

## TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS IN PRE-COLONIAL SRI LANKA

The aim of this study is to understand the system of transport and communications in Sri Lanka from the earliest times upto the sixteenth century A.D. The study will attempt to identify the network of ancient roads and to examine the operations pertaining to the construction of roads connecting the political centres with provincial administrative centres and seaports as well as the nature of the modes of conveyance including water transport. The study is also directed towards examining the functional aspects of the transport and communications system particularly in administration and warfare and in social relations. The implications of political power wielded by the authorities and the manner in which the transport system was tied up with trade will also be investigated.

The Pali chronicles use the terms *mahāmagga* and *mahāpāṭha* to denote main roads. In the context of ancient Sri Lankan history, defining these terms is somewhat difficult because they have a wider connotation in the present context. For convenience wide roads connecting political centres, ports and market towns can be identified as main roads. It is reasonable to believe that some of these were better maintained and well paved closer to political centres, ports and market-towns but certain stretches in remote areas were nothing more than gravel roads.

Obviously in the early stages of state formation there were only a few roads, but in course of time new roads were added to the communications network. Some of these roads were constructed to facilitate human movements and commodity transport from port-towns to political centres, and some from political centres to regional centres and market-towns for purposes of administration.

During times of warfare some new roads were constructed and existing tracks were enlarged to facilitate the movement of armies. With the development of state-sponsored large irrigation schemes some of the bunds of the larger reservoirs such as Kalavewa also turned out to be main roads and were added to the communications network.<sup>1</sup>

One of the earliest main roads joined Anuradhapura with Jambukōlapattana, a port in the northern tip of the Jaffna Peninsula. On this road a bridge spanned the Malvatu Oya. At the ends of the bridge were stone posts fixed in rocks on the bed of the river, a few of which were visible at the banks until recently. The road passed immediately below the embankment of a large and very early reservoir called Pavatukulam. Across the water, which escaped over the waste-weir or flood-escape, the road was carried by means of another bridge consisting of stone beams laid on stone posts, part of it still remaining at the spot.<sup>2</sup> It is known that Omantai was a halting place when the Tooth Relic was brought from Jaffna to Anuradhapura.<sup>3</sup> From these scraps of information it can be gathered that this highway probably ran via Rambava, Pavatukulam, Omantai, Vavunikulam and onto Jaffna.<sup>4</sup> Indian armies landing at Jambukōlapattana had invariably followed this route in proceeding to Rajarata. It seems that this road had been well established by the third century B.C., for it is recorded that during the time of Devanampiya Tissa (250-210 B.C.) a branch of the sacred bodhi tree, placed on a beautifully decorated chariot, was brought in a

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1. *UHC* Vol. I, Pt. I, p. 15.
  2. H. Parker, *Ancient Ceylon*, 2nd AES Reprint, Delhi, (1984) p. 243; Wilhelm Geiger, *Culture of Ceylon in Mediaeval Times*, Wiesbaden, (1960) p. 106.
  3. R.L. Brohier, *Ancient Irrigation Works of Ceylon*, Colombo, (1935) p. 21.
  4. M.Z. Ismail, *Spatial Interaction between Settlements in the Northern Dry Zone Lowlands of Ceylon, A Study in Historical Geography*, Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, University of Colombo, (1982) p. 214.

procession to Anuradhapura along this road.<sup>5</sup> This road did not lose its importance when Jambukolappattana lost its prominence after the tenth century and was connected to Uratota, modern Kayts, the port in the Peninsula which replaced Jambukolapattana.<sup>6</sup>

Another main road connected Anuradhapura with the great port, Mahatittha or Mantai, on the north-western coast. This was an important commercial route through which the bulk of the imports was transported to the capital and export commodities were despatched to the port. The lucrative trade between Sri Lanka and the Tamil kingdoms of South India in pearls, precious stones, spices, elephants, horses and cloth through the port of Mantai helped the development of this route from early Christian times. Besides, this route was extensively used by South Indian invaders advancing from the seaport towards the capital.<sup>7</sup> Local rulers sending forces to help their allies in South India also followed the same route from Anuradhapura to Mahatittha.<sup>8</sup>

Many more roads have radiated from the capital to the immediate suburbs. The capital city, Anuradhapura, had four gates, of which those in the northern and southern walls are still traceable. The eastern gate was approached from the ancient road running from Mihintale to Anuradhapura. This road crossed the Malvatu Oya just near the middle of the eastern wall by a stone bridge, the remnants of which are still visible.<sup>9</sup> The road from

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5. MV, XIX, 23-29.

