

THE NATIONAL TRUST  
SRI LANKA  
PUBLIC LECTURE



PROF. NIMAL DE SILVA

**SIGIRIYA MIRROR WALL  
AND  
GRAFFITI**

Mr. Chairman,  
Dr. Roland Silva, President, National Trust,  
Sri Lanka  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

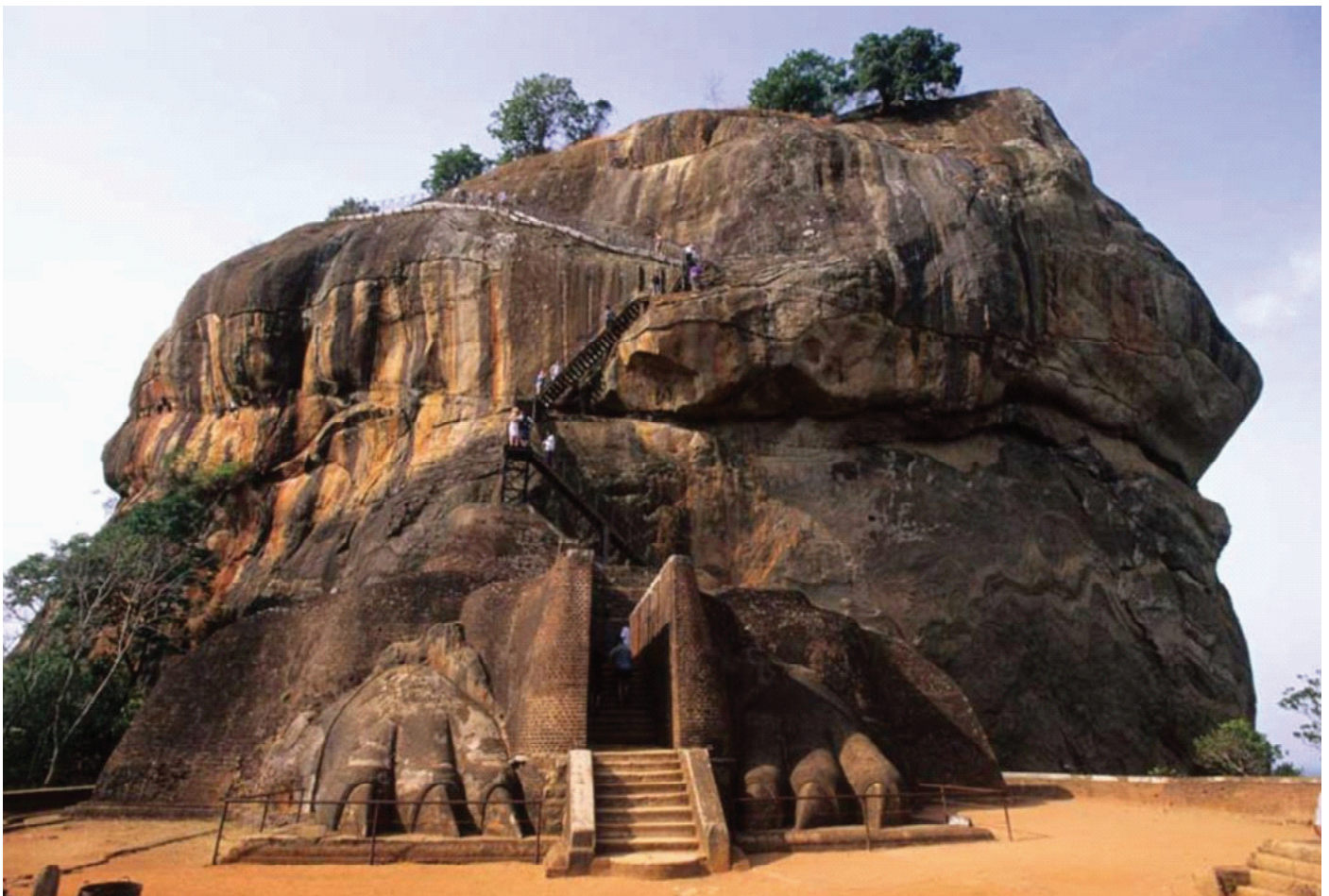
In this evening, I like to introduce some facts about Sigiriya, its Mirror Wall and the Graffiti.

I consider tradition as the accumulated wisdom of the past, and heritage as the inspiration, confidence and the strength for the future. Sigiriya built by the King Kashyapa in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, that is more than 1500 years ago, was nominated as a world heritage by the government of Sri Lanka and it was accepted by the UNESCO and inscribed on the world heritage list in 1982 ie. 30 years ago.

When a cultural site is declared as a World Heritage, it must satisfy one or more of the following selection criteria.

(i) Represent a master piece of human creative genius; or

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- (ii) Exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on development in Architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design; or
  - (iii) Bear a unique or exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to civilization which is living or has disappeared; or
  - (iv) Be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history; or
  - (v) Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of invisible change; or
  - (vi) Be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions with ideas or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.



Equally important is the authenticity of the site and the way it is protected and managed. The Cultural Heritage of Sigiriya satisfies all these criteria.

Creation of Sigiriya was a product of a Political drama in the Sri Lankan history. Prince Kasyapa took over the throne after a palace coup from his Royal Father king Dhatusena I (455-473 A.D.) who ruled in Anuradhapura. The golden era of Sigiriya was assigned to Kasyapa I (473-91 AD) and named the city as Simha-giri or Lion Mountain. Because the entrance to the palace on the summit is from the North, in traditional architecture the animal assigned for the North is the Lion and that is the chariot of northern guardian deity Vaishravana. The lion was the most dominating and prominent sculpture built in Sigiriya, hence the whole creation was identified as Simha-Giri.

Sigiriya is a unique product of many disciplines, nature, city planning, landscape architecture, architecture, hydraulic engineering, structural engineering, craftsmanship, painting, sculpture, Sinhala calligraphy

and literature. It is a good example to show that interdisciplinary approach to design can produce a unique and excellent product.

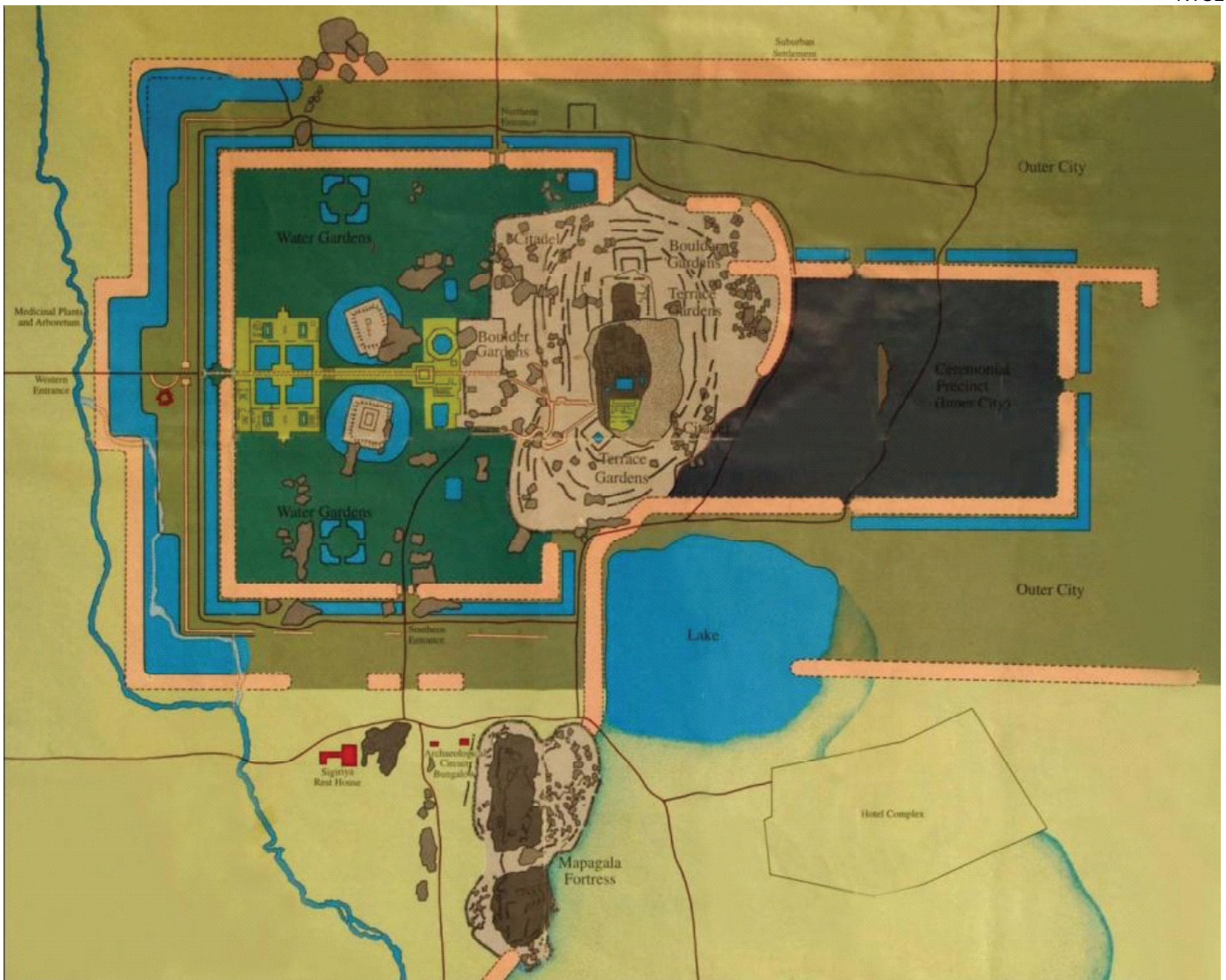
The value of Sigiriya can be considered on five disciplines; its Archaeological value, Historical value, Architectural value, Artistic value, Cultural and Literary value.

