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Polonnaruva Civilization

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THE SCULPTURE OF POLONNARUVA

Polonnaruva, the medieval capital of Sri Lanka emerged as the administrative centre of the island in 992/993 A.D. when Colas conquered the major part of the island. Vijayabahu 1 after liberating the island from the Cola yoke made Polonnaruva the permanent capital of Sri Lanka. Since then it continued to exist as the capital until 1235 A.D. Within this short period of time nineteen Sinhalese kings ruled from this capital out of which only three kings namely Vijayabahu 1 (1070-1110 A.D.) Parakramabahu 1 (1153-1186 A.D.) and Nissankamalla (1186-1196 A.D.) deserve mention so far as the sculptural achievements are concerned. In spite of the short duration of the period a considerable amount of sculptural works ranging from Buddha, Bodhisatva images, Hindu Gods and Deities to the ornamentations and embellishments of the buildings with decorative patterns and schemes comprising human, animal, floral and vegetal motifs have been produced.

Buddha Images

Buddha images made during this period were considerable in number, brick and plaster and metal have been used to make these images. The images made of stone, brick and plaster have assumed immense proportions while the metal images were of small in size. They are in three common postures seated, standing and recumbent and the seated images are mostly in Dyana Mudra. The notable Buddha images of impressive proportions are found at Galvihara (Uttararama), Thuparama, Vatadage, Lankatilaka and Tivanka Patimaghara. The Galvihara images are carved in the round from a living rock while the Images at Lankatilaka, Thuparama and Tivankapatimaghara are made

out of bricks and mortar and they are in a state of ruin. The well preserved Buddha images at Galvihara could be considered with certainty as representative of the type of Buddha images of this period. Culavamsa refers to these Buddha images as the works of Parakramabahu I (1153-1186)¹, the most powerful ruler of Polonnaruva. This is confirmed by the inscription - Polonnaru Katikavata incised on the same rock.² These Buddha images could very well be distinguished from those Buddha images of the Anuradhapura period in plastic conception and art idiom. In plastic conception the Polonnaruva sculpture has failed to accomplish the great spiritual qualities of wisdom and compassion of the Buddha to the extent that the Anuradhapura artists have accomplished. The half-closed eyes looking inwards expressing the conquest of the world of name and form and the warm and full lips lit up with a soft gentle smile registering the ineffable joy of bliss are striking characteristics of the Buddha images of the Anuradhapura period. Paranavitana correctly observes that the supramundane calm achieved by the conquest of the senses, the power which gives rise to and the compassion embracing all beings which is a consequence of the eradication of self are suggestive by the artist in a very effective manner and the Buddha images have to be reckoned among the greatest works achieved by the sculptors of ancient Sri Lanka. He further says that Polonnaruva ones fall short of in their spiritual evocations.³ Hence as works of art they are inferior to those of Anuradhapura Buddha images.

There are four well-preserved Buddha images carved on the face of the medium sized living rock boulder at Gal Vihara. Of them two are seated, one standing and the other recumbent. Of the two seated Buddha images one is carved within an excavated small cave called Viddhadharaguha in the Culavamsa (p1.1) and the other a larger image carved in the round at the left of the same rock boulder.(pl.2).⁴ This colossal seated figure of the Buddha 15 feet and 2½ ins. in height carved on the rock face at the left end seated on an elaborate asana was ones sheltered by a brick structure in front which is completely ruined now and its foundation indicates that it was a structure oblong in ground plan extending to a distance of 18 feet from the rock boulder having

the side walls running out straight from the rock and forming frontage of 40 feet which has been interrupted at the middle by a rectangular projection 23 feet by 9 ft. 9 ins. The entrance has been placed through a passage 7 ft. 3 ins. wide at the front opening. (figure 1) The image cut almost in full round in a recess on the rock face having only the back of the image attached to the rock matrix is in Samadhi Mudra placed on a pedestal 18 ft. by 4 ft. 4 ins. which is carved out in recessed outline and is moulded and adorned with a dado of lions, squatting full front alternating with traditional foliated Vajra emblems in low relief. An elaborate torana carved in low relief containing three cross bars united with uprights on either side of the image is depicted behind the Buddha image. The ends of the cross bars depict Makara heads in profile. In the background of the torana on either side is decorated with a partly exhibited facade of a temple where miniature cells which domicile roofs in storied fashion are carved in low relief and the small seated Buddha figures depicting the same posture as that of the main figure are placed within the panels of the domicile cells. (Pl. 3) The facial expression of this large seated Buddha figure has a dull, and unpleasant look. The facial features are not pleasantly balanced. The narrow receding forehead, the long nose, small eyes and the oval shape head have rendered it to diminish its grace, charm and gentle serenity which is definitely unfitting for the great and superhuman character of the Buddha. Hence the facial expression has hindered the noble dignified and sublime appearance of the Buddha which possibly creates a less religious fascination in the minds of the devotees. The treatment of the drapery is characteristic and it covers only the left shoulder. The folds are indicated by means of two parallel grooves.

The other seated Buddha image, smaller than the one at the left end, is placed within a small excavated cave shrine 26 ft. broad and 12 ft. 9 ins. high hewn vertically for 4½ ft. into rock boulder. The height of the face brow to the top of the rock is about 13 ft. This Buddha statue in Samadhi mudra is sculptured from the rock itself to nearly full round. The height of the Buddha image is 4 ft. 7 ins. excluding the siraspota. The head of the statue is encircled by an unadorned halo 1 ft. 10 ins in diameter curving at the top fol-

lowing the shape of the cave. An archless torana with three transoms stands behind the image and its jambs are crowned by representations of a five peaked ornament with beading and simple oval ornament at the centre. Two horned lions standing on their hind legs are attached to the outer side of the jambs. Two attendant figures stand upon the recessed base of the pedestal on either side of the image. Over the head of the Buddha image is an umbrella-like canopy fashioned out of the living rock. It has a circumference of over 7 ft. Two figures of four - armed gods, 2 ft. in height sculptured above the knees in three quarter length appear in between the Buddha's haloed head and the peaked ornament on the jamb of the torana and under the umbrella on either side of the image. H. C. P. Bell says that the god to the right is Brahma quadriform and the one to the left is Vishnu.⁵ The walls and the roof of the cave appeared to have been once covered with paintings but now the paintings remain only on the two corners of the cave.

The seated image inside the cave has been marvellously preserved and its original features could be recognized in detail. It exhibits a better facial expression than the large seated image described above. Its facial features are more serene, pleasant and well-balanced. Even its oval shape of the face, fully developed cheeks and warm lips display alive elegance. The balance and proportion of the bodily features too convey a better realistic vision. Hence in its plasticity this image is superior and comes nearer to the images of the Anuradhapura period. Though these two examples in Polonnaruva are poor in plasticity and workmanship they still possess a high standard in modelling and finish. They lack delicacy, refinement and elegance but possess nobility and greatness. It is important to note that the notion of the artists of the early period in making these Buddha images to be more representative as Dasabala than Mahakarunika are true in Polonnaruva images too. Polonnaruva artists seem to have held the conception that it is more important to express the inner experience of purity and compassion of the Buddha than to manifest the outward qualities of beauty and charm of the Buddha. Hence in these two images one can observe the inwardness of the half-closed eyes, erect body indicating the concentration of the mind, *dyana mudra*

and the majestic appearance denoting that he had conquered the world.

The most striking and impressive feature in these two seated images at Galvihara in Polonnaruya is the exuberantly ornamented torana in the background. This is a novel introduction to the decorative display of the Buddha images in Sri Lanka. (see pl. 1) This unique torana creation enhances adorability and the sanctity of the images. This highly ornamented torana appears to be so fascinating that it tends to cover up the inelegant and unpleasant facial features of specially the large Buddha image. The general pattern of the torana of the large seated Buddha image is of Sanchi type but with decorative motifs simulating Makara heads. But this torana appears to be unbalanced with the large Buddha image. Perhaps this may be due to the fact that the artist may have concentrated more on the Buddha image than the torana. Buddha image seems to have made first and later he must have ornamented the background with the torana pattern for which he utilised the available limited space on the rock. Hence automatically the torana became unbalanced with the Buddha image. The most important ornamentation of this torana pattern is the addition of four vimanas with the miniature Buddhas on either side importing an idea of heaven to the devotees. The seat of the Buddha image within the cave has also been highly decorated with a dado of lion figures and vajra emblems arranged alternatively in niches separated by miniature pilasters. This adds immense beauty and elegance to the Buddha statue. This type of dado decorations is first found in the Galvihara at Polonnaruwa. The introduction of the Vajra symbol may perhaps convey some esoteric meaning.

The torana of the seated Buddha image inside the excavated cave takes a different form with the decoration of its entire background with human and animal figures exquisitely and magnificently carved. The two standing figures of lions on the hind legs looking frontally carved on either side against the pillars of the torana, the elegantly and gracefully carved two standing chouri bearers wearing a well-balanced beautiful head-dress and bedecked with charming ornaments and the numerous gods and deities flying in the air above the Buddha image and beautifully carved well balanced

canopy over the head of the image, all are elegantly and gracefully carved with a sense of balance and proportion to tally with the size of the seated image. The design conception and the plastic quality of the whole composition undoubtedly bear testimony to the high degree of proficiency and competence in stone craft. Paronavitana in commenting on the artistic merit of the two figures of chouri bearers observes that for there is no doubt that in their graceful attitudes and correct proportions in the sensitive modelling for the limbs and the artistic treatment of the draperies, these figures proclaim themselves as the work of a sculpture of no mean ability.⁶ P.E.E. Fernando observes that these two images at Galvihara are an attempt by the Sinhalese craftsmen of old to continue artistic tradition of South India, Bihar and Bengal with those existing in the country to produce a set of images that would assist the spiritual development of the followers of Tantrism as well as of Theravada Buddhists.⁷ But Nandasena Mudiyanse refuting all the arguments made by Fernando denies that Tantric influence had not been in active force during the time of Parakramabahu I.⁸ But whatever the underlying meanings of Galvihara sculptures it should be said that the sculptural work in the cave could be considered as works of great artistic merit.