6. K. Indrapala, "The Nainativu Tamil Inscription of Parakramabahu I, U.C.R. (April, 1963) p. 63-70; K.A.N. Sastri, *The Colas*, Vol. II, Pt. I (1936) p.3.

7. MV, XXV, 79-80; CV, LVIII, 13-14; 44-45; LXI, 26-27.

8. MV, XXV, 1-52; CV, LXXVI, 85.

9. H. Parker, *op.cit.*, p. 272.

the northern Peninsula joined the city by the northern gate, and likewise, the western and southern gates would also have been connected by main roads approaching the city from the suburbs.

Although Polonnaruva became the capital only in the eleventh century, its proximity to the east coast had resulted in the establishment of settlements around the area from ancient times. The region was agriculturally developed at least as early as the fourth century A.D. and Polonnaruva was an important military post long before that due to its strategic location. The strategic importance of Polonnaruva lay in the fact that it controlled access into Rohana, and from Rohana into the northern plain through the passes at Dāstota (දාස්තොත) and Magantota (මාගන්තොත) along the Mahaveli river. From about the seventh century A.D. Polonnaruva also served as a secondary capital for the kings of Anuradhapura. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that communications between Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva were relatively developed from ancient times. In fact, the description of the campaigns of Dutthagamani against Elaka clearly indicates that there had been a main road from Anuradhapura to Polonnaruva and from there, via Dāstota ford along the right bank of the Mahaveli river, to Mahiyangana, Yudaganava, Buttala and Kataragama up to Tissamaharama or Mahagama.<sup>10</sup> This was the main approach road from the north-central regions to the southern principality. In the twelfth century Nissankamalla (1187-96) improved this road and caused inscribed pillars to be erected at each *gavava* to indicate the distance from one area to another.<sup>12</sup> Some of these pillars have been discovered and inscriptions on them published, while some lie in places such as Ratkinda temple and in the Bintenna area coming under the

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10. *MV*, XXV 1-52.

11. *Gavava* is equivalent to 2.84 miles

12. *CISG. II*, p. 129-34; *EP. I*, No. 15.

Mahaveli system C.<sup>13</sup> This ancient road was in use until the modern network of roads was constructed, and in 1815 major Davy too took this route to Kataragama.<sup>14</sup>

At least in the twelfth century there were two other roads leading to the north-central plains from the southern coast. One was called the "high-road of the sea coast" (*Velamahapatha*)<sup>15</sup> traces of which have been recognized by Geiger in a southerly direction.<sup>16</sup> It started at Ambalantota (*Mahanagahula*) and Tissamaharama (Magama) and went along the eastern coast on to Cagama which has been identified by Nicholas as Sakaman to the west of Tirukovil,<sup>17</sup> and up to Mahiyangana, and from there to Polonnaruva.

The other road started from Ambalantota and went along the southern coast through Dondra (*Devanagara*) Valigama (*Valukagama*) to Bentota (*Bhimatittha*) Totagamava (*Thitthagama*) Kalutara (*Kalatittha*) and via Dakkhinadesa through Nuvarakela near Hettipola (*Muhunuaru*), Batalagoda (*Badalatittha*), Manikdena South of Dambulla (*Buddhagama*), Magalla or Nikaveratiya (*Mahagalla*), Mahamadagalla near Polpitiyagama (*Mandagalla*) to Anuradhapura.<sup>18</sup> Certain

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13. I am grateful to Mr. Piyasena Gamlath for this information, which was later verified by me.
14. John Davy, *An Account of Interior of Ceylon*, first published in 1821, Tisara Press Reprint, Colombo, (1983) p. 305-314.
15. CV, LVIII, 41.
16. Wilhelm Geiger, *op.cit.*, p. 105.
17. C.W. Nicholas, "Historical Topography of Ancient and Mediaeval Ceylon" *JRASCE*, N.S., VI, (1963) p. 30.
18. CV, LVIII, 42-44; LXXV, 36-61; UHC, I, Pt. II. p. 426; Geiger, *op.cit.* p. 105, Nicholas, *op.cit.*, p. 71-72.

