The *Sittara* artists living in Nilagama enjoy six amunas of paddy lands at Velamitiyava and three amunas of paddy lands at Udawela to attend to the necessary repairs to the paintings at Dambulla *Viharaya*. This service is no longer continued, as the archaeological department has taken over their responsibility. Among the other services to the temple are services such as cleaning and sweeping, drawing water bearing the palanquins, erecting *Toranas* or pandols supplying food stuffs etc.

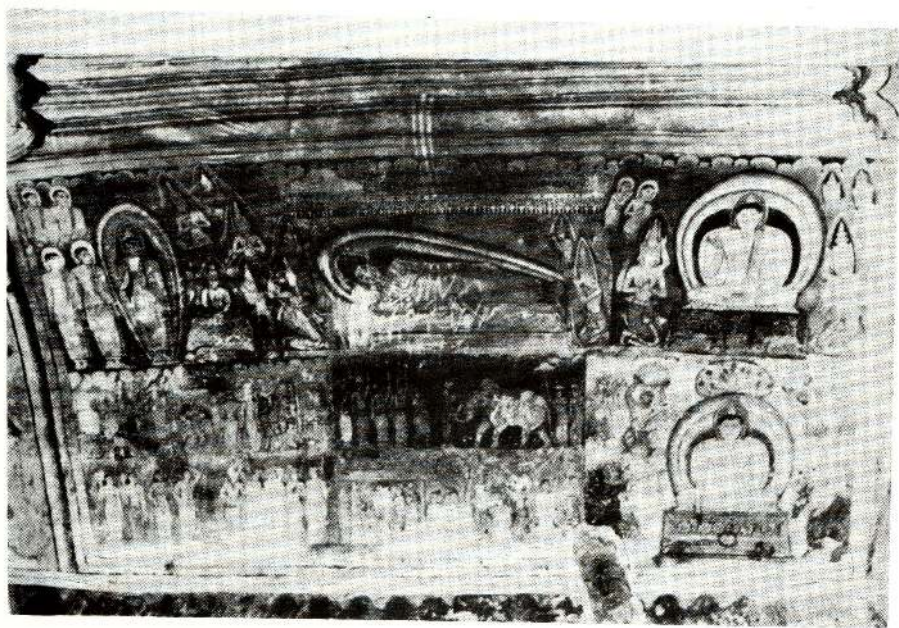


Lands are also allocated to the Visnu *devale*, and most of them are found in Kurunegala district. The cattle offered to the *devale* as a fulfilment of vows by the people are looked after by the service people, and lands for this purpose are allocated at Siyambalaveva.

The records containing these services and the lands allocated for such purposes are maintained in a temple register called *Lekammitiya*. However, things have changed so much to day that neither service nor lands are available to the *Viharaya* as in the good old days. Only a very few who fear the consequences of the sins they commit by enjoying the property offered to Buddha without performing any service in return turn up to carry out their duties, or *rajakariya*, and free themselves from the sufferings of this birth and the next.