Nature was the most influencing factor in designing this city. Selection of the site with a 200 meter unpenetrable rock out crop, understanding of its geology and geography, the orientation, use of topography, contours and levels, natural composition of rocks and boulders, rainfall and surface runoff, water courses and perennial rivers, climate and wind direction were the natural guiding factors in the design.

The totality in the design of Sigiriya was based on







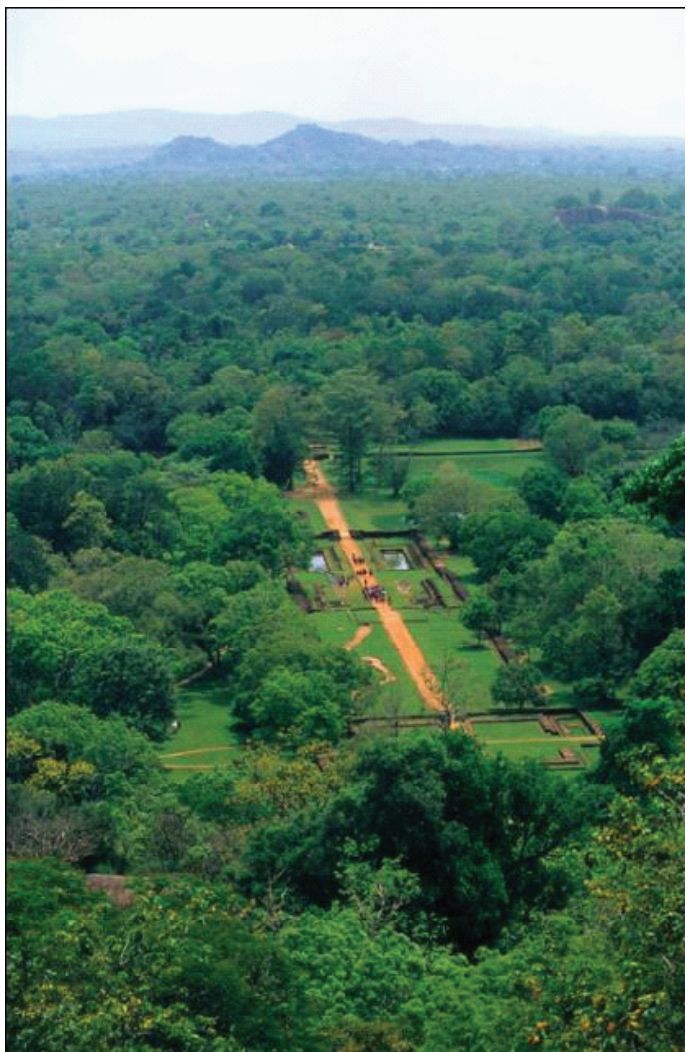
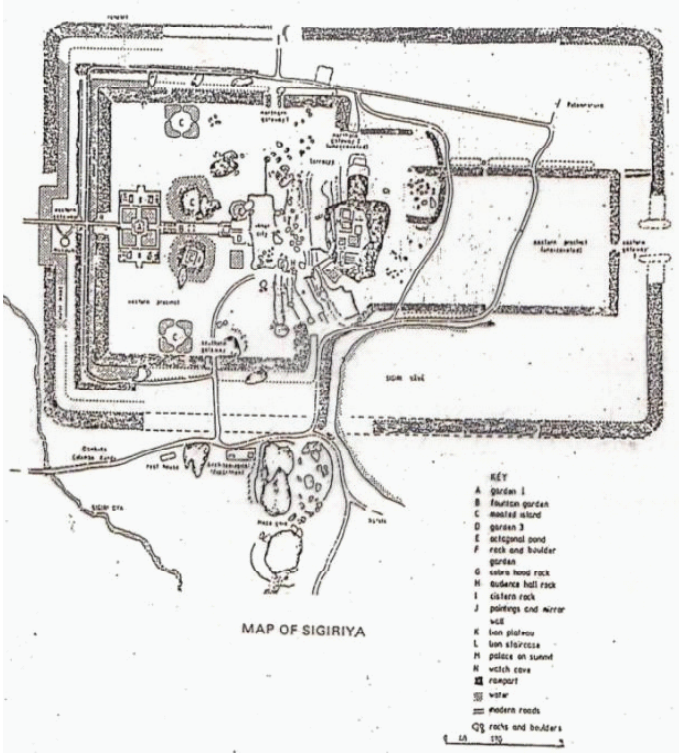
function, creativity, aesthetics and the technology used. The design component has varied from a city plan to a fountain detail or a piece of jewelry. Sigiriya is a product of the design achievements of a cultural evolution that took place through many centuries prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

It is a design based on a rigid axial modular geometric plan, amalgamated with the organic designs created using and blending the beauty of natural elements. It is a design for defense and protection. Designed as a royal residence in an overall context, Sigiriya is a design for leisure. It is also a design exhibiting an excellent system of water management.

Precipitation throughout the year was collected and used for both function and aesthetics. In city planning water was used as a boundary for defense,

for physical separation and isolation of built forms, for visual aesthetics such as rhythm in flow of water, cascading effects, music created, fountains, as a reflective mirror, for cooling effects, swimming and bathing, drinking, to grow fish and water plants, to bring a geometric effect and a symmetrical balance in the layout design.

Sigiriya is a product of creativity and aesthetics; its unique achievement is the beauty of handling nature, in converting a natural environment to a built environment while preserving the natural aesthetics. The sensitivity in integrating the rocks, boulders, topography and natural settings in its architecture and layouts, its beauty of using an organic concept in design within a formal geometrical grid pattern, beauty in the creation of a unique landscape and the decorative aspect of using painting and sculpture; basically the main theme in designing and creating Sigiriya was



‘functional aesthetics’.

Technology used in creating Sigiriya was a result of the continuous advancement of understanding nature, commonsense, simple mathematics guided by the tradition and culture of the Sinhalese civilization. Stone built retaining walls constructed one thousand five hundred years ago are still serving its original function.