stretches of this road were widely used in and after the twelfth century as the period coincides with the settlement expansion in the region. It is also likely that the southern direction of this road was improved and connected to commercially important centres such as Beruvala, Colombo and Wattala in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva were also connected with Trincomalee (the ancient Gokanna) by two main roads. The remains of two ancient stone bridges have been found near Mahakanadarava tank and on the Yan Oya near Ratmale. These probably marked the ancient road to Trincomalee which almost follows the present one. Thus, this road ran by way of Mihintale, Mahakanadarawa, Pankulam and then reached on to Trincomalee.<sup>19</sup> Panduwasudeva, who succeeded Upatissa as the king in the fifth century B.C., landed at Gokanna<sup>20</sup> and proceeded interior perhaps along this road. The road from Polonnaruva to Trincomalee would have followed the present road *via* Giritale, Minneriya, Kantalai and on to Trincomalee. However, the ancient port of Gokanna, although important as a landing place, was not so important commercially, and so this road would not have been used as frequently as that between Anuradhapura and Kantalai.

It is likely that when Sigiriya was the capital under Kassapa I (473-91) some routes of communication existed between Sigiriya and the important political, commercial and military centres in the north-central plain, but unfortunately the available evidence does not help us to understand the manner in which Kassapa and his court maintained administrative and communication links with the rest of the country.

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19. M.Z. Ismail, *op.cit.*, p. 216-17.

20. *Vamsatthappakāsini*, ed. G.P. Malalasekara, P.T.S., London, (1935) p. 269.



From about the middle of the thirteenth century, when the Sinhalese kingdoms drifted to the south-west, communications were relatively improved in these regions. Vijayabahu IV (1270-1272) improved the road between Polonnaruva and Dambadeniya by levelling it and built wayside shelters at distances of half a *yोजना*,<sup>21</sup> or approximately six miles. It is said that carriages drawn by horses, and rows of elephants moved on this road during a festival,<sup>22</sup> a factor which indicates that the road was wide and levelled. When Yapahuwa and Kurunegala became capitals the Polonnaruva-Dambadeniya road may have been further extended, or existing tracks may have been enlarged to connect those capitals. However, it seems that the communications network of Dambadeni, Yapahu and Kurunegala kingdoms was very inadequate when compared to that of the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva kingdoms.

Much of the highland above about 2,000 feet was largely unpopulated till the thirteenth century, except along the roads to Adam's Peak. Even these roads leading to Adam's Peak had been tracks or footpaths, but in and after the twelfth century certain stretches of these roads had been gradually developed so that ox-wagons and carriages drawn by horses could pass along those stretches. The *Cūlavamsa* attests that there were three pilgrims' routes to Sumanakūta, or Adam's Peak, in the reign of Vijayabahu I (1070-1111). The first was through Gilimale in the Kuruvita Korale of the Ratnapura district.<sup>23</sup> The Rajarata road was through Kadaligama,<sup>24</sup> present Kehelgamuwa near Ginigathena. This apparently refers to one

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21. CV, LXXXIX, 13-14.

22. CV, LXXIX, 55-56.

23. CV, LXXV, 36-61; C.W. Nicholas, *op.cit.* p. 71-72.

24. CV, LX, 64-66.

of the ancient roads connecting Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva with Mahagama,<sup>25</sup> which bifurcated at a place like Buddhagama or Manikdena south of Dambulla.<sup>26</sup> In the Ambagamuva inscription, found at the sixth mile on the present Navalapitiya-Hatton road, Vijayabahu I states that he provided almshalls on the Rajarata road to Adam's Peak at intervals of five *gavvas*.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently Nissankamalla (1187-96) and Parakramabahu II (1236-70) went in pilgrimage to Adam's Peak. It is likely that these kings used all available means of communication such as the elephant, the horse, the palanquin and the carriage drawn by horses in this journey, each mode of conveyance depending on the nature of the stretch to be covered. The third route to Adam's Peak was from Huva, or Uva, which was used by pilgrims coming from the Rohana region. Vijayabahu I improved all these roads and provided resting places for monks and pilgrims.<sup>28</sup> Pilgrims coming through all these three routes climbed the rock by a narrow footpath, the ascent near the summit being facilitated by iron chains fixed to the rock wall.<sup>29</sup>

Certain stretches of these roads leading to Adam's Peak were improved from time to time by various kings. During the reign of Parakramabahu II (1236-70), the minister, Devappatiraja, improved the road from Gangasiripura, the present Gampola, to Bodhitale, or Botale. At Botale he built a bridge of thirty five cubits in length and proceeded to Kahajjotanadi or Kanamadiiri Oya, where a bridge of thirty cubits in length was built at Ulapane

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25. *EZ*, II. P. 217, note 2.