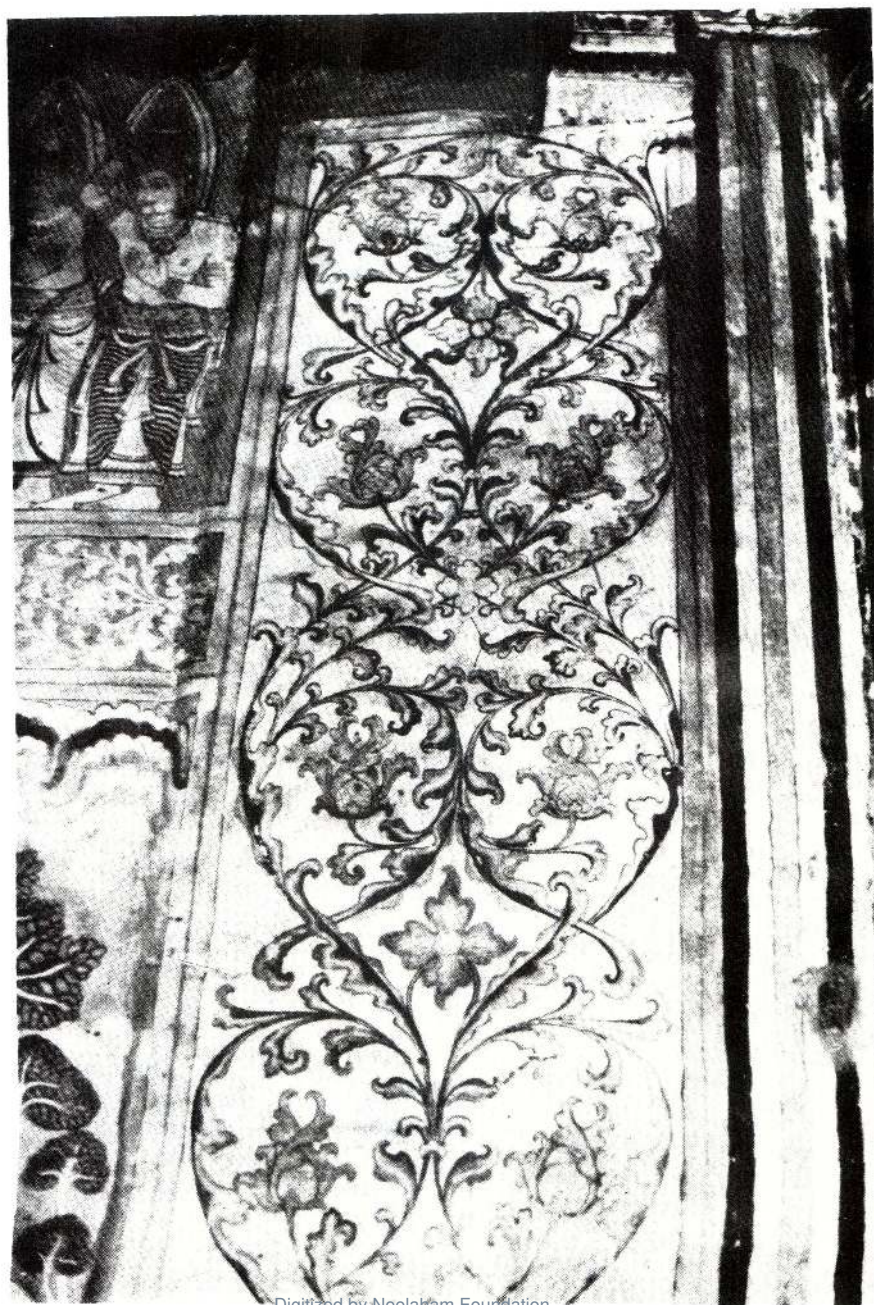


Approaching the Cave shrines



Conservation of Paintings is necessary

CONCLUSION



◀ Decorative motifs (Cave 3)

CONCLUSION

The Dambulu Rajamaha *Viharaya*, above all, still remains as one of the ancient and foremost living monuments among the many thousands of Buddhist *Viharas* in Sri Lanka. With a history going as far back as the dawn of the Christian era, it has survived through the ages for nearly two thousand years, witnessing many changes and developments under the pious rulers of the country. Hundreds of Buddha statues in various postures and varying sizes, increasing in number year after year, thousands of paintings adorning the plastered walls and ceilings of the caves and shewing the glory and virtue of the Buddha, were painted and repainted over the ages, one above the other.

Dambulla *Viharaya* will stand firm on the rock for more generation to come. The pious rulers, the devoted *Sangha*, and the humble worshippers for centuries have sanctified this holy temple, which has today become a living heritage of the people. The time has come for us to preserve this great religious and artistic treasure of the island for future generations. Sri Lanka has joined with UNESCO and formulated a Central Cultural Fund. This work now in progress at Dambulla includes as the main objectives:

1. Conservation of paintings and sculpture
2. Documentation of paintings
3. Restoration of the superstructure
4. Lighting and humidity control
5. New buildings such as a museum, and added accommodations for monks and pilgrims.
6. Landscaping.

