



**HERITAGE ACHIEVEMENTS
2007**



**Central Cultural Fund
2008**

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2007



Heritage Achievements - 2007



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A NEW CULTURAL ROAD MAP TO ANURADHAPURA: ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT MATERIAL CULTURE AT VESSAGIRI

Introduction:

Vessagiriya is located in close proximity to a road junction on the southern approach to the old city of Anuradhapura, and is constituted by three lines of rock cut-crops having a North-South axis. Artifacts recovered from the site testify to human habitations at this site from pre-historic times to about the 10th Century AC. It is evident that the most significant aspect of this site is with its evolution from a simple forest habitat of meditating monks to a complex forest monastery. The ancient name of the site is Isuruminiya, as testified to by Paranavitana and other scholars, on epigraphic evidence, although it is popularly referred to as Vessagiriya.

Historical Background:

the Mahavamsa (xx. 15-20) refers to it as the abode of 500 monks of the Vaisya clan led by Aritha, who renounced lay life, during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (247-07- BC.). Historical identity of this site dates to the second centuries BC and is referred to as Isiramana Vihara in the inscriptions. King Vasabha (67-iii) constructed a chapter house; Kasyapa I (473-91) expanded its precincts and donated land and renamed it Bo Upulvan Kasupgiri Vihara; Voharika Tissa (209301) built a rampart around it. Textual and epigraphs of the 6th - 7th centuries support these activities. Further contributions to its development were made by kings Jettha Tissa and Dathopatissa II of the 7th century, and Mahinda IV of the 10th century.

Roland Silva recognizes this site as a pabbatarama (rock monastery) constructed on the plan of a pancavasa ('five lodges') during the 5th -7th centuries. Its process of development, up to the 10th Century is noted in epigraphs of Dappula V (940-52) and Mahinda I (975-91). Siran Deraniyagala and Sudharshan Seneviratne have described the manner in which the region developed from a pre-historic site of the Mesolithic to a proto - historic Early Iron Age habitation and finally to a historic settlement.

Early Studies:

the early studies of the Vessagiriya region have concentrated on i. the epigraphy and ii. the architecture of the area by H.C.P. Bell, D.M. de Z. Wickramasinha. Senarath Paranavitana, Roland Silva, Leelananda Prematilaka and Senaka Bandaranayaka carried out these studies.

New Research Focus:

In 2006 a new research programme of Vessagiri commenced under the guidance of Sudharshan Seneviratne, having the following aims:

- * to reveal the nature of human activity of the region
- * to reveal the cultural landscape of southern Anuradhapura
- * to understand the social and archaeological background of the region through epigraphic studies
- * to train a new generation of field archaeologists.

The research was carried out in four stages:

Field

- * reconnaissance
- * scientific excavations
- * artifact analysis and classification
- * epigraphic studies

Field Reconnaissance

The low rock out - crop stretching N-5 between the Vessagiri out - crop and the Tisa Vava was chosen as the reconnaissance area, and it was divided into 10 squares of 30m. each., and the following studies were undertaken

- * ground plan
- * section drawing
- * sketch drawing
- * three - dimensional drawing

Drawings were made also of the artifacts inclusive of zoological and floral remains. GPS facility was used for the main documentation for which the students were trained. Two main physical features came to be recognized. With the help of theodolite measurements and the Dumpy levelling, cross-sections were obtained by which of the North-South and East West layout of the land was ascertained.

Scientific Excavation

Caldna Laidon

Excavations were made in two select areas named VGHL EX 01 and 02 by which the region's Cultural layers came to be recognized. The method followed was the Context System, in addition to which the computerized digital documentation method was experimented upon. Several cultural stages came to light. A layer of reddish brown earth revealed chert and transparent clear quartz flakes, about 6,000 in number, out of which four cutting tools were recognized.

In a brownish grey layer fragments of black and Red ware were found, dating to the seventh Century BC. providing a new dimension to the beginnings of settled human habitats.

An excavation was made within the Cave No. One by which remains of mediaeval period constructions came to light in seven stages. The Computer Data Base and GPS techniques were employed in this exercise.

Analysis of Artifacts

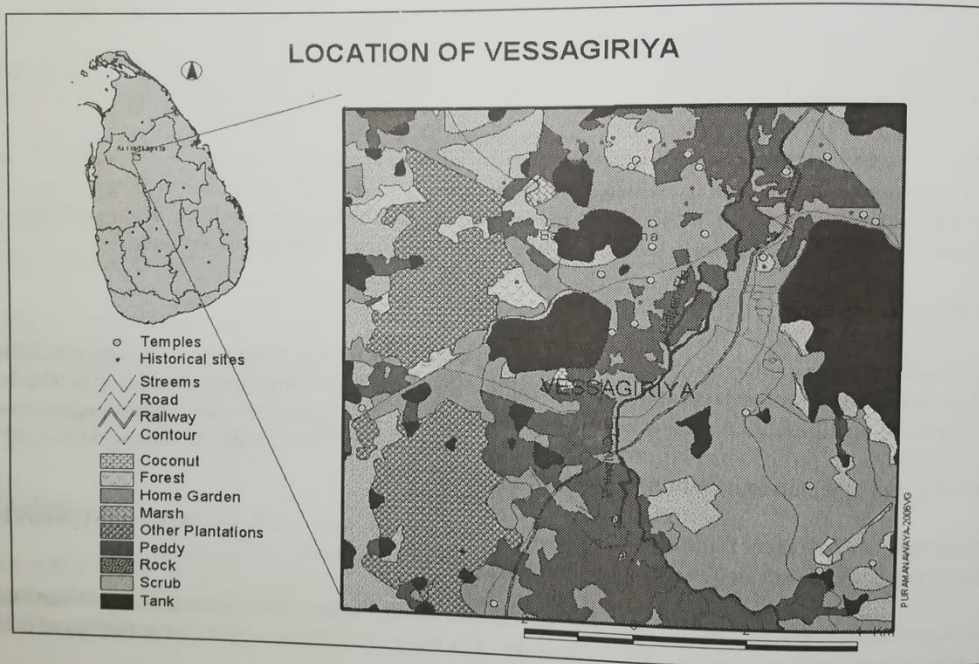
A study was made of bone, rock and clay artifacts in both Caves 1 and 2. Bone material pertaining to the tortoise, mongoose, monkey and stork and other birds were recognized by Kelum Manimendrarachchi.