26. See above.

27. *EZ*, II, No. 35.

28. *CV*, LX, 64-66.

29. (Ed.) Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, London (1871-75) p. 298.

(Ulapanagama). Devappatiraja also built a bridge of thirty five cubits in length and a bridge of thirty four cubits in length at Ambangamuva (Ambagama).<sup>30</sup> Perhaps some of these roads and bridges, particularly those around Gampola, were further developed during the time of the Gampola kingdom (1341-1408).

According to the *Visuddhimārga Sannaya* there were three kinds of bridges, namely *dandakasetu*, *jamghasetu* and *sakata setu*.<sup>31</sup> The *dandakasetu*, otherwise known as *edanda*, was a single or double tree trunk or log passing from bank to bank of a small stream. The *jamghasetu* was a bridge which could be used by four or five people walking abreast, and the *sakatasetu* was a bridge built to take a cart across. It is most likely that most of the bridges of this sort were wide bridges on which bullock carts could pass easily. These wide bridges were mainly of wood, but as mentioned earlier, on important main roads there were stone bridges or even bridges made of iron. It is said that an army commander of Parākramabāhu I (1153-86) built a long solid bridge, twenty cubits or thirty feet broad, across the Kalā Oya, passable by elephants, horses and carriages drawn by horses. In the construction of this bridge iron bands and nails and timber had been used.<sup>32</sup>

The construction of roads and bridges was initially unplanned and undertaken when necessary. The earliest tracks or roads were prepared by settlers and migrants, and later on some of the roads were constructed owing to military requirements. But subsequently an institutional setup which could organize labour resources for road-works emerged.

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30. CV, LXXXVI, 18-24; *Pujavali*, 34th chapter ed. M. Medhankara, Colombo, 1932, p. 37; C.W. Nicholas, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

31. *Visuddhimārga Sannaya*, Vol. IV, ed. K.A. Dharmmaratana, (B.E., 2486) p. 302.

32. CV, LXX, 127-29.

For example, at least by the ninth and tenth centuries there is evidence to suggest that the *raja-kariya* services were utilized for work on roads. A pillar inscription from Mihintale, datable to the ninth century, uses the term *mang mahavar*.<sup>33</sup> An inscription on a pillar fragment at the Gonnava Devale, datable to the tenth century, uses the term *mahavar*.<sup>34</sup> According to Paranavitana *var* (skt. *vara*) means 'turn' and may denote the corvee labour which was exacted from the peasants at regular intervals or turns. *Mahavar* may therefore be rendered as the 'principal turn of service' and *mangmahavar* as the 'principal turn of service on the roads'.<sup>35</sup> It is perhaps by utilizing such corvee duty that Vijahabahu IV gathered together a large number of people from various parts of the island for improving the road from Polonnaruva to Dambadeniya.<sup>36</sup> As stated earlier, certain kings even caused the roads to be surveyed and distances from one place to another marked by erecting inscribed pillars.<sup>37</sup> This further establishes the fact that there was a properly organized machinery for the construction and maintenance of roads.

Communications in large towns were facilitated by well-laid out streets. According to Fa-Hsien, the roads and streets in the city of Anuradhapura were excellently laid out and beautifully maintained. He further states that there were four principal streets in Anuradhapura and that these streets were wide and well paved with bricks and lined with walls built of bricks.<sup>38</sup> Terracotta

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33. *EZ*, V, No. 29.

34. *EZ*, IV, No. 33.

35. *EZ*, IV, p. 191, note 2, *EZ*, V. Pt. III, p. 325.

36. *CV*, LXXXIX, 13-14.

37. *EZ* II, No. 15, *CJSG*, II, p. 129-34.