These two Buddha images discussed above are quite similar in their seated posture and hand pose. The difference lies in the decorative elements in the background, which I suppose carry immense difference in meaning symbolically. Two images are placed in two different settings. Though both backgrounds of the two Buddha images display portals with three horizontal transoms fixed onto two vertical posts the design is different. The attention of the scholars has not been drawn to this aspect. Hence in interpreting the meaning of the four Buddha images at Galvihara I propose to consider the entire complex with their decorative elements in the background. Let me describe the decorative elements of the background of the two seated Buddha images. The background of the large seated Buddha image exhibits a portal with three transoms the ends of which depict a makara head with an opened mouth. Though the three cross bars fixed on to the uprights are similar in design to the Sanchi gateway the pattern of decoration is quite different. From the top of

the two uprights rise a peculiar form of arch consisting of a series of curves opening inwards and meeting in cusps. On either side of the portal above the three transoms depict four pavilions much closer in form to the pavilions depicted on the outer walls of the Gedige type of image shrines in Polonnaruwa, and within them four miniature Buddha images quite similar in form to the large Buddha image are placed. This type of decorative background has not been found so far anywhere in the island. Hence it is unique and ought to have conveyed some religious and symbolical meaning. A horse-shoe shaped halo with two bends of which outer one is decorated with a tassel design to represent beams of light emanating from the head of the Buddha, is deposited behind the head of the Buddha image. The pedestal of the Buddha image too is decorated with the representations of the Vajras alternatively with the figures of lions in a recessed dado in niches separated by miniature pilasters. P.E.E. Fernando after examining the above - said feature is of opinion that the Galvihara sculpture were designed and executed in conformity to some extent with the concepts formulated in the Sadhanas and that it was intended to be a Tantric Mandala for the use of the followers of Tantrism in Ceylon, though it may have at the same time been an object of worship to the orthodox Buddhists of the country as well. Furthermore he concludes that this was a Tantric Temple which was built by Parakramabahu 1 to serve the needs of the followers of Tantrism of whom there must have been a considerable number among his subjects.⁹ Furthermore we see four representations of the stupa in this sculpture, two stupas on each side. The representations of the stupas with miniature figures of Buddha seems to have been used by the followers of Tantricism in Bihar and Bengal for the purpose of worship.¹⁰ But one has to note that the shape of these stupas differs from those of the ancient Sri Lankan stupas.

However it is obvious that the backdrop setting of these two seated Buddha images are quite different in design. Hence the idea of the artist in presenting these two different backdrops clearly indicates that they convey two different meanings. In other words it should be noted that creation of two seated Buddha images of similar types in the same monastery makes no sense.

The other two colossal Buddha images at Galvihara one standing and the other recumbent - display a comparative plastic inferiority as works of art to those of Anuradhapura. The standing image carved nearly full round from the rock itself reaches to a height of 22 ft. 9 ins. It stands on a circular pedestal 2 ft. high sculptured as a full blown lotus with nine petals and it forms more than half a circle of 5 ft. 10 ins radius. (Pl. 4) This image manifests quite distinctive features peculiar to the period. The common feature of the standing Buddha images of the early period was the erect body made to express strength, power, nobility, and superhuman qualities of the Buddha. But due to the non-erect character of the body in this image reduces to a great degree the nobility sublimity and the greatness of the Buddha. This image has been the subject of dispute among the art historians and archaeologists. Some expressed the opinion that this image is of Ananda, the beloved disciple and the constant companion of the Buddha while others were of opinion that the image is that of the Buddha himself.¹¹ In 1885 Burrows expressed the opinion that it was of Ananda.¹² Bell, the first archaeological commissioner of Sri Lanka, held the same view.¹³ Hocart, the archaeological commissioner of Sri Lanka, several years after Bell, expressed the opinion that the image is simply a standing Buddha, one of the three positions in which he is represented.¹⁴ It appears that the doubt arose in the minds of the scholars as to the identification of this image was the peculiar hand pose that this image has. It is an unusual and uncommon hand pose of placing both arms across the breast. Paranavitana accepting the Hocart's view that it is an image of the standing Buddha has further analysed the unusual hand pose and interpreted it as representing the Buddha in the attitude of 'Paradukkha Dukkhitā' - "He who is sorrowing for the sorrow of the others."¹⁵ But as the Buddha has overcome suffering of the human being this interpretation has not been accepted by the scholars. Prematilleke has expressed the opinion that it represented the attitude of 'ANIMISALOCHANA'¹⁶ i.e. gazing at the bodhi tree in the act of conveying his gratitude to the Bodhi - tree during the second week after his enlightenment. But this idea too cannot be taken as true because there is no sign of a Bodhi tree in

front of the Buddha image. Some others were of opinion that the hand pose of the standing Buddha denotes the swastika symbol indicating the sign of prosperity. The opinion that it was the image of Ananda was based mainly on the reason that the standing image and the recumbent image next were sheltered in the same shrine. But Paranavitana has shown that these two images were sheltered separately in two different shelters. Hence the theory that the standing image represents Ananda at the passing away of the Buddha cannot be accepted. The treatment of the hair in ringlets, the long ears, and standing on a lotus flower used traditionally for the Buddha images only establishes the fact that the image is not of Ananda but of the Buddha himself. Moreover at the Parinibbana of the Master venerable Ananda was not yet an Arhant, Paranavitana cites some more examples of the same pose elsewhere; one at Yatalavehara in Tissamaharama and a wooden image at Dambulla. Furthermore he points out a smaller replica of the Buddha in the same pose found in a small natural cave to the east of Bhaddhasimapasada in Polonnaruwa.¹⁷ Hence this peculiar hand pose not common during the early period still remains unsolved with regard to its meaning. The present writer believes that this hand pose indicated that the Buddha's mission in this world is over and the next step is Parinirvana. However this image expresses a melancholy mood and his appearance does not show the greatness and the magnanimity of the Buddha. His non-erect body and the uncommon hand pose have immensely reduced the sublimity and the veneration.

The other Buddha image at Galvihara is the recumbent Buddha image carved in the round in the living rock 40 ft. 4 inches in length (p1). In plastic conception and workmanship this image stands as a product of high quality. It appears that the master craftsman who executed this image possessed a comprehensive knowledge of the human body and its positional behaviour pattern of the movement of the muscles and flesh of the body have been displayed realistically in its true perspective. The pleasantly modelled face expresses the qualities of contentment and peace of mind. It conveys the concepts of Dasabala and Mahapurusha. The body is covered with a smooth, soft and gentle robe with parallel grooves. The Buddha is made to lie in the attitude of

Sakyasinhalila. The general opinion is that the Buddha is in his Parinirvana position. In this case at Galvihara it is more nearer to the truth that he is in his parinirvana position. If so the interpretation given to the standing Buddha image in this complex may be acceptable. Large-sized recumbent Buddha images are found in other places such as Pidurangala, Attaragallewa near Alahera, Tantrimalai and at Dambulla of which the Dambulla image is in a fair state of preservation.

Polonnaruva artists have made it a common practice to produce impressive colossal Buddha images in limestone, bricks and plaster to deposit in massive image shrines. Three such massive images have been built within the city of Polonnaruva namely Thuparama, Lankatilaka, and Tivanka Patimaghara. The Buddha images in these shrines have been ruined beyond recognition but the remaining portions and the traces indicate that they were mature works of experienced artists. Paranavitana is of opinion that every Buddha image found in the shrines of Polonnaruva cannot be taken as dating from Polonnaruva period. For instance Buddha images of Pabalu vehara and at Thuparama do not differ in style from those of the Ruvanveli Dagaba at Anuradhapura or in the Pilimage at Madirigiri. It is conceivable that the images found at dilapidated shrines of earlier date at Polonnaruva itself and in other places within easy reach were installed in shrines that were built in that city in the reigns of Parakramabahu and Nissankamalla.¹⁸ This may be quite possible. But the images made of bricks and mortar within the Gedige type image houses appear to have been the works of the Polonnaruva period. Paranavitana's opinion can be applied to standing images housed within the Atadage and Hetadage. There are some Buddha images placed inside the small image houses built around the Pabaluvehara. All these images, some made of limestone and others of bricks and mortar, have worn out defacing the original features. Well-preserved seated images are found at the Polonnaruva vatadage. These images are quite noteworthy because it appears that they belong to a different tradition. They present a distinct iconographical type not quite familiar to Sri Lankan traditions. The facial expression of these images are not very pleasant, and the various parts of the body appears to be imbalanced. In marking these images the artists have given

more emphasis to manifest the physical energy, vigour and strength to the body. Hence the superhuman qualities of the Buddha had been lost. The treatment of the hair and the arrangement of the robe are quite unusual when compared with the existing traditions. The treatment of the hair looks like wearing a close fitting skull cap as in the image at Mankuvar in India.¹⁹ The robe has no folds and it is close fitting and more or less transparent. These images do not express the compassion and sublimity. In plasticity and workmanship they are quite inferior to the Galvihara images.

Bodhisatva Images

The rarity of the Bodhisatva images belonging to this period is an important point to note because the Bodhisatva images were abundantly in vogue during the later Anuradhapura period. Considerable amount of Bodhisatva images have been found from Anuradhapura, Pidurangala, Seruvavila, and Situlpavva. It appears that the trend of making Bodhisatva images due to Mahayanistic influence during the last part of the Anuradhapura period has become inactive during the Cola occupation of the island for about seven decades. Perhaps due to the lack of patronage of the Sinhalese Buddhist kings and the motivation, inducement and guidance of the Buddhist monks during the Cola rule the worship of Bodhisatva cult and the making of Bodhisatva images would have receded into the background. However the solidly cast bronze Bodhisatva image found from Thuparama monastery in Anuradhapura (now in the Colombo museum) has been dated as belonging to the Polonnaruwa period on grounds of iconography and style. This Bodhisatva figure, 46.7 cm in height, is a standing one in graceful and rhythmical triple flexed posture (*tribhanga*). Its right hand is raised in the attitude of *Katakahastā* while his left hand is extended downwards in the attitude of *Varada mudra*, or appears to have been holding an attribute which is now missing. The upper part of the body is left uncovered except for the rich jewellery while the lower half is covered with an elegant cloth clinging to the body. The sinuous lines of the pleats and folds elegantly modelled and beautifully balanced accentuate the almost feminine grace of the figure. The calm and meditative face manifests a rather sentimental and sen-

suous look. The head carries a multi - tiered crown adorned with pearls and jewels and large jem-set medallion. Sensitively modelled body displays a soft and pliant nature. The hanging earrings have the form of makaras releasing tassels. This Bodhisatva figure has been attributed earlier by various scholars to the Anuradhapura period.²⁰ It is argued by Nandana Chutiwong that the general description of the figure as well as the highly complex and sensitive treatment of the jewellery nevertheless bring it closer in style to the sculptures of the Polonnaruva period best exemplified in the stucco work at Tivanka and Lankatilake and the stone carvings at Gal Vihara.²¹ Apart from this image there is a lonely unidentified standing figure placed in the middle of the so-called Dalada Maluwa in Polonnaruva. In character and form this image appears to have been either of a prince or a Bodhisatva. It has a beautiful headdress and jewellery akin to that of a Bodhisatva. The upper portion of the body is bare while the lower part is covered with a garment akin to that of a dhoti. However this figure has been designed to convey the idea of combination of a prince and an ascetic. The tradition of making Bodhisatva images has set up a condition that it should carry an emblem of the Dyani Buddha or the Stupa in the niche in front of the head-dress of the figure as an indication that it is an image of the Bodhisatva. But it appears that the Sri Lankan artists have not followed this condition because the concept of Bodhisatva cult in this country was intermixed with both the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions.²² Even the Cultural Triangle excavations carried out recently have not unearthed any images that could be definitely identified as Bodhisatva images.

