

## COMMUNICATIONS

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON A SRI LANKAN  
CITY COMPLEX (KANDY)

This paper is an attempt to throw light on some aspects of the city complex of Kandy, the ancient hill capital of Sri Lanka, from the evidence culled out of recent excavations conducted under the auspices of the UNESCO - Sri Lanka 'Cultural Triangle' Project. The Cultural Triangle consists of six projects, of which Kandy is one. The Kandy archaeological project, which was commenced in 1981, primarily concentrates on the ancient Palace Complex together with four major shrines of Gods which are ancillary to the complex (Fig. 1).

The study of the city is significant for several reasons. It is the only capital city of Sri Lanka which came into contact with, and which was very much influenced by Indian as well as Western European powers, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. The resultant political legitimization of power in this final phase of Sri Lanka's indigenous rule ranked very high in the organization of the political, social, religious and cultural lifestyle of the present times.

Kandy remains the only ancient city that continues at the present times as a living city, with all its ancient buildings being used for various purposes. Kandy constitutes one of the major attractions for the tourist, where one could enjoy the living cultural traditions of the past, architecture, sculpture, murals, traditional crafts of ivory, lapidary, tapestry, metalware etc.

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This paper was presented to the South-Asian Archaeological Congress, University of Wisconsin, Madison, in November 1986.

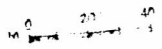
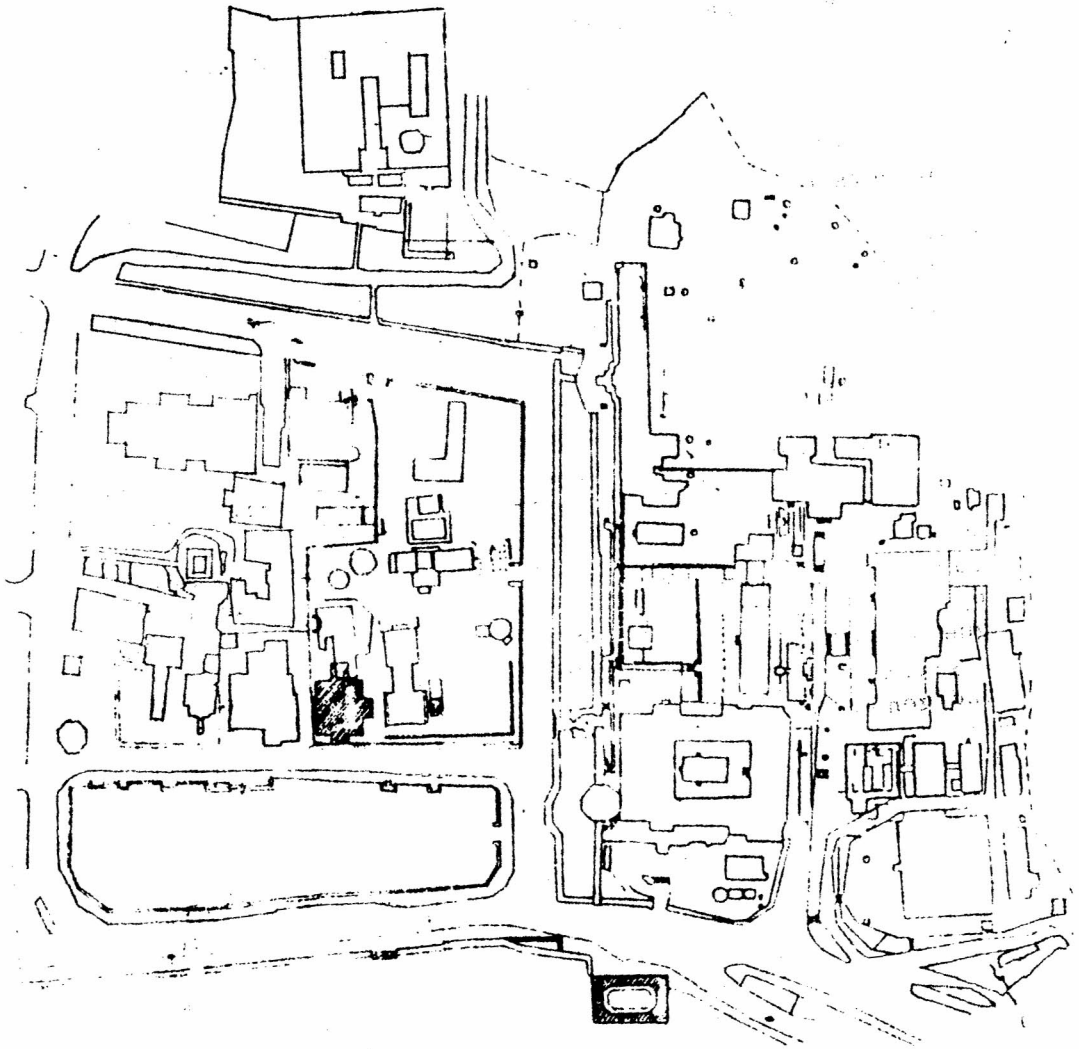


FIG. 1

The situation of Kandy (*Kanda*, meaning hill) in a valley among the central hills at an altitude of more than 1600 ft. above sea level, with a salubrious climate and girdled by the longest river of Sri Lanka, river Mahaveli (the Ganges of Ptolemy), affords the corrent environment for the sustenance of a rural economy on which the effects of modernization have been very minimal.

