

Aspects of Sri Lanka's Footprints of the Buddha

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Summary

In order to reveal the form of footprints of the Buddha in Sri Lanka, I took rubbings of footprints of the Buddha found locally. Sri Lanka has more footprints remaining than any other country, and diverse types ranging from those adorned with patterns of auspicious symbols to those without patterns are distributed widely throughout the country. Early footprints of the Buddha carved as a symbol of Buddha are decorated with the thousand-spoken wheel that is one of the 32 signs of Buddha, and this was a seal representing Buddha. However, there are also footprints of the Buddha with no patterns and no toes in Sri Lanka. In this paper, I examined footprints of the Buddha without patterns or toes while referring to the Buddhist scriptures to follow changes in Buddhist views and Buddhism. I also examined the significance attached to the patterns of auspicious symbols in Sri Lanka, and how they have been treated.

Introduction

Sri Lanka has footprints of the Buddha carved in stone slabs distributed across a wide area of the Island. They are found mainly at ancient temple sites. Motoji Niwa says that there are approximately 1,000 such footprints in existence, and that they are unique in the world ⁽¹⁾.

The Buddha in the absolute reality is the Body of Law (*dharmakāya*) according to both Thēravāda and Mahāyāna Schools. The Body of Law is the series of the pure *dharma* as Vasubandhu says ⁽²⁾. The *Mahāvastu* of *Mahāsānghikas* says *Tathāgatas* are born with a body made of mind ⁽³⁾. So the Buddha's physical body is not real Buddha ⁽⁴⁾. The *Tathāgata* or the body of Law (*dharmakāya*) is arisen from the *dharma* or the *Brahma* which is the cause and effect (*paliccasamuppada*) ⁽⁵⁾. Sakyamuni achieved this Body of Law with the enlightenment under the Bō-tree at Bodh Gaya, India. Since then he has been conventionally called the Buddha. But he declared that his humanly physical body is not the Buddha ⁽⁶⁾.

Early Buddhist attributed the physical body of the Great man endowed with thirty-two characteristics to the formless Buddha and created the anthropomorphic Symbol of the Great Man. And they used it as a one of the Buddha-symbols to help the followers of Buddha Sakyamuni to recall the real Buddha—the Body of Law. In this way they seemed to have guided by the Buddha's words in the *Lakkhāna sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* where Buddha says that a great man 2nd owed with the thirty-two characteristics becomes either

universal-ruler or a Buddha. Several of these characteristics relate to the feet. The feet have a level tread on the sole of the feet are the wheel-signs with thousand spokes; tyre and hub; the heels protect out; the toes are long; the feet are soft and tender; and they resemble a net⁽⁷⁾.

N. Chutiwongs referring to the footprint of the Buddha says “Most of them were not meant to represent imprints of the Buddha's feet but they were meant in general as Symbols to indicate the presence of the Buddha. Occasionally they were used in devotional scenes in combination with some other symbols to form none anthropomorphic images of the Buddha revealing him in his cosmic form” ⁽⁸⁾. We can agree with her interpretation except the term ‘images’ because the real Buddha is formless therefore we cannot have images of the Buddha⁽⁹⁾. Chutiwongs interpretation is based on the inscription related to the footprints at Kirinda in Sri Lanka ⁽¹⁰⁾.

As evident from the Buddhist art generally Buddhists use footprint as sacred objects of worship as well as a guide to communicate with the Buddha.

Sri Lankan Buddhists use a stanza when they worship footprints the stanza says “I worship the footprints of the Buddha, on the sandy bank of Narmadā river, on the Saccabaddha rock, on the Sumana mountain, and in the city of Yonakas” ⁽¹¹⁾. Buddhists believe that those footprints are the impression of Buddha Syakamuni's own feet. Of these the footprint on the summit of Sumana mountain in the Ratnapura district in Sri Lanka is recorded in the *Mahāvamsa* as the left impression of a foot by Buddha Sakyamuni dating his third

visit to Sri Lanka ⁽¹²⁾. The *Vamsathappakāsinī*, commentary to the *Mahāvamsa* says the Buddha left the impression of his foot on the summit of Sumana ⁽¹³⁾ mountain as a memorial of his three visit. Still Sri Lankan Buddhists go there and worship the footprint. A replica of it is worshipped in Thailand. Another replica is at the Foot relic temple in Kandy, Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, a few types of Buddha's footprints are found at historical sites in overwhelming numbers. It is written in the great chronicle *Mahāvamsa* that during the time of India's Maurya Dynasty in the third century B.C., Buddhism was formally introduced to Sri Lanka by Mahinda Tera, the son of Ashoka the Great. It is unclear when sculpted objects related to Buddhism, including Buddha's footprints, were also introduced.

In this paper, I will focus my inquiry on Buddha's footprints that were used as symbols of the Buddha. Furthermore, I would like to exclude the Buddha's footprints that contain 108 auspicious signs. Because such footprints do not belong to Anurādhapura period. For the purpose of my paper, I consider only those footprints used as symbols of the Buddha during the Anurādhapura period (3rd century BC to 10th century AD)

Among the Buddha's footprints of the Anurādhapura period, there are several different foot shapes carved in shallow relief on stone slabs. In addition, there are several designs including patterns over the foot or the signs of an umbrella with or without lotuses. Another interesting feature is that their sizes are not uniform.

I have seen a lot of Buddha's footprints in Sri

Lanka, and have taken rubbings of 27 of them this time. I would like to examine the position of the Buddha's footprints based on these and the specimens that I have seen, while giving an overview of the situation of Buddha's footprints in Sri Lanka. And also I would like to examine the isolated footprints of the Buddha in Sri Lanka.

The custom of worshipping the Buddha's footprints has almost faded among present-day Sri Lankan Buddhists. But the aforementioned Sumanakūta is still a popular site of pilgrimage. Based on my own inquiries, many present-day Sri Lankan Buddhists, when visiting temples, worship the bodily remains of the Buddha in stūpas, Bō-trees and Buddha images. They are the three fold sacred object. In that order, but they are not even aware of the existence of Buddha's footprints on stone slabs. According to this situation, it would be difficult to clarify where Buddha's footprints were originally placed and for what purpose they were made. Many extant Buddha's footprints, like the ones at such places as Sānchī, and Amarāvātī, or even in Sri Lanka, were placed near stūpas or at the site of the Bō-tree shrine and the throne-shrine. Near the Mihintalē stūpa, among the ruins around the Bō-tree shrine and the throne-shrine of Abhayagiri vihāra in Anurādhapura, multiple Buddha's footprints can be seen.

1. Analysis of Buddha's Footprint Rubbings

In my investigations, I found that there are several basic shapes and marks on Sri Lankan footprints of Buddha, and that almost all of the

rubbings I collected correspond to one of those basic shapes or marks. There were exceptional cases however, such as the single footprint carved directly into a huge stone. Nevertheless, I can give an overview of most of the characteristics of Sri Lanka's Buddha's footprints based on the 27 rubbings I collected.

The 27 rubbings of footprints that I have collected belong to Anurādhapura period. They were obtained from some of the major historical ruins of the Anurādhapura period that include Isurumuniya, Vessagiriya, Sōmavati, Rasvehera, Avukana, and Buduruwayāya. In addition to those specimens, I also obtained rubbings of footprints kept in the Colombo National Museum and Archaeological Museum, Abhayagiri Museum and Jētavanā Museum in Anurādhapura. Details about my collection of Footprints are given in the Table I at the end.

