

The Ancient

PARĀKRAMA-PURA

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PAṆDUVAS NUVARA

Guide to the Ancient

PARĀKRAMA-PURA

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PAÑDUVAS NUVARA

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PAṆDUVAS NUVARA

PARĀKRAMA-PURA was the capital of the principality of Dakkhina-desa for a period in mediaeval times. The name by which it is most popularly known today is Paṇḍuvas Nuvara.

Descriptive and Topographical

It is situated in Girātalāna Korale of Devamādi Hatpattu in the Kurunāgala District and is 22 miles on the Vāriyapola road from Chilaw. It is 63 miles away from Colombo by the shortest convenient route from Colombo by way of Kochchikade, Dankoṭuwa Junction, Pannala and Kuliyaṭṭiya. This road falls at Heṭṭipola where there is a Rest House, whilst close to the site itself there are hotels of the rural type.

Two miles from Heṭṭipola on the Vāriyapola road bring the visitor to a bustling junction known as Kōṅghamula or Koṭaṃbapṭiya (Koṭampṭiya) Handiya. From here the gravel road to the ancient Citadel site is a matter of yards. Constructed alongside the moat, it is motorable almost up to the Palace Courtyard. The traveller gets a clear impression of the southern and western portions of the ancient rampart as well as of the moat.

The site is also referred to as Nuvara-kāle (the Forest of the City) and Agala-kāle Mūkalāna (the Forest of the Moat). With the rapid opening up of the area, however, these names are passing into oblivion.

The traveller is now in the Dry Zone in which were evident most of the building activities of the ancient Sinhalese. There



A section of the Conserved Palace Ruins

are numerous village tanks on the face of the country and here, close to the Citadel, is an abandoned tank of modest proportions. Its name is Pañḍā-vāva. Its bed is scrub jungle and hamlet now, but once its waters covered about one quarter of the acreage of Minneri-vāva. The tank bund on the south is close to the Citadel. The City had been so built near the edge of the tank that when the latter was quite full the water extended to the moat. This connection between tank and City helps in regard to the chronology. A special

point to remember is that Parākramabāhu I (1153–1186 A.D.) repaired the tank. Wilhelm Geiger the editor of the *Mahāvamsa* thought that the tank was the Parākrama Samudra which was constructed in Dakkhinadesa. Not too far from the site there are villages which bear such names as Bamuṇumulla, Radādena, Lōkurugama, Āṇḍigama, Waḍuwana, Āchārigama, Panikgama, and activity of a time, centuries ago, when there was a royal establishment at the site which we are describing.

Henry Parker, the author of *Ancient Ceylon*, who was working in the area in the last century described the enclosing wall of the fortification as 40 ft. thick, faced with brick on both sides and having immediately outside it a ditch some seven feet deep and more than 10 ft. wide at the bottom. The wall was clearly defined and several feet high, being in plan a rhombus 1,000 ft. long on two opposed sides and 950 long on the other two—which was commendably good observation. But within the fortified area he knew of no buildings. (The Archaeological Department in recent years has exposed three, and there are vestiges of more.)

The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society for 1896 published a paper on the antiquities here by F. H. Modder ; the account also incorporated the notices of others. The Annual Report of Dr. S. Paranavitana for 1947 contains the most recent account. His ensuing Reports have recorded subsequent progress. As Archaeological Commissioner he was the first archaeologist to excavate the site.

HISTORICAL

The remains excavated within the Citadel do not bear any archaeological evidence to connect the site with the hoary times of King Paṇḍuvāsudeva (circa 504 B.C.), the second king of Ceylon, who is popularly said to have resided here.

There is no literary evidence, either, upon which the popular belief could be based. The only reason, as far as one may guess, appears to be the existence of the ancient circular site now known as Bisō-koṭuva near the modern temple a short distance away. The temple itself is on an old site and in the Bisō-koṭuva imagination has been the remains of the Ekattambhapāsāda (One-pillar-palace) in which Chitrā, the lovely daughter of Paṇḍuvāsudeva, had been confined against the fulfilment of an ominous prophecy which indicated several deaths in the royal family.

