

Quarterly Tours – No. 25



National Trust – Sri Lanka

23rd February 2013

Compiled by Nilan Cooray

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Quarterly Tours – Saturday, 23rd February 2013.

Programme

0630 hrs.	Leave PGIAR
0800 - 0820 hrs.	Comfort stop at Jinadasa Thalaguli at Ambepussa
0945 –1030 hrs.	Visit Gadaladeniya
1100 – 1145 hrs.	Visit Lankatillake
1200 – 1245 hrs.	Visit Ambakke Devale
1245 – 1315 hrs.	Visit the workshops of traditional wood carvers
1330 – 1430 hrs.	Lunch at Tea Fortress at Kiribatkumbura
1445 – 1530 hrs.	Visit traditional bronze casting factory and lens making workshop
1700- 1800 hrs.	Tea at the Elephant Orphanage, Pinnawela (Visit to the Orphanage is optional)
2000 hrs.	Arrive PGIAR

Compiled by Nilan Cooray

Buddhist-Hindu shrines of the Gampola Period

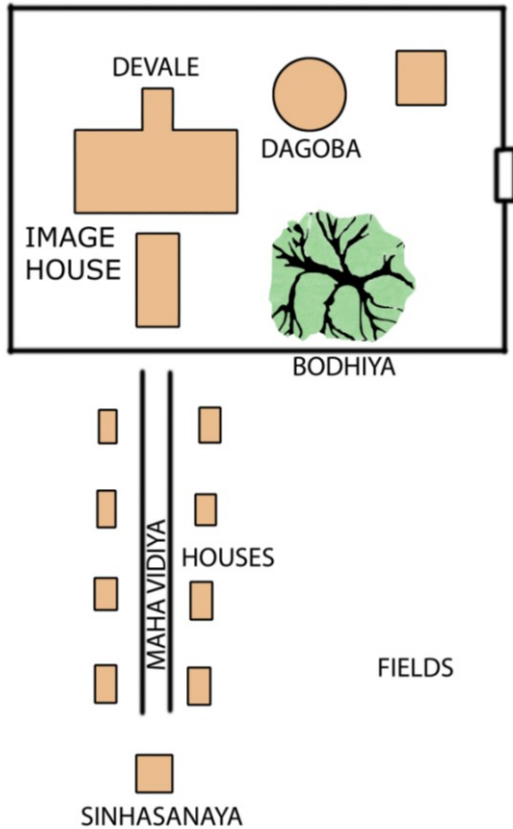
The kingdom of Gangasiripura or Gampola was founded by King Buvenekebahu IV in 1341 and lasted till the early 15th century. The shrines of Gadaladeniya, Lankatilaka and Ambakke were built during this period with a specific focal point of a “Buddhist-Hindu” shrine as a specific icon to village planning. The chief axis of the shrine extended as the *mahaveediya* or the main street terminating at the *Sinhasana* or the depository of the holy relics through the octave of daily processions. *Sinhasana* is the Treasure House which displayed the ceremonial weapons carried on elephant-back and are placed within, during the annual procession of the shrine. Dwellings of the serfs that served the shrine and owned large extents of land for such services were located on either side of the *mahaveediya*.

These Buddhist-Hindu shrines were purposely built under one roof often positioned back-to-back or even sharing the same ambulatory to synthesis the nearness of the two faiths of a single community, namely, the Buddhist and the Hindus. A visit to these Buddhist-Hindu shrines will undoubtedly, induce the pre-concept of this unique thought of this much unsung hero, King Buvenekebahu IV of the 14th century. He was the great reformer who erected these Buddhist-Hindu shrines under one roof and thereby, attempted to integrate the two communities following the 12th and 13th century conflicts of war and unwelcome disharmony. Apart from the three shrines visited on this occasion, the cult of the Buddhist-Hindu shrines extended far and wide into the rest of the country to places like Ratnapura Mahasamandevalaya, Boltumbe, Ukgalaluthnuvara, Soragune, Badulla Kataragama Devale and in the south in such sites as Devinuvara and even Kataragama. There could well be over fifty Buddhist- Hindu shrines throughout the country.