1-1 Auspicious Signs on footprints of the Buddha

Auspicious signs found on ten out of twenty seven footprints of Buddha are as follows; umbrella (4, 25), fly-whisk (4, 5, 15, 23, 24, 25), filled pitcher (4, 5, 23, 25), conch-shell (4, 5, 18, 23, 25), goad (4, 15, 16, 24, 25), *vajra* (4, 5, 7, 15, 18, 23, 24, 25), *Srīvatsa* (5, 28, 24), svastika (5, 25, 25), auspicious seat (4, 5, 24), Flag (15, 24) pair of fish (5, 23, 24)

(for details, see the table of footprints)

① *vajra* symbol

The term *vajra* is used here for ω symbol. But other modern writers have used *triratna*, *trisūla*,

vajra, *nandipāda*, *satti*, and *nandiyāvarta* ⁽¹⁴⁾.

There is no consensus among them. This motif is found depicted on the throne under the Bō-tree among the Sānchi reliefs and on the Amitayus Buddha tree symbol on the other face of the left pillar of the north *torana* and on the Buddha tree of light symbols found among the Amarāvātī motifs.

(Coomarasuwamy, 1998)

In the *Anguttara Nikāya* of the Pāli Buddhist canon says the adamantine consciousness is the highest ⁽¹⁵⁾. This adamantine identify is found in the *Māhayāna Sūtralankāra* (XIV. 45). Coomarasuwamy says "It is proper to the very last stage of a Bodhisattva's course and simultaneous with the "One Instant (i.e. Eternal now) Total Awakening" by which he is unified with the primordial Buddha-Essence. It is evident that for this Adamantine consummation only the Adamantine Heart ⁽¹⁶⁾. In the light of these evidences ω motif was used by early Buddhists to represent the *Vajirupamacitta* or the adamantine mind of the Buddha. Generally this *vajra* symbol is depicted on the heel of the footprint of the Buddha giving emphasis to it. Therefore the *vajra* is the correct term for this symbol.

② *umbrella* symbol

At the Abhayagiri Museum, there is a unique Buddha's footprint with a figure of a rabbit that may be later addition (Fig. 6). Moreover, there are only two examples footprints with umbrella and auspicious signs, and in the majority of cases an umbrella is present, it does not contain the thousand-spoke wheel. Also, there are many

examples of footprints that have both the toes and the umbrella, but there are only two that have toes with no Wheel but the umbrella.

Among these, like the Throne-shrines No. 1 and No. 2 in the historical ruins of Abhayagiri vihāra, there were also footprints of the so-called no-sign no-digit type that had no signs at all, neither wheel symbol nor toes. In some footprints the wheel is depicted like lotus (Fig. 3).

A large number of Buddha footprints with umbrellas are found all over Sri Lanka, though there are subtle differences between them. In most of the specimens, the heels are parabola-shaped and the toes are indicated by straight lines. In the footprint the umbrella handle is placed between the left and the right feet, and the umbrella that shown above the heels are common features. It is possible to suggest that Sri Lankan Buddhists probably favored this type of design. The outline of the foot is similar to the footprints found in Nāgarjunakonda in southern India, yet it is not common for those with umbrellas to have auspicious signs. In the specimen No. 23 from Sōmavatī, and No. 18 from Jētavanārāma museum (lacking one of the pair of footprints), there is the rare combination of an umbrella, a thousand-spoke wheel, toes and auspicious signs together.

In this case the umbrella is used as an auspicious mark. Also, in the specimen No. 14 from Avukana, the same stone was carved for both footprints in the pair and both have umbrellas, which could be considered a rare design. Among the Buddha's footprints I investigated, there were many with an umbrella but no auspicious signs. Also, there was an

example with an umbrella but no toes or thousand-spoke wheel. For expedience, I will call these types of Buddha's footprints "no-sign no-digit but with umbrella".

There are two type of umbrellas related to the footprints; the external umbrella and the internal umbrella. The external umbrella on the Tree of Amitayus Buddha is interpreted by Coomarasuwamy as it is the *uṣṇīṣa* of the head of Buddha⁽¹⁷⁾. But all three fold object of worship, bodily remains (*sārīrika*), the Bō-tree used by the Buddha (*pāribhōgika*), and Buddha's symbols (*uddēsika*). Amitayus Buddha Symbol belongs to the third category. In such cases the umbrella is the symbol of royalty of the Buddha. The *Apadāna*, a pāli canonical text calls Buddhas as *Dhammarāja*. Therefore, Coomaraswamy's interpretation is incorrect. The other type of umbrella is shown externally among the auspicious signs on the footprints found in Sri Lanka (Fig. 4, 25).

1-2. No-Sign No-Digit Buddha's footprints

Among the samples I gathered, there are Buddha's footprints that are devoid of any signs including thousand-spoke the wheel. As shown in Table, there are three no-sign no-digit footprints (Fig. 11, Fig. 12 and Fig. 26), with two of them from the area of a Throne shrine in the historical Abhayagiri vihāra, and the other, having only one foot left, from a Mirisawetiya stūpa. There were several Buddha's footprints with a thousand-spoke wheel, digits and auspicious signs among same Throne-shrine at the Abhayagiri monastery site. The footprint No. 11 (78 × 38.5 cm) from Throne-

shrine in the Abhayagiri monastery, and No. 26 (74 × 40 cm), the Mirisawetiya footprint were not only no-sign no-digit type, they also had the feature of one foot having a greater length and width than the other one. However, the example No. 12 from Throne-shrine in the Abhayagiri vihāra is 50.5 × 29 cm, which is an almost average size.

Anurādhapura's historical ruins are divided into zones with the stūpa of the three main sects as their centres. The Throne-shrine belongs to the Abhayagiri sect, and identical footprints in the Mirisawetiya-stūpa belongs to Māhavihāra sect. Therefore, we can see that the no-sign, no-digit type is not the original design of a specific Buddhist sect. Here there is the question whether the no-sign no-digit Buddha footprints began.

1-3. Problems visible from the data

From a design perspective, the samples of Buddha's footprints can be divided into three general classes (having auspicious symbols, having umbrella and no marks). I have outlined their features above, but I would like to point out that from this analysis, two problems emerged. One is that how to interpret the no-sign no-digit Buddha's footprints. In other words, given that the thousand-spoke wheel signifies the great Man and is the most symbolic sign, can Buddha's footprints that lack the same symbol be called footprints of the Buddha. And what was the purpose of creating such footprints? The second question is what the reason for such diversity in the creation of the Buddha's footprints.

2. The *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* (the Eight Auspicious Signs)

2-1. Precedence studies of the *Aṣṭa-mangala*

We can see many auspicious signs on the Buddha's footprint. Then, I would like to pick up some important auspicious signs. There are eight auspicious signs so called *Aṣṭa-mangala* in India. T.B. Karunaratne says auspicious signs have such meanings as happiness, prosperity and protection, and that such signs have been invented throughout the world since the prehistoric times. He considers them to have been used as talismans or ornaments, and says such phenomena are not limited to Buddhism, but also existed in Jainism and Brahmanism ⁽¹⁸⁾. Moreover, regarding the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*, which are a suite of eight auspicious signs, it is thought that from ancient times in India the numbers eight and four and multiples thereof had auspicious meanings, though their origins are unclear. Karunaratne says that an *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* unique to Jainism can be seen on the offering stands, altars, chairs and the like of Jain archaeological ruins. The *Anpadi Sutra*, one of the Jain *sūtras*, lists eight auspicious signs as an *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* the swastika (Svastika), Srivatsa, a kalpa or large swastika with nine corners (*nandiyavarta*), *bhadrāsana*, a filled pitcher (*kalasa*), a pair of fish (*matsya*), a mirror (*darpana*) and Mahāvīra (Vardhamanaka). The Hindu text *Nārada Samhitā* says that an *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* was used only for rituals ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Early Buddhist *sūtras* contain no detailed descriptions of *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*, but *Mahāmangala Sutta* ⁽²⁰⁾ in the *Sutta Nipāta*, Sakyamuni explains

what auspicious signs are. Also, in *Mahāmangalajātaka* ⁽²¹⁾, there are schools including a visual auspicious sign school (*dittamangala*), an auditory auspicious sign school (*sutamangalika*) and a perceptual auspicious sign school (*mntamangalika*), and there is a scene in which they argue about auspicious signs. Accordingly, we can see that in ancient Indian society, the concept of auspicious signs was a matter of major concern and interest.