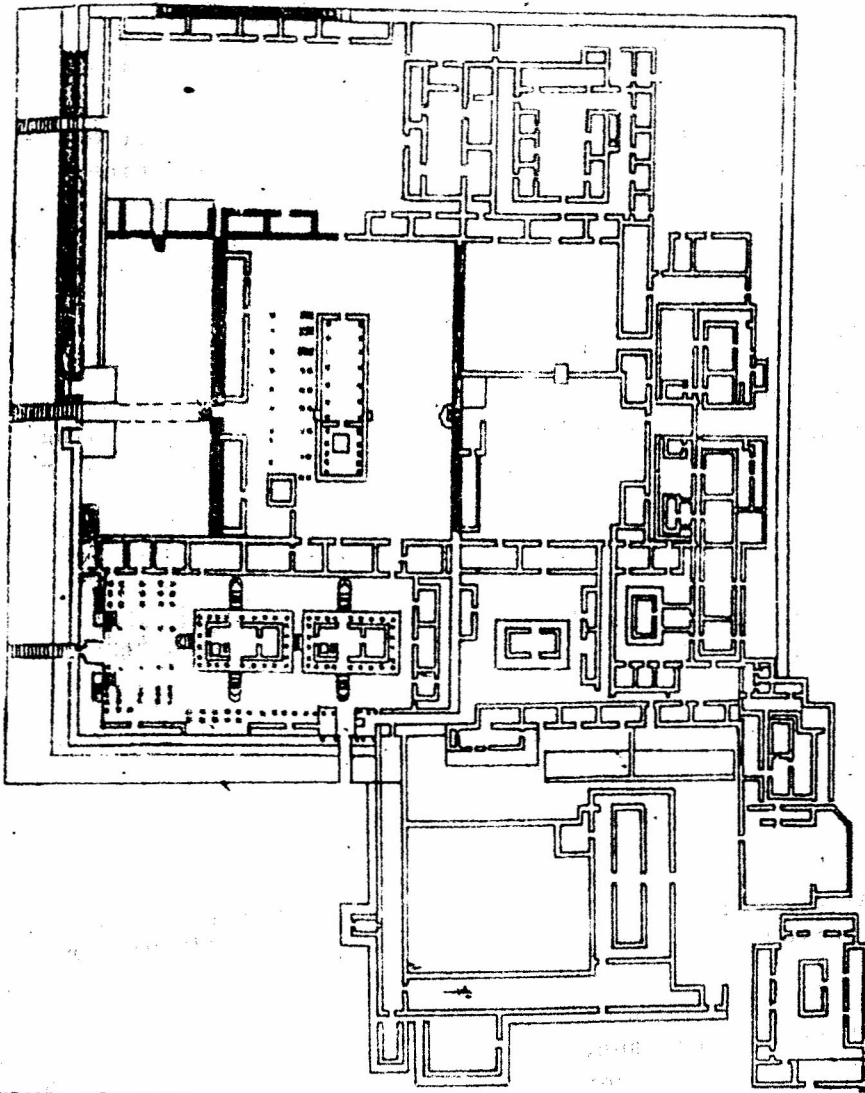
The foundation of a royal residence in Kandy goes back to the 14th century, though the establishment of the capital city commenced with the ruler named Vimaladharmasuriya I, who ascended the throne in 1592 A.D. A host of other rulers (8) followed in succession, the more important among them being Narendrasinghe, Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe, and the last ruler, Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe, who was captured by the British in 1815.

It is significant that rulers after Narendrasinghe (1707-1739) were of South Indian stock, known as Nayakkars. This kind of intermingling inevitably resulted in the introduction of South Indian lifestyles to a significant extent.

"The Nayakkar rulers, in their eagerness to compensate for their marginal political status as a foreign dynasty, extended the most lavish patronage to the regeneration of the authentic religious and cultural traditions of the people." (Welandawe - 1983).

The religious and cultural legitimation reached its height under the patronage of Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe (1747-1782). A Western power, namely the Portuguese, had already established themselves in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the 16th century, and they were followed by the Dutch and finally the British. In 1815 the long rule of the Sinhala political power, which lasted nearly 25 centuries, came to an end and Sri Lanka came under the colonial rule of the British Empire until it regained independence in the middle of the present century.

During the last six centuries (i.e. 15th-20th century) the entire city complex, which continuously functioned as



