

MEDAWELA RAJAMAHA VIHARA COPPER PLATE INSCRIPTION

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Introduction

Medawela Rajamaha Viharaya situated in Harispattuwa in the District of Kandy is said to have been founded by King Walagambahu (A.D. 103-102 BC and 89-77 BC). The village is known after the temple that consists of a modern shrine room, *Stupa*, *Tampita vihara* shrine (Shrine built on pillars), *Bodhi* tree and *Poya-ge*. However, no concrete evidence is furnished about the contributions made by rulers to the temple until 14th century A.D. The temple was periodically renovated and new grants and donations were made by the different rulers after 14th century. The significance of the temple is underscored not only the legends associated with the temple and village, but also availability of inscriptions, religious edifices representing typical Kandyan period, donations, grants as well as constructions made by several rulers, invasions and destructions made by Portuguese armies and historical records such as palm leaf manuscripts and copper plate inscriptions available in the temple. The temple has been renovated by the Department of Archaeology in 1952 paying attention to the old craftsmanship under the instructions of Director General of Archaeology, C.E. Godakumbure.

Purpose of the Study

On the basis of available information and site exploration the paper is focused on discussing the great deal of information compressed in *Medawela Rajamaha Vihara* copper plate inscription, which provides an excellent opportunity to study social, economic, political and art history of mediaval Sri Lanka in a novel way through different perspectives. A critical desktop

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review and site exploration has been carried out in the study. Also the paper draws attention to study the unique but different styles of architectural and sculptural features noticeable in the various edifices of the site such as *vahalkada*, *stupa*, *poya-ge* and *tempita vihara* shrine.

Discussion

Out of the three inscriptions available at the temple, the rock inscription in the temple, belonged to the third year of king Vikramabahu III of Gampola Period (A.D. 1357-1374), reports an agreement between King Vikramabahu II of Gampola and Aryacharkavarti of Jaffna, on the collection of taxes from the areas of Kandyan territories (Epigraphia Zeylanica, 1966 & Paranavithana, 1960) . This implies the magnitude of significance of the village and temple as a centre due to its location being closer to Galadedara pass.

King Keerthi Sri Raja Singha (A.D. 1747-1782), of his third year of his reign has donated a Copper Plate Inscription to the temple which provides evidence of invaluable information of historical, and political events during the period. The copper plate inscription is an excellent source for ancient art historical and aesthetic education of Kandyan period as well the main purpose of this document was to confirm and document the grants made by the King Keerthi Sri Raja Singha to the Medawela Rajamaha vihara.. In addition to the information mention in the copper place inscriptions it provides remarkable information about the history of ancient Sri Lanka. For an example it records a conflict taken place between the Parakaramabahu IV of Kurunegala (A.D. 1302-1326) and Bodamapa, which has not been recorded in the historical sources of Sri Lanka.

Tampitavihara Image House

Medawela Rajamaha Vihara is well known due to its shrine; *Tampita Vihara*, which was constructed by King Keerthi Sri Raja Singha (A.D. 1741-1782) converting a two-storeyed edifice in to a temple on stone

pillars. This *Tampita vihara* in the temple known as one of the finest examples of Kandyan period architecture, is adorned with the artistic ornamentation that is typical to 18th century A.D. . This unique wattle and daub edifice constructed on stone pillars with paintings on the inner walls is used as a shrine room. Buddha statue inside the image house is seated on *vajrasana* position under a decorated *makara thorana*. Figures of gods, incident of the life of the Buddha, and *Jataka* stories such as *Uraga* and *Vessantara* are painted in the inside of the wall of *Tampita vihara* (Godakumbure, 1956). The copper plate describes the history of origin of the temple, architectural features and some of the materials used in the paintings of the image house. Also, it describes architectural embellishments as well as sculptural devices that has been used to adorn the edifice such as *gajasimha*, *kibisi*, *liyawel* and *sandakada pahana*, which are still visible in the site. Scholars such as Senarath Paranavithana and C.E. Godakumbure (1966) point out that the copper plate is an important source in studying the literary and linguistic traditions of the period.

Keywords: Medawela Rajamaha Vihara, Tampita Vihara, Inscriptions, Copper Plate

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