Fountains still work with gushing water. Advanced hydraulic engineering and water management, cavity walls and pathways built on sloping rock edges etc. exhibit the engineering achievements of the builders of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

Sigiriya is well known for its 5<sup>th</sup> century paintings of excellent artistic quality. What is remaining today are only small fragments found in two depressions on the rock surface, depicting eighteen female figures of immense beauty known as Apsaras. This painting would have spread throughout the western surface

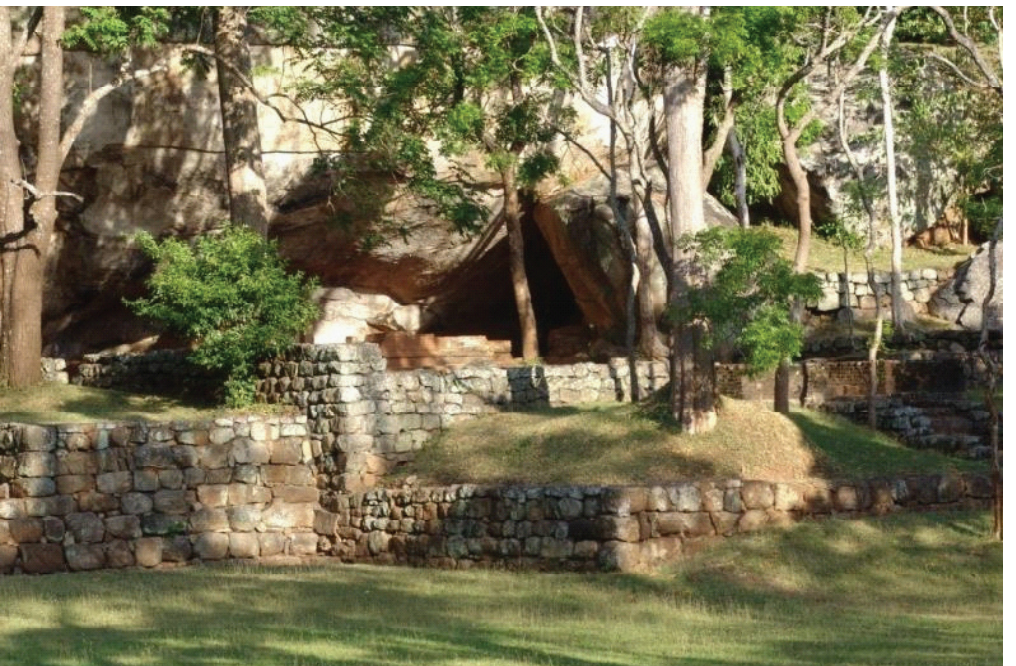
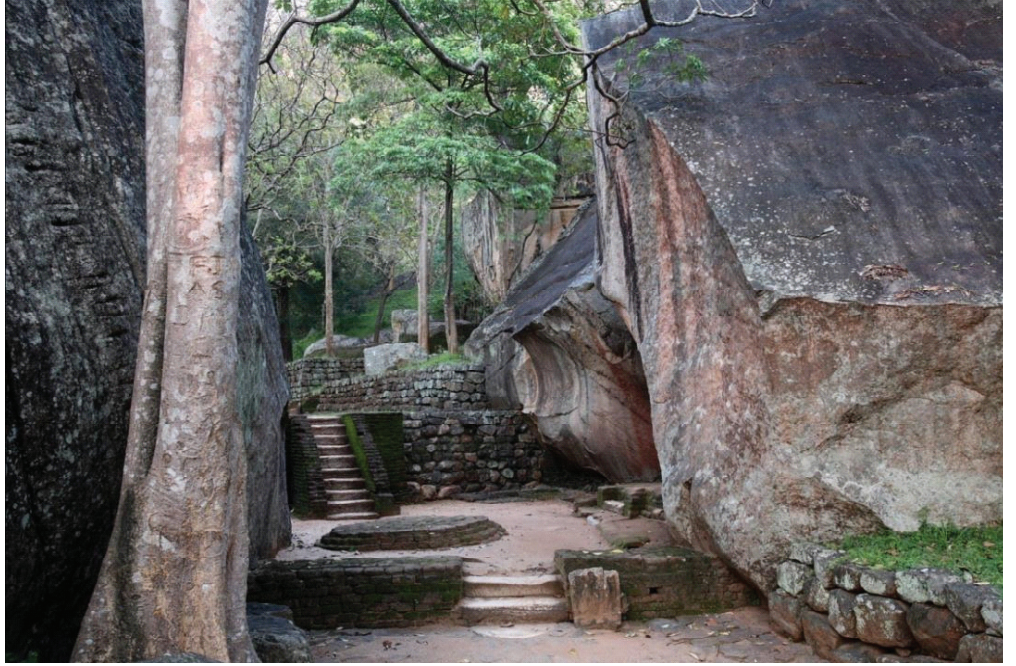


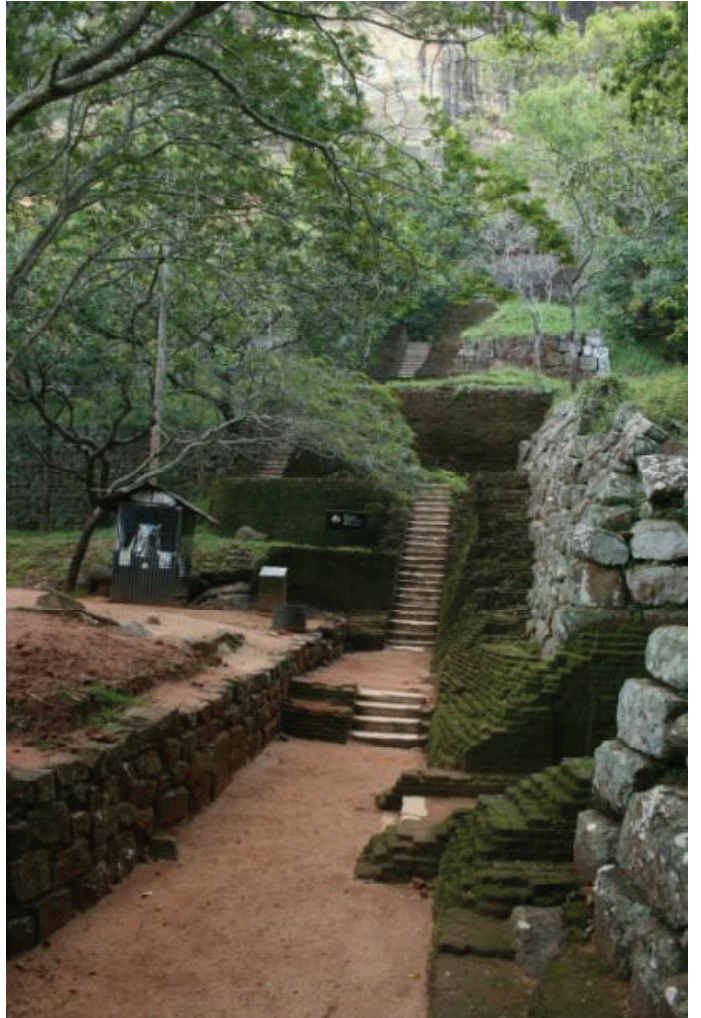
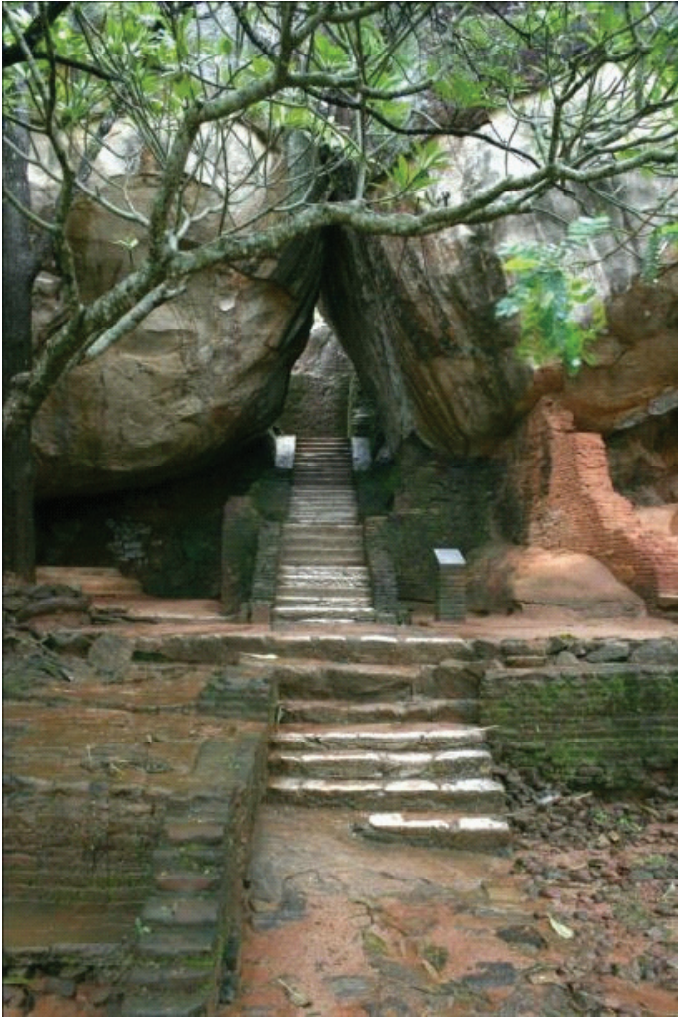
of the rock, forming a back drop to the western guard covering an area of more than 100 meters by 40 meters and it would have been the largest mural ever done by man. It is a good example of the oriental painting tradition. The artists have carefully followed the principles and methodology described in the ‘silpa’ texts that have recorded the painting traditions while depicting the beauty of the female figure, the jewelry, head dress and other















adornments.