May this record of the glory that was Dambulla enlighten and uplift the hearts of every visitor to this *Viharaya*, inspiring them to extend their assistance to keep the historic monument alive for generations to come; so that they, also, will be able to visit, worship and take pride in this historic and sacred shrine.

As you enter Cave No. 3, Alut Viharaya



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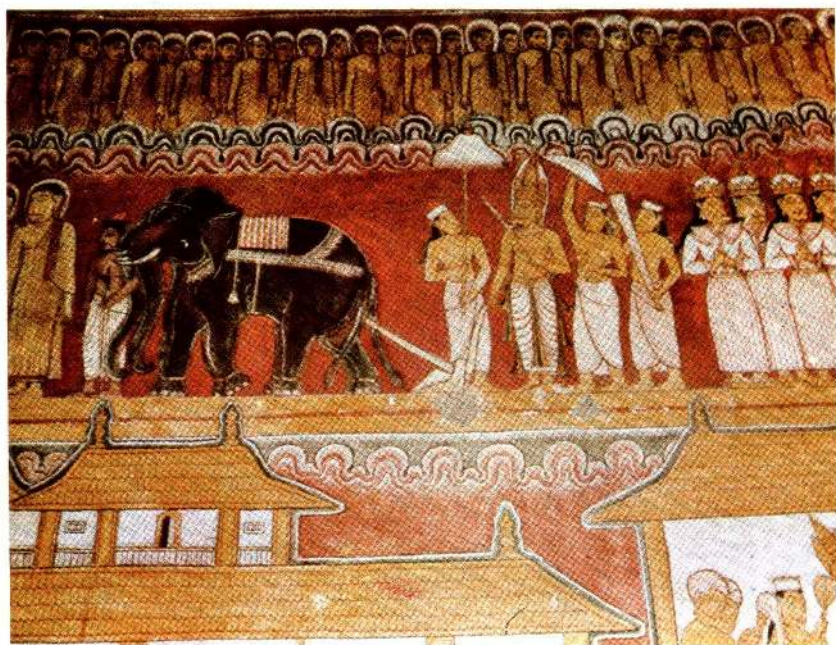
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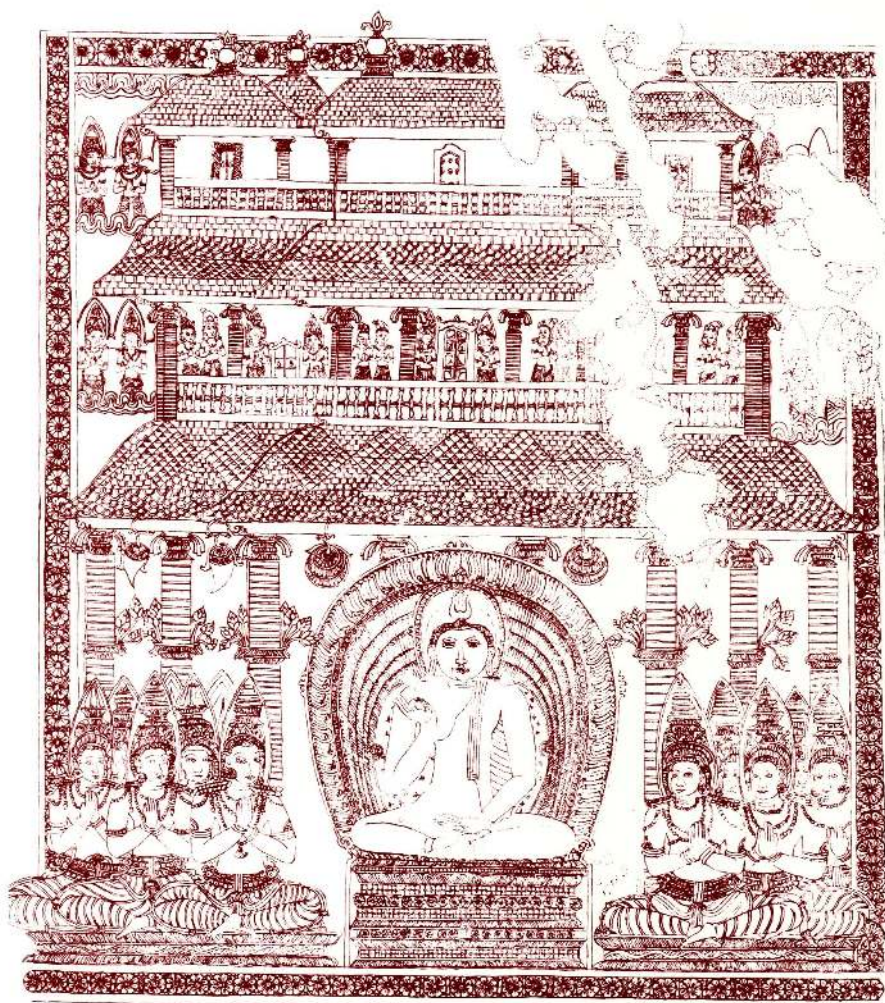
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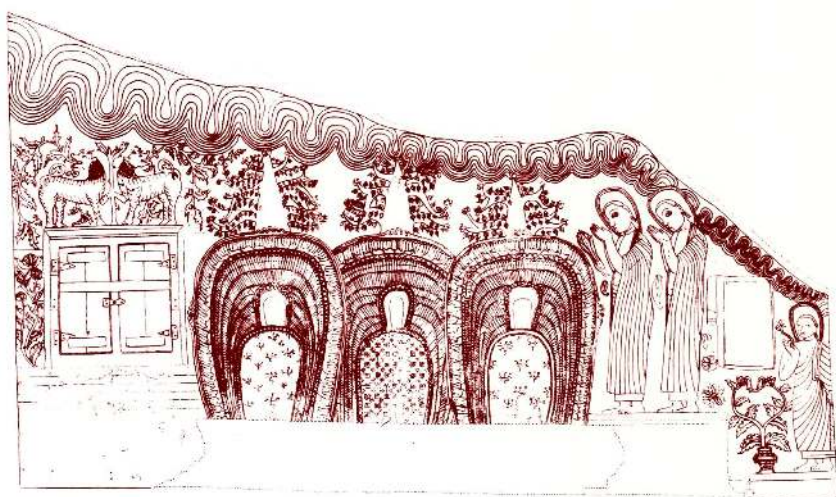
1. *Dambulu Sannasa* of Kirti Sri Rajasinha (Copper plate) now with Rev. Madugalle Sobhita of Kondadeniye Rajamaha Viharaya, Katugastota.
2. *Nilagama Panivida Panata*, (ola manuscript) now with Nilagama Patabendi Jivathamy of Nilagama.
3. *Dambulu Shantiya*, (ola manuscript) now with T. B. Karunaratna of Watapuluwa, Kandy.



