

COMMUNICATION

A NOTE ON SOME PRIMITIVE ROCK ART
FROM THE GAL-OYA VALLEY, SRI LANKA

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SITE :

Rajagala-kanda - Gal-oya Valley, Ampara District, Eastern Province.

Gonagolla cave - Gal-oya Valley, Ampara District, Eastern Province.

DISCOVERY :

June 1959: During an archaeological expedition to the valley before clearing of the jungle area for agricultural development.

In about the years 1958-59, the Gal-oya agricultural development scheme was in progress with the construction of the Senanayake Samudra dam and the clearing of large extents of forest for casuals and paddy cultivation.

It was in one of those surveys usually undertaken before development of an area that I happened to be one of the explorers. We were looking for evidence of history of the valley, mainly inscriptions, sculptures and ruins of buildings. The hill slopes of Rajagala provided a body of evidence in stone steps, pillars and brick buildings besides several caves containing donative inscriptions. The rows of Bráhmí letters, usually a single line only, mentioned the grant of the cave to the monks by the person who had it prepared for occupation.

These caves must have been in occupation when the agricultural settlement was alive, and abandoned with the breach of the reservoir and subsequent break down of the irrigation system. During the long period when jungle took over it became the haunt of wild animals. Hunters in search of flesh, skins of animals and tusks of elephants found the jungle very attractive. The early visitors must have been the impoverished farmers who continued to live on the fringe of the forest and hunted the animals for food. They spent several days in the jungle probably taking shelter in the abandoned caves.

In their expeditions they also relied on magical influences to aid them in the hunt. So it becomes natural for them to do magical signs and figures of themselves, the hunters and the animals they hunted with whatever simple earth colours or stones they could powder to make up a paste. This perhaps they mixed with the juice of a fruit or sap from a tree to make it adhere to the rock surface. A crude branch or stick was used as a brush. Occasionally there is evidence of their rough fingers used in drawing the figures. It was almost visible that every cave had its own drawings, done at a level a man could reach while standing.