The *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*, which encompasses eight auspicious signs, came into existence against the background of a society that attaches importance to promising signs, and it is conjectured the auspicious signs, which visualize such omens, were formed at the same time.

2-2. Sri Lanka's *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*

In Sri Lanka, the oldest description of an *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* is found in the *Mahāvamsa* in the description where *Duṭṭhagāmaṇi* (161-137 B.C.) erects a nine storied chapter house for the monks called *Lōhapāsāda*, or Brazen Palace. In this mansion a spacious pavilion

(*Maṇḍapa*) was built, and there he had created something called *Aṣṭa-Maṅgalikāni* (decorative pattern that includes the eight auspicious signs), for which seven gems were used to represent the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*. However the *Mahāvamsa* contains no concrete description of the symbols. Also, the same king had a Bō-tree made out of gems built to be placed in the relic chamber of the Great stūpa, and the tree's trunk is described as having been decorated with a *Aṣṭa-Maṅgalikāni*. However, the *Vaṇsatthappakāsinī* ⁽²²⁾, a commentary of the

Mahāvamsa, only mentions some of the auspicious signs, including a filled pitcher (*puṇṇaghaṭa*) and *Srīvatsa* in regard to the content of *AṣṭaMaṅgalikāni* Type A.

There is a complete description of the eight auspicious signs in the manual known as *Sikhavalaṇḍa saha Sikhavalaṇḍa-vinisa* ⁽²³⁾ for *Māhavihāra* monks, written in the 10th century. The auspicious signs cited in this book are as follows.

(after Karunaratne):

Type A

- ① conch shell (*saṅkha*)
- ② wheel (*cakra*)
- ③ filled pitcher (*puṇṇaghaṭa*)
- ④ mace (*gadāyudha*)
- ⑤ sacred goddess symbol (*Srīvatsa*)
- ⑥ goad (*aṅkusa*)
- ⑦ flag (*dhvaja*)
- ⑧ swastika

The 12th century *Pālimuttaka Vinaya Vinicchaya Saṅgaha Tikā* ⁽²⁴⁾ provides the same description on the eight auspicious signs, and those books were the works of *Mahāvihāra* monks. Professor Chandra Wikramagamage conjectures that there is a high probability that the auspicious signs in the *AṣṭaMaṅgalikāni*. King *Duṭṭhagāmaṇi* used to decorate the *Lōhapāsāda*, or Brazen Palace, and the Bō-tree in the *Mahāthūpa* consisted of those same auspicious signs, and that the traditional eight auspicious signs of the *Mahāvihāra* ⁽²⁵⁾.

Next I will cite the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* found in canonical texts on art and architecture, also known as silpa texts, such as *Mañjusrī Vāstuvīdyā*

Śāstra ⁽²⁶⁾ and *Citrakarma Śāstra* as fellow.

Type B

- ① sacred goddess symbol (*Śrīvatsa*)
- ② *swastika*
- ③ auspicious seat (*bhadrapiṭha*)
- ④ filled pitcher (*Pūrṇakumbha*)
- ⑤ fly whisk (*cāmara*)
- ⑥ conch shell (*saṅkha*)
- ⑦ pair of fish (*matsyugma*)
- ⑧ goad (*ankusa*)

They lack the *cakra*, *mace* and flag on the list of the Mhāvihāra school. On the other hand, the list of *Mahāvihāra* school lacks the pair of fish, fly-whisk and auspicious seat. But we cannot determine whether the differences between these two types of Asta-mangala reflect the differences between the Theravada and Mahāyāna Schools or a reflection of the trend of the era. The reason is that sign of Type A can be seen scattered among the engravings on the entrance of the gate of the Sānchī Stupa in India. The footprints with these signs, most probably, belong to the Mantrayāna or the Righthanded tantrism as evident from the *Manjuśrī Vastuvidyā Śāstra* and *Citrakurma Śāstra*.

However, the Buddha's footprints in the National Museum of Colombo (Figs. 28-29) have the flag, streamer, filled pitcher, swastika, auspicious seat, *śrīvatsa*, *vajra*, conch-shell, the fly whisk and goad and pair of fish in each. It seems that the filled pitcher, *śrīvatsa* and swastika are common to the both Schools, Theravada and Mahāyāna. The *cakra* in the footprints is one of the thirty-two characteristics of a great Man (Mahāpuruṣa).

Also agree with the result of my analysis of the small amount of material given in the Table of this paper.

Karunaratne draws our attention to the stark similarity of the placement of the eight signs on the two stone slabs in the collection of the National Museum of Colombo that were discovered separately at Anurādhapura and Polonnaruwa (Figs. 30-31). He assures that those signs are clearly representations of *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*. He claims that these are the same *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* signs that are mentioned in *Mahāvamsa*, expressing a different view from that of Prof. Wikramagamage ⁽²⁷⁾.

Also, I found a similar stone slab in the repository of a temple in Tantirimallē (Fig. 32).

A great degree of uniformity can be seen in these two examples in the National Museum of Colombo, and the combination and placement of the auspicious signs also matches. Although the stone slab discovered at Anurādhapura (Fig. 30) is damaged, it contain auspicious signs in the four corners of square stone and midway between them. Additionally, this also has the four holy beasts (lion, elephant, bull and horse). The eight auspicious signs are conch shell, filled vase, *śrīvatsa*, fly whisk, elephant goad, pair of fish, swastika auspicious seat. Both Karunaratne and Wikramagamage point out that the stone fragments excavated from Anurādhapura have the Four guardian deities, animals and other symbols representing the four directions ⁽²⁸⁾. As an example supporting the idea that the four holy beasts represent the four directions, they cite the fact that the holy beasts seen in the four

fronticepieces of Kantaka Chaitya in Mihintalē match those of Anurādhapura. They are arranged with the lion to the north, the elephant to the east, the bull to the south and the horse to the west.

The example excavated from Anurādhapura (Fig. 15) and the one excavated from Polonnaruwa (Fig. 16) have the same arrangement of auspicious signs, so they are thought to be based on the same cannon. These stone fragments are known as *Astamahāgrahamandala* and there is a high probability that they were used in Tantric Buddhist rituals.

Considering the facts mentioned above, it can be concluded that the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* seen in Sri Lanka were not simply symbols to enhance feelings of well-being, but also had the role of symbolically expressing the Buddhist view of the universe, and that auspicious signs were positioned directionally from a considerably early time just as the animals and Four guardian deities (*Lōkapālas*) were assigned specific directions. At the latest by around the 5th century, after Buddhagōsa translated the commentary of the *Tripitaka* into Magadhi, it is probable that an *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* based on these concepts was in use. Karunaratne further claims that the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* were used to symbolize heavenly bodies and gods, cosmic-scale guardian deities, and were used to decorated ritual objects made of stone for the use in secret ceremonies of Tantric Buddhist practices.

Also, Karunaratne says that in the Late Middle Ages (17th and 18th centuries) of Sri Lankan history, the *Asta-mangala* became connected to exorcist rituals, and as a result, the drum, cow,

snake, fly whisk, lion, Makara, flag and votive light were added ⁽²⁹⁾.