38. S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, (1869) p. 101 ff.

drains were laid under the streets for drainage purposes.<sup>39</sup> Some of the streets were known by names such as *Candavamka vīthi*, *Mahaveli vīthi*, *Singuruvak vīthi* and *Raja vīthi*.<sup>40</sup> One of the main streets, the ceremonial street, started at the southern gate near the Thuparama, and it is said to have veered eastwards and then northwards.<sup>41</sup>

The other centres of political power such as Polonnaruva, Mahagama, Dambadeniya, Yapahuwa and Kurunegala and large market towns such as Mantai, Padaviya and Vahalkada were also divided into different quarters by streets. According to the *Cūlavamsa*, in Polonnaruva Parakramabahu I "had different kinds of streets laid down, many hundreds in number adorned with many thousands of dwellings of two, three and more storeys and provided with various bazaars where all commodities were available."<sup>42</sup> The *Cūlavamsa* further states that there was incessant traffic of elephants, horses and carriages drawn by horses in these streets.<sup>43</sup> Although the *Cūlavamsa* account may be exaggerated, Polonnaruva was undoubtedly a developed city in the twelfth century.

Reference has been made to *Mangul Maha vīthi* and *Talaveli vīthi* in Mahagama; and *Parivāra vīthi*, *Setthi vīthi* and *Agampadi vīthi* in Dambadeniya.<sup>44</sup> Obviously

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39. S. Paranavitana, *Excavations in the Citadel of Anuradhapura*, Colombo (1936) p. 8-9.

40. *Sahassavatthapakarana*, ed. A.P. Buddadatta, Ambalangoda, (1959) p. 102, p. 107.

41. *Sumangalavilāsini*, vol. II, P.T.S. London, (1931) p. 572-73.

42. *CV*, LXXXIII, 148-50.

43. *ibid.*

44. *Sahassavatthapakarana*, *op.cit.*, p. 102, p. 117, *Dalada Pūjāvali*, ed. Kanadulle Ratharamsi, (contd.)

towns were focal points of spatial mobility and were linked with far-away places in the countryside by routes of communication which tended to radiate from the city to the agricultural hinterlands that surrounded or skirted them. There were people living in the periphery of cities, who moved in and out of them daily on various kinds of business. Thus, communications within the city and the immediately surrounding area were very much better than in the countryside.

In addition to roads, streets, footpaths and tracks, rivers were also used as a means of communication, but the geography of the island posed sharp limitations on their use. There is no doubt that, during the early stages of settlement expansion, numerous rivers and streams were crossed by rafts (*pahuru*), barges (*paru*) and small boats (*oru*)<sup>45</sup> and that these means of water-transport continued to be in use even after road transport systems developed. Rafts and barges were made of the lopped-off branches of the bamboos or pieces of wood,<sup>46</sup> and boats were usually carved out of wooden logs. The *Culavamsa* refers to the anchoring of small ships (*nabayo*) in the Mahaveli river,<sup>47</sup> which indicates that up to a point the river was navigable, although navigation was not possible in most parts of the Mahaveli or any other river.

Colombo, (1954) p. 54, *Saddharmalankara*, ed. Bentara Sradhhatissa, Panadura, (1934) p. 460, p. 500, p. 505, p. 520, p. 553, *Visuddhimaggasannaya*, vol. I, *op.cit.*, p. 166.

45. *Jataka Atuvā Gatapadaya*, ed. D.B. Jayatilaka, Colombo, (1943) p. 159. *Dhampiya Atuvā Gatapadaya*, ed. D.B. Jayatilaka, Colombo (1932) p. 144.
46. ed. Mahdi Hussain, *The Rehla of Iban Batuta*, Baroda, (1953) p. 218.
47. *CV*, LXXVIII, 29.

One of the chief means of conveyance on land was the cart drawn by bullocks, which was commonly called *sakata* in Pali and *gala* in Sinhala. These were drawn by oxen and were used for passenger transport as well as for commodity transport. As indicated by the Madirigiriya pillar inscription and the pillar inscription from Mahakalattawa, even buffaloes had been used in carts in ancient Sri Lanka.<sup>48</sup> But mostly small quick zebu oxen would have been used as draught animals. The cart was the most commonly used means of transport for long distance travel, and therefore some main roads and tracks were known as 'cart-road' or *gal manga*.<sup>49</sup> Mercantile groups, who transported commodities in bulk, depended on the bullock-cart for such travel and they even travelled from the northern Dry Zone plains to the hill country to fetch commodities of trade such as ginger and turmeric.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps the cart was similar to the modern two-wheeled bullock-cart, which is protected from sun and rain by a thatch of plaited palm leaves. The cart drawn by buffaloes would have been designed differently.