Neither the ancient name of the Palace, nor any indication as to who built it, emerged from the excavations. But the archaeological evidence, coupled with literary and historical material, strongly points to the twelfth century as the period in which the buildings had been constructed.

For various reasons the site may be taken as Parākramapura, the City where Parākramabāhu resided in his days at Dakkhina-desā. The Palace, for the same reasons, could thus have been of his construction.

No traces of an earlier period have so far been found in the Citadel, except for some fragments of stone pillars containing inscriptions of the 9th century which had been used in the building material of the Citadel wall. But they had obviously been brought from elsewhere.

There is an inscription of Niśśaṃka Malla (1187-1196 A.D.) on the *āsana* in the Palace. It leads to the inference that the Palace existed in good condition during the king's visit. If he was responsible for all, or even part of it, his contribution would have been mentioned in the epigraph as was his practice. Here is also an interesting point that he has avoided mentioning the name of the place. This, too, is unusual to one familiar with his way of doing things. It is likely that the omission



Palace Ruins before excavation

was deliberate, for the study of his numerous records indicates that he was little concerned with the works of Parākramabāhu I.

The Palace being of wooden construction above, the ground floor would have lasted about a century. The Citadel wall and moat are of the same date. The site would have been called *pura* or *nagara* in the literature of the period. Thus in identifying the remains, one should look for a *pura* or *nagara* in this part of the country during the century or two preceding Niśśaṅka Malla. On these additional grounds Dr. Paranavitana has identified the Citadel as Parākramapura the seat of government of Parākramabāhu whilst ruler of Dakkhīṇa-desa in the years preceding his over-lordship of the whole Island.

Parākramabāhu who ever entertained the ambition of bringing together Laṅkā under one canopy of dominion (in

the phrasing of the ancient recorders) initiated a vigorous policy when, as successor to Kittisirimegha, he took charge of the "Southern" country. He was an efficient administrator and restlessly active in building up the resources of his own kingdom from his headquarters at Parākramapura.

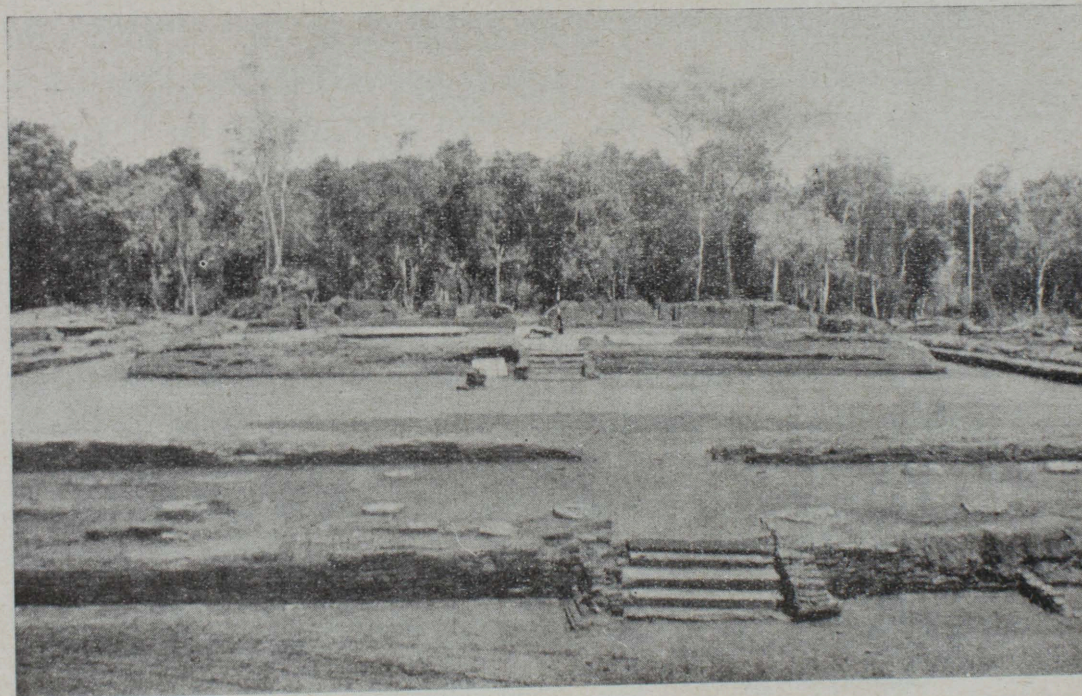
The seat of Parākramabāhu's government cannot be identified with other sites like Saṅkhattalī, Puṅkhagāma or Badalatthalī. One has to look elsewhere, therefore, to locate Parākramapura which was founded by him in his own kingdom in the "Southern" country. The description given of it in the *Mahāvamsa* is scanty. Nevertheless, having special regard to military disposition the only ancient site within Dakkhina-desa which is satisfying to the historian is the present site. The popular Paṇḍuvas-Nuvara is, concludes Dr. Paranavitana, the Parākrama-pura mentioned in the chronicles.