2-3. The *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* and other Auspicious Signs in Buddha's Footprints

Auspicious signs have a variety of aspects, ranging from serving as directions to heavenly bodies, and using as the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*, a suite of eight auspicious signs, giving them new values and meanings. However, it is unclear under what circumstances the Buddhists chose the auspicious signs to put on the Buddha's footprints. It's less probable that those who offered Buddha's footprints to temples had the *Aṣṭa-mahāgrahamandala* in their minds when they chose to include the auspicious signs into the decorations. Given that the combinations of auspicious signs that constituted the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* were not strictly differentiated according to the different Buddhist sects of Sri Lanka, we can conjecture that the devotees who offered the footprints probably advised the craftsmen of their choices of symbols to be included in them.

On the other hand, as I will explain in detail later section, when Buddha's footprints were dedicated or constructed, it is unclear how to take in the concept of the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*. If the auspicious signs on them are used for the symbol of directions and the like demonstrate validity under the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* concept, it is conceivable that the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* are reflected considerably in the auspicious signs of the Buddha's footprints. However, there are no grounds for written argument. We can understand that having

auspicious signs on Buddha's footprints strengthens the image that it is being adorned with the Buddha's existence.

3. Considering No-Sign No-Digit Footprints from the Figurative Viewpoint.

3-1. The Possibility That Thousand-Spoke Wheels Were Drawn

In this section, I would like to discuss the no-sign no-digit footprint from a figurative viewpoint. First I will discuss the kind of stones used to sculpt the Buddha's footprints. Dolomite, which is a commonly available rock in Sri Lanka has been a popular material for sculpting the images of the Buddha. Dolomite, which is a kind of limestone, is easy to carve, but is also susceptible to weathering in the presence of water. Gneiss, granite, and other hard stones were often used to make Buddha's footprints, while only a few were made with dolomite. Etching on crystalline stone like dolomite tends to create imprecise lines, so those stones are not suited to produce intricate auspicious sign designs. Many of the footprints in Sri Lanka have outlines that were carved a few centimeters deep, so it is possible to surmise that the designs and selection of stone were left up to craftsmen. And I expect that the spot where a Buddha's footprint would be placed was also considered in the selection of stone.

Many of the Buddha's footprints we find at historical sites today have withstood years of scorching sun and weathering. This situation gives

rise to the preconception that Buddha's footprints were typically set-up outdoors from the early times.

When examining the no-sign no-digit examples (samples 11 and 12 from the Throne-shrines at Abhayagiri monastery and sample 26 from Mirisawetiya stūpa site), one may notice that the lengths of those footprints of samples 11 and 26 are relatively large; each measuring over 70 cm. Though it is difficult to notice from a photograph, on-site inspection showed that all three have uniformly smooth surfaces. It is hard to imagine that weathering rubbed signs off them. I inspected several worn-out footprints and noticed that in some of the footprints there were cavities in the centre probably created by rainwater that was collected over long periods, and in some other cases, the degree of defacement depended on the location of the footprint. Even if they were preserved underground or under suitable environmental conditions, it would be impossible for signs carved into a flat stone surface to be uniformly worn away without a trace leaving only a flat surface.

Therefore, we can surmise that no thousand-spoke wheels, other auspicious sign or digits were carved into the no-sign no-digit Buddha's footprints. However, if that is the case, it is difficult to call them footprints of the Buddha. In response to this statement, Prof. Wikramagama has pointed out that thousand-spoke wheels may have been drawn on them rather than carved⁽³⁰⁾. Considering the locations where the footprints were placed, this hypothesis is novel and plausible. In other words, if we imagine that the

thousand-spoke wheels were drawn on the stones, this immediately solves the problem. Depending on the stone material, etched lines can be hard to see. It is conceivable that in such cases color was added to make the etchings stand out. If that is the case, we can imagine that there was not much resistance to coloring the entire stone. But at present, this is only a hypothesis. If a Buddha's footprint with traces of coloring were found, it would strongly support the hypothesis.

In my investigation of outdoor historic ruins, I found no surviving examples with traces of pigments. However, as some of the best samples of Buddha's footprints are found in museum collections, we are unable to conclude that colored footprints of the Buddha did not exist.

3-2. Buddha's Footprints with Auspicious Signs that Have Traces of Coloring

Buddha's footprints on display at the National Museum of Colombo have auspicious signs that are in good condition without too much wear, and we can tell that they have been preserved against weathering. They were probably placed indoors originally. Also, careful observation shows deep brown color on the surface of the stone from the heel end to the tiptoes. I assume that the original color of the stone has changed as a result of repetitive touching by worshipers. And, on the front end, there is a noticeably deep-colored part that looks more like traces of coloring (Fig. 28-29).

The possibility that this Buddha's footprint was colored is only a part of this hypothesis, and I await scientific proof.

4. The Locations of the Buddha's Footprints and their Purposes

4-1. The Buddha's Footprints as Offerings

As observed during field studies, the footprints were often located near the stūpas, Bō-tree shrines and Throne-shrine but occasionally, some were established indoors. May be due to modern conservation's mistakes and the treasure hunters activity.

Accordingly, many Buddha's footprints were probably offerings made by lay believers to stūpas and Bō-trees. If so, it is conceivable that the design of a Buddha's footprint was the ultimate reflection of the intent of the dedicator. Even if some of these had many auspicious signs and others were Buddha's footprints with an umbrella and no signs or digits, I expect the dedicators all had feelings of reverence for the Buddha.

4-2. Buddha's Footprints Placed in Locations for Meditating while Walking

According to Yijing's "*Account of Buddhism Sent from the South Seas*"⁽³¹⁾, there are 14 or 15 Buddha's footprints in India's walking meditation spots. Walking meditation (*cankramaṇa*) involves walking in a straight line and then coming right back, in a round-trip straight path. It is said to help monks' digestion and help cure their illnesses.

I went to a Sri Lankan forest temple called Arankelē and saw a walking meditation spot, but there were no Buddha's footprints.

I would like to pay attention to the fact that the Buddha's footprints were placed at locations where the monks' ascetic practices carried-out,

and are of a different nature from those offered by lay believers at stūpas. If no-sign no-digit Buddha footprints were placed in such locations, in terms of design, they can be thought of as separate type Buddha's footprints adorned with auspicious signs; Yijing recorded the size and number of these Buddha's footprints but made no reference to their design and signs. Accordingly, we cannot be certain that no-sign no-digit footprints were placed in locations used for monks' ascetic practices.

Conclusion

In this paper, I divided the Buddha's footprint data I gathered into three categories and analyzed them. In particular, I focused on the peculiarities of no-sign no-digit footprints and consulted examples and *sūtras*. The thousand-spoke wheel has been the most important symbol of the Buddha from the time of early Buddhist scripture, and I reconfirmed that it is an indispensable sign for Buddha's footprints. I wonder if we can say it is the Buddha's footprint, because it has no symbol of Buddha. It might be easy to solve this question, if we think the artist tried to draw wheel. As for coloring, I have one recent idea. Many of the statues in ancient Greece are made of marble. In addition, for a long time, we have a prejudice that the Greek statues are white in color. However, recent studies are showing the statues were colored with bright colors. I think it is possible that Buddhist arts are the same as Greek statues. I mean, I guess Buddha's footprints were colored at first.

In relation to Buddha's footprints adorned with multiple auspicious signs, I carefully examined the collection of eight auspicious signs that has been known from time immemorial as the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala*. As a result, I was able to understand that the *Aṣṭa-Maṅgala* has an important function in iconography and ceremony, and I considered how it influenced the Buddha's footprints of Sri Lanka. Regarding the relationship between the 32 major marks of a Great Man attributed to the Buddha and Buddha's footprint, I was unable to do as much analysis as necessary.