Apart from being used in carts, bullocks were also used as pack animals or draught animals. According to the Badulla pillar inscription of the tenth century A.D., transporting commodities to market towns was largely done by using pack animals.<sup>51</sup> Undoubtedly there would have been wayside stop-overs all over the country for groups of *tavalam*, or pack animals, and ox-wagons from very

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48. EZ, II, No. 16, EZ, V, No. 31.

49. EZ, I, No. II.

50. MV, XXVIII, 24-35; *Sinhala Thupavamsa*, ed. Vataddara Medhananda, Colombo, (1950) p. 166; *Racavahini*, ed. Sarnatissa thera, Colombo (B.E. 2434) p. 109.

51. EZ, V, Pt. II, No. 16.

ancient times. One such stop-over known as *Tavalāna* close to Bentota, and a caravan leader, *Sattuna*, are referred to in the Galapāta vihara inscription of Parakramabahu II.<sup>52</sup>

Irrespective of the movement of trade commodities on bullock-carts or pack animals between commodity-producing areas and towns and urban centres, the pattern of economic activity and the nature of communications in the countryside restricted mobility. The limited needs of the villagers for products that were not available locally were supplied by itinerant traders operating from market towns and cities that were close to them. These itinerant traders operated along main roads, tracks, river crossings and footpaths and a pingo, or *kada*, was commonly used by them to carry small quantities of merchandise.<sup>53</sup>

The majority of the ordinary people walked even when travelling long distances, usually carrying their own food.<sup>54</sup> Therefore wayside shelters known as *agantukasāla* or *sāla* in Pali and *ambalāna* in Sinhala.<sup>55</sup> were a common feature on widely used roads and tracks. These ancient wayside shelters would not have been very different from those of the eighteenth century described by Coomaraswamy. According to him, the pillars of *ambalānas* were of stone, supported on carved wooden brackets and had open timbered roofs covered with tiles. The smallest *ambalāna* consisted of a foundation of four beams with four posts at the

52. *EZ*, IV, No. 25.

53. *Jātaka Atuva Gatapadaya*, *op.cit.*, p. 13

54. *Elu Attanagalu Vamea*, ed. Munidasa Cumaratunga, Colombo (B.E. 2404) p. 34; *Saddhamalankara*, *op.cit.*, p. 722.

55. *CV*, LXXIX, 20-22; 63-64, 80; LXXXIX, 15; *Khankavitarani Pitapota*, ed. K. Pannasekara, Colombo, (1936) p. 58.

corners and a thatched roof; the better ones had more pillars and were sometimes divided into compartments for the convenience of those having to spend the night there.<sup>56</sup>

The modes of conveyance of the nobility were diverse. Horses, mainly imported from Sind, apart from being used in the king's stables, were utilized for travel by members of the royal family, army commanders, ministers and similar dignitaries. Although sparingly used, horses had also been utilized in warfare<sup>57</sup> and cavalry constituted a section of the traditional four-fold army. (*senācaturāni*).<sup>58</sup>

Carriages drawn by horses too were used in warfare but not frequently and that too depending on the geographical conditions of the battlefield. Rak̄kha, a general of Parakramabahu I, having defeated Gajabahu's (1132-52) armies at Aligama (present Alagamuwa on the Navula-Elehera road) is said to have captured carriages drawn by horses along with implements of war.<sup>59</sup> In another instance, a general of Gajabahu, having been defeated by Parakramabahu, is said to have left the horse-carriage and umbrella and fled into the forest.<sup>60</sup> Carriages drawn by horses, perhaps different from those used in warfare, were also used on certain festive occasions. It is said that Parakramabahu II, in the celebrations of the Tooth and the Bowl relics, placed the two relics on a vehicle (*ratha*) adorned with many kinds of ornaments.<sup>61</sup> Vijayabahu IV (1270-72) brought the Tooth and the Bowl relics on a vehicle from Jambudoni to Pulatthinagara.<sup>62</sup>

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56. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, 2nd ed. New York, (1956) p. 116.

57. *MV*, XXIII, 71; XXXI 38; *CV*, L, 26-28; LXX, 299.