EXPOSED STRUCTURES

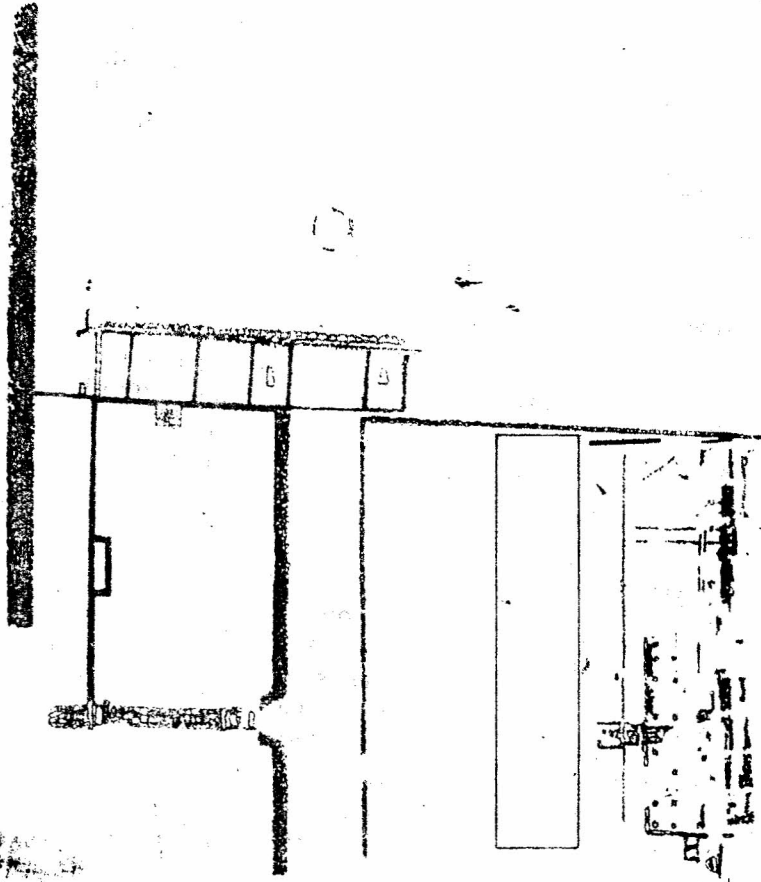
DUTCH PLAN (1765)

FIG. 2

the hill capital, went through a gradual expansion and transition - first in an indigenous atmosphere and in the latter half, with the arrival of Western powers, as a commercial city. The simple unpretentious city layout of the 15th century, with tiled or thatched buildings lying on either side of the not-too-wide streets blending with the natural environment finally was struck by the disarray caused by the vulgar taste of the dilettante. Some of the most significant edifices of the ancient political authority of the kings have been later disfigured and transformed into commercial and official establishments.

Nevertheless, the landscape and layout of the old city and its important edifices to some extent could be determined with the help of some drawings and maps executed by the European visitors during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (eg. maps of Portuguese (1602), Dutch (1765) and British (1815)). Moreover, the city of Kandy has been the subject of discussion by many scholars, travellers, ambassadors etc. during the last two centuries. There had been two main streets running North-South with cross-roads joining them. The city streets were studded here and there with residences of important ministers (Adigars) of the royal entourage, built in architectural styles of the times. The streets themselves were associated with the residences of various functions and services eg. Daladā Vīdiya (Street of the Tooth Relic, the main route of the procession of the Tooth Relic of the Buddha), Āth Vīdiya (Elephant Street, where the elephants that took part in the annual pageant were assembled), Kavikāra Vīdiya (the Street of the Musicians), Deva Sanhinda (the Street of Justice, at which the commonfolk prayed to the King to mete out justice) etc.

The Palace Complex, consisting of the royal residence and other ancillary structures, is situated in the eastern part of the valley of the city at the foot of the forest reserve (Udawatte-kele), which with its lush vegetation, adds to the picturesque backdrop of the palace edifice. On the south-western sector of the Palace terrace is located the most sacred of Buddhist edifices, the Temple of the Tooth, which is protected by a moat and a wall. The location of the Temple of the Tooth, though an object of worship,



MALIGAVA COMPLEX

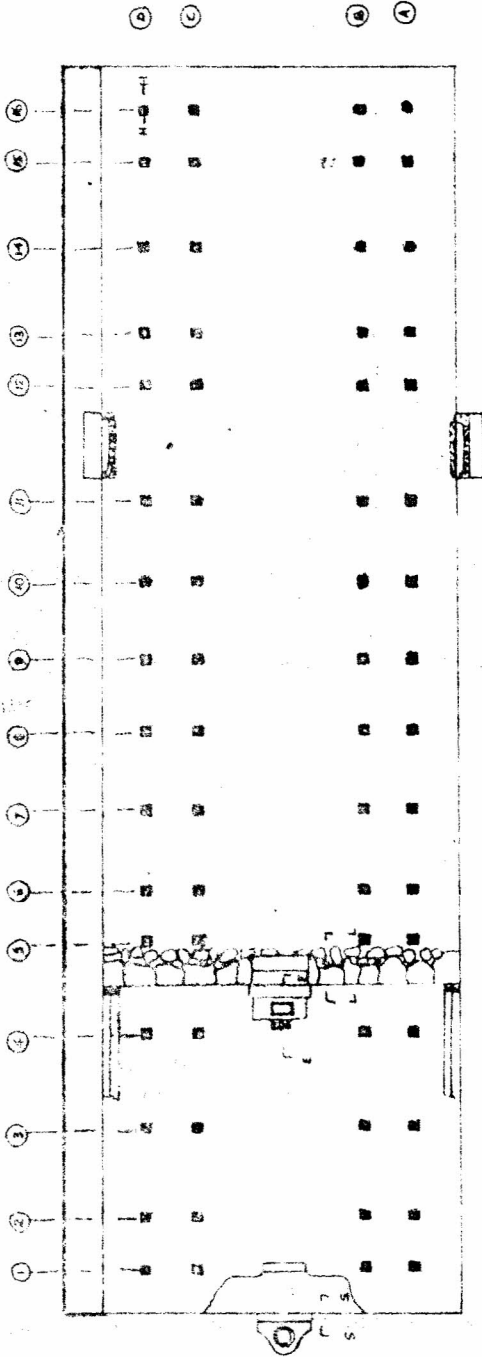
FIG. 3

within the Palace Complex, follows the tradition upheld ever since the relic was brought to Sri Lanka in the 4th century. The relic was considered the palladium of Kingship and this belief compelled the rulers to possess the Tooth Relic under their protection.

