

University of Ceylon Review

Vol. XX, No. 2

October 1962

An Inscription of Circa 200 B. C. at Rajagala commemorating Saint Mahinda

IN 1935, Mr. W. E. Fernando, then employed in the Archaeological Department as Second Draughtsman, was sent by me to inspect an ancient site named Rājagala or Rāssahela in the Vāvugam Pattu of the Batticaloa District, and to copy the Brāhmī inscriptions known to exist in a number of caves there. At that time, the site was very difficult of access, and camping out there, in order to erect scaffoldings and prepare estampages of the inscriptions on the drip-ledges of the caves, had to be done under very trying conditions. Mr. Fernando discovered twenty-two cave-inscriptions in early Brāhmī, five of which contain royal names, three records in the Sinhalese script of about the eighth century, and a record in early Brāhmī engraved on a rock, which forms the subject of the present paper. The estampage of the last mentioned inscription prepared in 1935 showed a deficiency towards its end. This might have been due to the writing in that part of the document being totally effaced, or being faint and covered with moss so as to be unnoticeable.¹

Since then the area round the site, coming under the Gal Oya scheme, has been opened up for cultivation, and roads have been constructed so that one can now motor to the very foot of the Rājagala hill. The numerous remains of buildings scattered over a large area at the site have been cleared of jungle by Mr. P. C. Dabare, the officer detailed for archaeological work by the Gal Oya Board. The site has been explored more thoroughly than it was possible to do in 1935 by the Archaeological Department, and estampages have been prepared of nineteen more early Brāhmī inscriptions in caves, besides those of several later Brāhmī records of great historical interest on rock. At the same time, a fresh estampage of the rock inscrip-

1. See *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon* for 1935, p. 9, and *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol. IV, pp. 169—176.

tion in early Brāhmī copied by Mr. Fernando has revealed that about ten letters towards its close had not been noticed when it was first copied. Dr. C. E. Godakumbure, the present Archaeological Commissioner, has very courteously given me the opportunity of examining these estampages of newly discovered inscriptions, together with the new estampage of the record under discussion, and I am indebted to him for the photograph reproduced to illustrate this paper.

The inscription, as now copied, consists of one line $18\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in length. The letters vary in height from 1 ft. to 5 in. The record is very well preserved for 13 ft. from the beginning, and for about 2 from the end. In between, for a length of about three feet, the rock has suffered from the weather, and the letters in this part of the record are badly worn, but have not become altogether illegible. The script is the earliest type of Brāhmī. The tubular form of *ma*, which is common in the earliest Brāhmī inscriptions of Ceylon and South India, is not found in this record; instead, we have the form of that letter normally met with in Asoka's edicts. The *i*, on the other hand, is of the type peculiar to Ceylon, i.e. a straight vertical stroke with two dots on either side. The form of the *pa* is also noteworthy; the stroke on the left which in the normal form of this letter extends vertically above that on the right, is here about the same length as the latter. In one example, the top of the stroke on the left is in fact lower than that of the right hand stroke.

Before we discuss the significance of the record, we give its text and translation.

TEXT

යෙ ඉම දීප පටඨය ඉදිය අගනන ඉධික[තෙර ම]හිදතෙරහ තුබෙ

TRANSLITERATION

Ye ima dipa paṭamaya idiya agatana Iḍika-[tera-Ma]hida-teraha tube

TRANSLATION

This is the *stūpa* of the Elder Iḍika and the Elder Mahida, who came to this Island by its foremost good fortune.



An Inscription of *Ceyra* 200 B.C., Commemorating Saint Mahinda at Rājagala.

REMARKS

The most significant part of the inscription is its second half, comprising five words stating that the *stūpa*, by the side of which it was no doubt incised, was that of the Theras *Idika* (Pali *Itthiya*) and *Mahida* (Pāli *Mahinda*). It is therefore to be regretted that this part of the record is not so well preserved as the rest of the inscription. The last two words *teraha tube* are satisfactorily preserved. Of the three letters which precede *teraha*, the upper part of the letters, *hi* and *da* are somewhat damaged, but the major portions of them, which are quite clear, leave no doubt with regard to their identity. The letter which forms the first of a name, of which the second and third are *hi* and *da*, respectively, must be *ma*, and we can be quite certain of the reading even if the letter which precedes *hi* had been altogether lost. But the general outline of the letter is discernible even though the rock is weathered here. Of the three letters forming the word *Idika*, all are well preserved except the right-hand side of the horizontal stroke of *ka*. Between this letter and *ma* of the word *Mahida*, the space available is not sufficient for more than two letters, and just preceding *ma*, we can easily read *ra*, and the letter *te* has also left enough for its recognition.