I confirmed again that the footprints of the Buddha are important object for Sri Lankan Buddhist arts during Anurādhapura period. Many number and variety of footprints show it.

End Notes

- (1) Niwa, Motoji, *Buddha's footprints, pictures and explanations: Buddhism as seen through the footprints of Buddha*, Meicho Shuppan, 1992, p. 149.
- (2) *Abhidharmakosa*, ed. Ldela Valie Powssin, Paris, 1923, ch.7. v.34
- (3) *Mahavastu*, ed. Radha Govinda Basak, London, 1914, II. p. 18.
- (4) Wikramagamage Chandra, *Principles of Buddhist Iconology*, Nedemala, 1997, p. 54
- (5) *Dīgha Nikāya*. III, PTS, London, 1960, pp. 142-ff.
- (6) Wikramagamage Chandra. *op.cit.* pp. 10-11.
- (7) *Dīgha Nikāya*. III, pp. 142-66.
- (8) *Ibid.*
- (9) Chutiwongs Nandana, "Buddha's Footprints — A preliminary Study", *Ancient Ceylon*, 1990, 10, pp. 59-116.
- (10) *Ibid.* pp. 59-116.

- (11) *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, vol. III, ed. G.P. Malalasekera, Government of Sri Lanka, 1971, p. 151.
- (12) *Māhāvamsa*, Ch.1, v.77.
- (13) *Vamsatthappakāsinī*, ed. G.P. Malalasekera, PTS, London, 1935, p. 114.
- (14) Quagliotti. Anna. Maria, *Buddhapadas*, Italy, 1998, p. 142.
- (15) *Anguttara Nikāya*, I, PTS, London, 1961, p. 124.
- (16) Coomarasuwamy, A.K., *Mahāyāna Sūtralankāra*. ch.xiv, v.45; 1998 (reprint) *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Munshiran Monoharla publishers Pvt, p4. and note 133.
- (17) Coomarasuwamy, *op.cit.*, note for fig. 1.
- (18) Karunaratne, T.B., “The Eight Auspicious Symbols (With Five Plates)”, *Journal and R.A.S.* (Ceylon). vol. xv. 1971.
- (19) *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- (20) Soni, R.L., 2006-2012 (trans.) *Life's Highest Blessings: The Maha Mangala Sutta*, Bhikku Khantipalo.
- (21) *Mahāmangalajātaka*, [Jataka-A, 453]
- (22) *Vamsatthappakāsinī*. ed. Geiger, W., PTS., London, 1958, Ch. 27. vv. 29-38.
- (23) *Sikhavalañda saha Sikhavalañda-vinisa*, ed. D.B. Jayatillaka, 1924.
- (24) *Pālimuttaka Vinaya Vinicchaya Sangaha Tikā*, ed. D.B. Jayatillaka, 1942, p. 75.
- (25) Wikramagama Chandra, “*Aṣṭamaṅgala And Aṣṭamahāgrahamaṇḍara*”
- (26) *Manjusrī Vāstunidyā Sāstra*, ed. Jayasuriya M.H.F, Prematilleke Leelanda, Silva Roland, The Archaeological survey of Sri Lanka and The central cultural fund, 1995.
- (27) Karunaratne, *op.cit.* pp. 50-69.
- (28) *Ibid.* pp. 50-69.
- (29) *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, Coomarasuwamy A.K, p. 271.
- (30) Prof. C. Wikramagama said this to me verbally during my research on 2011.
- (31) Yijing, *Account of Buddhism sent from the South Seas*, tr. Miyabayashi Shogen, Eiji Kato. Hōzōkan, 2004, pp. 245-247.

Table of selected Buddha's footprints in Sri Lanka

Legend : ○ mark means possess, / means nothing,
SV (*srivatsa*) or 卐 (*swastika*) appears on the toe

	Place	Wheel or Lotus	toe	Umbrella and lotus	Auspicious symbols
1	Vessagiriya	/	/	○ /	/
2	Ruvanwāli sāya 1	/	?	○ ○	/
3	Ruvanwāli sāya 2	/ ○	○	○ /	/
4	Anurādhapura museum 1	○	○卐	/ /	umbrella, fly-whisk, filled-pitcher, auspicious conch-shell, goad, <i>vajra</i>
5	Anurādhapura museum 2	○	○卐 SV	/ /	conch-shell, fly-whisk, <i>srivatsa</i> , pair of fish, spear, filled-pitcher, <i>swastika</i> , seat, <i>vajra</i>
6	Anurādhapura museum 3	○ and rabbit	○卐	○ /	unclear
7	Abhayagiri museum 1	○	□	/ /	<i>vajra</i>
8	Abhayagiri museum 2	/	○	○ ○	/
9	Abhayagiri museum 3	○	○	/	<i>vajra</i>
10	Abhayagiri museum 4	/	○	○ /	/
11	Abhayagiri Throne-shrine 1	/	/	/ /	/
12	Abhayagiri Throne-shrine 2	/	/	/ /	/
13	Abhayagiri Throne-shrine 3	/	○	○ /	/
14	Avukana two pair of one	/	/	○ ○	/
15	Buduruwayāya	○	○	/ /	<i>vajra</i> , flag, fly-whisk, goad
16	Rasvehera 1	○	○卐	/ /	<i>vajra</i>
17	Rasvehera 2	/	/	○ /	/
18	Jātavanarāma museum 1 (The parts of the two pair of one)	/ ○	○	○ /	<i>srivatsa</i> , conch-shell, <i>vajra</i> , umbrella
19	Jātavanarāma museum 2	/	○	○ /	/
20	Jātavanarāma museum 3	○	○	○ /	/
21	Jātavanarāma museum 4	/ ○	○	○ ○	/
22	Abhayagiri stūpa	/	/	○ /	/
23	Sōmavati	○	○卐	○ /	conch-shell, fly-whisk, pair of fish, pot, <i>vajra</i>
24	Colombo National museum	○	○卐	/ /	conch-shell, <i>swastika</i> , pair of fish, flag, fly-whisk, streamer, filled-pitcher, goad, <i>vajra</i> , <i>srivatsa</i> , auspicious seat, umbrella
25	Isurumuniya	○	○卐 SV	/ /	conch-shell, umbrella, goad, <i>swastika</i> , <i>vajra</i> , filled-pitcher,
26	Mirisavatiya stūpa (one foot)	/	/	/ /	/
27	Katussara (refectory) Anurādhapura	?	○	○ ○	/

Illustrations Datas of the rubbing of the Buddha's footprint

Legend; length×width /one foot, wheel's or lotus diameter, length of toe (unit-centimeter)

