

## Antiquities and Paintings from Śāṅkhapāla-vihāra (Ceylon)

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Śāṅkhapāla-vihāra is situated on the Ratnapura-Hambantota road, in between the 91-92 mile posts, on the left side. It is accessible by means of a gravelled road running for nearly 160 yards off the main road. It is perched at the base of a hillock, ascent to which is by means of a succession of flights of steps. The area in which this Buddhist temple is located is called Pallēbādda, in the Taṃbagamu-pattu of the Aṭakalan-kōraḷē of the Ratnapura district. It is a place worth visiting on account of its situation at the base of a hillock, amidst the thick green foliage of the jungle as a background. Sightseers have often been enraptured by the natural beauty of the spot and have published photographs of this beautiful temple, some of them in colour, in journals of local and international repute. As the antiquities within its oldest shrine room, which are of great interest to antiquarians, have not yet been brought to light, it is proposed to deal with them in the following pages, paying special attention to the remarkable paintings on its walls.

The site is traditionally associated with Phussadeva, one of the ten warriors of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi Abhaya (161-137 B.C.). This warrior, whose competence in the blowing of the conch shell is on record<sup>(1)</sup>, had, after his association with Duṭṭhagāmaṇi Abhaya in his wars with the Tamils, joined the Order of Buddhist monks and lived to the end of his days at Śāṅkhapāla-vihāra. He is said to have attained arhantship and passed away at this spot. There are early Brāhmī inscriptions on the drip ledges of the caves at this site. Two of these<sup>(2)</sup> mention Puśadeva (Pāli *Phussadeva*) as the donor of the caves to the Order of Monks. Below these inscriptions are engravings of a conch, a *stūpa* and a lamp post. A small *stūpa*, which had been erected on the summit of the rock above the caves, lay in a ruined state till 1942 when it was restored. At the time of restoration, bricks which were exposed measured 15 × 9 × 2½ in. Tradition has it that the conch belonging to the warrior Phussadeva was deposited within a cavity specially designed for the purpose in the rock above. About a mile away from the site of the temple, on a rock surface is a second *stūpa*, small in size. It is believed to have been erected on the site where Phussadeva was cremated and his ashes are said to have been deposited there. The cave where the Brāhmī inscriptions are found has now been converted into shrine rooms, two in number. When one

<sup>(1)</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, transl. W. GEIGER, Colombo, 1950, chap. XXV 65.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, I (Archaeological Survey of Ceylon), Colombo, 1970, nos. 765, 766.