Mahida, of course, is the form which Pali *Mahinda* (Skt. *Mahendra*) would have assumed in early Sinhalese. *Idika* is the name given in the *Mahāvamsa* as *Itthiya*.² In an inscription of Bhātika Abhaya at Mihintalē also, the name occurs in this form.³ The association of Mahinda-thera of this inscription with *Itthiya*-thera, and the statement contained therein that they came to this Island, presumably from abroad, due to its good fortune, leave no room for doubt that the reference is to the Saint Mahinda who came to this Island from India to preach Buddhism here. It is stated in the chronicle that half of the bodily relics, which remained after the cremation of Mahinda-thera, were distributed to *vihāras* all over the Island, to be enshrined in *stūpas* built for the purpose.⁴ The *stūpa* referred to in this record was thus one in which the relics of Mahinda, as well as those of his companion *Itthiya*, were enshrined. It is not impossible that the *stūpa* was built shortly after the death of Mahinda, and that the inscription was also indited at the same time. The palaeography of the inscription contains nothing that militates against this view.

2. *Mahāvamsa*, chapter xii, v. 7.

3. No. 20 of E. Müller's *Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon*. The text of this inscription given by Müller admits of improvement; that scholar has also wrongly identified the king who set up this record.

4. *Mahāvamsa*, chapter XX, v. 45.

The phrase *ima diya paṭamaya idiya agatana* qualifies *Idika-tera-Mahida-teraha*. *Agatana* is equivalent to P. *āgatānāni*, Skt. *āgatānām*, being the genitive plural of *agata* 'one who has come'. *Idiya* is the instrumental singular of *idi*, corresponding to Pali *iddhi*, Sanskrit *ṛddhi*. The word is taken here in its primary meaning of 'prosperity', 'good fortune', etc. The word *paṭamaya*, agreeing in case, gender and number with *idiya*, is equivalent to Sanskrit *prathamayā*, Pali *paṭhamāya*. The word is taken here to mean 'foremost', 'excellent', 'preeminent', as Sanskrit *prathama* does. The best known meaning of *iddhi* in Pali is 'supernatural power', but the word *paṭamaya*, which qualifies *idiya*, would not fit in with that meaning of the word, though it would be in accordance with the account given in the *Mahāvamsa* of Mahinda coming to Ceylon by air from Vidisā.⁵ Perhaps it is due to a misunderstanding of phrasology like that occurring in this record, which gave rise to the legend of Mahinda coming by air. It is also noteworthy that, while *agatana* is in the genitive plural, the word qualified by it, *Mahida-teraha*, is in the singular. The case ending does not occur after *Idika-tera*; we may therefore take that the two names are joined together in a copulative compound. It may therefore take the singular termination, but the qualifying phrase ends with a word in the plural, as it refers to two personages.

The word *ye*, with which the record begins, appears at first sight to be nominative singular of the relative pronoun, corresponding to Sanskrit *yah* (*yo*) and P. *yo*, or the nominative plural, equivalent to Sanskrit and Pali *ye*. But the construction of the sentence does not appear to justify its interpretation as a relative pronoun. It is therefore taken as the old Sinhalese form of Sanskrit *ayam*, in which the initial *a* has been elided, and to which the nominative singular termination *-e* has been added.

It is also possible to interpret *agatana* as 'of those who have come', and to translate the text accordingly.

The record thus is of the utmost importance as evidence of the historicity of Mahinda-thera, and his companion Iṭṭhiya-thera. It establishes also that the account given in the chronicles of the introduction of Buddhism to Ceylon is based on a genuine historical tradition in its essentials. The record also indicates that the antiquity of the religious establishment at Rājagala goes back to the days of the first introduction of Buddhism to this Island.

S. PARANAVITANA

5. *Mahāvamsa*, chapter XIII, vv. 8ff.