Gadaladeniya



Gadaladeniya is located about 1.5 km along the Davulagala Road off the Colombo-Kandy Road at Pilimatalawa. The principle building at Gadala Deniya is a storied structure. Situated on an outcrop of rock and built entirely of stone in the '*gedige*' style utilizing the vaulted construction technique, the shrine displays the South Indian architectural influence of the 14th century. Designed and built by a South Indian architect or *sthapathy*, the pillared entrance porch and the central dome of the shrine are reminiscent of the architecture of Vijayanagar of South India. The *Buduge* or the Buddha image house and the Vishnu *devala* are positioned at right angle to each other and these share a common *digge* or vestibule. The *Buduge* with its entrance porch and the dome over the sanctum containing the image is oriented on an east-west axis with the image facing the east.



The north-south oriented Vishnu *devale* has its main axis extending from the *devale* and runs across the *digge* and the entrance porch on the south into the *mahaveediya*. The *Sinhasana* is located at the southern end of the *mahaveediya*. The dwellings of the serfs servicing the *devale* are located on either side of the *mahaveediya*, which have to a large extent been destroyed, probably due to the construction of the modern road, which crosses the old *mahaveediya* disintegrating the original village layout.



The *Buduge* contains a seated Buddha figure placed within the sanctum of the lower shrine and a second shrine room built immediately above it to represent the Buddha preaching to the gods. The stairway with relatively high risers to the upper storey, make the ascent very difficult, thereby, restricting the visitors to the upper level. The seated Buddha image, the *makara* arch over the image and the mural paintings on the walls of the sanctum in the lower chamber reflect a typical Kandyan style, but the paintings of the upper shrine belongs to the Gampola period. As the rain water has percolated through

the stone work damaging the painted surfaces, a wooden framed tile roof has been erected in a very sensitive manner during the historical period to cover the vaulted roof of the shrine.



The Department of Archaeology had removed this roof, with the view of exposing the original architectural form of the shrine, but destroyed the evidence of the evolved architecture of the subsequent period as at the Gedige in Kandy and so re-exposed the shrine to the effects of the rain. The present

temporary canopy has been erected by the Central Cultural Fund with the intention of replacing the wooden framed tile roof to its original evolved design.

The inscription on the rock outcrop indicates that the shrine was built by King Buvenekebahu IV and completed in 1344. The length of cubit, or the historical linear measure as used by the builders of old, is also engraved on the outcrop in front of the Buddhist shrine.



Vijayotpaya, the *stupa* house or *kuludage*, is located to the northeast of the Buddhist-Hindu shrine. Tradition affirms that it was constructed by Parakkramabahu V. In contrast to the *vatadage*, in which a roofed *stupa* is enclosed by a wall, a

stupa house is an open pillared structure devoid of an enclosing wall. Vijayotpaya thus represents the continuation of a tradition of a building type, which has a history going back at least to the Polonnaruva period of the 12th century, as evidenced by the Nissankalata Mandapa at Polonnaruva.

The chapter house and the monks' residence are located to the north of the religious compound both of which carry a traditional style where the chapter house retains the *sima* stones and the *avasa* is built with an inner courtyard.