Paintings in Sigiriya have been the focus of specific interest and attention in both ancient and modern

times. Sigiri Kasyapa's creative contribution was not only confined to the master piece of Sigiriya. The Architectural concept of aesthetic blending of



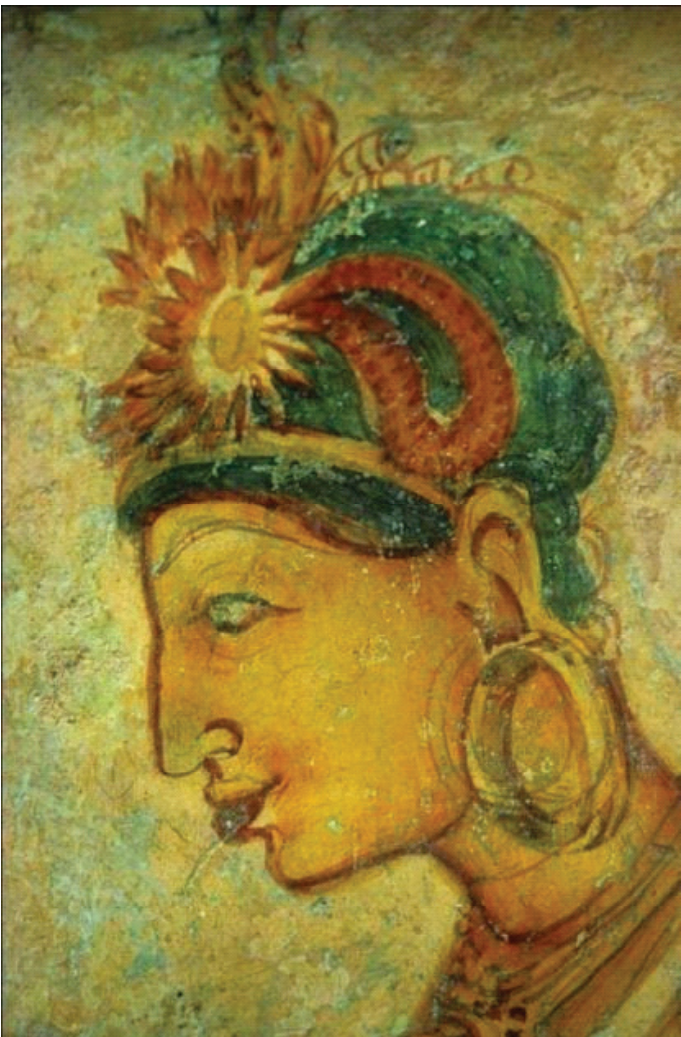
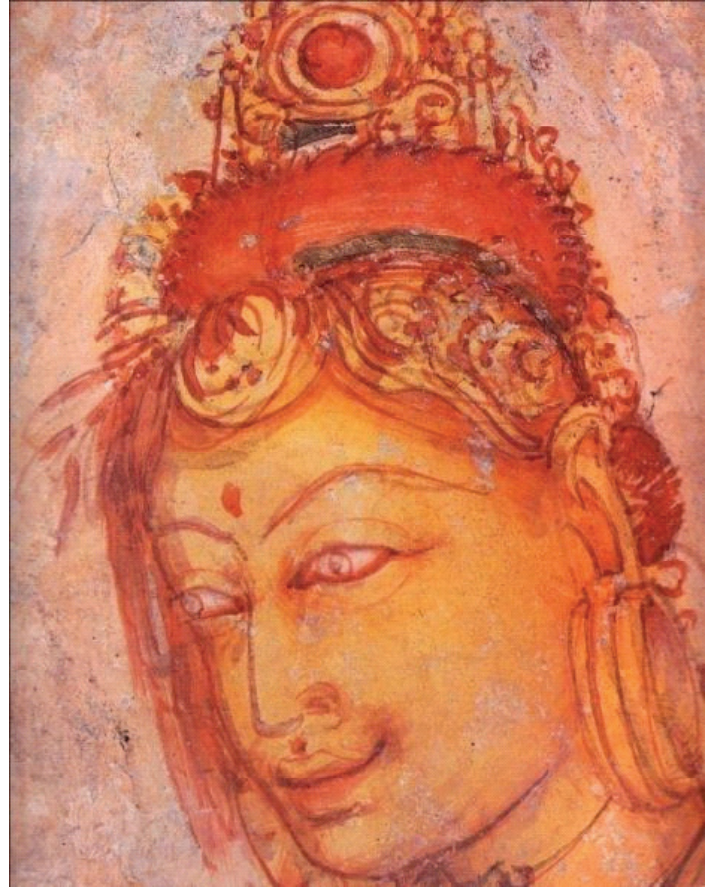


rocks, boulders and the topography with created built environment was found in two other building complexes in Anuradhapura. Use of lapis lazuli, a semi precious stone imported from Afganiztan as the blue pigment in traditional painting was found only at Sigiriya,

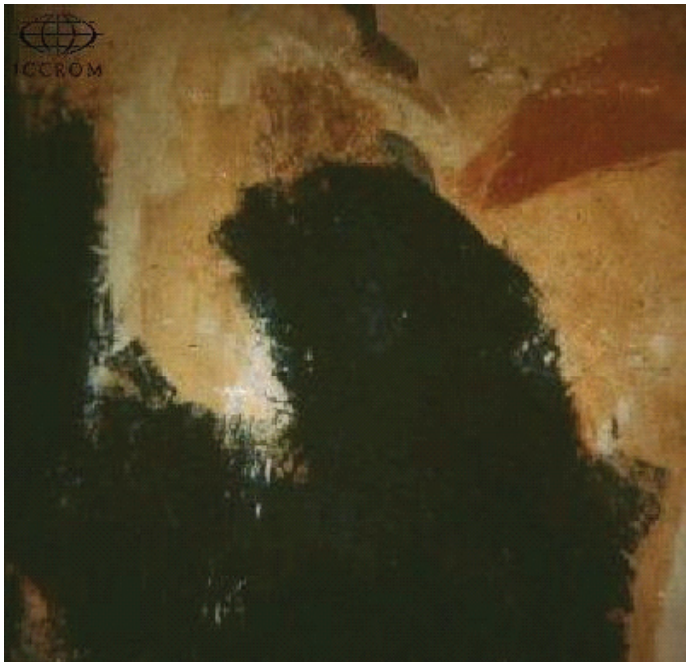
Vessagiriya and Ranmasuuyana. Vessagiriya was a monastic complex originally built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century