At present the Palace-cum-Temple is approached by a single drawbridge, though earlier drawings indicate the existence of three such bridges. The artificial lake (Milky Ocean) built by the last king, Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe, only a decade before his downfall, bordering the city on its South virtually forms an ornament to the city. The Palace-cum-Temple of the Tooth Relic was complemented by the establishment of shrines dedicated to the four guardian deities, Nātha, Vishnu, Kataragama (Skanda) and Pattini. The artificial terrace retained by a massive retaining wall immediately to the west of the Palace Complex, constitutes the Nātha Devāle, dedicated to the Mahayana Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara. The shrine of Vishnu is located on the terrace north of Nātha shrine and the shrine of Pattini situated on its west side. The shrine of Skanda is, however, positioned in the heart of the present city. Thus, the whole city is seen to have been laid out to conform to the following distinctive entities:

- I. Palace Complex consisting of the Temple of the Tooth Relic, royal residence, council hall, Queen's chamber, the harem, residences of the King's relatives, the baths, the treasury, kitchens, storehouses etc.
- II. The shrine complex consisting of the devāles dedicated to the four guardian deities, Nātha, Vishnu, Kataragama (Skanda) and Goddess Pattini.
- III. The city streets occupied by the ministers, servicemen and traders.

Besides, the two most important Buddhist monasteries, Malwatte and Asgiriya, which claim their descendancy from the two ancient sects of monks, the Gamavāsī (city dwellers) and Vanavāsī (forest dwellers) are found to be established on the south and the north-west hillocks guarding the city.



MAGILMADOVA : PLAN AFTER EXPOSURE

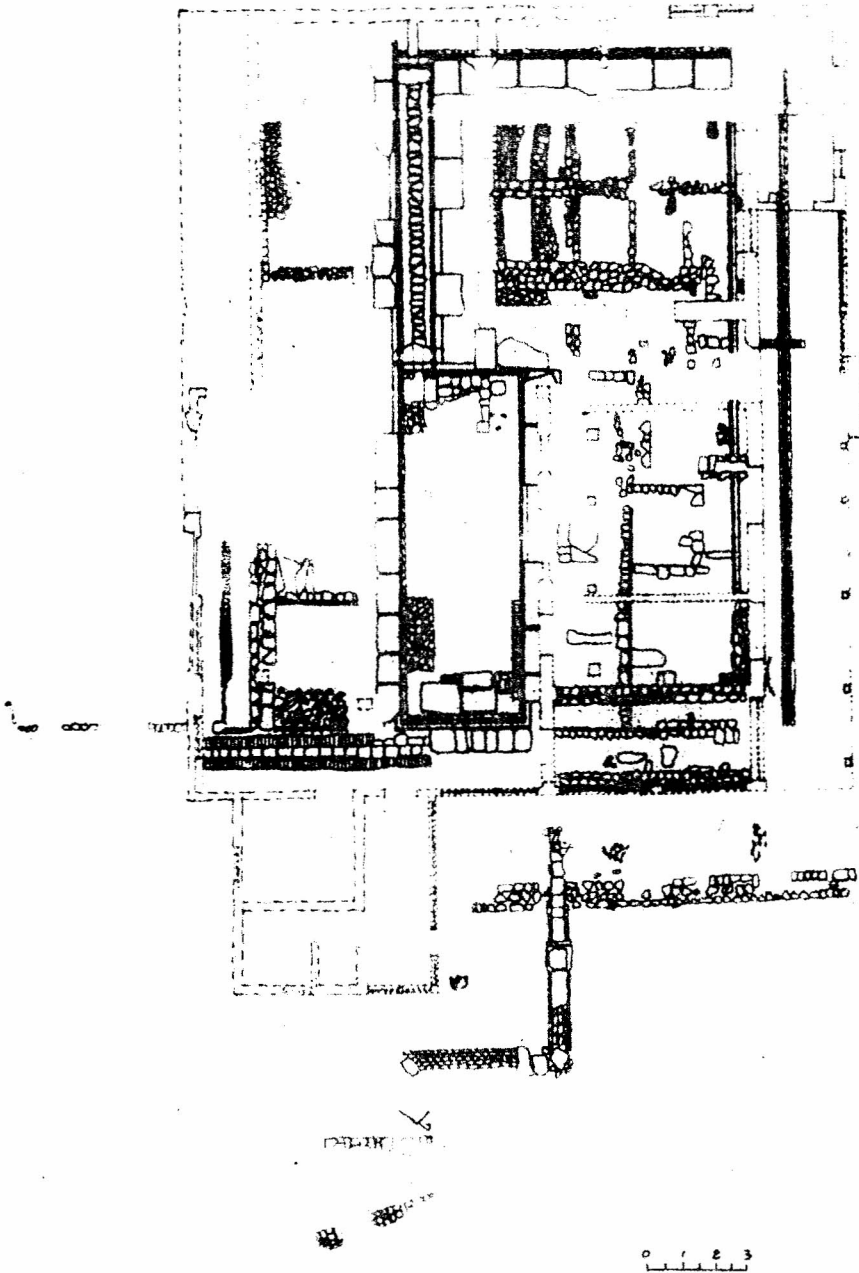
FIG. 4



The religious synthesis seen in the amalgamation of Buddhist and Hindu forms of worship, as is evidenced by the aforementioned four devales or shrines of Gods, apparently reached its zenith during the 14th century, as is evidenced by the combined shrine of Buddha and Vishnu at Gadaladeniya in the Kandy District. The syncretistic ideal of Buddhist-Hindu forms of worship was a fully established norm at the time of the Kandyan kings. This harmonious blending became more adaptable and feasible due to the firm bonds achieved by matrimonial alliances between the Sinhalese and Nayakkar families of the royalty, which soon became the ideal social order of the day.

