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With 42 figures, 4 tables, 1 map, 1 folding plan
and 48 plates



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BUDDHIST TREE-TEMPLES IN SRI LANKA

Plates 76-80

It must be said from the outset that the main concern of this paper is with a purely typological problem. It contains little detailed description of the monuments in question and takes no account of their sculptural decoration or their religious significance. Ceylonese architecture in general is of a mixed timber-and-masonry tradition, leaving behind only the barest vestiges of its original ornamentation. Thus, the richest aspects of the tradition that are left to us in the archaeological record of ancient Sri Lanka consist, to a large extent, of what we might call architectural and planning concepts. This includes not only the elaborately planned monastic complexes, the royal citadels and pleasure gardens and the extensive network of irrigation works, but also a number of building types which reflect the high level of development of formal architecture achieved by the ancient builders, architects and engineers. The most familiar examples of these are the colossal *dāgābas* or *stūpas* and the *vaṭadāgés* or circular *stūpa*-temples. The former are amongst the largest *stūpas* in Asia—the Jetavana and the Abhayagiri *dāgābas* at Anurādhapura surpass both Barabaḍur and the edifice at Nandangaṛh in height and in dimensions at the base—while the latter, as a type, is certainly one of the most dramatic and beautiful architectural conceptions associated with Buddhist traditions.

What we are concerned with here, however, is the identification and classification of two or three apparently different types of structure which together constitute another rather extraordinary architectural form found in Sri Lanka, also in a monastic context. These monuments were excavated in the course of what we might call three cycles of archaeological activity—the most recent in the 1960's, the earliest in the 1890's and a few isolated examples in the years between. The period to which the structures themselves belong is roughly the 8th to the 10th century, although both earlier and later examples did certainly exist. These sanctuaries have been variously identified by Ceylonese archaeologists: a few have been recognised as shrines of the type with which we are concerned here; those excavated in the 60's have been interpreted, as we shall see, in a somewhat different way; most of them have not been considered as belonging to any distinct type or category or have been conjecturally identified as image-houses