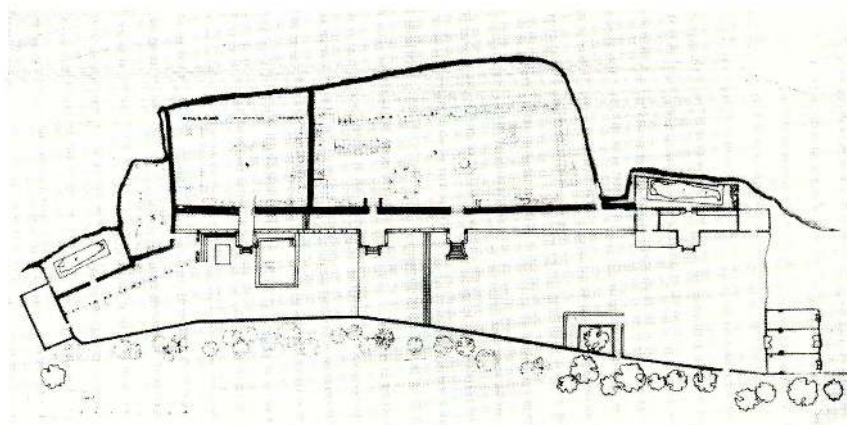
Demarcating the boundaries at Anuradhapura
—by King Devanampiyatissa.