Figures of Gods

Polonnaruva sculpture includes a considerable number of figures of Hindu divinities. All these are bronze images discovered from Hindu devales constructed during the Cola rule in Sri Lanka. The bronze casting appears to have been widely practised in the production of Hindu gods. The discovery of a large number of Hindu bronzes clearly indicates that there were Hindu oriented bronze casters in Sri Lanka following the South Indian traditions. These discoveries comprise the figures of Natarajs, Siva and Parvati and Siva Saints.

The Cultural Triangle excavations at Polonnaruwa have discovered six bronzes of Siva Chandrasekara, Parvati and Saiva Bhakta. Within these discoveries the figures of Natarajas are unique in plasticity and workmanship. Of the two Nataraja figures, one discovered from the Siva devale No.5 is the most impressive and striking figure exquisitely and magnificently casted. Here the God is represented as a Cosmic dancer performing the dance of creation and destruction of the universe (p1) The four - armed God balances his bodily weight in his rhythmically bent right leg the foot of which tramples down the demon Apasmarapurusha, the personification of ignorance. The upper right hand holds the kettle-drum (Damaru) symbolising the rhythm of his cosmic dance and the heartbeat of the cosmos in general. The rhythmically bent upper left hand holds the flame, the symbol of his ultimate destructive aspect there by balancing the symbolism and also the formal composition of the opposite feature in the upper right hand. The lower right hand posing rhythmically to the dance is in the Abhayamudra denoting that the god is offering solace to the devotees. The lower left hand is in the attitude of Gajahasta (the elephant trunk gesture) and points at the left foot in the attitude of dancing posture denoting the gesture of granting spiritual release. The dancing god is encircled by an aureole (tiruvasi) which was separately fixed to the pedestal which is decorated by a row of musicians starting with a female devotee Karaikkal Ammaiyar playing the cymbals. The arch shaped aureole too is decorated with diamond studded pattern and its outer ring is ornamented with a flame pattern decoration. The facial feature, the treatment of the anatomy and the arrangement of the jewellery are well-balanced, well organized and charming.

The other Nataraja figure discovered earlier from Polonnaruwa (plate) displays different features. It is quite worth to note Coomarswamy's description on this figure. 'It is a figure with four arms, having flowery braided locks ending in tight curls and whirling in the dance. On the proper right side in a flying hair is the figure of Ganga (represented as a Nagini) on the left a cobra and a crescent moon. The head-dress contains and terminates in a fan of Cassia leaves: a pearl fillet encircles the forehead: a man's earring is worn

on the proper side, a woman's on the left. Of the four hands right holds a drum (udukkai) the rear left a flame; the front is in Abhayamudra, the front left hand points to the lifted foot. Amongst the many ornaments are small bells tied round the calf of a leg as Morris dancers wear them. The whole figure is enclosed in a fiery arch (tiruvasi) arising from the mouth of a pair of adorned makaras established on a lotus pedestal (padmasana).²³ He further adds that this plastic type more than any other expresses the unity of the human consciousness for it represents equally religion, science and art.²⁴ The whole figure taken in its entirety distinctly indicates the clarity of artists imagination. The lotus pedestal, fiery arch, and the figure are well balanced symmetrical and pleasing to the eye that it could be considered as a grand piece of art.

There is another figure of Nataraja discovered from Siva Devale No. 5, a bronze figure solidly cast with a hollow pedestal and height 64.5 cm. now displayed in the National Museum, Colombo is also quite noteworthy because it is shown without an aureole. All the features in this image are similar to that of the one described above but its modelling is not so elegant, graceful and delicate. O.C. Ganguly says it would be impossible for any sculpture familiar with the rules laid down in the Kashyapiya regarding the modelling of the image of Nataraja to dispose the hands and the feet at such absurd angles as in this image.²⁵ This four-armed god dances balancing his weight on his right foot trampling down the demon Apasmarapurusha who looks up in fear. The upper hands hold the kettle - drum and the flame, symbols of creation and destruction while the lower hands are in varadamudra and gajahasta. The hair is fashioned up into a Jatamakuta (head - dress of matted hair). Most strange characteristic of this figure is that seven strands of hair whirling out on each side of the god's head due to the violent movement of his dance are displayed here in a very peculiar manner. It is believed that on the top of the strands of hair on the right is seen a small figure of the Goddess Ganga, the holy river Gangas, showing us how god Siva received the fall of the river Ganga onto his hair to reduce the shock of her rapid steep descent from the Himalayas. (plate)

Equally brilliant and elegant figures of Siva

Somaskandamurthi and his consort have been discovered from Siva devale no.5 in Polonnaruwa. They are solidly cast in four parts with a hollow pedestal made of bronze. Siva figure is now in the Anuradhapura museum, and Uma figure is in the Colombo museum. These two figures are extremely beautiful and pleasant and they are seated on a throne surrounded by a flame bordered halo. As usual the basic canonical attributes of battle axe (parashu) and antelope (mrga) are held in Siva's right hand and left hand respectively. His lower right hand is in Abhaya mudra while his left hand appears to be in a pose like that of Varada mudra. The facial features and the other bodily parts of these two are excellently balanced and beautifully moulded in a manner quite true to the nature. No doubt that the artists who have casted them appear to be experts in bronze casting art. Lakdusingha observes that they have several unusual features deviating from the traditional rules of South Indian iconography indicating that they were products of Sri Lankan workshop. The noticeable deviations are the reversed disposition of the God's legs (i.e. right flexed and left pendent instead of vice versa), large gap between right foot and the left knee of the Goddess, and the right hand of the goddess raised above the level of the nipple and the wearing Makara ornament instead of a floral feature.²⁶ The head-dress and the jewellery of both the figures are excellently well balanced and they enhance the artistic value of the figures.

One of the manifestations of God Siva known as Vatuka Bhairava which represents his destructive and reproductive principles found from Siva devale no.5 in Polonnaruwa could be considered as another important piece of sculpture. Usually the figure of the Vatuka Bairava is shown naked with four, eight or ten hands. Here it is depicted only with hands of which the upper right hand holds a kettle drum (damaru) upper left hand a noose (pasha) lower right hand a trident (trishula) and the lower left a skull (kapala). The head is fashioned with matted and dishevelled hair in the shape of a aureole with flames. Its mouth shows the gruesome nature of the god. Even the facial features are created to express terror. He wears a sacred thread composed of garland of small bells. According to the Saivaite literature this aspect of Siva is related to the incident when he assumed the form of Bairava

to cut off the fifth head of Brahma. Reviled and forced to pay for this sin he was made to wander from place to place as a naked beggar with his dog. His dog is also depicted here in this figure. (plate). The other noteworthy two figures from Siva devale no.4 and 5 are figures of Parvati and Sivakamasundari. The image of Parvati is a solidly cast bronze figure 56.5 cm in height, now in the National Museum, Colombo. Though it has been identified as Parvati, the consort of Siva, by some scholars the possibility that it is of some other deity cannot be ruled out, because it is not accompanied by some other figure of a God. The only distinctive attribute given to her is the lotus bud held in her right hand. But this alone cannot decide identification of the deity. The facial appearance and the other bodily parts of the figure are not very elegantly and gracefully modelled when compared with the other figures discussed above. The legs are modelled rather weakly and the ornamental details are poorly moulded.

The other figure Sivakamasundari is far more beautifully and elegantly modelled and its facial appearance and the ornamental details are shown that it is a product of a well experienced skilled craftsman. Her lower garment is highly decorated with a very delicate design. The notable features in this image are the ear ornaments and the unusual katakahasta gesture of the right hand. The other important images discovered from Siva devale no.5 in Polonnaruwa are Gods and Ganesha, Sikhivahanaskanda, Vishnu, Surya, and Goddess Sarasvati. The elephant headed Ganesha who is considered as the eldest son of Siva and Parvati is one of the imposing bronze icons 143 kilograms in weight. The God is represented with four arms seated in maharajalilasana or 'the attitude of royal ease' on a double lotus pedestal. His upper right hand holds a battle axe (parashu), left hand a rosary (akshamala), lower right hand his broken tusk, and the lower left hand a mango. Usually in Ganesha figures instead of the mango fruit a bowl of sweets or oil cake is shown. Godakumbura observes that the Sinhalese mythology attributes the mango fruit to Ganesha which indicates that it is a product of Sri Lankan school.²⁷ The other image which is of importance is the icon of Vishnu

who is shown with four arms in samabhaga pose or erect posture on a lotus pedestal fixed onto a square base. This image of the god is endowed with a makuta head-dress while his ears are adorned with maraka-kundalas. The upper part of the body is bare except for the necklaces, upavita and udarabhanda while the lower part of the body is covered with a garment akin to dhoti. His upper right hand holds a chakra, upper left a snake, lower right is in abhaya mudra and the lower left holds nothing but most probably a gada, which is now missing. Next is a standing image of Saraswathi who holds a parrot in her right hand while the left hand falls parallel to the body (avalambita). Her head-dress is arranged in a peculiar manner. It is similar to the shape of a bun tied with a string of pearls. The upper part of the body appears to be naked which is hidden by the ornamental jewellery while the lower part of the body is covered by dhoti which is held by an ornamental band tied to the waist. Several loops around the waist and the long sash falling down to the ankles between the legs in front add beauty and elegance to the figure. The fully developed bosom depicts that she is in her prime and vigorous youth. The facial appearance appears to be in a meditative mood but her smooth and pliant body with rhythmically modelled physical feature enrich her beautiful youth. Her treatment of the garment and the shaping of the bodily parts bring the image closer to the Cola school of craftsmanship. The next image in importance is the God Surya one of the five main deities known as Panchadevata. The standing God Vishnu is shown in samabanga pose on a circular lotus pedestal fixed to a square base which has to lugs on either side probably to attach a tiruvasi now missing. The head is crowned by Kiritamakuta behind which there is a circular halo representing the disc of the sun. The ears are adorned with circular earrings. The face is pleasantly modelled depicting the dignity and the majesty of the God. The upper part of the body is covered with a dhoti which is tied at the waist with an ornamented belt. The figure has two arms which carries two lotuses.