Lankatillake

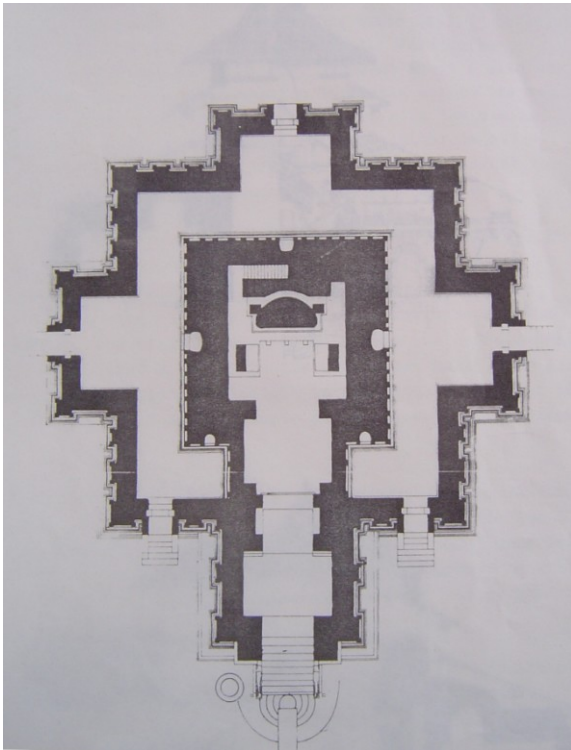


Lankatillake was designed and built by a South Indian Architect or *stapathy* and completed in the year 1344 during the reign of King Buvenekebahu IV. An edifice of great elegance and beauty, it is scenically sited on an outcrop of rock in a picturesque setting at Udunuwara, about three kilometers from Gadaladeniya. The graceful shrine with its white washed walls is of unique architectural design. The shrine was originally a vaulted brick-built four-storied structure of the *gedige* style. The study of the remains of the original construction and the inscription at the site suggest that the original edifice resembled the 11th century Bagan's Nagayon temple in Myanmar. However, its upper stories have collapsed many centuries ago, leaving only the ground floor and part of the first floor. Part of the corbelled brick-built vault has still survived over the sanctum of the *Buduge*. A combination of gable, hip and lean-to-roof structure, covered with terracotta tiles has been erected subsequently over the truncated structure.

It is believed that these renovations were carried out by King Parakramabahu VI in the Kotte period during the 15th century. In its present form it showcases a unique fusion of Sri Lankan and Indo-Chinese architectural features.

The study of the ground plan and the exterior decorative work of the edifice suggests that the *Buduge* facing east was constructed initially and the vaulted brick-built ambulatory-like passage surrounding the Buddha image house forming the *devale* has been added subsequently, but not long after, to protect the Hindu figures positioned on the exterior walls. This addition has made the *Buduge*, the inner core of the shrine with the *Devale* joined back to back as “siames-twins”. Images of the deities are placed within the niches formed on the outer façade of the *Buduge* as was the tradition previously. These images are facing the cardinal directions except directly to the

east, where, the entrance to the *Buduge* is positioned. The *devale* has entrances as *pronaos* projections facing the images of the deities, but the drumming hall facing west and positioned axially at the western *pronaos*, forming the main entrance to the *devale*.

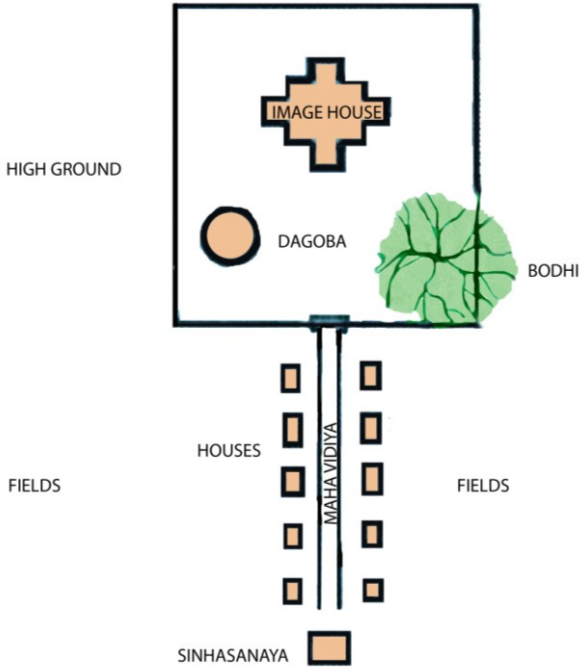


The entrance porch positioned on the eastern direction on the east-west axis of the shrine provided access to the shrine from the foot of the hill where the monks' residences are located. The sanctum of the *Buduge* contains a superbly executed



seated image of the Buddha, which is more striking than the one at Gadaladeniya. The mural paintings on the walls of the sanctum reflect the typical Kandyan style, but the two lion figures of considerable scale, and exposed recently underneath the modern whitewashed surfaces of the side walls of the vestibule, are assigned to the Gampola period.