The archaeological investigations conducted in the Palace court, together with the various edifices, have revealed important data which concretise in visual form the image created by literary and illustrative records of the past. The Palace area, now crowded with a Law Court Complex at its eastern quarter, obliterates much of the layout plan of this part of the city. The open frontage of the Palace Complex terrace, which is bounded by a massive retaining wall and a moat, had been completely filled up over the years to foundation level of the buildings of an upper terrace, and new accretions such as baths and toilets crept in along the wall. The excavations conducted in this area with a view to examining the ancient layout of this area, as evidenced by the ground plan drawing of 1765, were not in vain (Fig. 2). These investigations revealed the actual layout consisting of a centre courtyard at a lower level with a stone-paved approach leading to the council chamber built on a higher terrace. As shown in the 18th century plan, the path was entered into by a drawbridge and a flight of steps, which has completely disappeared by joining the then existing two bridges into one, as seen in modern times (Fig. 3)

The path that ran across the courtyard is actually the one that led the various foreign ambassadors to the king, who gave audiences to them in the council chamber, as described by contemporary writers (Pybus 1762). The flight of steps that led from the lower centre courtyard to the upper terrace, appeared to have possessed an archway, as seen in one of the early paintings. Though the archway has now



QUEEN'S PALACE

FIG. 5

completely disappeared, the remains of a stone slab of a female guardian exposed at the site, and other structural vestiges give an indication of the presence of such an archway in ancient times.

As indicated in the 1765 plan, the courtyard was broadened on its north side by minor adjuncts of the Palace Complex, such as stores, toilets, rooms for minor staff etc. The foundations of all such structures have been traced. A wall retaining the Palace terrace on the north side, decorated with trefoil-arch niches, tallies exactly with the boundary wall of the plan of 1765.

The continuation of the courtyard to the east of the council chamber was, until recent times, used as a car park of the Law Courts. The extension of the excavations into this section was rewarding. The subsidiary structure led by pathways adorned with entrance moonstones, as given in the plan, could be traced with some accuracy.

The King's Palace is an oblong structure of modest dimensions located at the north-west corner of the eastern-most terrace of the city. According to the chronicle *Cūlavamsa* "the Kings of Kandy built their residences, which they were ready to abandon at any time, and even set fire to, as many Kings did, when threatened with invasion". The building, however, in spite of its having been subject to renovations down to the British period, retains characteristic features of the architecture of the Kandy period. The building was finally turned into the premises of the Archaeological Museum. Investigations carried out on the northern section of the building indicates the existence of an oblong building with chamfered edges. New accretions, such as the archaeological circuit bungalow, newly built throne-room etc., when removed finally, would provide with a grand layout and a landscape of the original setting of the Kandyan times.

The most significant among secular structures is the Audience Hall, or Council Chamber (*Magul-Maduwa*), located in the open courtyard discussed above, thus dividing the latter into eastern and western sections. The hall is an open structure supported by a colonnade of beautifully carved

