A fragmentary unpublished slab-inscription from Sigiriya area

Nilanthi Bandara

Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

Introduction

A previously unpublished slab inscription, found within the Sigiriya archaeological area in the Matale District of the Central Province, is now preserved in the Archaeology and Ethnological Museum at the Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya. This fragmentary slab inscription reveals very important information. The aim of this paper is to discuss to study this inscription, before the interested readers, what I have gathered from this study, pertaining to its chronology, paleography and the social environmental arising from that

Several inscriptions discovered at Digampataha, Pidurangala, Enderagala, Wevala, Viyavulpata, Kaludiyapokuna, Kimbissa prove that there were settlements around Sigiriya since the 3rd century B.C (Paranavitana 1970, Ranawella 1984, 198-218).

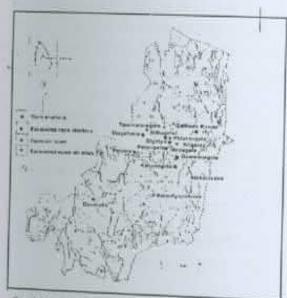


fig.1 Sigiriya geographical area

Geographical area

Signiya is geographically surrounded by Mirisgoni Oya, Dambulu Oya, Kiri Oya and Yan Oya (Fig 1). The history of Sigiriya spans several periods, from the prehistoric to the historic. This can be solidified by means of literary and archaeological factors (Deraniyagela 1992, Mahavamsa 1996, Paranavitana 1970). The Viyavulpota pillar inscription belonging to the period of Sena II states that officers such as Dunu madullan, Rataladdans, Pasladdan should not be admitted to

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the premises of any monastery located within the area designated as "Sihagiri Bim" (Sigiriya lands). This pillar inscription is situated 11 km from the Sigiriya rock (Ranawella 2001, 13-15). This is an important indication of the vast administrative area belonging to Sigiriya.

A fragmentary slab inscription

A fragmentary slab inscription was found from the Sigiriya archaeological area. Its left section is completely broken. Though the right part of it is also broken it can still be deciphered. It measures 1 ft. 7.5 in. in length and 2 ft. 10 in. in width. The stone contains the left half of each of five lines of writing. The letters have been clearly incised and measure 6 in. to 2.5 in. in height

Chronology

The letters (fig. 2) of this inscription are similar to the letters of the Angamuwa rock inscription (Paranavitana 1983, No. 6) which belongs to the period of King Bhatika-

tissa and to the letters of At -vehera inscription (Paranavitana 1983, No. 17) of King Mahanaga. For instance the letters ba, pa, ra, ka, ma, a indicate that these letters belong to the first and second centuries A.D.



fig.2 Angamuwa rock inscription

Text

Translation

Success! A stupa was built at Tapigala......by grandson....of son a (baya) (fig. 3).

This inscription begins with a blessing word "Sidha" To begin an inscription with a blessing word was the practice from the 1st c. up to the 7st and 8st centuries A.D.

Avukana, Navakada, Ridiviharaya and Madawala inscriptions prove this fact (Paranavitana 1983). Alternative blessing words such as Sa, Sidha, Siddha and Siddham have also been used.

The 3st line on the right part of the inscription is broken after the word "Maruma" it probably refers to the term "Marumanaka" which was used since the 3st century

B.C. (Paranavitana 1970, 1983). Galkandegama, Hittaragama and Kaduruwewa inscriptions are for this. Marumakanaka. examples Marumakanakaha, Marumakane. Marumakanakasha and Marumakanake are synonyms. In the inscription the term 'putha' or son was used before the term "Marumanaka" or grandson. However in most cases the term 'putha' follows the term 'Marumanaka'. The inscriptions at Rajagala, Abhayagiriya and Tammannawa are examples for this. Although this inscription is broken, we can grasp its meaning without difficulty. We can presume that is a reference to the son's grandson.



fig.3 Fragmentary inscription

"Thube" is derived from the Sanskrit word "Stupa". In Pali the term "Tupa" was used since the 3rd century B.C. building of Stupas had begun. We can easily prove this by means of Situlpavuva, Sasseruva, Ridi-vihara, Bambaragala and Billavegala inscriptions. Thube, Thuba and Thuhe are synonymous. This inscription indicates that a stupa was constructed in the area named Tapigala.

Paleography

Some important factors about Paleography can be learnt from this inscription. Letters such as Ka, Ra, Sa, Tha, and letters such as A, Ma, have small horizontal line attached to them.

Conventional letters	Sa	Kα	Thu	1	Ma
	ču	J	3	y	X
Sigmya Slab inscription	ð	J	T	K	X

fig 4 Important factors

According to Abhaya Ariyasinghe, P.E.P Fernando, Bandusena Gunasekara and Jayasiri Lankage this feature can be seen in the Sri Lankan Brahmi alphabet and also the Indian Kshastrapa alphabet. Hence this is evidence of Indian Satrapa influence on the development of the Sinhalese alphabet (Ariyasinghe 1963, 75, Feranando 1949, 282-301, Gunasekara 1996, Lankagea 1996, 27).

Another important feature in this inscription is the extension of the vertical line in letters such as;

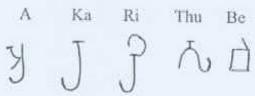


fig. 5 Vertical lines

And also in some instances this vertical line tends to curve to the left. This curving feature can be seen in post- Sathavahana period letters. Nicholas states that the Sinhalese alphabet was influenced by the early Sathavahana alphabet from 1 AD onward. Therefore we can conclude that the letters of this fragmentary inscription were influenced by western Shastrapa and Sathavahana scripts. This is a unique factor.

In addition several inscriptions of this period use punctuation marks to separate the 'blessing' phrase from the rest of the text. In this inscription the punctuation mark takes the form of a short horizontal line (-). This has been joined to the letter 'dha' of the word 'sidha'. Similar instances can be seen in the Viharegala, Kaduruwewa and Ratnaprasada inscriptions (Paranavitana 1983, 60-61, 54, 56, 58). In addition punctuation marks consisting of three short horizontal lines (a") following the 'blessing' phrase can also be seen in inscriptions of this period (Paranavitana 1983, 48, 51). In some instances they are joined to the letter, at others they are not.

Conclusion

This fragmentary slab inscription, found within the Sigiriya premises belongs to ca. In and 2nd centuries B.C. Sathavahana and Kshasthrapa alphabetical systems have influenced the development of these letters. In addition this inscription provides vital information regarding ecclesiastical architecture, kinship, ancient place names, traditional modes of invoking blessings and social stratification.

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