58. *EZ*, II, Nos. 14, 23; *CV*, LXX, 226-27; LXXXII, 220.

59. *CV*, LXX, 122.

60. *CV*, LXX, 85.

61. *CV*, LXXXV, 25.

62. *CV*, LXXXIX, 55-56.

The Galpota inscription refers to a designation titled *Vāhananayaka*.<sup>63</sup> Paranavitana renders the term *Vāhananayaka* as 'Commander of Vehicles' or 'the Chief of the Department of Vehicles'. Further, he equates the title *Vāhananayaka* with the office of *Yan-tan-navan* of the same inscription. Most probably the horse-drawn carriages and such other vehicles of the king were in charge of the officer who held this title; but the manner in which this office functioned cannot be determined in the light of the available evidence.

In addition to carriages drawn by horses, in exceptional circumstances the elephant also had been used in drawing vehicles. The *Daladā Siritā* states that a vehicle drawn by an elephant was used in a procession in which the Tooth Relic was taken.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps in transporting large stone slabs for the construction of reservoirs and sometimes for the setting up of slab inscriptions, elephants, or wheeled platform drawn by elephants, were used. The postscript of the Polonnaruva Galpota slab inscription of Nissankamalla states that the slab in which the inscription is engraved was brought there from Sagiri<sup>65</sup> by the soldiers of Nissankamalla. According to Burrows and Wickramasinghe the Sagiri referred to in this instance is Mihintale<sup>66</sup>, while Muller is of the opinion that the original home of the slab was not Sagiri but Sigiri, which is situated only about fifteen miles from Polonnaruva.<sup>67</sup> In any case this huge slab was brought to Polonnaruva from a considerable distance. Most probably a wheeled platform or a carriage drawn by elephants was used by the soldiers of Nissankamalla to transport this slab.

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63. EZ, V. no. 17.

64. *Daladā Siritā*, ed. Vajira Ratnasooriya, Colombo (1949) p. 50.

65. EZ, V. No. 17.

66. S.M. Burrows, "A Year's Work at Polonnaruva", *JRASCB* X, No. 34, (1889) p. 46-49; EZ, II, p. 99.

67. ed. E. Muller, *Ancient Inscriptions of Ceylon*, London, (1882-83) p. 66.

The king sometimes rode an elephant during festive processions and in war.<sup>68</sup> The chronicles describe how elephants sheathed in protective armour were goaded on to break down city walls and gates, while the defenders stationed on the top of the wall counteracted by hurling weapons and pouring down molten pitch on the attackers.<sup>69</sup> The elephants formed the first category of the traditional fourfold army and were used particularly to break up the fortress walls of the rivals. But the number of animals used in each battle would have been rather small and in certain wars fought in the thickly wooded areas the elephant, the horse and the horse-drawn chariot would never have been used.

The palanquin or litter known by terms such as *sivikā*, *sivige*, *idoli*, *doli* and *kunam*<sup>70</sup> was an important means of conveyance and was mostly used by the king, ladies of the court and high dignitaries, including Buddhist monks. The chronicles refer to instances of the king and his officers being carried in palanquins even in war.<sup>71</sup> The *Dambadeni Katikavata* warns that monks in monasteries should not use palanquins as their private property.<sup>72</sup> John De Marignolli refers to palanquins made of coconut wood and palanquin bearers of Ceylon.<sup>73</sup> According to Iban Batuta, the Aryacakravarti had given him a *dōlā*, or a palanquin, to proceed to Adam's Peak, which was carried

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68. MV, XXV, 67-70.
69. MV, XXV, 26-40; *Sinhala Thupavamsa* ed. W.A. Samarasekara, Colombo, (1914) p. 132-33.
70. MV, XXXII, *Vesaturudasanne* ed. D.E. Hettiaracchi, Colombo, (1950) p. 20; *Saddharmalankara*, *op.cit.*, p.442.
71. MV, XXXII, 7; CV, Pt. I, p. 328, note 2; CV, LXVII, i, XC.5.
72. *Dambadeni Katikavata*, ed., Dhammindaśabha and Denagama Pragnasāra, Colombo (1927) p. 18.
73. ed. Henry Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Hakluyt Society, London, (1866) p. 366.