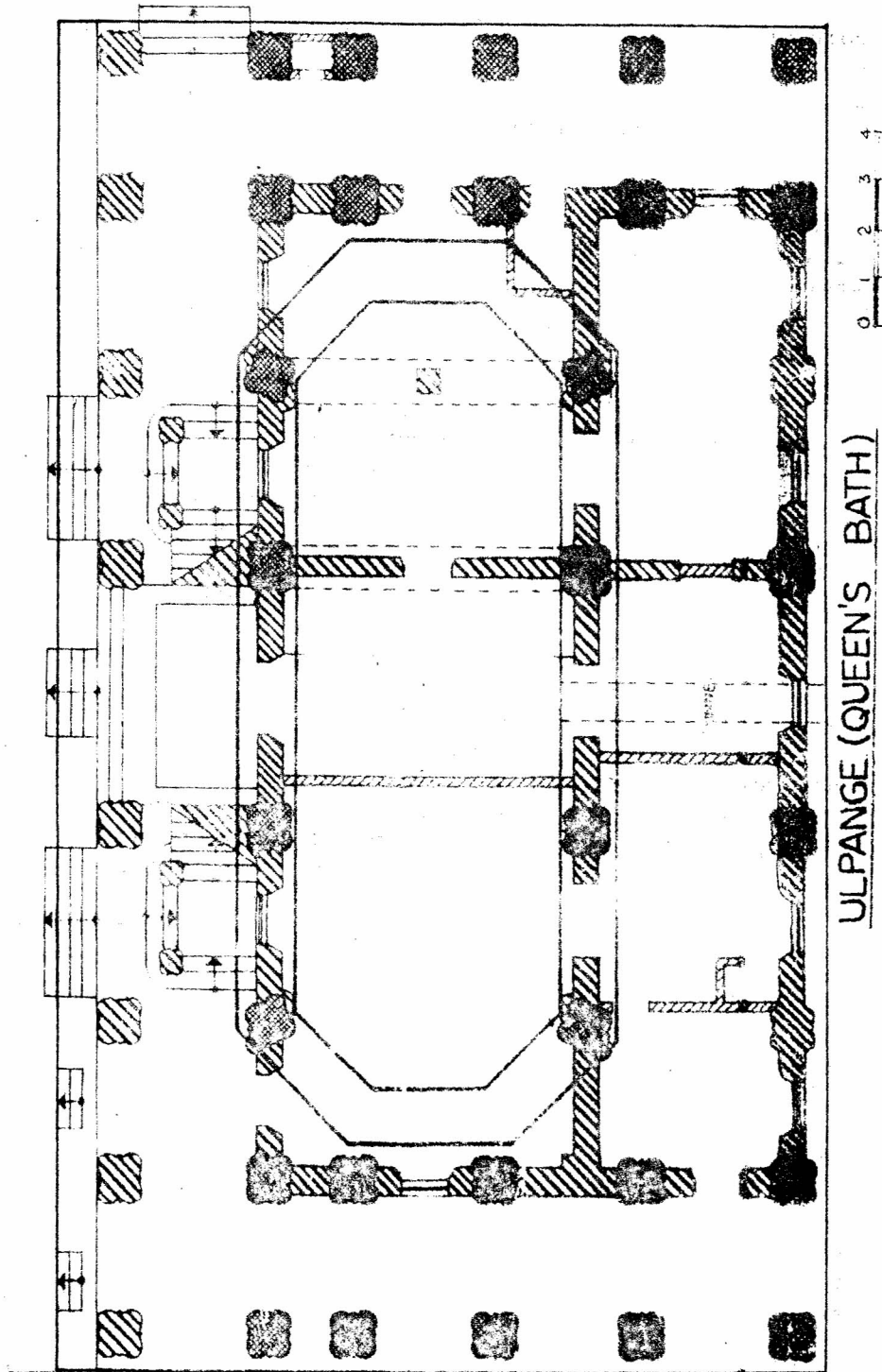


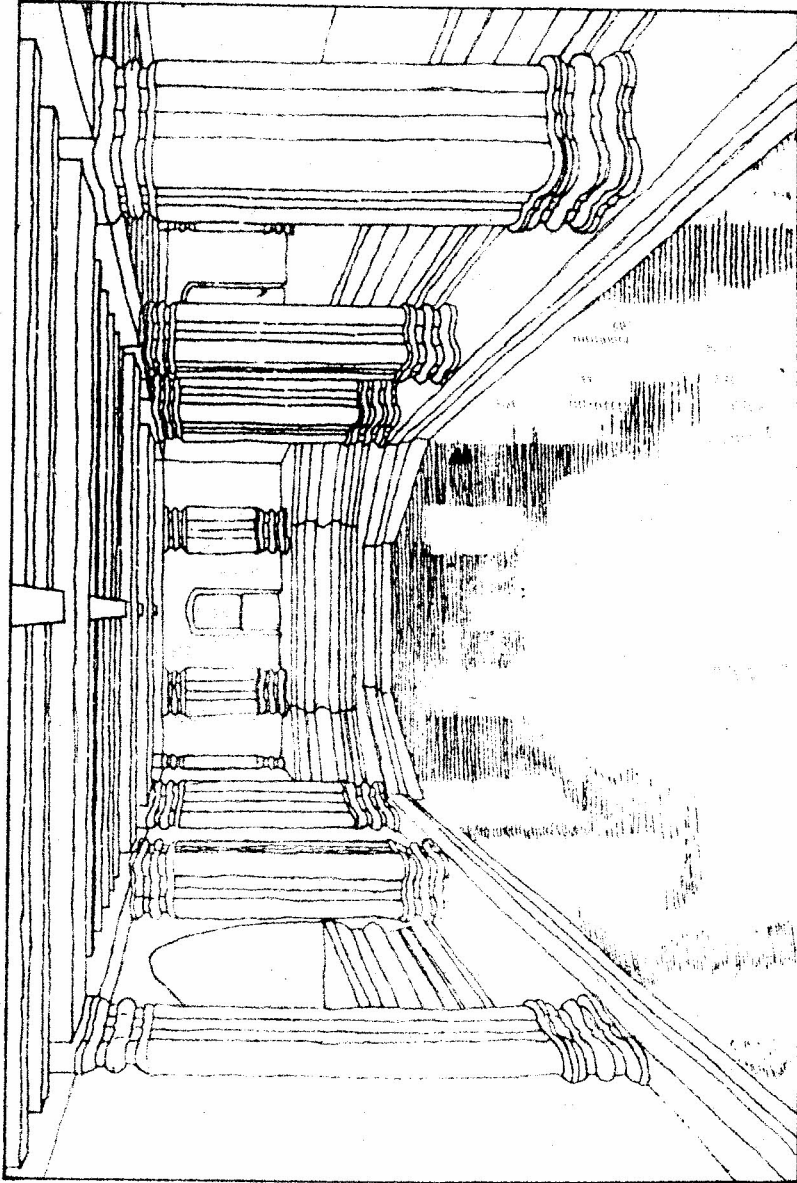
FIG. 6

wooden pillars. The Council chamber, in which the king held council with his ministers, also served as the court building when the king sat in judgement of those who had committed political treason. The Kandyan Convention, handing over the overlordship of the country to the British in 1815, was signed in this hall. The structure represents an excellent example of their timber architectural tradition of the late mediaeval period of Sri Lanka. The chronicle and archival records indicate that the structure had been subject to destruction and renovations on several occasions, the last being during the British period, when the hall was extended on its north and to facilitate the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1875. The pillars of the extended section have been executed imitating the older ones, but a distinction between the two sets is apparent to the discerning eye.