It is difficult to say how long this Parākrama-pura retained a degree of importance. Probably not very long. For we know that much havoc was caused by the marauding Māgha (1215–1236 A.D.) who, says the *Mahāvamsa*, landed as leader of four and twenty thousand warriors from the Kalinga country and conquered the Island of Laṅkā. The great scorching fire, King Māgha (continues the chronicler), commanded his countless flames of fire, his warriors, to harass the great forest, the kingdom of Laṅkā. Perhaps his "flames of fire" literally consumed this Palace, too, for burnt timber from the wooden pillars was noticed in position whilst archaeological work was in progress.

A Tamil inscription on an ancient site south of the Citadel mentions one Parākramabāhu Niśśmka Malla who cannot be identified. A hoard of coins of King Dharmāsoka-deva (1208–1209 A.D.) was also found in a *dāgāba* site south of the Citadel. The Polonnaruva period is thus the latest point of

ancient history which has so far been reached. It is also the period most in evidence, archaeological, epigraphical or literary.

In comparatively recent times, attention was focussed on the site on account of the illegal activities of a Malay treasure-hunter in 1877 and the subject was mentioned in the despatches between Governor W. H. Gregory and Earl Carnarvon, Britain's Secretary of State. The Epigraphical Assistant to the Archaeological Commissioner (Mr. S. Paranavitana) wrote a report in 1926 and A. M. Hocart, his chief, got two areas of land declared Archaeological Reserves in 1931. It was in 1934 that the Citadel site was first cleared ; excavations commenced in 1947.



Palace Ruins after excavation

In addition to the commitments of the Department at other sites, the work has been continued since that year. The results of these operations, the visitor may now see in a large portion of the Citadel wall, the Palace, a subsidiary building close to it, a pond and a wall standing clear in an area which, less than two decades ago, had been engulfed in the jungle.

CITADEL

Wall

In the course of the drive beside the moat the visitor sees the western and southern sides of the wall. This wall is of brick and had been plastered white on the outside. An occasional patch of plaster may still be seen adhering to the wall on the exterior surface.

The evenness of the wall is relieved by projections in certain portions ; their purpose will be manifest as our studies of ancient fortifications progress. The western and southern sides have been fully exposed and conserved. A portion of the eastern wall, too, has been conserved and the rest, including the northern wall, also has been exposed. In the course of work on this side it was found that the wall had been repaired at different times in the ancient days.

The area which the Citadel Wall enclosed formed a rough square being 352 yards by 330. Towards the north-east the wall had been so constructed as to admit a sheet of water within the Palace area to form a pond. It is reminiscent of the *dik-vāva* of the Royal Park below the bund of *Tisā-vāva* in Anurādhapura. The same may be seen within the western side, now, where there is actually an earth bund on the Palace side. Lotuses have been planted in these sheets of water to recapture the ancient atmosphere when probably many an aquatic flower bloomed making a pretty picture.

Gateway at Entrance

The drive to the Citadel branching off from the Village Committee road a few yards away from the junction, brings



Gateway before excavation

the visitor to the only gateway to the Citadel. It is on the east. This would be the natural starting-point of a sight-seer.

What remains of the gateway comprises two brick platforms built at right angles to the Citadel Wall, between which is a passage which had been nearly 12 ft. wide. This width had been in later times reduced by a facing. The facing has been preserved for a short length.