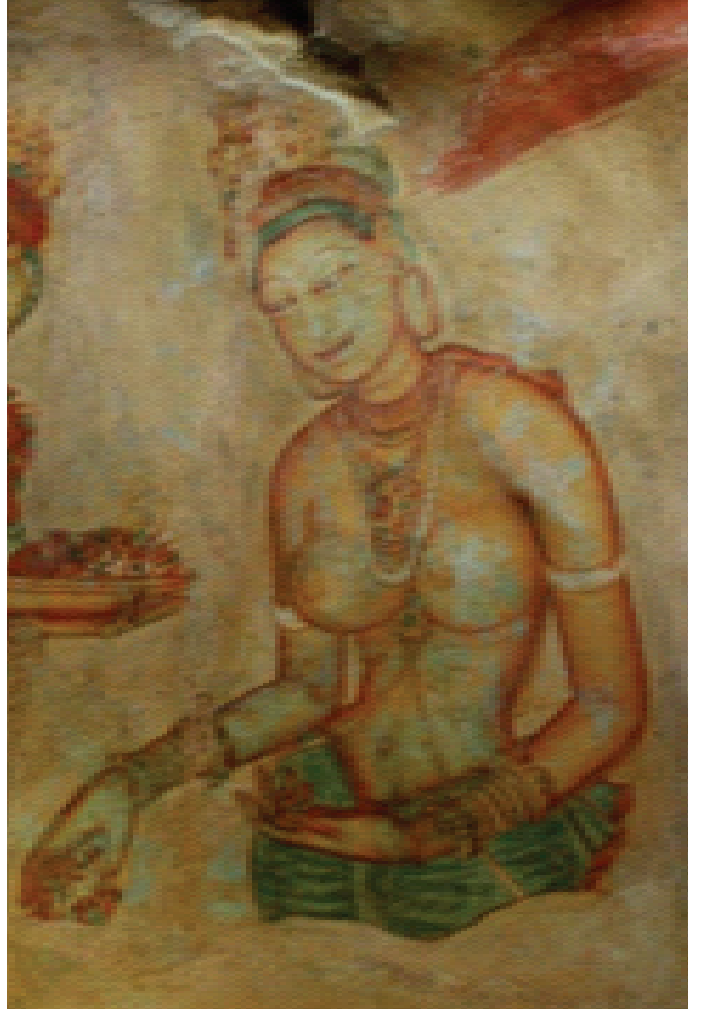
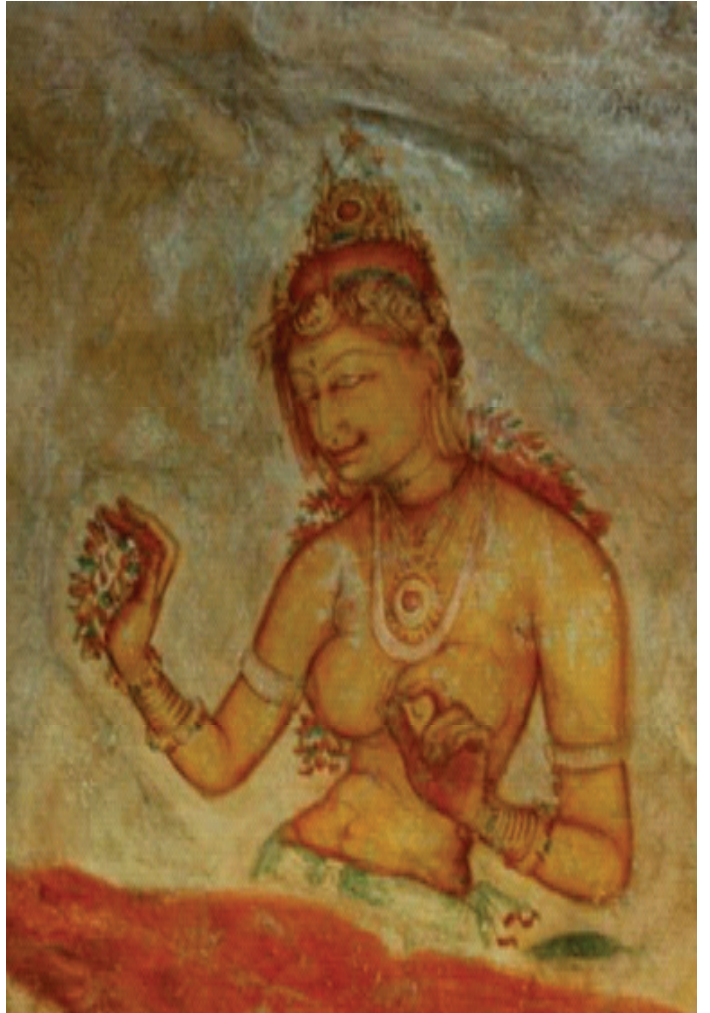


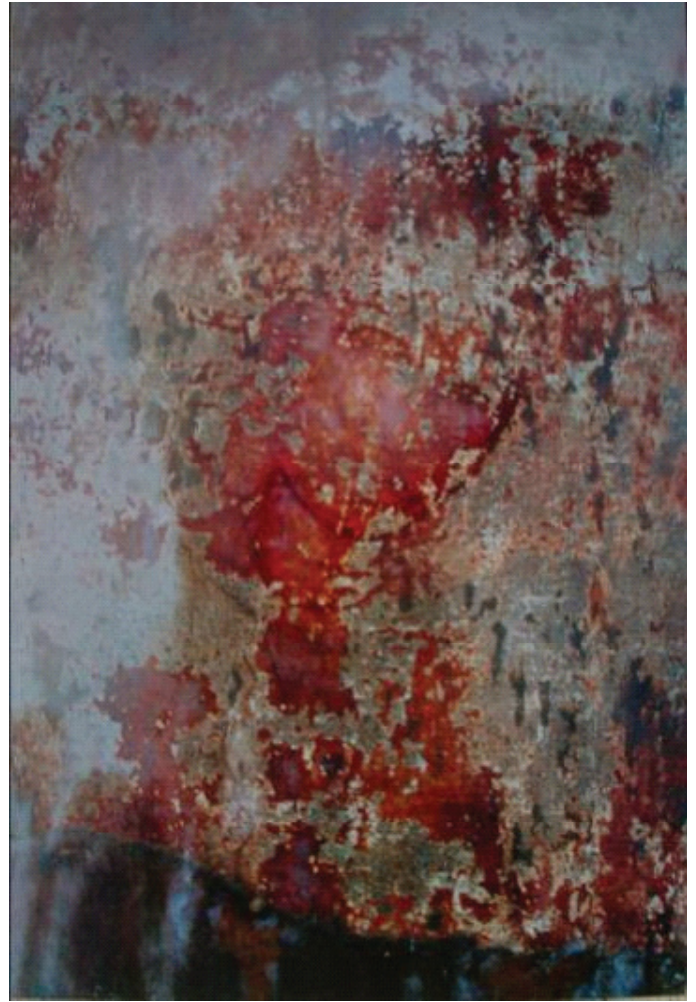




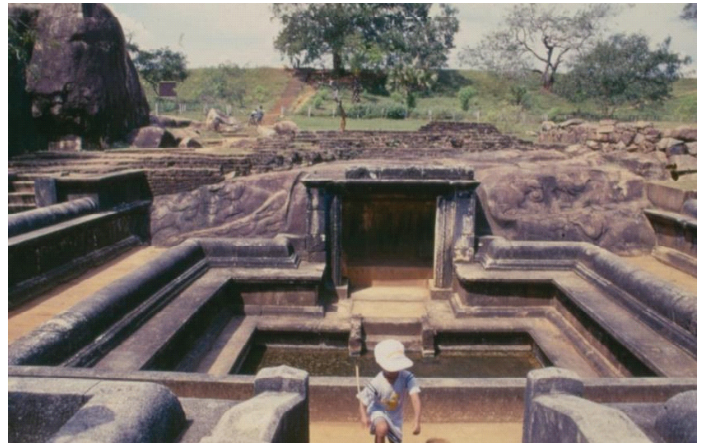


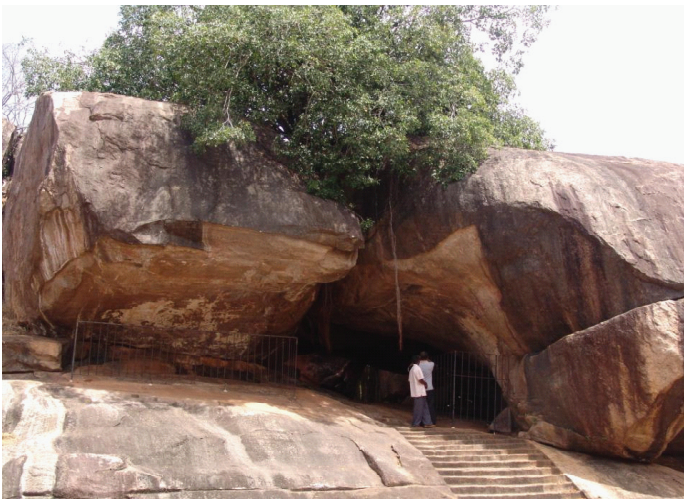
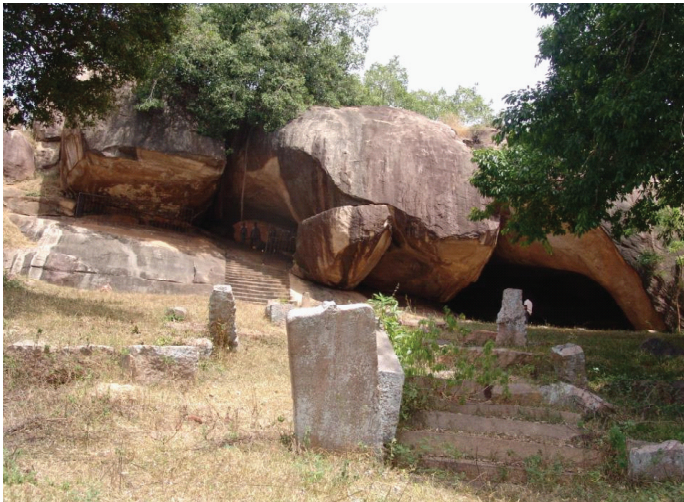