The hall, enveloped by a four-sided hipped roof of flat tiles, prior to excavation, was completely cemented during the British period. The opening of the cement floor revealed the original floor, which consisted of terra-cotta floor tiles. The southern end of the hall, on further excavation, exposed the square throne room area demarcated by a stone foundation layer. This exposure revealed the actual position where the king sat in audience, for in later times, when the hall was used as a Magistrate's Court, the judge's seat was placed on the opposite side (i.e. north). It also revealed the similarity of the tradition followed in early times in the planning of council chambers, as exemplified by the remains of the 12th century structures at Polonnaruwa.

The exposure of the floor in the northern section of the hall revealed important data relating to the plan and design of the hall constructed by the Kandyan kings. It consisted of a long hall entered by a flight of steps, and a lower terrace with a lime-plastered floor. This probably constituted the area where all visitors to meet the king were accommodated. Further investigations of the hall revealed the plinth of an earlier structure, probably the first council chamber, built in the 17th century (Fig. 4).

The Queen's Chamber (*Meda-Vācala*) was used as a Government office of the Health Department until the building was



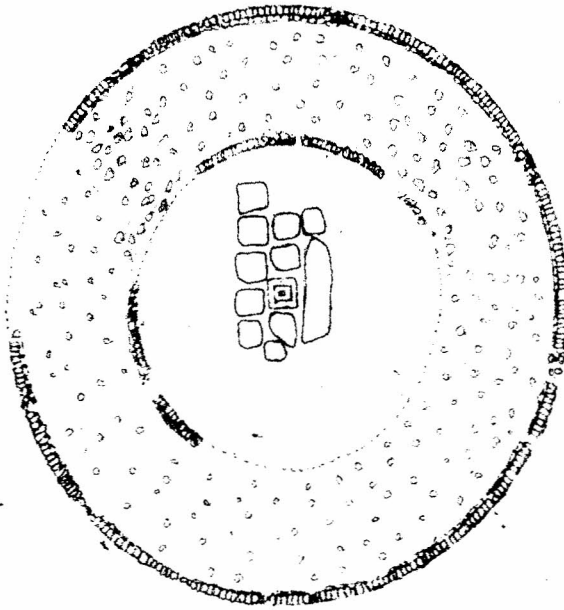
**KANDY ULPENGE (QUEEN'S BATH)**  
CONSERVATION PROJECT  
INTERIOR PERSPECTIVE  
A. J. S. 12. 1. 56

FIG. 7

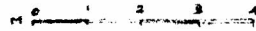
taken for investigation and conservation by the Cultural Triangle. The Queen's Chamber excavations have revealed the existence of a centre courtyard open to the skies. The basic ground plan thus conforms to the plan of the Kandyan period *Walawwa* type house architecture (Fig. 5). The present roof joining the end-points of the four roofs of structures surrounding the centre court, is evidently a work of the British period to accommodate state offices within the building. The excavations within the chamber also revealed interesting data relating to earlier occupational levels and the general contour of the land sloping down from the hill behind. The protective charms inscribed on copper plaques embedded in stone blocks serving as props of the legs of the royal beds are unique finds in portraying the beliefs and customs of the time.

The Queen's Bath (*Ulpangē*) is yet another structure that had undergone vast changes. The original structure had been filled up and cemented to accommodate various official and commercial quarters during the British period. The structure was apparently built by the last king, who converted the large tract of paddy-field into a beautiful lake. It was built within the edge of the lake, thus creating the impression of a floating structure at a distance. In some ways the building simulates the Golden Temple of Japan, also built in a lake, though the purposes of the two are different. The opening of the cemented and tiled floor exposed an oblong octagonal pool constructed with moulded stone slabs with a large central ledge running round the pool. A colonnade of adorsed pillars supported the roof originally, but subsequently they had been covered with British period walls. The bath, provided with an inlet for water, probably had its used water let out through a channel device. The whole structure speaks of the ingenious skills of the contemporary architects (Figs. 6,7).

The *Nātha Dēvāle*, dedicated to Avalokitesvara, situated on the artificial terrace in front of the Tooth Relic Temple, was evidently the earliest recorded religious shrine in Kandy. The *Gedige* shrine, portraying the Vijayanagara architectural style, is datable to the 14th century. However,



