

SRI LANKA AND THE SILK ROAD OF THE SEA

Editors

Senake Bandaranayake

Lorna Dewaraja

Roland Silva

K.D.G. Wimalaratne



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Front Cover : The Jetavana terracotta jars, Anuradhapura, circa 2nd-3rd century AC.

The selection of terracotta jars, illustrated on the front cover, is from the excavations at the Jetavana Vihara, Anuradhapura. These jars, between 10 and 20cm in height, were found deeply buried at the foot of the colossal Jetavana *stupa*, built in the last quarter of the 3rd century AC. They are a part of the 'Jetavana Treasure', discussed in this volume. These jars and other related ceramic materials are thought to be of Sri Lankan origin, but are based on West Asian and Chinese pottery forms, indicating very early contacts between Sri Lanka and distant lands to the north, east and west. Being essentially containers for precious liquids, and serving in their present context as offerings, the jars reflect a close connection between trade, technology and religion.

These jars – and associated finds, of precious imported objects and locally-produced artefacts – are contextually and stylistically dated between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AC. Their deposition in the present context can be definitely connected with the construction of the *stupa* by King Mahasen (276-303 AC).

Mahasen was a great innovator, pioneering new ideas in Buddhist tradition and practice and in constructional and irrigation technology. His most ambitious monument, the Jetavana *stupa*, is the largest of the colossal Sri Lankan *stupas* or *dagabas* and is thought to be the largest brick building in the world. Its platform measures 95 metres square the diameter and circumference at the base of the dome are 112 metres and 352 metres, respectively. The foundations of the dome go down to bedrock, more than 10 metres below the level of the upper basal platform. The *stupa* originally rose to a height of nearly 135 metres above ground level.

The jars represented here link one of the world's largest monuments with distant countries to the north, east and west of Sri Lanka.

Frontispiece : 'The Return', oil painting on canvas by Ivan Peries, 1956. Anton Wickremasinghe Collection, Colombo.

This painting, 86 x 56cm, is by the Sri Lankan painter Ivan Peries (1921-1988), well-known for his highly evocative paintings of the island's coastal landscape.

Back Cover : Map of Taprobane (i.e. Sri Lanka) from a late 15th or early 16th century edition of Ptolemy's Geography; Department of National Archives, Colombo.

Although Ptolemy's *Geography* dates from circa 150 AC no extant map or drawing exists from that time. The earliest versions of 'Ptolemaic' maps are found in Greek manuscripts from Byzantine contexts, dating between the 12th and 14th centuries.

The first engraved (copperplate) version of Ptolemy's *Geographia* was printed in Bologna circa 1477 and can be considered the first engraved atlas in the world. Scholars are divided in their opinion whether the Mediaeval and 'Renaissance Ptolemy maps are derived from Ptolemaic originals or are creations of the early map makers, the latter being the more likely situation. The present map is probably a woodcut print by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemuller (c. 1470-1518), editions of whose work were produced in Strassburg and later in Lyon and Vienne.

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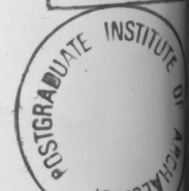
Inquiries to:

The Director-General, Central Cultural Fund, P.O. Box 1531, 212, Bauddhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 7.

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