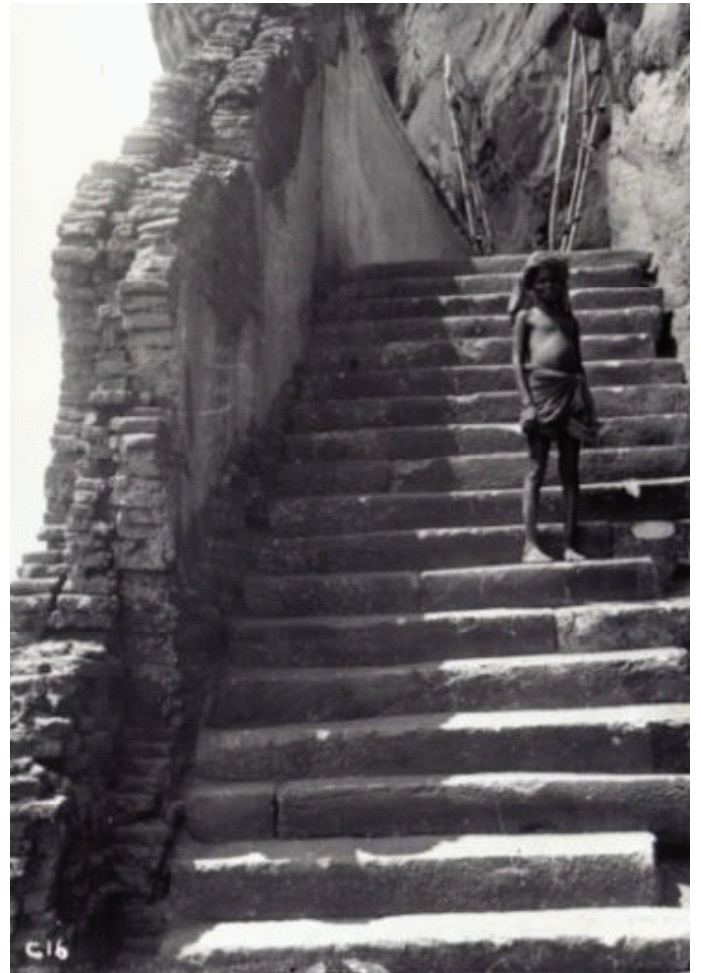


BC with Brahmi inscriptions found in rock caves indicating the names of the people who donated these to Buddhist monks. The same architect of Sigiriya would have converted Vessagiriya in to a new temple complex during Kasyapa reign. The 5<sup>th</sup> century inscription found in Vessagiriya has named the temple as “Kasabu Bo Upulvan Vehera” depicting the names of Kasyapa’s two daughters. The other architectural complex Ranmasu uyana is found just half a kilometers away from Vessagiriya, but it is a royal pleasure garden where the architect has followed the same design principles in blending nature in to the created built environment. Therefore it is logical to accept that Ranmasu uyana, the pleasure garden of Anuradhapura royalty was a product of Kasyapa’s contribution to Sinhalese art and architecture. Today, the designers should be inspired by the past because the tradition is the accumulated wisdom of the past and the knowledge tested and carried down for generations.





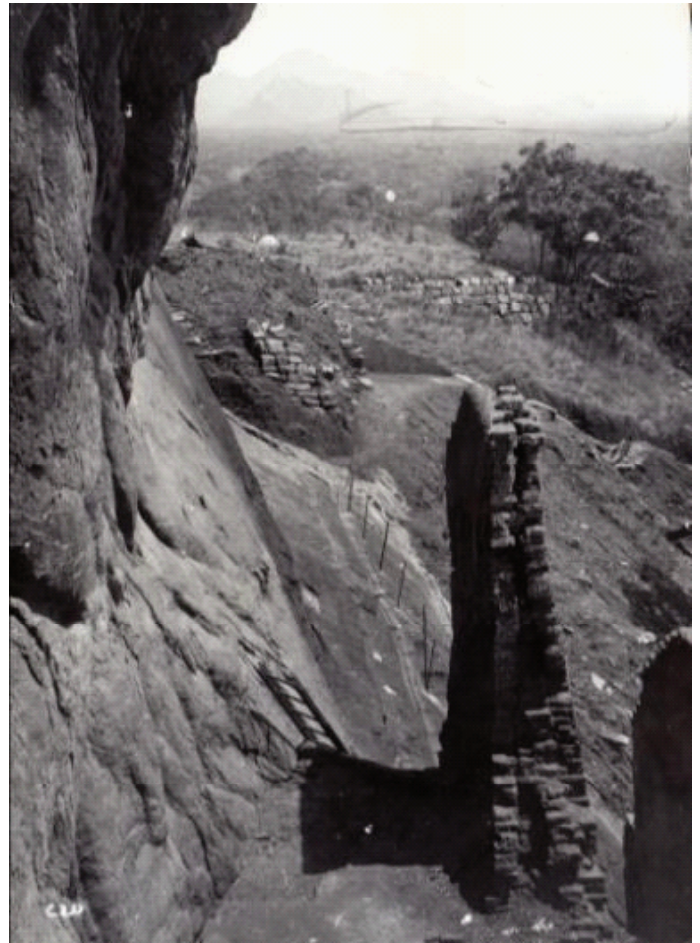
Half way along the vertical western side of the rock



surface was pasted with a two meter wide path way connecting and climbing from South to the North. Outer edge of the path was protected with a two meter high cavity wall. In the construction bricks were laid on the steps cut on the sloping rock surface using a thick layer of clay motor. This wall is plastered with a special lime mortar and the inner surface is burnished to a reflective mirror finished in such a way that the painting on the opposite rock surface is perfectly reflected creating a special ambience to feel that the

ladies are on both sides when the king walk along. Because of that reflecting surface , this was known as the mirror wall or “kata path paura” This wall was directly exposed to the western sun, monsoon rain and the wind for more than 1500 years but still preserving the reflecting polished surface.

But the two ends, the southern end connecting the main stair case to the mirror walled path and the northern end connecting the mirror walled path to the lion platform has fallen and was destroyed with the passage of time. Presently a link connection was made with steel bridges. As you are aware among the many thousands of visitors who climbed sigiriya from the 6<sup>th</sup> century to 14<sup>th</sup> century to see and admire the painting gallery and the palace buildings, more than thousand five hundred have written poems and names in their own hand writing and these are preserved up to date.

