

## **A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON IDENTITY OF THE STATUE OF KING OR SAGE AT POLONNARUWA WORLD HERITAGE SITE, SRI LANKA**

**Pathmakumara Jayasingha**

The Coordinating Secretariat for Science, Technology and Innovation,  
Janadhipathi Mawatha, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.

*jpathmak@gmail.com*

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### **Introduction**

Sri Lanka is rich in stone cultural resources and commonly made up of Proterozoic high grade metamorphic rocks. Among them, stone statues made up of various gneisses and marbles are iconic due to the ancient carving and sculpturing technology (Jayasinghe, 2010). Samadhi Buddha statue made up of marble is one of the best examples for such creativity of Anuradhapura period. Galviharaya Buddha statues and the statue of king or sage which are made up of layered Gneiss are excellent insitu carvings in Polonnaruwa world heritage site (Abeyratne and Jayasingha, 2005). The statues of Galviharaya are clearly understood as the outstanding work of Polonnaruwa period. But still there is a debatable question regarding the statue at Pothgul Viharaya whether it is of King Parakramabahu I or Sage Pulathisi.

A geoarchaeological study conducted on ancient rock quarrying and carving techniques in archaeological sites with special attention to the world heritage sites of the country has found two

characteristic techniques which are specific to Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa period (Jayasingha, 2009; Jayasingha and Wagalawatta, 2010; Jayasingha, 2013). The technique differences can be noted specially by the shape of wedging holes. It has been observed that the latter technique developed during the Polonnaruwa period has been continued afterword and it can be noted even in archaeological sites of Yapahuwa, Kandy, Dambadeniya etc.

The main objective of this paper is to present a key finding, which can be used as a clue in determination of identity of the statue of King or Sage.

### **Materials and methods**

The statue of King or sage was carefully examined and measurements of carving marks were collected as much as possible. The area around the above mentioned statue was surveyed in order to identify the petrology and mineralogical compositions and a local geological map was produced to understand the geological background. Quarrying and carving marks at the

premises of the statue were noted, measured and reported with the objective of characterization. Obtained results were compared with the other ancient quarries in the country specially at Anuradhapura, Sigiriya, Thissamaharamaya etc.

### Results and discussion

The entire area of Polonnaruwa covers with highland complex high grade metamorphic rocks specifically known as Migmatitic Gneiss and marble. The area around the statue of King or Sage is covered with Migmatitic Gneiss and presently the appeared rock surface in everywhere is highly weathered. Mineralogical assemblage proves the existence of hornblende and biotite as mafic minerals and quartz and feldspar as the felsic minerals. Most of the mafic minerals have been altered and some are removed off due to long term weathering process.

The statue is carved on one of three gneissic boulders running north-south direction and the statue is placed on the north face of the biggest boulder. The rest of the area is flat and some carving and cutting marks are found evidencing for an ancient building.

According to the survey the area around the statue can be recognized as an ancient quarry site. The wedging holes that are characteristic to both above mentioned periods are found. Hence, it can be inferred that the study site had been used for quarrying rocks even during Anuradhapura period. But, the dominant wedging holes were found in the study premises shows the characteristics of Polonnaruwa period showing major influence of Polonnaruwa cultural tradition.

Careful examination of the statue found that the quarry marks on the carved surface confirm the technique applied in carving/quarrying and the technique belongs to Anuradhapura period. Best piece of evidence for wedging holes of Anuradhapura technique can well be observed on the north face at the right hand side of the statue. They show clear half oval shape which were resulted after the splitting the boulder piece.

According to Jayasingha (2009; 2013) it can be noted and clearly identified that the wedging holes of Anuradhapura technique has not been extended and continued to Polonnaruwa period and it had been produced their very specific rectangular shape wedging holes. Hence, the statue should be carved during Anuradhapura Period or before, not definitely during Polonnaruwa period. Therefore the statue cannot be of King Parakramabahu I. And the possibility to be sage "Pulathisi" eventually goes high.

### Conclusion

Sri Lanka is rich in the resources of stone statues made up of Proterozoic high grade metamorphic rocks. Quarrying and carving marks clearly define two technological differentiations during Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods. The study site had been influenced by both traditions with the domination of Polonnaruwa technology of quarrying. The quarry marks on the statue of king or sage bear witnesses for the creation of Anuradhapura period or before and it is not definitely related to Polonnaruwa period. Hence the statue must not be of King Parakramabahu I.

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