Saiva Saints

Among the Hindu bronzes next in importance come the figures of the Hindu Saints about whom Coomaraswamy comments that the Polonnaruwa series afford examples unique in craftsmanship and variety. The four chief Saiva saints and psamists represented are Manikkavasagar, Tirugnasambandharswamy, Apparswamy, and Sundaramurthiswamy. These Saiva saints are represented in action. Manikkavasagar is portrayed as reciting his hymns from palm-leaf manuscript and Tiru-Gnana-Sambandhar-Swamy is represented as a child holding castanets in his hands given to him by the God Siva himself. While Apparswamy is depicted in an attitude of devotion holding a hoe with which he was accustomed to remove weeds, Sundaramurthy is displayed as a youth in bridal dress. Commenting on these figures Coomaraswamy observes that the best of the two images has a touching quality of arrested movement and breathless wonder and is one of the most remarkable of all Indian art.²⁸ The depiction of bodily features and rhythmical posture are so well balanced and so true to the nature that they bespeak of competence, Proficiency and skill of the craftsmen not only in handling and manipulating the material but also in proper understanding and rendering the realistic nature of physical postures and movements of the various parts of the human body. Arunachalam remarks that the Nataraja figure (now in the Anuradhapura Museum) is a fit symbol of the cosmic rhythm and the figures of the saints express very strikingly fervent self-abnegating devotion to the deity.²⁹

During the period of the Cola domination they built several Hindu Devales. At least seven Siva devales and five Vishnu devales can be identified among the ruins of Polonnaruwa. Even after the overthrow of the Cola rule by Vijayabahu I in 1070 A. D. these Hindu temples were maintained by the Sinhalese rulers who actually paid homage and allowed to continue the rituals and ceremonies with the same vigour and vitality. It seems that Vijayabahu I named a Siva temple at Kantalai as 'Vijayaraja-Isvaram' and a Brahman settlement in the area was known as 'Vijayaraja Caturvedi Mangalam'.³⁰ The kings who ruled at Polonnaruwa

after Vijayabahu I continued to build or maintained Hindu temples. A Hindu temple at Nikaveratiya was known as 'Vickrama-Colamega-Isvaram' which indicates that it was built by king Vickramabahu.³¹ Kahambiliyava inscription refers to him with the title 'Parvati-pati'.³² Culavamsa records Parakramabahu I (1151 - 1186 A.D.) built thirteen temples for the Gods and repaired seventy nine decayed temples and restored twenty four other Devalas.³³ King Nissankamalla is said to have helped Brahmanas by building a brahmana sastra.³⁴ Thus it is clear that the Sinhalese kings who ruled in Polonnaruwa believed, and encouraged the worship of Hindu Gods.

It is worthwhile to note here that the scholars have expressed their views on the question of the origin of these Hindu bronze figures. H.C.P. Bell who discovered most of these figures expressed the view that 'there is every likelihood that when the Colas who brought the Sinhala people under subjection began building shrines to worship their Gods and started making images of the deities and saints they employed Sinhala artisans'.³⁵ The next scholar who commented on these figures was Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam who expressed the view that 'Let it be asserted once and for all that they are Polonnaruwa bronzes for the better or for worse'.³⁶ A different opinion was expressed by Ananda Commaraswamy who said that 'They may have been cast in Sri Lanka but as a group they belong to the prolific South Indian school of medieval bronzes represented in Madras and Tanjore'.³⁷ O.C. Ganguly expressing a different view says that 'it will be impossible to associate the Saiva images from Polonnaruwa with local artists of Ceylon brought up in the tradition of Buddhist art'.³⁸ Lakdusingha observes that all these scholars have expressed their opinions after studying only those bronzes found at Polonnaruwa in 1007 and 1908 Hoard of Hindu bronzes discovered in 1960 has not been considered. It is these later images that exhibit the distinctive characteristics which indicate that they were made in Sri Lanka.³⁹ Even C.E. Godakumbure, the archaeological commissioner at the time of discovery of the bronzes observed that these bronzes were made in Sri Lanka.⁴⁰ O.C. Ganguly too later said that some of the bronzes of the early collection was made by local craftsmen. He says that 'there

is no doubt, however, that these beautiful images which the Cola colonists brought to Ceylon excited the wonder and emulation of the local Sinhalese craftsmen, some of whom attempted to copy some of these models and to reproduce the conventions of poses and peculiarities without a previous knowledge or training as to its traditional rules and measurements.⁴¹ Moreover in discussing the seated figure of the Parvati of the Siva Somakandamurthi group O.C. Ganguly observes that the seated figure of Parvati found in Ceylon is perhaps an attempt of a Sinhalese sculptor to reproduce a Tamil model of the same deity. If we compare this image with somewhat similar sediment figures of the same goddess it will be apparent that there is a deviation both in the modelling and the treatment of the figure as also in the ornaments and details of the Ceylonese example which marks it out as the work of an artist unacquainted with the rules and conventions of South Indian Sculpture. The hand carrying the lotus in this class of images according to the rule of South Indian sculpture should never reach the nipple of the right breast. Similarly the drawn up right leg shall nearly touch the knee of the leg in this class of images. Both these rules have been observed in the South Indian examples but not in the Ceylonese specimen.⁴² On the Ganguly's observations Lakdusingha comments that it is a sound basis to propose with confidence that the figure of Parvati was the work of local artists and this hypothesis has formed the basis for further investigations which have now clearly revealed the existence of what we may call a Sri Lankan school of Hindu Bronze sculpture.⁴³ It appears that the Sri Lankan artists were unfamiliar with the classic conventions of South Indian Hindu sculptural traditions. In this connection it is important to draw the attention of Godakumbure's observation that in describing the icons of Chandeshvara, Gopinath Rao refer to a book called Kamikagama where the canons on Hindu sculpture available in Sinhadesa or the country of the Sinhalese are included.⁴⁴ Lakdusingha points out that there is a manuscript of Sri Lankan Sanskrit treatise called Rupamala which include the particulars of casting and drawing the images of Hindu deities. Neither the author nor the date of this book can be traced. The translator says that on the basis of the style of the language it could be assigned to

a period between 1190 - 1290. However this is good testimony to the availability of a local tradition of Hindu sculpture.

Figure of Yama

Another noteworthy bronze figure of artistic merit is the figure of Yama discovered from a Yantragala in a stupa at Alahana complex in Polonnaruwa. This resembles the life-size figure of God Saman at Dambulla rock temple which too may perhaps come under this period. In modelling the Makuta head-dress, drapery and ornaments of both figures bear close similarities. The figure of Saman at Dambulla carved out of wood and painted yellow displays a high degree of modelling. The god is represented in ideal human form. Both hands are held forward with palm outwards. The fingers are rendered very sensitively. Its dignified and majestic appearance exhibits the godly qualities. Apart from this even the figure of Vishnu may possibly belong to this period. However the sculpture of the Dambulla needs a thorough investigation because it appears that this rock temple houses the art works running upto the the Anuradhapura period.

Ornamentations and embellishments

Polonnaruwa period has produced a considerable variety of sculptural ornaments and embellishments in stone slabs, flights of steps complexes comprising balustrades, guardstones and moonstones, wall decorations, base mouldings, pillar and pilaster ornamentations. All these sculptural works display a high degree of skill which enhances aesthetic taste. Their plastic conceptions, plastic quality and the art form, though inferior in delicacy and refinement to those of the earlier period, yet maintain a high level of skill in artistic merit that highlights aesthetic attraction. The flight of step complexes comprising balustrades, guardstones and moonstones made usually of fine grained granite display that the sculptures of the period have faithfully followed the tradition of building entrances in the same architectural pattern of the earlier period. Due to the hard and plutonic texture of the granite, most of the surviving examples retain their original features to a great extent. The balustrades are

carved out of one single block of stone, curvilinear in with an ornamental makara figure on the upper side of the cornice., a composite animal found in Indian art. From the mouth of the animal issues an ornamented scroll curling downward into a volute. Though the style and pattern of the decorative design is as same as in the earlier period balustrades the plasticity is inferior in delicacy and refinement. In some of the balustrades in Polonnaruva, the sides too are carved with figures of deities and animals. Two examples of exquisite workmanship in the balustrades of Lankatilaka and Rajavesyabhujanga. Paranavitana entertains some doubts that these carvings are not representative of the art of the Polonnaruva period; and point out that in their time there were many edifices of earlier ages that had gone into ruin and they were free to use the materials from such dilapidated buildings in their creations. But he cites no concrete examples to prove his case except pointing out the discrepancy in the number of the risers in the flight of steps at Lankatilaka. He says that the two wingstones which flank the flight of steps leading to the Lankatilaka were carved for five risers to be fitted to them, whereas there are only three in the flight which they now adorn. The fine sculpture of a person holding a rod, which is seen on the outer face of the balustrades on the left of this flight of steps, and the figures of Naginis which adorn the inner face are, therefore, not representative of the art of the Polonnaruva period. They date from about the ninth century.⁴⁵ However in workmanship these figures are delicate and refine and, in modelling more elegant and graceful. But when we consider the workmanship of the balustrade slab on which these figures are depicted and which is less delicate and less refine in its finish and texture, one could think that the carvings were done by some other artists. The balustrades and its carvings could not belong to two different periods. The figure of the deity and the attendants on the inner side of the balustrade of Lankatilaka are more dynamic and lively. Similarly the figures of the outer face of the balustrade at the entrance of the Rajavesyabhujanga are quite charming and artistic. When we compare these figures with those found within the Vijjadhara cave of the Galvihara - specially with the figure of the chauri bearers we see that in modelling and in the plas-

ticity both appear to belong to one and the same art form. Parānavitana has observed that the chauri bearers of the Vijjadhara cave afford evidence that the sculptors of the twelfth century were capable of producing works of considerable artistic merit. He says that in their graceful attitudes and correct proportions, in the sensitive modelling of the limbs and the artistic treatment of the draperies these figures speak of themselves as the work of a sculptor of no mean ability.⁴⁶ The figure of Yama on the balustrade of Lankatilaka and that of Varuna on the balustrade of Rajavesyabhujanga definitely possess the charm and gracefulness in their pose which generally the other figures do not possess.

Flight of Steps

The next component of the flight of steps that deserves attention is the guardstone. Polonnaruva guardstones, too, follow the same pattern of decorative scheme, that of the earlier period. Parānavitana says that the pair of guardstones flanking the steps at the eastern entrance of the vatadage surpasses all the others in artistic merit. He is of opinion that these figures indicate a date in the late Anuradhapura period.⁴⁷ In the symmetrical and balance modelling of the physical features, in the graceful and elegant pose, in the rhythmic and charming treatment of the drapery, in the well-balanced distribution of the composition, in the benign and pleasant expression of the face, these guardstone rank with those of the Anuradhapura period. Parānavitana also observes 'apart from the continuation of the same artistic tradition of the earlier period, artistic traditions of the masters who created the figures on the best guardstones of the Anuradhapura period were still alive in the 12th century in spite of the fact that such inferior work too, was produced by the craftsmen of the day, mainly as a result of the anxiety of the rulers to achieve quick results in order to impress their subjects.'⁴⁸ However we need not hesitate to affirm that some of the guardstones of Polonnaruva fall within the range of better pieces of artistic creations but not the best.

