

ROCK ART OF SRI LANKA- AN INTRODUCTION.*

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Abstract:

The rock art heritage of Sri Lanka is formed by drawings, washings or engravings executed on natural rock surfaces by the Vedda or other groups of people who lived on hunting and gathering. The state of research on this subject is yet in its infancy. This genre of Sri Lankan art was rather 'little known' until the present writer stimulated interest in it a couple of years ago. The aim of this paper is to introduce this art to the world of scholars.

Sri Lanka has a fairly rich heritage of rock art. Chance discoveries made so far have yielded about thirty seven sites with drawings or engravings done on the bare rock surfaces of caves and rock shelters (Fig. 1). Most of the rock art sites show evidence of Vedda occupation continuing until recent times.

H.C.P. Bell's name goes down in history as the first to discover rock drawings in Sri Lanka (ASCAR 1897:15; Bell 1918:197). During one of his expeditions in 1897, he discovered some drawings in two caves called Arangodagala and Konattegodagala. The two well known anthropologists, C.G. Seligmann and B.Z. Seligmann (1911:318 ff.) have recorded the next significant discovery which they made around the year 1908 at Gamakandagalge, Pihilegodagalge and Panchikiriimmagalge. John Still's discovery of three sites at Andiyagala, Billewa and Tantrimale brought to light very interesting examples (Still 1910: 83 ff). Fredrich Lewis (1914: 278-9) recorded a discovery of an engraving at Nawgala. G.F.R. Browing (1917: 226-7) published a discovery of another of engraving at Dorawaka. (Also Deraniyagala 1951:2-3; 1955:112-3) R.L. Spittle (1925:72 ff., 110), the great admirer of the Veddas, discovered more drawings at Henannegala and Dikgalge. C.F. Winzer (ASCAR 1929:16) mentions the occurrence of some drawings at Sangamankanda, the easternmost point of the Island. Paranavitana is the first Sri Lankan to record a rock art site. He mentions (ASCAR 1933: J 17) that a cave at Molagoda contains some engravings similar to that of at Dorawaka. This discovery was followed by an uneventful period of about seventeen long years, during which no new discoveries were recorded. This hiatus was broken by P. E. P. Deraniyagala and his archaeological exploration parties, who brought into light a large number of rock art sites in the Eastern and Uva provinces. These discoveries

* (This paper was first presented to the Faculty Seminar of the University of Kelaniya on 17 July 1985)