Fragments of Black and Red Ware, Red Ware, black ware and buff ware obtained from these excavations.

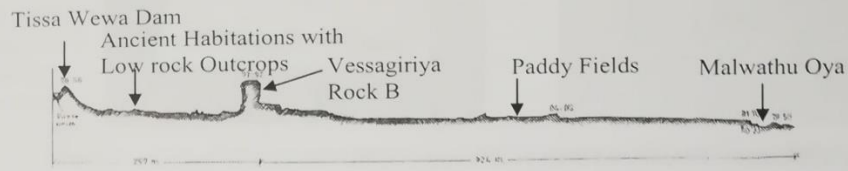
Epigraphy

Rock outcrop A carries many non-Brahmi symbols belonging to the Proto Historic Early Iron Age. In addition two inscriptions were found from caves and rocks, and two others from architectural remains. While some belong to the second century BC., one inscription mentions a trading point and two reservoirs. Another inscription clearly mentions the name of this site as Issaramana.

Thusita Mendis
Chief supervisor (Archaeology)
Jetavana Project



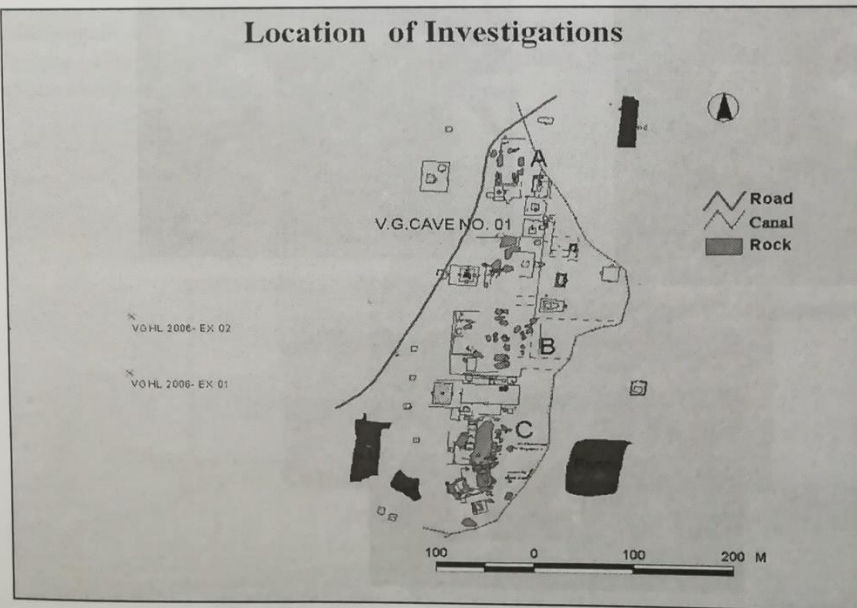
Landscape Section: Tissa Wewa (West) to Malwatuoya (East)

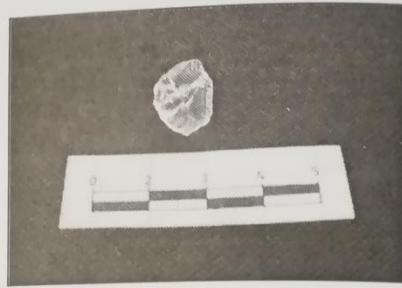
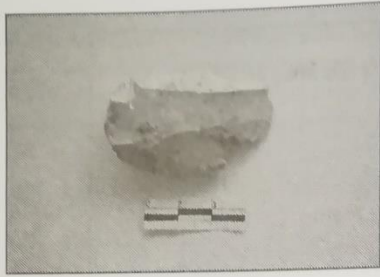


● KEY PLAN

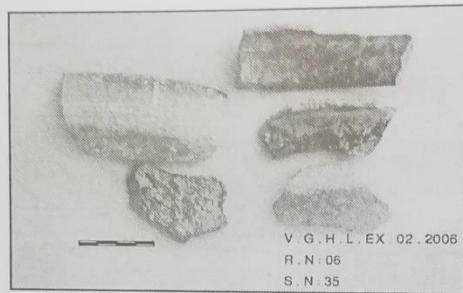
		VESSAGIRI ARCHAEOLOGY SITE	
GRID NO	01	DATE	04.06.2007
DRAWN BY	S.P., S.S., H.K.	TRACED BY	THUSANGA DEJARANATHA
D. ARCH		C. C. F	
SCALE	1:100		

Location of Investigations

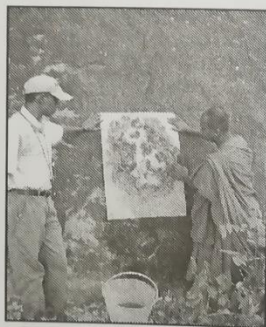




Stone implements Discovered from excavations VGHL EX 02



Black and Red Ware pottery discovered from excavations VGHL EX 02



Making of estampages of symbols on Rock A



University students under training



Scientific lectures being delivered to University Students in the field

