

ESSAYS IN ARCHAEOLOGY

# SIRINIMAL LAKDUSINGHE Felicitation Volume



PRISHANTA GUNAWARDHANA  
GAMINI ADIKARI  
R. A. E. CONINGHAM  
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

# SIRINIMAL LAKDUSINGHE

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## SIGIRIYA: NOTES ON THE CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION<sup>1</sup> OF THE PALACE AND THE LION STAIRCASE

SENAKE BANDARANAYAKE

### Introduction

Sigiriya is best known for its paintings, the Kasyapa story and the rock itself. But visitors and poets over the centuries and antiquarians, archaeologists, painters and historians in more recent times have also been fascinated by the remains of the palace complex on the summit of the rock and its grand Lion Staircase entrance. As poets writing more than a thousand years ago observed:

With tears in my eyes  
I saw  
how a king had lived  
as he pleased  
on the mountain  
inaccessible  
lofty as the sky (179)

Having seen them  
(the ladies in the paintings)  
one is not content....  
see also, indeed, the mansion  
in which they lived  
so happily (376)

We saw at Sihigiri  
the King of Lions  
whose fame and splendour  
remain spread  
in the whole world (206)

Having ascended Sigiriya  
to see what is there  
I fulfilled my mind's desire  
and saw  
His Lordship the Lion<sup>2</sup> (45)

The archaeological remains of the palace and the lion are quite eloquent as they stand. They have a great deal to say to both the casual observer and the archaeologist, and have complex levels of meaning. But what also interests observers is to be able to 'see', to read, not what is there but what is not there. As a result there have been many conjectural reconstructions of both the palace and, more often, the lion. A few of these offer acceptable, impressionistic images; others are inelegant