



Book of Abstracts

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Prof. Anura MANATUNGA

An Interpretation of the Buddha Statues at Galvihare, Polonnaruva

Galvihare at Polonnaruva is well known for its colossal and elegant Buddha statues which have no parallels in the world. There are four statues; two in seated postures, one standing and the other in recumbent posture. One of the two seated statues is in a rock-cut cave in the centre while the other three are found in open space. All these four statues have been chiseled out in situ at an elongated rock boulder which is in the northern part of the ancient city of Polonnaruva.

Galvihare has been identified as the ancient Uttararamaya built by King Parakramabahu I (1153-1186 AD). The chronicles say that the king has built three image houses with Buddha statues at the site and named them as Nissina lena, Vajradhara Guha and Nipanna Lena. Identification of each of these three statues out of the four at Galvihare has been a long lasting controversy, hence the present study.

Most of the scholars have taken the rock-cut cave as the Vajradhara Guha and identified the other seated statue as the one which was in the the Nissina (seated) Lena and recumbent image as in the Nipanna (recumbent) Lena. Then arises the problems, which one was the Standing Statue and why it has been ignored by the chronicler. Some scholars consider it as a representation of Ananda, a disciple of Buddha, moaning at the Buddha Parinirvana, represented by the nearby recumbent Buddha. Some others date the standing Buddha either prior or later to king Parakramabahu I, thus there is no reference to that statue in the chronicle.

The peculiar hand posture of the standing statue is also a subjected to a controversy. The present writer interprets

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the controversial mudra as the 'Vajra Humkara mudra' and this interpretation leads him to identify the Standing Buddha as the one in the 'Vajradhara Guha'. Accordingly, the large seated statue as in the Nissina lena and Recumbent Buddha in the Nipanna Lena. Considering the stylistic features, the seated image in the rock-cut cave can be antedated to King Parakramabahu I. Thus it has not recorded as a work of the king Parakramabahu I by the Chronicler.