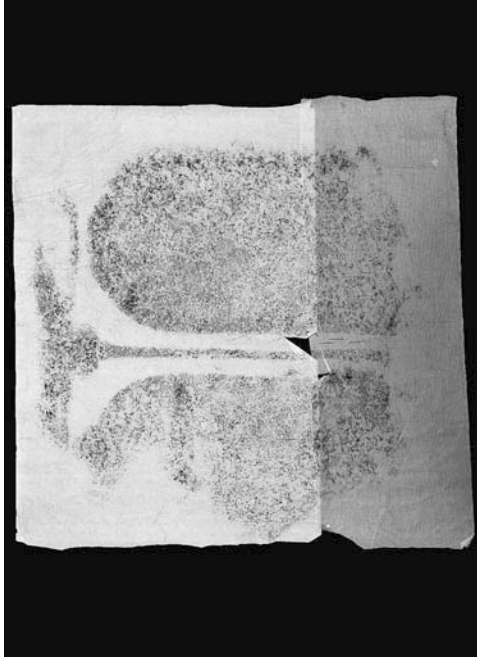


Fig. 1. Vessagiriya
About 73×42, toe: ?, Umbrella

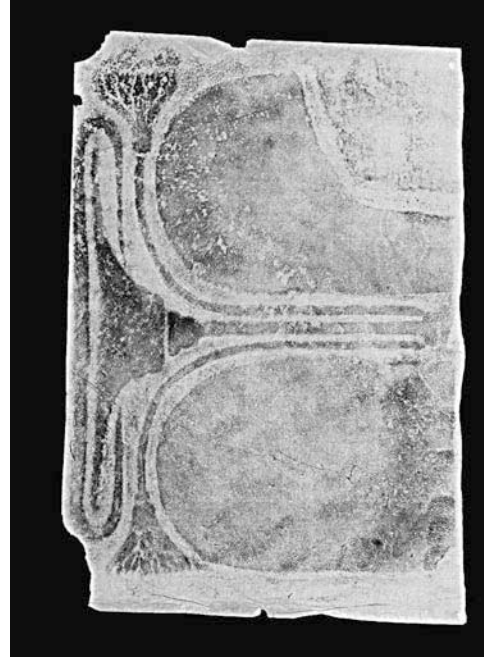


Fig. 2. Ruvanveri sāya No. 1
38×26, toe: ?, Umbrella and lotus

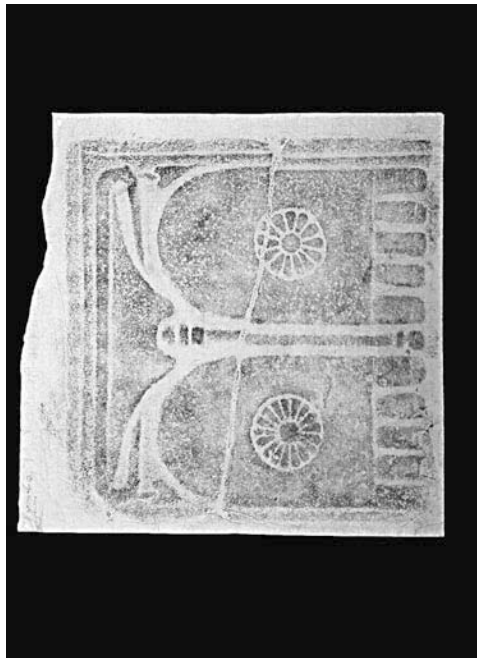


Fig. 3. Ruvanwāli sāya No. 2
45.5×25, toe: 9 Lotus: 12
Umbrella

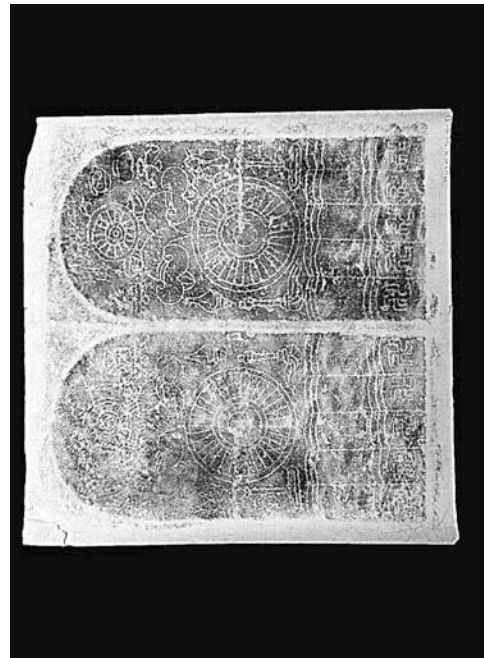


Fig. 4. Anurādhapura Museum No. 1
61×29 toe: 18, 卐, wheel: 18
umbrella, fly-whisk, filled pitcher,
auspicious seat, conch shell, goad, vajra

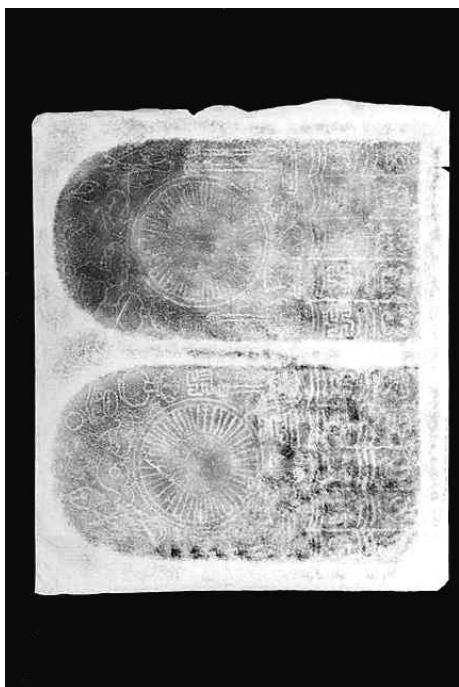


Fig. 5. Anurādhapura Museum No.2
61×32, toe: 17卐, *srivatsa*, wheel: 22
conch shell, fly-whisk, *srivatsa*, pair of
fish, spear, filled-pitcher, *swastika*,
auspicious seat, *vajra*

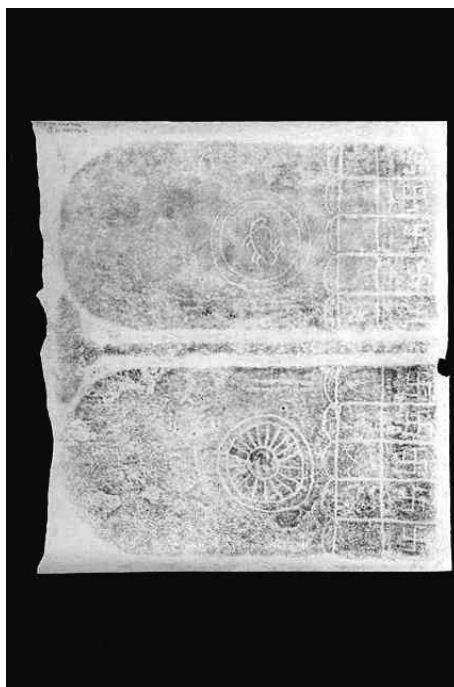


Fig. 6. Anurādhapura Museum No.3
67×28, toe: 17.5, 卐, wheel: 15 (A
rabbit is in left)
auspicious sighs are unclear.