Moonstones

The moonstones of Polonnaruva, the other essential member of the flight of steps complex, though differ much in decorative content and composition, possess distinctive qualities and artistic achievements. The vision that urged the sculptors of Polonnaruva to create decorative pattern and compositional design different from the earlier period appears to have been motivated by the structural change of the contemporary religion, due to the infiltration of Hindu ideals and Tantrism. Ideological changes occurred in the sphere of religion during the Polonnaruva period. These changes are dominantly reflected in the sphere of art. Dimensionally Polonnaruva moonstone has grown bigger than its semi-circle. A decorative band is added to it in between the first step of the flight and the moonstone slab, which the earlier ones did not have. The pattern that Polonnaruva sculptors evolved included only two animals instead of four that have been depicted in the moonstones of the earlier period. The lion and the bull have been omitted. Instead of decorating a single band with different animals alternatively they have done it with one animal. Hence there are two different bands with the elephant and the horse only. As Paranavitana suggests the omission of the bull may be interpreted as a concession to the Hindu sentiment which held this animal in veneration.⁴⁹ The reason why the lion is out is still unknown. Perhaps it may be due to the fact that the lion is given a more elevated position in Polonnaruva buildings. The design of the Polonnaruva moonstone has been further changed by shifting the swan to outer band whereas in Anuradhapura moonstones swan has given an inner band next to the lotus. However the interpretations given by Paranavitana to Anuradhapura moonstones cannot hold good in the case of these moonstones. This design might have had its own connotative application. It is no doubt a beautiful piece of work. The modelling of the animals is excellent and lively. The carvings of the floral band has been executed flawlessly and with precision, but the design is we may say, lacking that glory and charm that characterised earlier works. The moonstone at the northern entrance to the lower terrace of the vatadage appears to be the best specimen in Polonnaruva. Paranavitana says that 'the work as a whole

lacks that undefinable something which elevates the moonstones of Anuradhapura from mere decoration to significant works of art.⁵⁰ One of the most notable features in Polonnaruwa sculpture is its repetitive nature. The basic idea of the sculpture appears to be the repetitive and multiplicative pattern of the same figure or design. What he preferred by this was the quantity to quality. This would perhaps, he might have thought, give a striking and a deep impression to the beholder. This had propagative effect. The first attempt on this line is seen in the designs of the moonstones, and it has continued flawlessly on the walls of the religious buildings. However, as the guardstone, all the moonstones of Polonnaruwa do not fall into the same category as works of artistic merit. For instance the moonstones at the Baddhasimpassada and Rajyavesyabhujanga are inferior in quality. The modelling of the animal figures in these moonstones is rather stiff and formal, with the result they lack elegance and beauty. The vegetal scrolls lack rhythm and grace and appear as if they were eye-copyists' attempts. Though Paranavitana expresses the view that Polonnaruwa moonstone had degenerated to a mere decorative carving without any spiritual message being conveyed, still the possibility exists that it too would have had a certain basic idea on which such changes have been effected. It is unreasonable to assume that moonstone carvers of Anuradhapura were completely extinct when Polonnaruwa became the capital of Sri Lanka.

The sculptor's dextrous hand was never limited only to the ornamentations and embellishments described above, but he extended it to decorate the walls, wall bases, pillars and pilasters of the buildings both secular and religious in Polonnaruwa. The purpose of this seems to be to distinguish the religious buildings from those of the several ones as well as to evoke religious fervour. Of course the aesthetic consideration too were at play for, we see the rhythm, grace, balance, proportion and symmetry in these ornamental schemes. Especially in the base mouldings and the wall ornamentations of the Thuparama and Lankatilaka such perfections are achieved with elegance and beauty; but the Tivankapatimaghara such ornamentations are well-nigh

excessive and 'baroque perhaps due to the ? anxiety of the patrons, to overshadow the existing examples.

Generally the decorative schemes and the base mouldings appear to have followed the same traditional pattern of the Anuradhapura period, but with modifications, alterations, and additions carried out under the influences of Hinduism and Mahayanism. The most striking and attractive base mouldings and wall ornamentations are found in the image houses of Gynjakavasatha type, e.g. Thuparama, Lankatilaka and Tivankapatimaghara. The base mouldings generally consist of the following order, two fillets decreasing vertically inwards, cyma curve, vertical fillet, round torus, vertical face, three successive fillets projecting outwards in increasing vertical progression and ogee coping. The vertical face about 15 inches wide has been divided into rectangular panels by means of miniature pilasters. Each panel contains a stucco lion modelled in high relief, shown in profile with face turned outwards and front legs raised. Its tail is raised in the back and twisted to form the figure similar to number eight. In Lankatilaka and Tivankapatimaghara the basements are duplicated providing two vertical faces of which lower one, fourteen inches in width, contains a similar set of lion figures separated by miniature pilasters while the upper face six inches wide, contains figures of dwarfs made out of stucco in high relief. At Lankatilaka the arrangement of both these dados are pleasant and methodical. But at Tivankapatimaghara especially the dado of dwarfs depicted in a manner that is painful to the eye. Other notable basements are found at Vatadage and Rajavesyabujanga in Polonnaruva. The mouldings of the basement of the upper terrace of the former contain two vertical faces, and they are decorated with dwarfs and lions whereas in the latter there are three vertical faces decorated with dwarfs, lions and elephants from top to bottom respectively. The lions appear to be of conventional type and the elephants are quite natural and charming. Parnavitana correctly observes that 'Of the sculptures with architectural embellishments as their purpose to be seen at Polonnaruva none is more arresting than the frieze of elephants, in low relief, running round the lowermost tier of the base of the pavilion to the east of the Royal Palace. The attitude of no two of these elephants is the

same and the artists, in depicting them in various moods and movements, have shown a thorough understanding of these majestic animals.⁵¹ Unlike the figures of elephants on the moonstones these figures are more energetic and throbbing with life. A differently ornamented type of basement exists at the Manikvehara in Polonnaruwa where a lion dado that decorates the basement of the stupa is quite different both in arrangement, design and pose from the lion dados described above. The lion figures moulded on clay tiles are shown in frontal view as squatting figures. A type similar to this is found at Nillakgama Bodhighara.

Dwarf Figures

The figure of dwarfs at Polonnaruwa have caught the eye of the most scholars. H.C.P. Bell, perhaps the first to examine these figures, says 'above the fascia and fillets is a lesser dado of ganas - so crowded together are these merry little persons in their pradakshina circumambulation of a building from left to right that as many as two hundred and fifty once joined the gay throng that goes laughing along the foot of the temple.

For the more jovial band, male and female, it would be hard to find anywhere, jostling one another, jesting and conviviality which makes crowds on pleasure bent.

The ever varied attitudes of these ganas are worthy of attentive study; they forcibly illustrate the breadth power and the wondrous skill of the potter's hand which could fashion this engrossing procession of life - like figurines - these jolly figurines brusting with full joy of life.⁵² Hocart in one of his essays on carving dwarf figures observes that the tendency from the 12 th century was to emphasise motion at the expense of form. This love of motion found ample scope in stucco work e.g. dwarfs in the Northern temple i.e. Tivankapatimaghara.⁵³ Martin Wickramasinghe enjoying the charm and beauty of these gana figures opines that the sculptor's humour and joy of life had to be inhibited in making the statues of the Buddha and of the gods in austere moods. But in carving the dwarf figures they availed themselves of an outlet and seized the opportunity to express their suppressed feelings even boisterously, sometimes riotously Dwarf fig-

ures represent the joy of life and the exuberant conviviality of pleasure - loving men and women.⁵⁴ The above observations testify to the fact that the authors of these carvings were artists of great ability. However, finally it could be said that the variety of poses and the outbursts of frolicsome and frenzied creatures display the deep knowledge of the artist regarding the movements and actions of the human body and limbs.

Polonnaruwa buildings have preserved their wall to a certain extent to facilitate us in ascertaining the wall ornamental schemes. Hence overall motifs and patterns could be studied. The use of stucco in fashioning these decorative patterns has made it easier to obtain a rhythmical and graceful effect on them. The brick vaulted image houses stand unique with regard to their wall ornamentations. The smoothly plastered outer wall surfaces of the Thuparama, Lankatilaka and Tivankapatimaghara exhibit ornamental scheme conceived basically on similar lines. The objective of the artist here seems to have been to depict vimanas accommodating figures of deities on the outer surface of the walls of the image shrines, perhaps to indicate the impression to the devotees that the image shrine is being protected by the guardian deities. The artist has evolved a pattern of his own by arranging different forms of vimanas in a rhythmical and well-balanced manner. These different forms of vimanas could be divided into two main types as the single dome type and multi-dome type. (plate). The latter type is formed by duplication of the single dome type, vertically and horizontally. Thuparama seems to be the earliest attempt of the most uncompleted and simple ornamental scheme. The wall is divided by pilasters standing on moulded bases and ending in triple capitals, the lowest of which is in a familiar spreading form, the middle is a flattened-cushion with rectangular fillets below and above and the uppermost is an inverted bell. In between these pilasters the vimanas are depicted and within which the figure of the deity stands. At Lankatilaka the same scheme becomes more systematic and rhythmical by placing them with proper spacing and proportion. Here it appears that the wall has been divided horizontally into five parts indicating that it is a multi - storeyed building. In each section an exquisitely modelled vimana is depicted. At the

Tivankapatimaghara this scheme of ornamentation is overcrowded and it has become clumsy due to the excessive presentation of vimanas. These vimanas contain a stucco figure of a very beautifully modelled deity, wearing a short loin cloth and is bedecked with jewellery and a charming head-dress. Some of these figures have attained a high standard of artistic merit. The intricate details of the head-dress and jewellery are exquisitely delineated. The figure is modelled in the form of a prince in his youth. It is important to note here that in the arrangement of the human and animal motifs the artist has followed a certain order of progression. At the Thuparama which can be said as the first attempt, the animal figure sculptures do not appear at all and even the human figures introduced are few in number. Only within the vimanas there are deities. But at the Lankatilaka the animal figures begin to appear in the spaces even outside the vimanas and the number of human figures begin to increase. Apart from the deities occupying the vimanas there are some more human figures placed outside the vimanas in open spaces. e.g. on the top tier of the north wall. At the Tivankapatimaghara a heavy increase in quantity of both the human and animal figures could be noticed. The cornices of the plinths and the roofs of the vimanas are adorned with either a dado of lions or geese at times with both. Moreover it has high boldachinos occupying a tall figure quite out of proportion and very uncomfortably placed. The seated human figures with beards are placed outside the vimanas. Bell who commenting on this ornamentation scheme, says that 'at the Tivankapatimaghara it is pushed to that extent destructive of the very artistic effect striven after. By reveling at the undue prodigality of the detail the sculptor or the modular defeats his own object moreover the incrowding of the high boldachinos canopying a tall figure quite out of proportion to the vimana makes the greater elaboration of the scheme painful to the eye of the beholder.⁵⁵ However it may be assumed that the builders of different edifices have attempted to surpass one another in introducing diversity and variety into their ornamental schemes.