The northern platform is stepped on the outside to form two terraces. Ascending its elevated portion, too, one may see two terraces. At a later time a third terrace has been added from the inside.

The arrangement of the southern platform generally resembled that of the northern one. The two had perhaps been connected overhead by means of timber placed across to serve as the base of a structure.

In 1948 when the ground outside the gateway was being levelled, an interesting copper statuette came to light. It is of a male figure and only 6 ins. high. Though by no means to be considered a work of art it is nevertheless intriguing, because it holds a rope (metal) in its hands. The pose startlingly recalls that of the colossal royal figure near the Potgul Vehera at Polonnaruwa which popular belief holds to be that of Parākramabāhu I.

A little way inside towards the south, or to the left of the entering visitor, there was exposed a brief length of drain pipes ; it is now covered.

The Palace

On the left of the visitor may be seen the remains of a rectangular structure enclosing a sunken area. This was probably a bath of sorts.



Gateway after excavation



Soakage pit after conservation

The main court of the Palace consists of two component parts, a compact central edifice and galleries enclosing it. The central edifice measures over one hundred feet east to west and over ninety north to south. It was entered through a courtyard, by means of a flight of stone steps. These steps were flanked by brick walls. At the foot here is to be seen a moonstone of brick.

The base of the building is heavily moulded. The cornice takes one right round the edifice and serves, too, as a landing at the head of the flight of steps.

To the left of one ascending the steps is the *āsana* of stone which has been previously mentioned. Once damaged by treasure seekers, it has now been repaired. The top surface is inscribed as usual with Niśśmka Malla on similar blocks of stone at Polonnaruva and Kantalai. Dated in the ninth year of the king's reign, the inscription states that the king, on his return from Samanola (Sri Pāda or Adam's Peak), was seated on the *āsana* and witnessed sports and theatrical performance.

The next hall is the Audience Hall. Measuring 83 feet by 36, it had a number of pillars as one may count from the several spur-stones on which they had been planted. These pillars were of wood. There is also a platform upon which seats for the king and queen had, perhaps, been placed.

A doorway from here leads to a smaller hall. The two cubicles adjoining this second hall were probably meant for the wooden staircases which lead to the upper storey. A third hall and side chambers complete this plan of the ground floor of the central structure.

In the various halls and rooms of the central structure there were altogether some eighty pillars. In addition to them, nearly sixty wooden pillars had been embedded in the masonry of the wall. It was the pillars which carried the weight of the superstructure. With their cross-beams they served much the same purpose as a modern steel frame does.

At the north-western corner there are to be seen the remains of a water closet. Its floor looks cemented recently but the plaster dates from the original foundation. A stone conduit which drains off water leads on to a circular brick-built pit lined with rings of terra-cotta. The present depth of the pit