Aligned with the east-west axis on the *devale* side is another entrance porch providing access to the shrine complex from the west. This axial line continues further westwards as the *mahaveediya* of the village to be terminated at the *Sinhasana*. Although the original dwellings that lined either side of the *mahaveediya* have partly disappeared, the positioning of the present trading stalls still follows the original layout.



The roofed structure near the Bodhi-tree within the compound contains the sacred foot print of the Buddha as the object of veneration, which is testimony to the continuity of the popular practice of venerating the sacred foot print during the Gampola period. The Buddhist priests in Sri Lanka were persecuted by king Magha of Kalinga (1215-1236) at the beginning of the thirteenth century and were forced to leave the country to countries like Burma, Siam (Thailand), Cambodia and Laos. Since the monks in exile could not go on pilgrimage to the mountain of Sri Pada to venerate the sacred foot print as it was prevailing practice then, as an alternative, the migrant monks from Sri Lanka erected special shrines on top of the rocks or

even on artificial mounds in the migrated countries to perform their ritual. As a result, even today the Footprint shrines of the Buddha exist in those countries. Subsequently, with the death of king Magha, the king that followed, namely, Prakramabahu II of Dambadeniya invited the Sri Lankan monks that had migrated to return to the motherland. Many of them accepted the invitation and returned to the country establishing temples in the vicinity of the capitals of the thirteenth century namely Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa, Kurunegala, Gampola etc. where the returning monks also brought back with them the newly created Foot-Print-Shrines of the countries where they were refuges to the new temples established by them in the thirteenth century and after. Thus the Foot-Print- Shrine at Lankatillake is a testimony to a tradition that had evolved in the South-East-Asian countries of that time.



The elevated position of the compound offers a stunning panoramic view of the surrounding Kandyan hills with paddy fields in the foreground.

Ambakke



Ambekke is located close to Daulagala, and the principle shrine here is the *devale* dedicated to God Skanda, which deity is popularly known as God Kataragama. The local tradition holds that the *devale* was built in the 14th century. It consists of three spaces, the sanctum, the dancing hall and the drummers' hall. It is however, the drummers' hall of the shrine with its splendid carvings on the pillars, brackets and the roof timber that is considered the main attraction at the site. Intricately carved pillars, leap to life with dancers, musicians, wrestlers, men and women in fluent and graceful body movements, with

legendary beasts and birds and floral design of many combinations, thrills the artistic appetites of all visitors. No design is repeated, making each carving absolutely unique. The structures over the sanctum sanctorum are raised above the rest of the roof to provide an impression of an upper storey, but without an upper floor, to emphasize the dignity of it being the abode of a deity in the architectural composition. Even the walls with the double height of this sanctum, are constructed using wattle and daub.

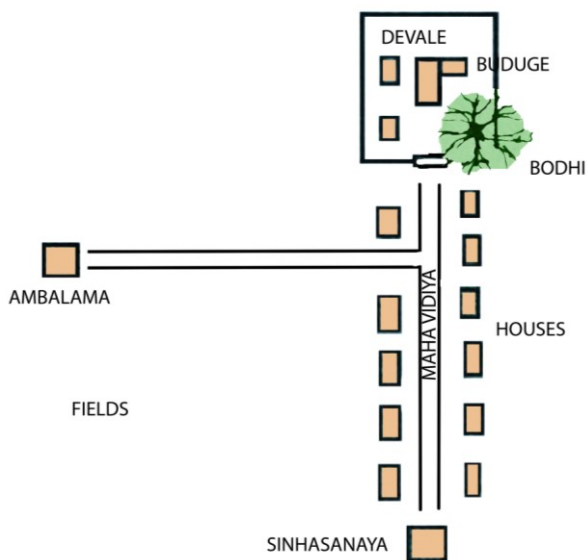


The *Buduge* of this Hindu-Buddhist shrine is attached at right angle to the main building on its western side. The old Bo-tree sits directly in front of the *Buduge*. To the east of the *devale*,

but within the compound is a shrine dedicated to a local deity called Devata Bandara. Also within the compound is a traditional *vee-atuva* or a paddy store resting on boulders, reminiscent of the structures on stilts. All these edifices are contained within a walled area with an entrance porch.