Another noteworthy sculptural ornamentation can be seen on the portico of the Hatadage in Polonnaruwa. The portico contains a frieze of figures of dancers and musicians

which, though worn out due to the exposure to the natural elements explicitly manifest the skill and competence of the artist in modelling human figures in the relevant postures dynamically and dramatically. They exhibit the charm and elegance of the female figure in dancing styles of the Polonnaruva days. Another rare type of sculptural work is found on the screen wall of the Vatadage. This ornamental scheme has a four - petalled flower design in diaper pattern with smaller flowers in the interstices. (plate). This is an unprecedented type of ornamental pattern found only in Polonnaruva. They are carved on small panels placed between the pillars. Here we find the wood carvers technique conveniently converted into hard stone. Parānavitana in describing this piece of sculpture says that the ornamentation of the screen wall of the Vatadage with four-petalled flowers may be a trifle overdone, but the individual flowers are carved with great charm.⁵⁶ However this remarkable piece of sculpture has elevated the dignity of the building and enhanced its aesthetic beauty. Parānavitana comparing the screen wall of Vatadage with the decorated pillars of the Atadage, observes that in the one there is harmony and charm given by motives set in front of a detached background; in the other vibration and movement given by motives piled up one on another and intertwined.⁵⁷

However, the art works of the Polonnaruva period show that the motives and figure sculptures of the Anuradhapura period were not unknown to the artists of Polonnaruva period, but the formulation of design and the fabrication of ornamental schemes appear to be novel attempts. South Indian examples may have exerted its share of influence in formulating these novel forms. Parānavitana commenting on this aspect of art says that it is not valid to argue that the elaboration of ornamentation in the vaulted-brick temples of Polonnaruva is Dravidian in spirit for we cannot be certain that the ruined brick shrines of Anuradhapura did not exhibit similar features. Elaboration of ornament in examples of later date, belonging to the same style is due to natural development rather than to outside influence.⁵⁸

Pillars and Pilasters

Next in importance is the pillar and pilaster ornamentations. They are made either in stone or brick and plaster. Most noteworthy of the pillars are the six square shafted stone pillars at Atadage and those at the Nissankalata-mandapaya. All these are independent pillars planted within the shrines to support the superstructure. The pillars at the Atadage follow two different types of designs. (Plate) Those on the east row are embellished only at the top, centre and bottom. The design at the top and the bottom comprises of a band of three dwarf figures in a square panel on each face of the square shaft. On the underside of the panel at the top and on the upper side of the panel at the bottom run a band of egg and diamond pattern ornament between flower-like fillets and a three peaked ornament similar to the honey suckle motif. At the centre of the pillar shaft is a five-peaked floral design with a plain oval centre and the entire ornament rests on a horizontal band formed by a band of makara heads. A couple of fillets adorned with flowers from which depend tasselled loops are depicted below this. The second type of the designs is found on the west row. They are carved profusely with a foliage creeper design covering upto the three-fourth of the pillar and the rest is left blank save for a rich floral band of about six inches below the capital. Out of the three columns of this row the first two deserve special mention. On the east face of one of these pillars is depicted a foliage creeper from a purnaghata held by a dwarf with both hands raised above his head which is thrown back or sideways. The creeper rises from three volutes shown as medallions in which from the bottom to top are shown, a narilata flower, a mithuna couple and a figure of makara. On its north face another creeper rising from a vase held by raised arms of a dwarf figure in similar manner, forms three volutes in which bottom to top is ornamented with sculpture of a goose sucking honey from a flower, with another little goose, a dwarf figure and a full blown flower. On the west face of the pillar depicts another creeper rising from a vase held by two dwarfs and the creeper forms into three volutes in which from bottom to top are shown a woman with a child, a dwarf figure and a bearded risi seated on a lotus. Lastly on the south face another creeper rising from a vase held by a dwarf figure is

shown and the creeper forms into three volutes in which a figure of a dwarf, a dancing figure of a girl and a female figure seated on a lotus with two female attendants are depicted. These volutes however in other pillars exhibit different designs with dwarfs, deities, dancing figures, kings seated on lotus flowers flanked by two female attendants along with lotus and lotus-bud designs. The meaning embodied in these carvings is difficult to determine. Parnavitana says that no examples of decorative art surpassing these carvings have been noticed anywhere else in Ceylon and they stand comparison with the best of such work elsewhere.⁵⁹ Further he points out that the motif of the creeper with undulating stem and curved tendrils growing into or supporting single pairs of men and women, of pairs of lovers, the whole springing from a vase decorating the pillars of the Atadage are reminiscent of the designs of the vahalkadas of ancient stupas at Anuradhapura and Mihintale. The designs of these pillars show similarity to Gupta work and their sinuous lines and curves covering almost the entire face of the pillar are expressive of a lively and exuberant phantasy.⁶⁰ The carvings in these pillars are executed to a greater depth than in other places and with a technical perfection not matched elsewhere. It appears to be a work of a mastercraftsman who could comfortably manipulate his chissel according to his needs. However as Parnavitana points out the intricate rhythm in the details of these decorative designs baffle verbal descriptions and have to be seen to be appreciated.⁶¹ We notice in these magnificent carvings a rare expression of wealth, prosperity and fertility of human and natural resources. Their uniqueness lies in their rarity, vitality, elegance, exquisite workmanship and aesthetic expression.

The other noteworthy pillars are found at Nissankalatamandapa. They belong to a class by themselves in shape and decoration. The pillars, eight feet four inches in height made of stone, rise as a semi-rounded lotus stalk with three curvatures relieved at intervals by a shallow leafy ornament ending in high relief brackets. The pillar ends up with a capital separately carved as an opening lotus octagonal in shape. Parnavitana referring to these pillars observes that the blending of naturalism with architectonic stylisation exhibited in these pillars is quite pleasing and stand in

striking contrast to the simple form of the railing which encloses them.⁶² These pillars display an innovative approach to column construction combined with aesthetic, visual and further suggests that the inspiration for these pillars had perhaps been derived by Nissankamalla's architects from the lotus-shape flowers such as those at the Ruvanvaliseya and the Tiriya Vatadage.⁶³ (see plate 17) Another important sets of pillars are found at the mandapa in front of the Lankatilaka and at the Rajyavesyabhujanga. They are carved in a different style, partially octagonal and without capitals. They are carved only at the base, centre and top. The base is carved with a band of water leaf, and at the centre with a seven-peaked ornament having a florid motif resting on a pair of makara heads addorsed. The whole motif is placed on a fillet of egg and diamond pattern from the fringe of which depends loops and tassels. At the top an eight - petalled full-blown lotus between similar fillets is shown. Rajyavesyabhujanga - mandapa pillars are more elaborate than those at the mandapa in front of the Lankatilaka. However, the carvings of these pillars lack refinement and elegance that the Atadage pillars possess. Thus the Atadage pillars appear to be more closer in relationship to the art style of the earlier period in delicacy, refinement and workmanship.

Pillar capitals and pilasters too are not devoid of ornamentation, but when compared to the other sculptural works they do not possess any notable artistic merit.

POTGUL VEHERA STATUE

Now we come to the most outstanding sculpture in Polonnaruwa - a rock cut colossal male figure situated close to the Parakramasamudra and to the north of the Potgulvehera. This is an elderly figure in standing posture ten feet twelve inches high, carved in the round on the face of a small rock boulder about 12 feet in height. The figure has a fully grown moustache and a beard and the features of the face, body and the lower garment are very clearly delineated. The elderly and dignified expression of the face, the strong and well-built body expressing a mighty personality, the unusual type of the head-dress indicating his superior-

ity of supremacy and the proud and stately attitude of standing posture with the left knee little bent forward manifest, that he is a noble person holding a position of responsibility and authority in the society. The object similar to an ola book held reverently by both hands indicates that the object symbolises something sacred and holy. Today this stands as a solitary figure. The only connection that it has is to the circular shrine now called Potgulvehara which the figure faces and close to the tank now called Parakramasamudra. The identification and the functional significance of this figure in this location still remains unravelled. In this regard various views had been put forward by several scholars. Bell expressed his view that this sculpture is neither a representation of a king nor of a Buddhist abbot. He said that the object held in the hands of the figure is a palm - leaf scroll of the Veda and considering the whole appearance and the pose of the figure he says 'stamp it unmistakably as a rock-hewn portrait of a revered religious teacher from the Indian continent'. He surmises that the figure represents Kapila, the ascetic, for whom Parakramabahu built an eagle - shaped dwelling adorned with diverse works of art and ornamented with peaks and the like.⁶⁴ Comaraswamy expressing his doubts about its identification says that 'it does not seem at all impossible that the pious should have wished to be represented in this fashion. (i.e. as a dignified bearded sage reading from a palm - leaf book)⁶⁵. Another theory has been adduced by C.F. Winzer and elaborated by Andreas Nell says that it represents Sage Agastya on the basis that it resembles the figure of that sage in Java in certain particulars.⁶⁶ Vogel who examined this figure says that in style it points to a much earlier date than the period of Polonnaruva. In other words this so-called image of Parakramabahu may have existed long before the days of that king. Further he says it is undoubtedly Brahmanical and not Buddhist. Among the Gods of the Hindu Pantheon it is Brahma who is usually bearded but Brahma has mostly four faces and four arms. The figure in question has not the appearance of a deity. It lacks the halo which is the sign of a deity. If the image is neither a god nor a king, its appearance certainly suggests a rishi. Can it be Agastya, the great sage who is created with having introduced Aryan culture in the Decan and who is venerated in