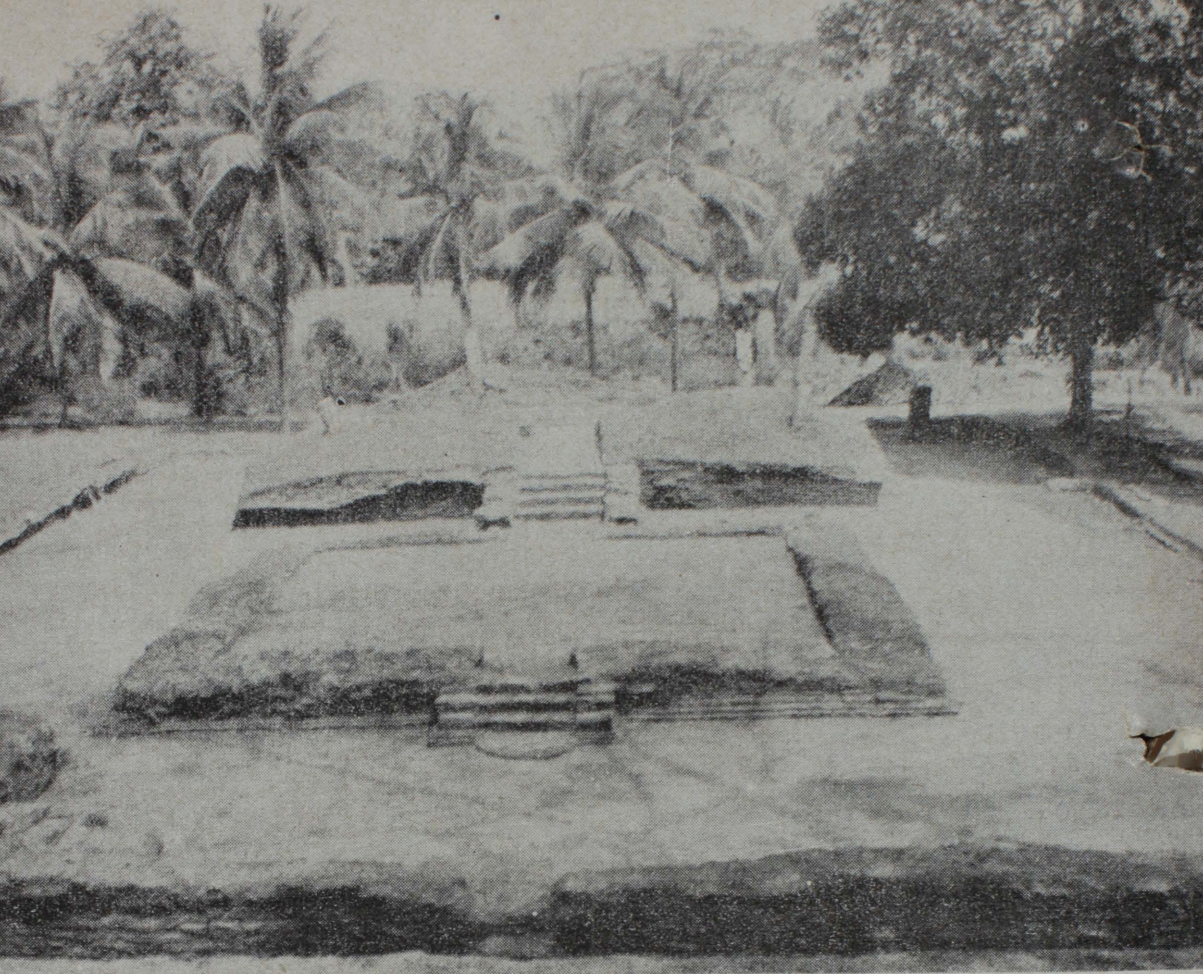


Pilimagē outside Citadel after conservation

is 7 feet. A stone slab once sealed this soakage pit. But treasure-seekers evidently ignorant of the purpose of the pit, had smashed the slab in their attempt to get at some concealed hoard, as they had fondly hoped.

The surrounding galleries had been divided into small rooms, some of which served such purposes as kitchens.

There is nothing to indicate that the outer wall was provided with any windows. The entire building must have looked like a fortress from the outside.



Pilimagē near Circular Rampart after conservation

The Palace itself was well ventilated. Its upper portion was most probably of wood. It is likely that there was more than one storey. Outside, the walls were plastered white ; within, they were washed in red. The floor was paved white. The bricks were laid in mud mortar. The timbers of the upper portions were rivetted with iron nails, some of which, as long as 2 ft. each, were found in large numbers. This gives an indication of the massiveness of the beams used. The roof of the building had been covered with tiles.

The Palace building, taking the entire dimensions, with the galleries, measures 268 ft. east to west by 168 ft. north to south.

Building to South-West

In 1951 was conserved a building lying to the south-west of the Palace. It is a fair-sized structure whose dimensions are 114 ft. by 42 ft. There are two courtyards to it and both of them sunken. The first has an outlet for water on the northern side. On the inner of the further side of the other courtyard there is a small stone trough to hold water. On another side there is a small round stone shallowly carved into lotus shape and obviously meant for stepping on to wash the feet. The building was evidently not a casual one because it is too close to the Palace. One tends to surmise that the two sections form twin baths.

Ponds and Well

Within the Citadel there are traces of ponds. One of them which has been conserved may be seen off the soakage-pit. It is faced on the inside with rubble and holds a fair depth of water. Possibly it was ornamental in purpose.

Dāgāba outside Citadel after conservation





Circular Rampart before clearing

Of the other ponds within the Palace area, two are to be clearly defined on the northern and southern sides.