The Hindu-Buddhist shrine is accessed through an entrance porch positioned at its northern limit on the main axis of the shrine, which is oriented in a north-south direction. This axis extends beyond the entrance porch as the *mahaveediya* with the *Sinhasana* at its northern limit.



The early photographs of the *mahaveediya* associated with Ambakke, shows vividly the true character of the architecture and layout of the dwellings that lined the *mahaveediya*. These houses were single storied and thatched with straw.



Nearby was an ancient *ambalama* or a way-side rest, of which only the stone columns have survived. The monolithic pillars contain carvings similar to those on the wooden pillars of the *devale*.



Traditional crafts

Patronized by the king, the artificers, dancers, weavers, wood carvers, painters and other craftsmen were held in high esteem during the Gampola and Kandyan periods. They contributed immensely to the economic and cultural life of society, being second only to agriculture. However, with the conquest of the hill-country kingdom by the British, and the subsequent loss of

state patronage, these traditional crafts were severely affected and only a few families practice their traditional crafts at present. Nevertheless, the revival of the woodcarvings, bronze casting, and even lens making are crafts that are still lingering in these Buddhist-Hindu shrine centered villages.

Wood-carving:

Originally associated with architecture, and design of furniture and house-hold items, the modern wood carving industry covers the products such as exquisitely decorated trays, ash containers, wall plaques, figurines and a wide range of carved items. A visit to some workshops at the village associated with Ambakke will provide an overview of the process of transforming the lifeless wooden blocks and planks into artistic masterpieces.

Bronze casting:



One of the best exponents of the art of brass work is in the village associated with Lankatillake. Apart from traditional items such as images of the Buddha and the deities, pinnacles, oil lamps, the recent additions include ash-trays, bowls, vases, mirror-frames, serviette rings, letter openers, and a wide array of ornaments. A visit to a factory with traditional foundries at this village will provide an overview of the process of bronze casting.

Lens making:

One of the rare traditional crafts still surviving in Sri Lanka is the optical lens making using crystals. Such crafts could perhaps be found at present only in the village associated with Gadaladeniya. Practiced at present by not more than one or two families in this village, the crystals that are unearthed from the gem mining pits are used to make optical lenses using age old tools and techniques. They also cut the crystals to be fixed at the top of the pinnacles of the Buddhist *stupas*. A visit to a workshop will give the rare opportunity to see how the crystals are cut, polished and shaped to be used for different sizes, types and designs of spectacles.

Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawela



Situated at Pinnawela on the banks of Maha Oya, the Elephant Orphanage has the world's largest herd of captive elephants. Located about 6 km. from Kegalla on the Rambukkana Road and managed by the Department of Zoological Gardens, it provides the home for a large number of orphaned baby wild elephants. Except those that are born at the Orphanage, all the others are motherless baby elephants brought here. Opened in 1975 with five orphans, the Orphanage has launched successfully a captive breeding programme since 1982. It is also one of the largest elephant conservation and breeding centers in the world. Today it has more than eighty elephants. The physical environmental condition at Pinnawela is also

conducive for the breeding programme. Some orphans enjoy the fortune of seeing their grandchildren born in the same location. The orphanage has given out more than sixty grown up elephants to temples, *devales*, and private elephant owners and to foreign zoos.

A visit to the Orphanage will provide an opportunity to get an overview of the exiting activities associated with this institution, specially the bottle feeding style for motherless babies. It is also interesting to see two orphans, each about three months old and found from two different locations, how they enjoy themselves by playing together within a special area demarcated for them.

