

Identifying the ‘Daladage’ at Anuradhapura

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Abstract

From its arrival to the Island in the Anuradhapura period, the Tooth Relic of Lord Buddha has been one of the most venerated objects in Sri Lanka. Ancient literary works refer to the various customs associated with the Tooth Relic. Especially the accounts of Ven. Fahien on the festivals and occasions held in honour of the Tooth Relic bear testimony to this fact. Up to the Kandyan period, every ruler paid a special concern over the security of this object of veneration. Thus the Temple of the Tooth occupied a significant place in every ancient capital in Sri Lanka. It was always situated very close to the king’s palace in the inner city or at an easily accessible distance. Although the ancient city of Anuradhapura and its vicinity has been subjected to archaeological research over a period of hundred years, the exact location of the Temple of the Tooth at Anuradhapura remains a question.

According to the chronicles and other ancient literary works, the ‘Daladage’ or the Temple of the Tooth situated in the citadel referred to as ‘nagara’ or ‘atnakara’ in chronicles and inscriptions. The first attempt to identify the Daladage was done by E.R. Ayrton, former Archaeological Commissioner of Ceylon, who deciphered an inscription which refers to the Temple of the Tooth. The edifice situated south to the pond and next to the Mahapali alms-hall in the southeast portion of the citadel, which was identified by Senerat Paranavitana as the Daladage, was subjected to excavation in the 1930s. Ayrton’s decipherment and literal evidence which states that the Daladage was located near the Mahapali was based for this identification. Senake Bandaranayake has opined that the both edifices referred to as the ‘Gedige’ and ‘Building A’ by Paranavitana may have served as the Temple of the Tooth. One of his arguments was that the beads and the image of a lion unearthed in the 1930s indicate the earlier Daladage to be a secular building. At present the Building A regarded as the Daladage. This identification is not entirely void of doubt. The earlier edifice identified by Paranavitana is in accordance with Fahien’s eyewitness account who refers to the Daladage as a very tall building. The ground plans of Building A, and the Gedige does not suggest for them to have been buildings of great heights. Further, both these edifices bear appearance of an image house. On the other hand, the presence of secular type objects does not necessarily point to a habitation site as evidenced by the Jetavana and Abhayagiri sites where beads are found extensively. Based on these, we may suggest that the earlier edifice identified as the Daladage has a high chance of being the exact Temple of the Tooth.

Keywords: Temple of the Tooth, Anuradhapura, Citadel, Archaeological heritage

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