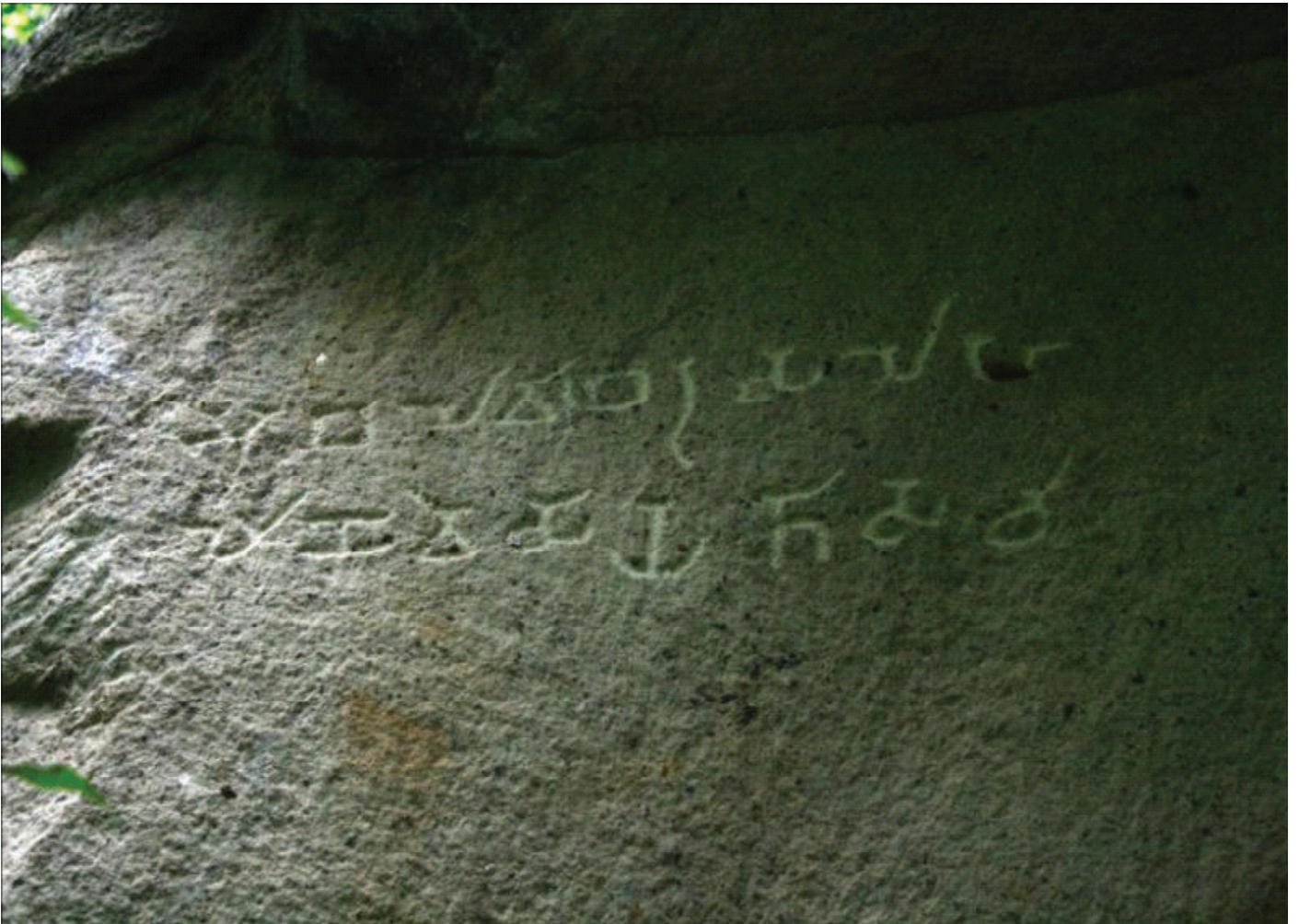


It is an unique occasion and opportunity to see such a collection of handwriting of the people who lived thousand years ago. From the 6<sup>th</sup> century on words Sigiriya has become a place of natural, cultural and historic interest. The social elites and Art enthusiasts, who heard about the beauty of the Sigiriya Royal Precincts and the painting gallery, specially visited and climbed Sigiriya as tourists to enjoy the setting and got their mind stimulated with poetic thoughts and carefully inscribed poems on the shining mirror wall.

Bell recognized that the earliest of these graffiti date paleographically from about the sixth century. He also concluded that the greater number of these records belong to about the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the Bells’ statements were not quite correct as the evolution of the Sinhalese script was not correctly understood in 1905.

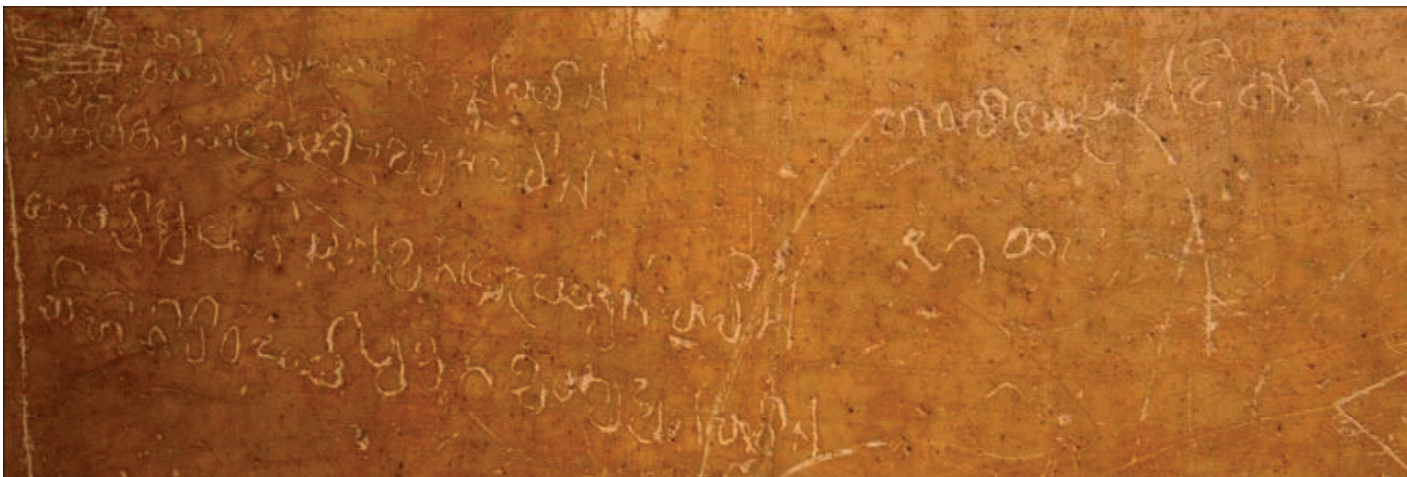
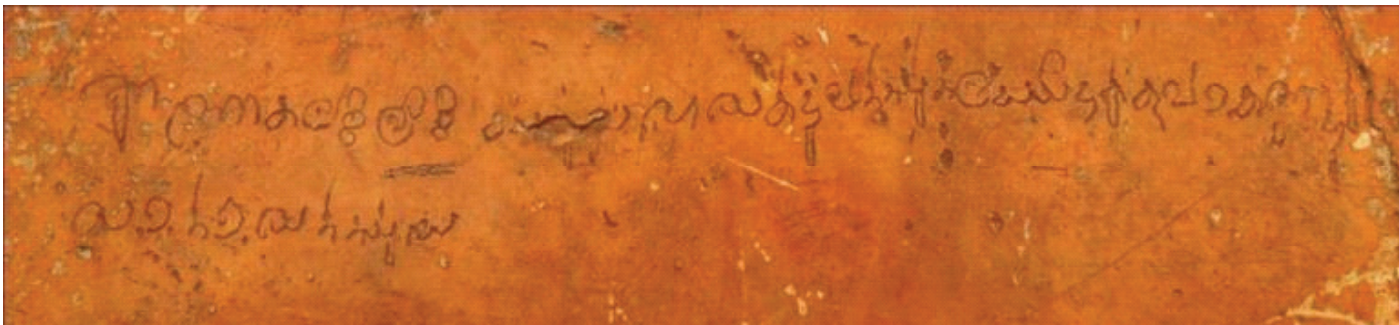
John Still, who was Bells’ assistant for sometime and Ayrton, who succeeded Bell, appear to have taken some interest in these graffiti.





Professor Senarath Paranavithana started work on Sigiriya graffiti from 1928 and finally has made an incalculable contribution to Sri Lanka Archeology by deciphering 685 Sigiriya graffiti from the mirror wall and were published in two monumental volumes titled Sigiri Graffiti in 1956. Paranavithana's publication contains majority of the complete poems which are of high poetic quality.

Benil Priyanka has done a strenuous detail study



and published another 800 graffiti which are shorter, incomplete or only the name of visitor in 2010 which include 40 or more writings from Polonnaruwa and Dambadeniya period.