Documentation of Paintings (Cave 4)

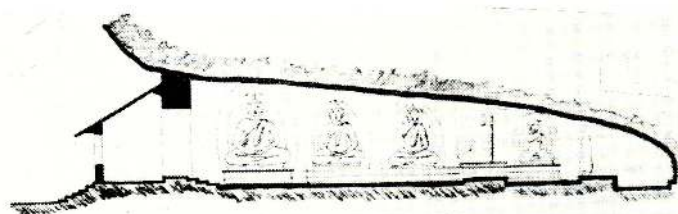


Documentation of Paintings (Cave 4).

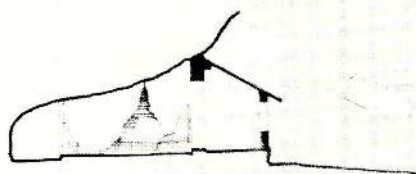


Section – Cave Complex

Section thro. large Image House

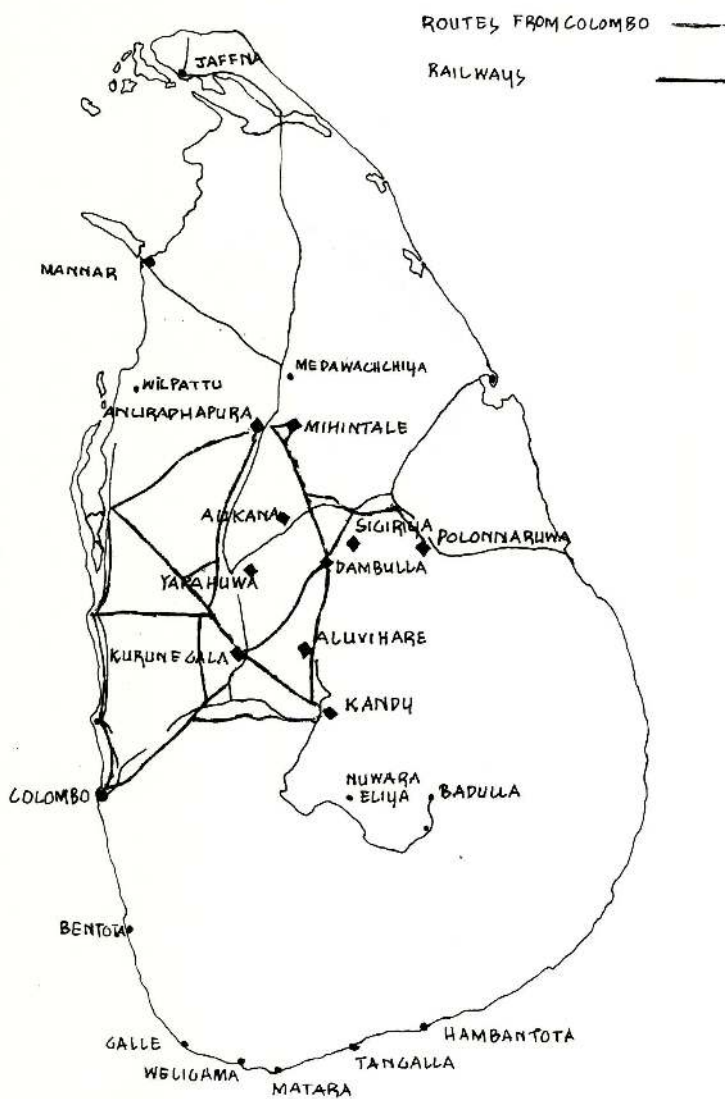


SECTION thro. LARGE IMAGE HOUSE



SECTION thro. CAVE AT WAR

Passage to Dambulla





THE CENTRAL CULTURAL FUND



UNESCO-SRI LANKA CULTURAL TRIANGLE PROJECT

The work of the Cultural Triangle at six important sites in Sri Lanka includes excavation and Conservation of Abhayagiri and Jetavana Viharas in Anuradhapura, Alahana Pirivéna in Polonnaruwa, the palace complex and four devales in Kandy, the water gardens of Sigiriya and the Cave Shrine at Dambulla.

Ministry of Cultural Affairs,
Colombo,
Sri Lanka.