by the king's slaves on their shoulders.<sup>74</sup> This implies that there were people who were assigned the *rajakariya* duty of bearing the palanquins, as it was in the Kandyan period.<sup>75</sup> The Mankanai inscription of Gajabahu II indicates that the royal palanquin department had been well established by the Polonnaruva period similar to the *kunam maduwa*, or the royal palanquin establishment of the Kandyan period. The Mankanai inscription refers to a land grant made to the overseer of the palanquin bearers of the king.<sup>76</sup>

In the Kandyan period none below the royal family could sit while an *adikarama* or a chief minister was standing, nor could a person ride on an elephant, horse or in a palanquin while an *adikarama* was on foot; he was also obliged to give way to the *adikarama* when passing. When a *disave* or a chief of a province entered his province, he could ride in a palanquin, but not when attending the king.<sup>77</sup> Probably similar customs prevailed in earlier periods as well.

The foregoing study of the routes, ways and means of communications indicate that mobility in ancient and mediaeval Sri Lankan society was limited to a considerable extent. The communication process was relatively slow when compared to the countries in which the horse was a regular means of conveyance. Nevertheless there were organized communication links connecting the capitals, ports, market towns and large and small villages.

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74. *The Rehla, op.cit.*, p. 218.

75. Ralph Peiris, *Sinhalese Social Organization*, Colombo, (1956), p. 17, 116, 122.

76. K. Kanapati Pillai "Mankanai Inscription of Gajabahu II" *UCR*, XX, No. 1 (1962) p. 12-14.

77. Ralph Pieris, *op.cit.*, p. 22-23.

The capitals like Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa were served by reasonably good roads connecting them with major ports, market-towns, as well as with the settlements of the immediate suburbs. Immediate suburbs of the capital were dependent on it with regard to educational and health facilities. The capital was also the centre of administration, religious ritual, entertainment, trade in luxury commodities such as fine cloth, perfumes and wines, and therefore attracted outsiders throughout the year.

It is possible that imported luxury commodities were conveyed from port towns and the capital to the other towns where there was a demand for such commodities. Towns such as Padaviya and Vahalkada were large centres with urban functions and had separate market sectors with shops selling a variety of goods. To those centres people moved from surrounding areas for specialized services. Entertainment and religious functions were better organized in these places, for many festivals were celebrated at them and on a grander scale than in the villages.<sup>78</sup>

Those who lived in cities, market-towns, port-towns and closer to *mahapathas* or important roads were undoubtedly exposed to greater outside influence, including ideas. Their needs were also better supplied, as some of the luxury commodities entered their markets. Local goods from the villages moved upwards from the countryside on ox-wagons and pack-bullocks to the towns, the capital and the ports, and these operations too benefited those living closer to the *mahapathas*. But at the same time they came under the stronger administration of the king and his officers.

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78. M.Z. Ismal, *op.cit.*, p. 201-208.

Only the pedlar and the hawker helped to link the numerous village communities into some sort of trading network. The majority of the villagers, it would seem, have been confined to their own localities except on the occasions when they went on pilgrimages or flocked to a nearby large village or a town to witness festivals. To a large extent the villages were spatially restricted societies, where close interaction was only among the villagers themselves and among other nearby settlements. These considerably self-sufficient local units existed with close cooperation and interdependence among the inhabitants within a locality. On the other hand, in times of distress, such as famines and plagues, very little outside help came to them. This explains why several regional famines are referred to as major famines in the chronicles.<sup>79</sup>

Administratively the village was ruled by a village headman, known by various designations such as *gamika* and *gamabhōjaka* in the early Anuradhapura period, and later by a *gamanayaka* assisted by village committees.<sup>80</sup> These villages enjoyed a greater autonomy on account of the poor communication system but were answerable to the central administration through royal officers who went on circuit once a year.<sup>81</sup> There are also instances of people living in remote areas refusing to pay taxes when the king's authority was weak,<sup>82</sup> and rebels collecting

79. MV. XXXII, 29-30; CV, XLI, 75-80.

80. UHC, I, Pt. I, p. 235; CV, LXVIII, 53.

81. UHC, I, Pt. I, p. 373; Wilhelm Geiger, *op.cit.*, p. 142-43.

82. CV, LXI, 70-71.

forces in inaccessible regions. Thus, in theory, the suzerainty of the king extended to the remotest village but, in practice, the degree of state control over any region was in inverse ratio to its distance and accessibility from the administrative centre.

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