The well to the north of the central court of the Palace had been dug to a depth of 30 ft. from the present ground level. The last 9 ft. had been sunk through rock. At some height from the bottom and resting on a stone foundation starts the circular brick facing which had probably been continued above ground level to form a parapet. Wedge-shaped bricks had been used so that, placed touching each other, they formed a circle.

OUTSIDE THE CITADEL

Dāgāba

If the visitor now leaving the Citadel area on his return walks along the gravel road which will eventually take him to the

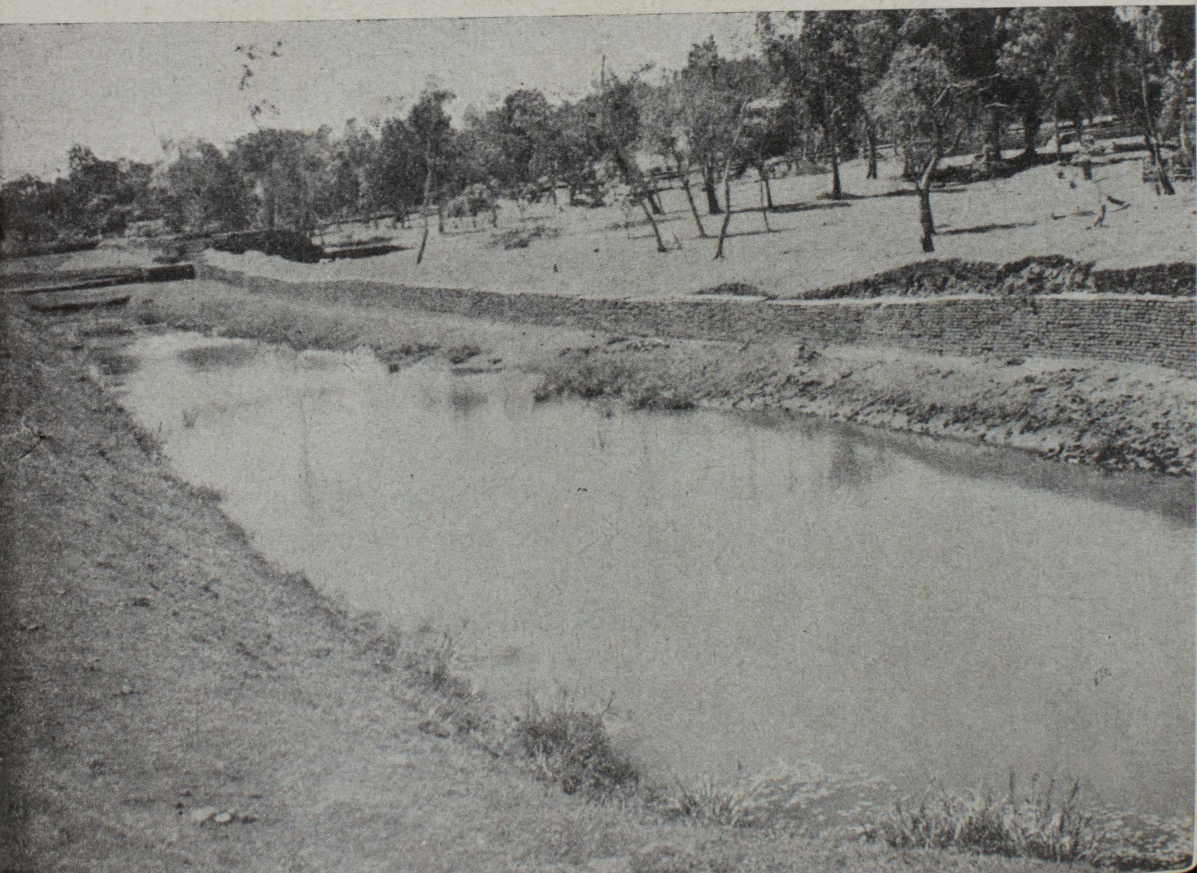
modern temple which has arisen on an ancient site, he would come across an ancient *dāgāba* and *piḷima-gē* which have been conserved a short distance away from the Citadel gate.