the South of India where he is believed to dwell in the Agastyamalai mountain Agastya is always associated with the southern quarter and the rock - cut image of Potgulvehara faces south. Rai Bahdur Daya Ram Sahn, once Director General of Archaeology in India, G.V. Atari, Curator of the Archaeology in India, G.V.A. Atari, Curator of the Archaeological section of the prince of Wales museum in Bombay and K.C. Crucq supported the view that it is the figure of Agastya.⁶⁷ But G. Codes, Finot and Goloubew considered that it is a portrait of a court pundit.⁶⁸ O.C. Ganguly who has published an exhaustive study of the iconography of Agastya in India and Java claim that it is most probably a portrait of a risi (sage). It is very tempting to identify it as Agastya. But there are serious difficulties to confirm this view. In the first place, with regard to its date (stylistically) it cannot be later than the middle of the twelfth century. Our Polonnaruwa figure appears obviously to be an unconventional portrait and not a cult-image of Agastya has been known to represent the sage with a book and it is possible as suggested by Bell, that it may be Kapila.⁶⁹ Siri Gunasinghe too opposing the view that it is Agastya says it could be the image of Kapila rishi.⁷⁰ But Paranavitana after a thorough examination of this figure says that it does not represent an idealised type, as usual in Indian sculpture but appears to portray individual characteristics in the physiognomy as well as other bodily features. The object held in hand generally taken to be a book, is in reality a yoke, held upside down as if it is being balanced deliberately. The yoke according to Indian concepts, accepted also in Ceylon, symbolised a burden i.e. the king's responsibility for the maintenance of justice and order. The figure may accordingly be a portrait statue of a king, whether of Parakramabahu 1 as tradition has it or some other monarch who ruled in Polonnaruwa as capital. Whatever this statue represents it is full of dignity and strength and undoubtedly a masterpiece from the hands of a great sculptor.⁷¹ But Wijesekara questions 'Could it be a sage or a king? No one can yet answer. The purpose may be the perpetuation of a memory of a remarkable personality represented in lasting rock in a characteristic symbolic pose and attitude through which he was known to and identified by the people of his day.⁷² However one can entertain some

doubts as to Parnavitana's identification of this figure as a king because the conventional pattern of representing kings in Sri Lanka is clear from the examples in Anuradhapura and Dambulla. They are represented invariably in their royal attire which is completely absent in this figure. Moreover Parnavitana's identification of the object held in hands too is questionable. He considers the object held in hands as a yoke held upside down which is rather doubtful. It is unreasonable to assume that a master craftsman who has carved out this magnificent piece of sculpture would have ever done it in that manner which would misguide the beholders in identifying the object. Nilakanta Sastri in commenting on this figure says that the figure may be a king or a sage - it is well known that both meet in a Rajarshi ; but the object held in hands does not seem to be a yoke, whatever else it may be. The book comprising long oblong leaves seems to come nearest the mark. So he says unless we get some tangible evidence that Parakramabahu or someone else caused a portrait of his to be carved on the rock, some doubt must continue to linger about the identity of the noble figure.⁷³

What is of special significance here is the evaluation of the artistic merit of this magnificent piece of sculpture. Parnavitana in discussing the artistic aspect of this figure says in one of his essays that the face of the figure with half-closed eyes reflect a deep thought. It appears that the entire might of the figure is directed towards one objective. Its right leg is kept at ease by slightly bending it at the knee and the weight of the body is made to rest entirely on the left leg. Weight of the waist is given to the left side. The circular shoulders display a mainly bodily strength. The chest and the abdomen have been so realistically modelled that it reflects a body of an elderly person whose health has not failed him even at the old age. Well-grown long beard, pendant moustache and the broad fore-head, all express the characteristics of an elderly lord gleaming with a dignified look and a deep thought in his face. The hair is treated in the shape of a makuta. Ears are adorned with ear ornaments. The upper part of the body is naked except the Punanula or the sacred thread. The lower garment is tied with an artistically decorated knot. The strong arms hold some object clinging to the abdomen.⁷⁴ This description is quite sufficient to understand

its artistic value. Parnavitana again says that in its majesty and dignity its embodiment of power and self-reliance, and in the economy with which these characteristics have been expressed, it proclaims itself to be the work of the master.⁷⁵ Hocart commenting, on its artistic quality says that it stands in a class by itself, its breadth and dignity cannot fail to impress; the face shows no attempt at idealization, so much so that one is tempted to say that it is a portrait, if so it is almost unique.⁷⁶ Then again he says that the technique of the so-called statue of Parakramabahu near Potgulavehera is the same as the Galvihara, but the spirit is very different; it is not a rigid composition, but breaths dignity.⁷⁷ (plate)

Another noteworthy frieze of dancing figures from a Vishnu temple in Polonnaruwa (now in the Colombo museum) displays delicacy in workmanship and dynamic quality in expression. As Hocart has rightly observed in these figures the anatomy is strained to the utmost in order to render the violence of the movements which has led to an awkward disproportion of the legs.⁷⁸

Another one of the best examples of Hindu stone images has been found at Potanakadu in Kantalai. It is a standing image of a god 3ft in height including the pedestal. It wears a tall makuta the details of which are now obliterated. It has four hands. The back right hand holds the sankha and the left the cakra. The front right hand is holding a lotus flower and the left rests on a club. The mark srivasta appears on the breast. Parnavitana has shown that this image belongs to the period between Vijayabahu I and Nissankamalla.⁷⁹ This figure bears testimony to competence of the artists of the time in carving out Hindu images in stone.

Polonnaruwa sculptors have shown equally a high degree of skill in carving out animal figures in the round. The massive stone lion figures at Nissankamalla's Council Chamber are good examples. In plasticity and in execution these lion figures are quite different from those figures depicted on the walls of the buildings. The standing posture and the sharp delineation of the physical features of these figures exhibit the majestic quality and the haughty appearance of the animal. It is a well-balanced figure with full of life and energy.

Another quite interesting sculptural achievement in Polonnaruva is the lotus pond made of stone situated close to the Tivankapatimaghara. It is made in the likeness of a full-blown lotus of eight petals. Its fine execution and beautiful set up, proclaims itself as a work of aesthetic beauty. Paranavitana describes this attempt as striving to make up for the lack of grandeur by creating novel forms.⁸⁰ (plate)

Finally it is important to add here the aesthetic beauty of the sculptural achievements of the Hindu shrines in Polonnaruva. They are in fact pieces of sculpture made of stone. For example the Siva devala no 2 is a work accomplished out of dressed stone slabs. The art idiom and the building concept of the Hindu devalas are quite different from the Buddhist buildings. However in carving out the slabs and the pilasters and their capitals and kudu decorative motifs definitely a considerable input of sculptural skill.

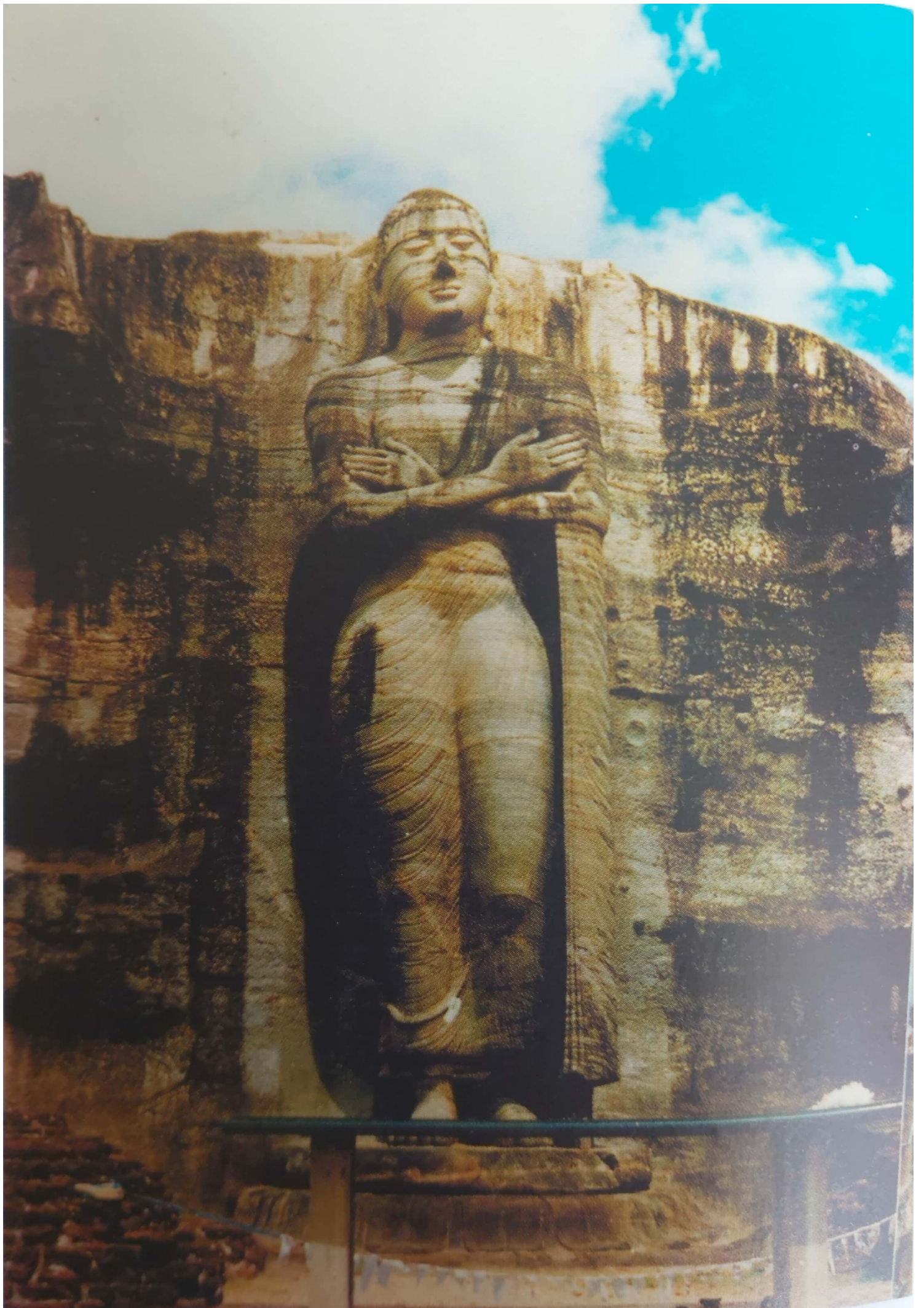
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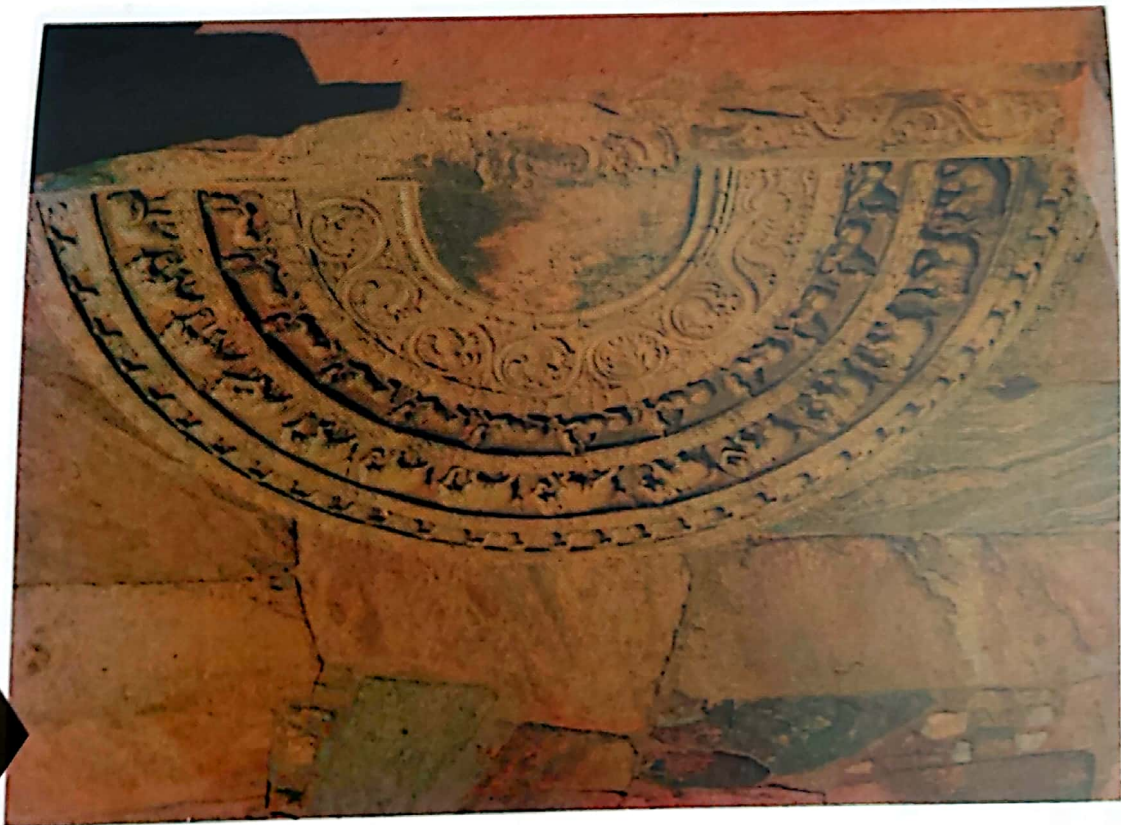
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wingstone
- Council
Chamber
Parakramabahu