Visitors have written down their poetic appreciation of the beauty of the ladies depicted in the paintings while recording more than 1000 Sinhala words used at that time ,about 250 names of the Authors, large number of place names, names of royalty, ranks and titles of authors, chronological development of Sinhala script from 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century and many other information about Sinhala grammar, intellectual quality of the visitor, their literal creativity and many more things

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of the society who visited Sigiriya.

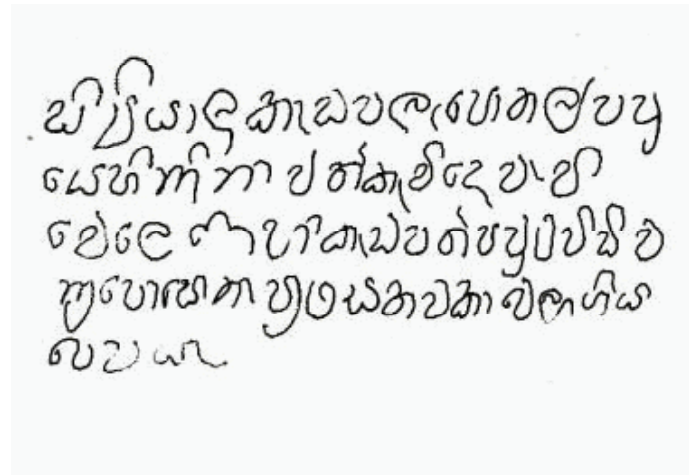
All visitors to Sigiriya may not have written poems



but what is written has mirrored the quality of the society. I will present ten of these poems.

*Budalmi*  
*Siyora âmi sihigiri*  
*Balîmi gi boho jana*  
*Litûyen nolimi*

I am Budal who wrote this  
 I came with a crowd and saw Sihigiri  
 I did not write a song as many people have  
 written them.

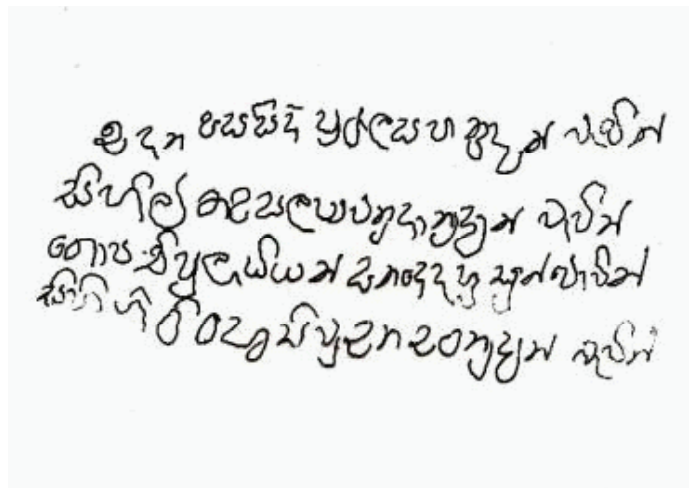


*Apahat vavet b alanew*  
*Puvat e sihi nagad aśa aya*

She stirs to break the stillness and ask if we  
 could bear to know her tragic story.

*Siri lak devehi (polo) dāka siyalaga*  
*(tutu) dā lomū daha ganāneli*  
*Tepuladinna ma.*

Having climbed (Sigiri) I am delighted with  
 the site created by the natural surroundings of  
 Sri Lanka. The words she spoke exited me.



*Swasthi sahakayi*  
*Bāli ga misa ve darana bojana*  
*Ti mevenava*

Hail ! I am sahakayi  
 Bali ga misa ve darata  
 Bo jana ti mevanva.

*Nagi sihigiri sihi kot giyak*  
*Ba(da)nā*  
*Batimi nā gī nuyum mana*  
*gannanat janā*

I am Bati, who having ascended Sihigiri and

recalled (things) to memory. I'm composing a song.

There is no song for those (the ladies) who captivate the eyes and mind of people

*(Nu) yum maña badana piyavuru  
Balum rusnâ  
A bayadahi ranwan mana  
Mata has yo-mu kala thamâ*

Ah! the golden coloured one on the mountain side, who entices ones eye and mind and whose breasts are delightful to look at directed my mind to the intoxicated swans.

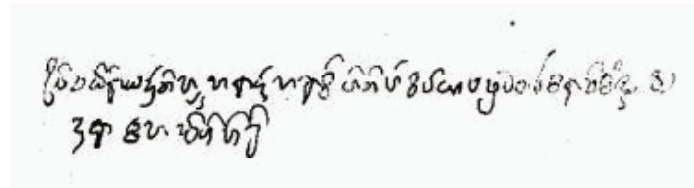
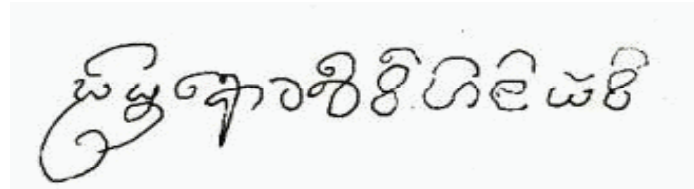
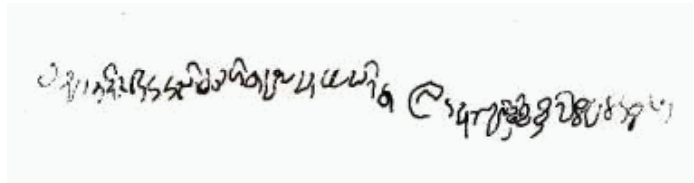
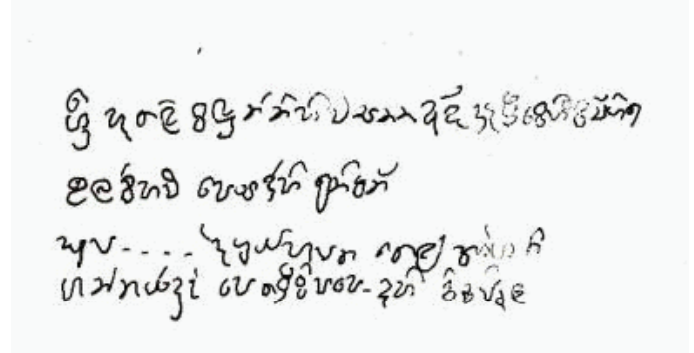
Svasti vira-vidur batimi limi  
Sihil pini- bindin ad savand  
Pavan gena mand hamule  
Kand kumund vast-avhi mal  
Su(sadivi) he(bi) mulule  
Tabay ey me-ran-vanun dakut me

Sith katara kele  
Vidi yamin me mand-balamini vagulemi me  
Giri- te(le)  
Pan-siya a gana risi-sey balay giri te(le)  
No ga (niyasa) g mene may  
Ekak menehi kot mana kot

Hail! I am vira-vidura bato I wrote this

The gentle breeze blew- the breeze which is wet with cool dew drops- taking with it fragrant perfume, in the spring sun shine, the jasmine and water lily, being adorned with flowers, shone all over. Leaving it all side, my mind was agitated on seeing these golden coloured ones and , being shot at whilst going by their side long glances.

I became prostrate on the slope of this rock  
Having seen to my heart's content, the five



hundred Damsels on the surface of the rock,  
and having well remembered one of them.  
Heaven itself does not take my mind.

*Svasti vajarâ gî  
Tanapata vela sarang- mal  
Sihilas kot lû  
Daka mana ma niyala beyond hi  
Ran-vank dig neth.*

Hail! the song of vajara, Having seen, on the  
mountain side, a long eyed golden coloured  
one who for sake of coolness has put on sweet  
scented flowers enveloping her breast cloth,  
having seen her my mind has been troubled

Svasti agboysmi limi  
Nil katrol malaka avanu  
Vatkol mal say  
Sandaga sihi venne-y  
Mahanel vana hay ran  
vana hum.

Hail!  
I am agboy. I wrote this like a vatakola flower.  
Entangled in a blue katarola flower, the golden  
coloured one who stood together with the lily  
coloured one will be remembered at the advent  
of the evening.

This is sihigiri  
A great heritage of culture, it is for you to  
learn and enjoy, protect it for generations to  
be born.

Thank you.