The *dāgāba* stands on a terrace which is almost square and is raised $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. from the ground. A flight of steps each 8 ft. wide leads to it. The basal circumference of the *dāgāba* is 118 ft. and, though the upper portion of the dome is missing, the three basal rings (*pesā-valalu*) have been conserved.

Shrine

The *piḷima-gē* opposite has a square shrine with a flanking vestibule on the east. This vestibule has two entrances. The inner chamber which is 20 ft. square has walls 2 ft. thick. It was in the course of conservation work that its four stone pillars and the lotus pedestal of the image that had anciently been set up on it were put into their proper position. Whilst

A section of the Moat



this shrine was under conservation a hoard of coins came to light. Amongst them were 108 one-eighth *masu* pieces of Dharmāsoka-deva as previously mentioned. The type was considered very rare until the present collection was secured. H. W. Codrington, in fact, had only one specimen for his monograph on Ceylon coins.

A few yards beyond are the extensive remains of another temple on a high terrace. Here there is at least one ruined *dāgāba* which is badly breached. Amongst the stone slabs is a moonstone. Its top surface is plain, but along the edge runs a moulding of lotus-petals. It is here that the Tamil slab inscription of Parākramabāhu Niśśmka Malla may be seen close to the *dāgāba*. It registers grants to an image-house and a *caitya* and is dated in the king's fifth year. The places referred to in the grant may be those whose remains were described.

The donor calls himself the King of the South (Dakkhina desa, most probably) but there is no evidence to identify him with either Parākramabāhu I or Niśśamka Malla. Perhaps he was a local ruler who came soon after Māgha, the Kālinga invader.

MODERN TEMPLE AND ANCIENT REMAINS

Proceeding further ahead and keeping to left at the fork the visitor should arrive at the modern *pansala* a few yards beyond. The road cuts through an ancient site as may be seen from the pillar-stumps and *pokuṇa* on either side.

Between the modern Bo-maluva and the *Dharmasālava* are to be seen several ancient pillars of stone in position as if in some ruined hall. Popularly called Daḷadā Māligāva the building is in the twelfth century (Polonnaruva) style. However, there are traces of earlier times, too, as noticed within the Citadel. There are a number of inscribed pillars of the 9th and 10th centuries in the *vihāra* premises. They

are badly weathered. Along with the several scattered fragments of stone work from various buildings, they do not appear to be in their original places.

Circular Site

The most interesting site, however, is a little further off the Bo tree and in a shady grove of ancient *nā* trees. It is a circular rampart of earthwork within which are foundations of buildings. The width of the base of the bund is 66 ft. and of the top 21 feet. Called Biso-koṭuva, they are connected by popular stories with the one-pillar palace within which was immured the legendary Princess Chitrā, the Maddener of Men, only daughter of Paṇḍuvāsudeva who hoped thus to secure here against the suitor, as her issue had been prophesied as bringing about deaths in the royal family. As in fairy tales, so secretly by night came Prince Charming in the form of her cousin Prince Dīgha-gāmanī. And in the course of time what the stars had decreed came to pass.

Grey facts are never the rosy visions of romance, however. And, Dr. Paranavitana in his Annual Report for 1952, discussed the evidence and identified the site as a representation in miniature of the Universe. The central structure was a seat of Parākramabāhu (later I) wherein he was installed as Cakravartī, Lord of the Universe. It was symbolic of the Cosmos and was the Cakravāḷa of Indian mythology. The circular earthwork was a Chakravāḷa-koṭṭe and its date the twelfth century.

Ancient Shrine

The remains of an ancient structure, which was probably a *piḷimagē*, may be seen on the west and just outside the Circular Rampart. A visit to it would not be without interest.

At left, a few yards away from the first take-off to the Palace there is to be seen a fair sized mound clothed in vegetation. It was known as Koṭa Vehera and had been

opened up about 80 years ago, though not by archaeologists. Nine Buddha images of gold sheet were found in its rather unusual type of relic-chamber, eight of these may be seen in the Colombo Museum. Their style, taken together with that of bricks, points to the twelfth century. This is the period which was most widely indicated in the several important archaeological remains the visitor would have seen.



Stone āsana inscription

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