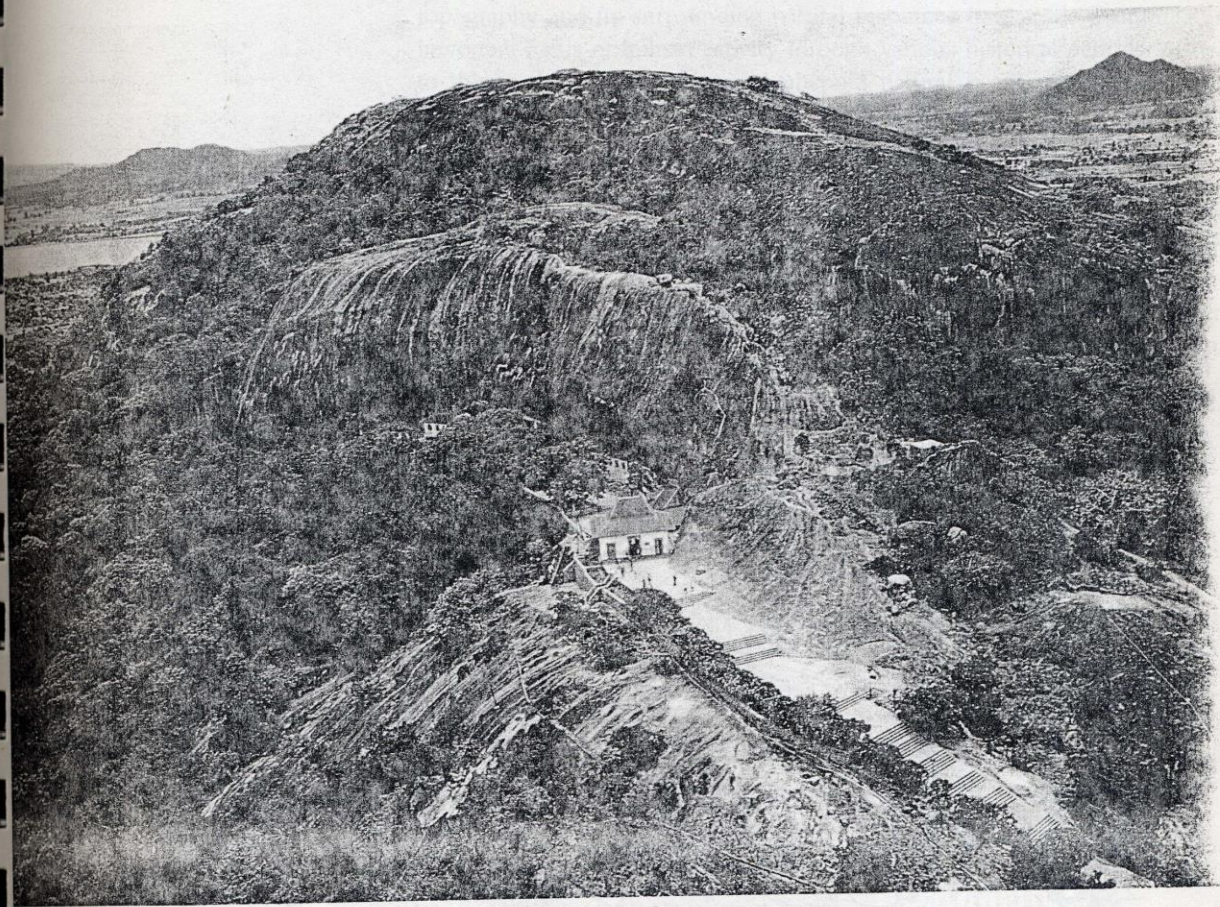


# Dambulla

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## The Golden Mountain temple

Senake Bandaranayake



The Buddhist monastery at Dambulla, the ancient Jambukola vihara, is best known for its rock temples and its great cycle of well-preserved eighteenth-century rock and wall paintings. It is one of the largest cave temple complexes in the South and Southeast Asian region and one of the most important centres of Buddhist pilgrimage in Sri Lanka. Dambulla is also an extremely complex archaeological and historical site, a palimpsest reflecting successive periods of human occupation, with a history extending from prehistoric and protohistoric times right down to the modern period.

*Rock and Upper Terrace, Dambulla, 3rd century B.C. and later. The upper terrace at Dambulla had been in continuous use for more than two thousand years.*

Located near the centre of Sri Lanka, at the northern edge of the central mountains as they descend to the great plains of the north-central Dry Zone, the Dambulla rock has been formed by the combination of two great rock outcrops, erosional remnants or inselbergs, each roughly domical in shape. Like Sigiriya, they are of considerable importance and interest in the study of the geological history of Sri Lanka.

From historical times to the present day, Dambulla has played an important role in the communication system of the northern half of the country. It functions as a radial hub or nodal point between the eastern and western sections of the Dry Zone and also as a gateway from the Dry Zone plains to the central mountains. This location, its distinctive topography and its surrounding natural resources have made Dambulla an important focus of human activity through various historical periods. Added to this is the extraordinary and unspoilt natural beauty of the site, with its massive rocks interspersed with deeply-forested tracts.

### Prehistory and the first farmers

Along the western slopes of the Dambulla rock is a series of large boulders, terraces and caves, which formed the habitat of prehistoric man. Excavations on the uppermost terrace of the Dambulla complex have yielded remains of prehistoric stone implements, displaced from the rock shelters when they were cleaned out in Early Historic times. They are the first indications

Map of Dambulla  
 Modern settlement  
 Peripheral processional path  
 Pilgrim path  
 Residences of monks  
 Old cave residences  
 The five painted cave shrines  
 Summit