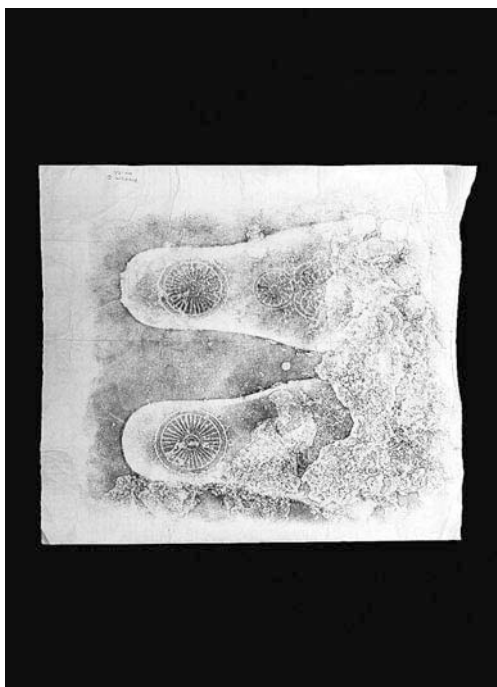


Fig. 7. Abhayaigiri Museum No.1
73×42 wheel: 12, toe: damaged
vajra

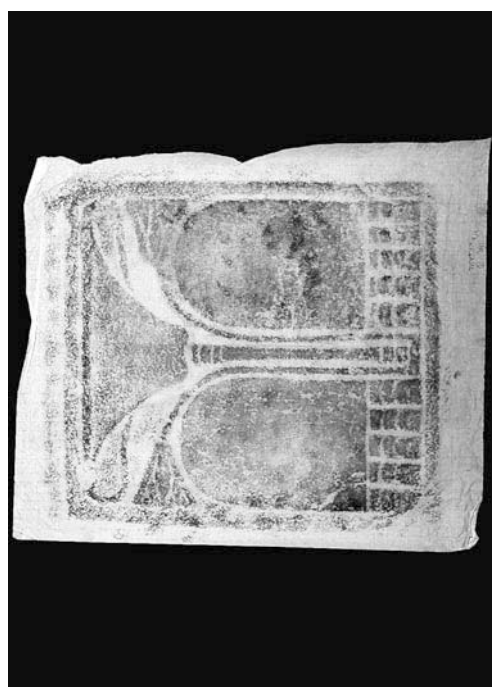


Fig. 8. Abhayagiri Museum No.2
36×20, toe: 8 Umbrella and lotus

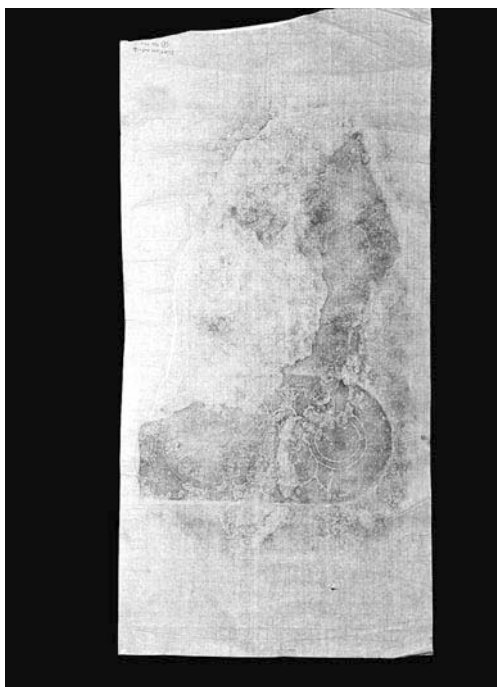


Fig. 9. Abhayagiri Museum No.3 outside
About 42×21.5 (toes are lost)
vajra

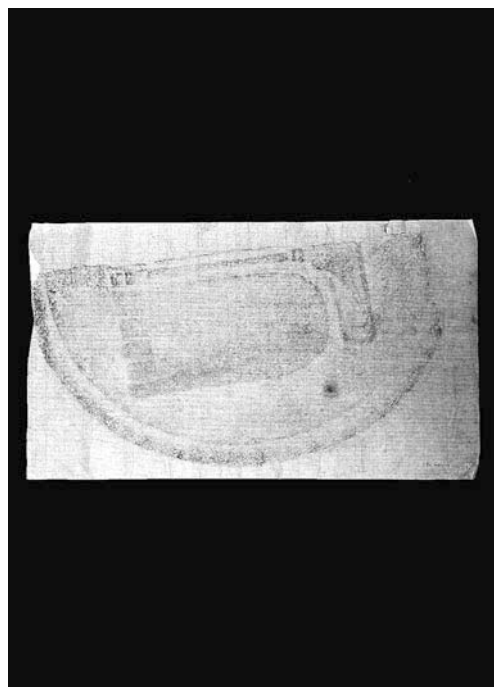


Fig. 10. Abhayagiri Museum No.4
About 39×25 (heel side 20) toe: 5
Umbrella

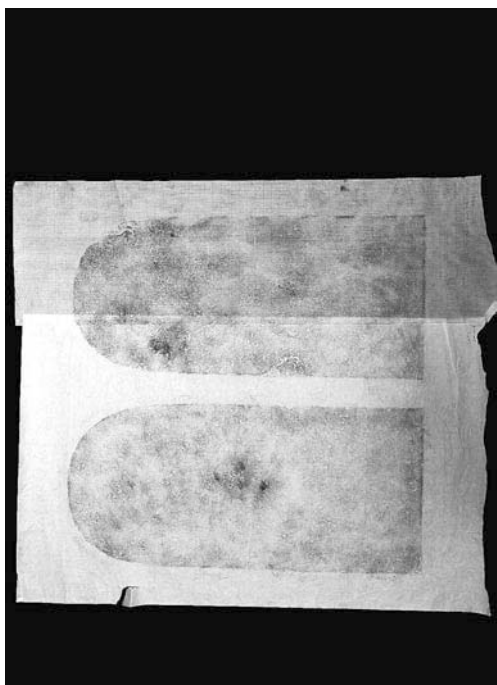


Fig. 11. Abhayagiri Throne-shrine No. 1
 78×38.5 ,
No marks, no toe

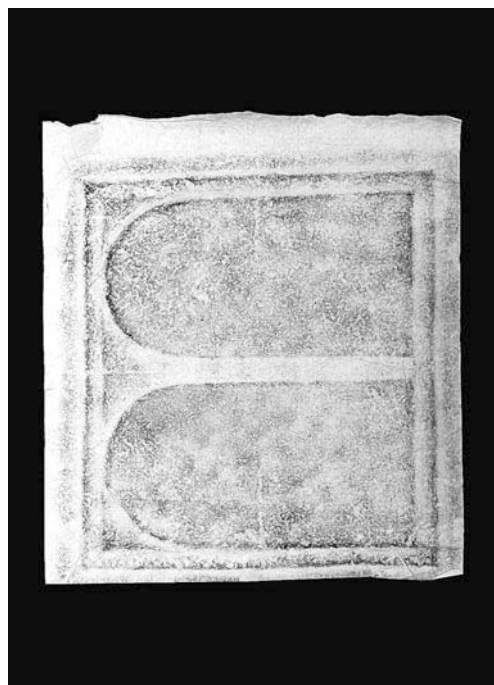


Fig. 12. Abhayagiri Throne-shrine No.2
 50.5×29 ,
No marks, no toe

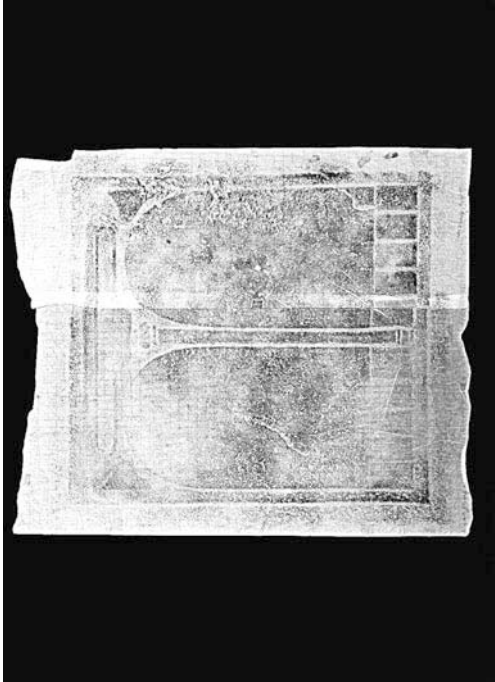