Moonstone
Vatadage



STUCCO FIGURE (THUPARAMA)



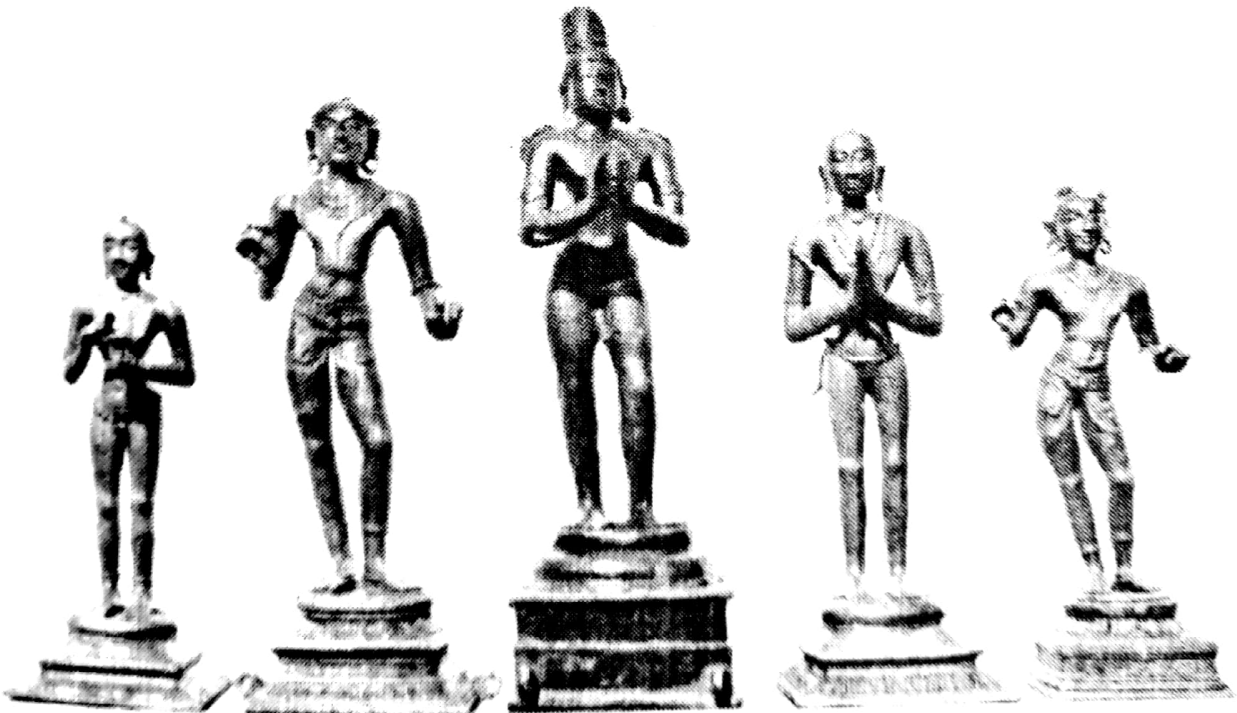
DECORATED STONE PILLAR
(ATADAGE)



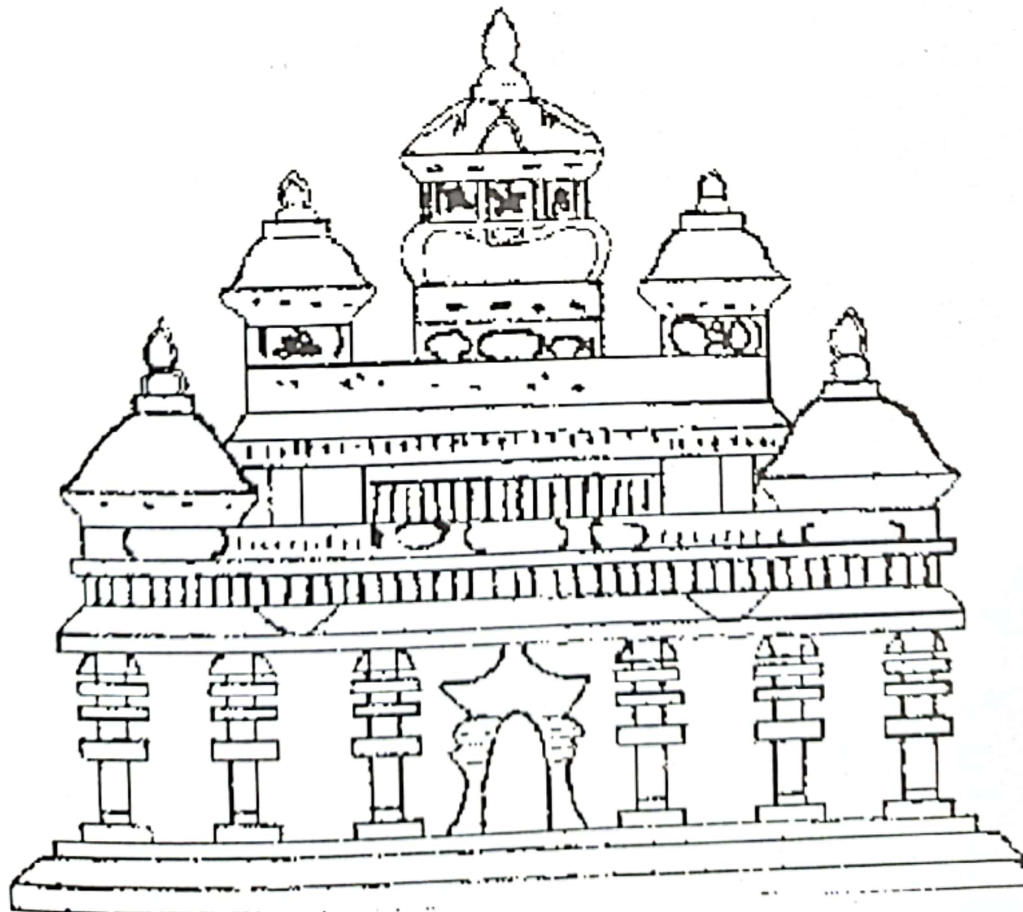
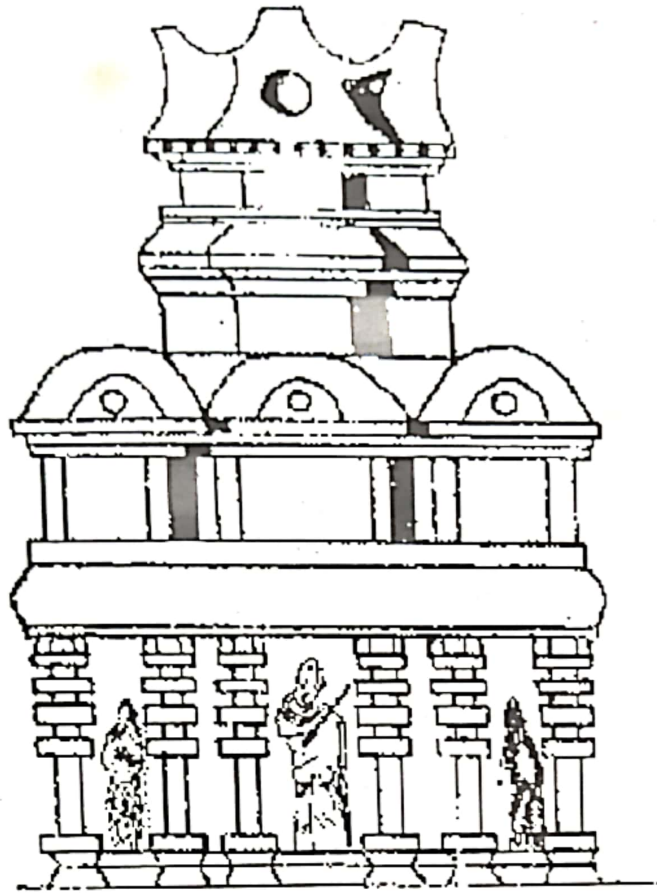
PARVATI AND SIVA



ŚIVA BRONZES



MULTI DOME VIMANA



ŚIVA AND PARVATI



NĀṬARĀJĀ