CIRCULAR MANDAPA



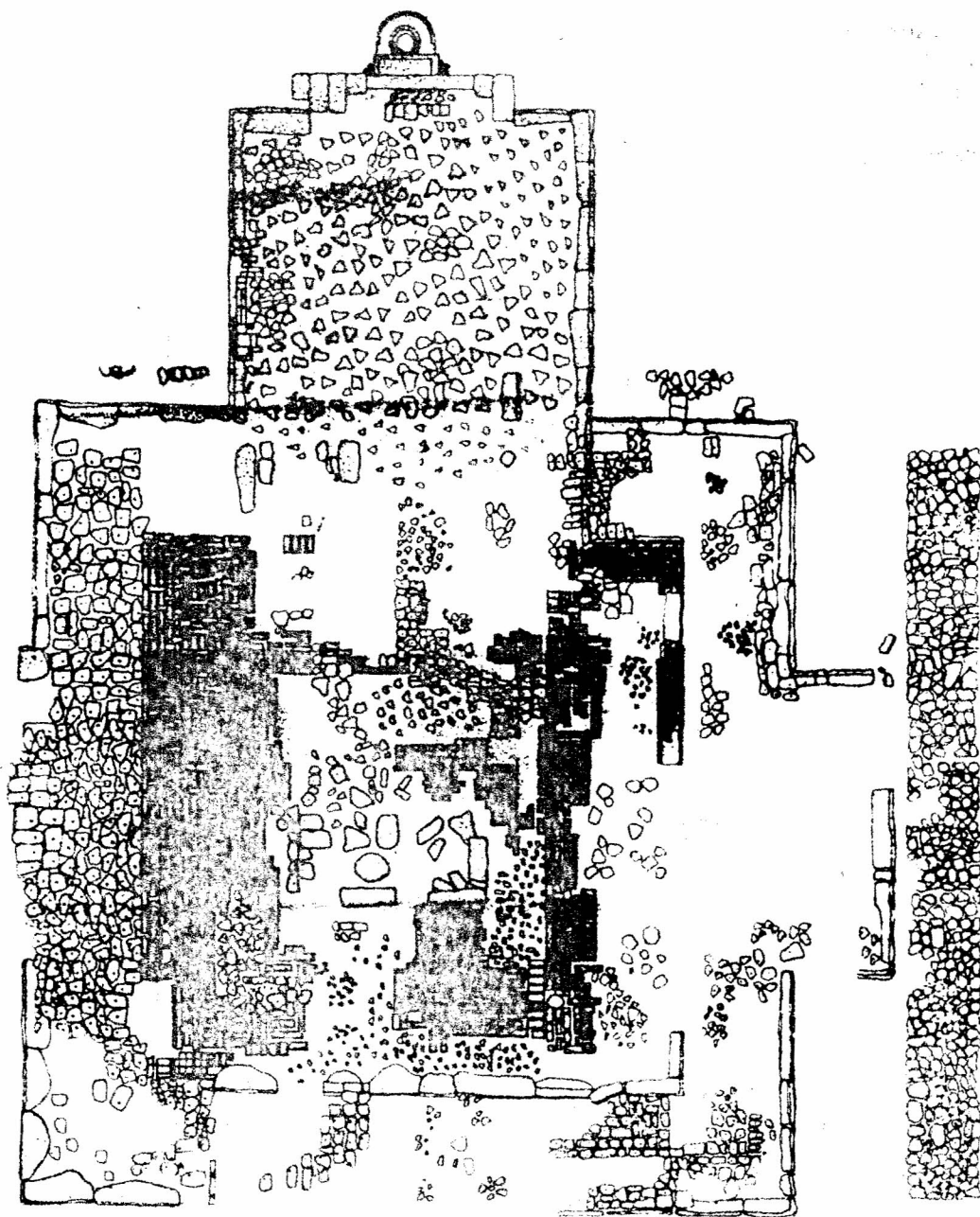


the excavations conducted in the premises have revealed much historical data indicating the religious-political significance of the shrine. The foundation, newly exposed at the south-west corner and identified with a Bodhi-tree shrine, adds yet another structure to the 14th century period. The brick foundation of a circular building appears to be a kind of open pavilion, which would have been built to be used in the king's coronation ceremony (Fig. 8). Tradition asserts that the naming of the Kandyan kings and the connected rituals took place at the devale premises, an excellent example of the religious and political legitimization of power in ancient Sri Lanka.

The wide stretch of ground between the Nātha Dēvāle and the Pattini Dēvāle was known as Āth Vīdiya (Elephant Street), which as mentioned above, served for the assembly of elephants that were brought to take part in the annual pageant. During the period of British occupation the whole street was utilized for the erection of buildings, among which St. Paul's school stands prominent. Recent clearing of the southern end of the stretch has brought to light the existing street. Once modern accretions are removed, the city complex of this area would provide the layout in its original setting.

Apart from the exposure of the original plans and layouts of the part of the city complex discussed above, the excavations have also thrown much light on the social and cultural life of the society at large. The discovery of numerous artefacts, e.g. ceramics both local and foreign, metal utensils, glassware including bangles, stone sculptures, inscriptions etc., throw new light on the study of the history of the Kandyan period.

The fragment of a bronze image of the Buddha in seated posture, discovered during the excavations at the Nātha Devale near the Bodhi-tree shrine (Fig. 9), if complete, would measure about five feet across the knees and thus be the largest bronze Buddha found so far in Sri Lanka. A large quantity of cannon-balls of iron amassed at one place at the same premises, testifies to the Portuguese and Sri Lankan wars at the time. At least two foundries, discovered



BODHIGARAYA



in the palace courtyard, burnt pieces of bronzes, mass of iron slag and large blocks of wax, all go to define the practice and technologies used in bronze casting.

The pottery fragments constitute the largest quantities of artefacts discovered. These constitute a large variety of cooking utensils which show the evolution of the local ceramic industry through the centuries. However, thin section studies of potsherds of Anurādhapura (1st millenium A.D.), Polonnaruva (11th-13th century A.D.) and Kandy (15th-19th century) indicate a steady deterioration of the technology and workmanship of the potter. Yet, the character and style of the early pottery is found to be maintained in Kandyan were as well.

The excavations of the last five years in the Kandy Palace Complex have unravelled a mass of information that would help the historian to place the history of the period in its correct perspective. The layout plan of the Palace Complex as it stood in the 18th century is being retraced in its ruined state. The conservation of various edifices in the light of new data found through excavations and the landscaping of the rediscovered layout would no doubt present a glimpse of the grandeur that was Kandy at the zenith of its power.

LEELANANDA PREMATILLEKE

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