Fig. 13. Abhayagiri Thrine-shrine. No.3
58×33, toe: 8, Umbrella

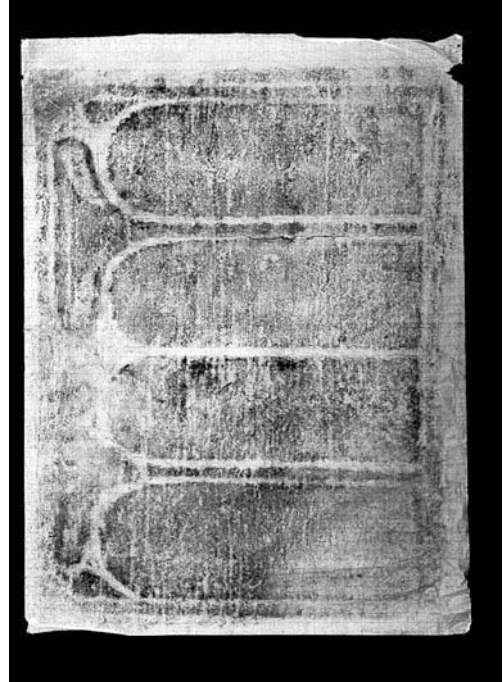


Fig. 14. Avukana
2 pair of foot 48×18, no toe, Umbrella

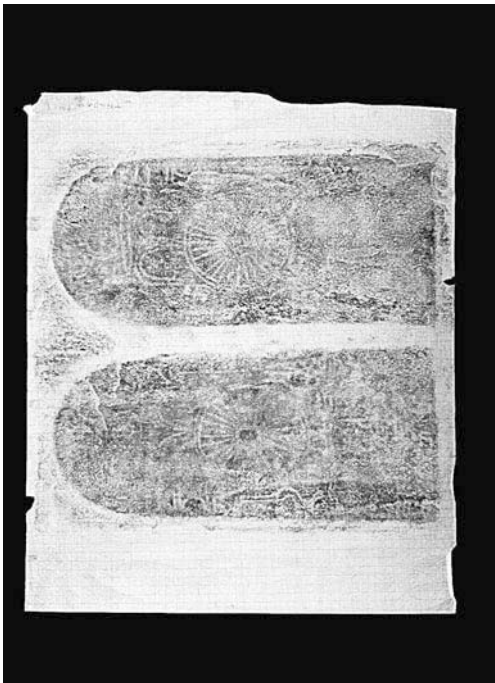


Fig. 15. Buduruwayāya
62×29, no toe
vajra, flag, fly-whisk, goad

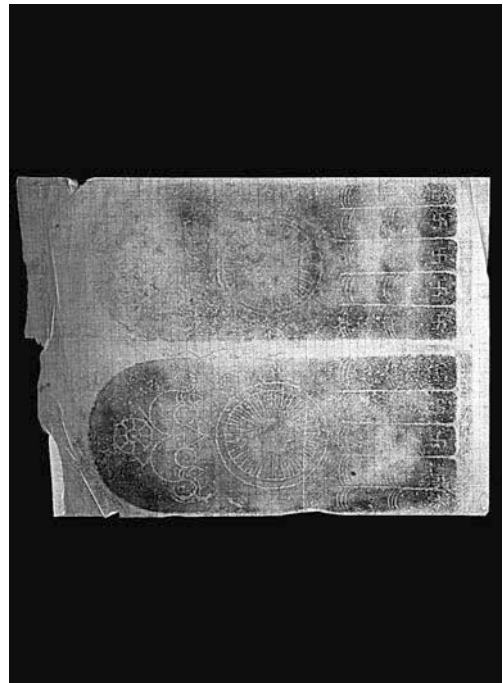


Fig. 16. Rasvehera No.1
68.5×31, toe: 22, 卍, wheel: 21
vajra

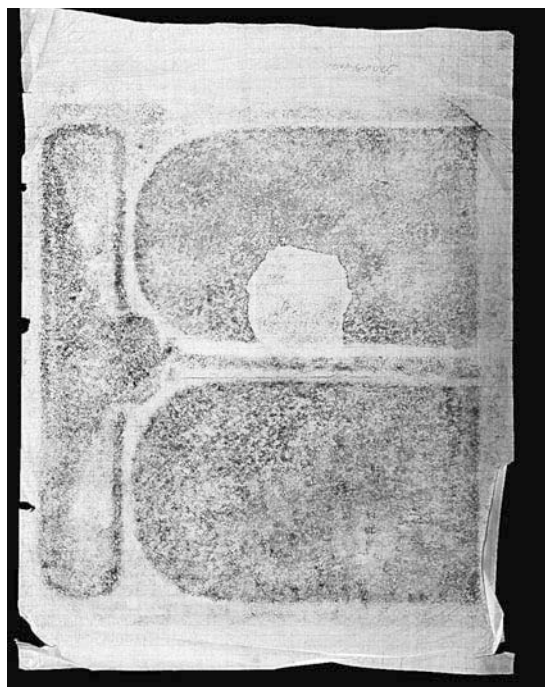


Fig. 17. Rasvehera No.2
48×33, no toe.
Umbrella

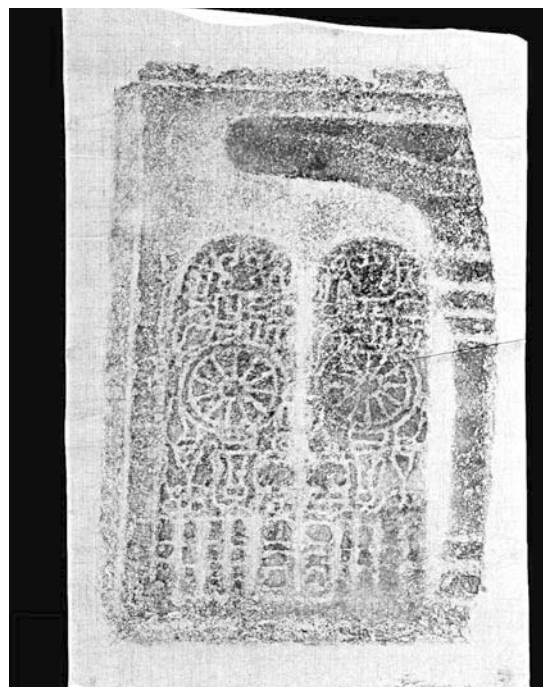


Fig. 18. Jētavanarāma Museum No.1
46×15, toe: 10, Lotus: 11
srivatsa, conch-shell, *vajra*, Umbrella

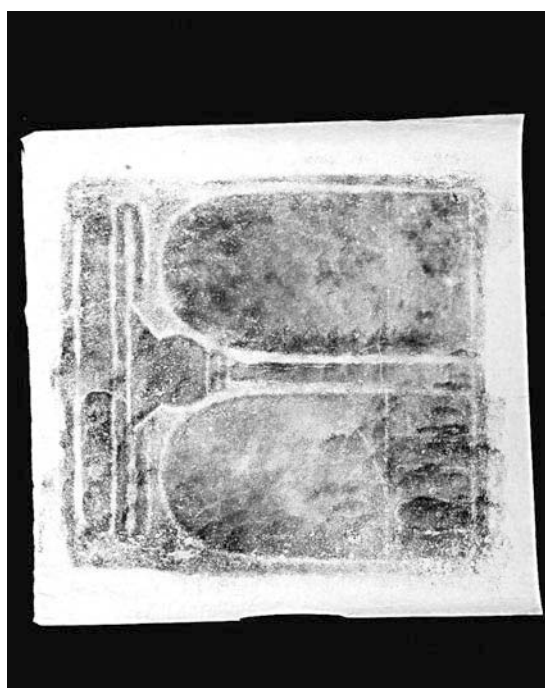


Fig. 19. Jētavanarāma Museum No.2
39×22, toe: 10.5,
Umbrella

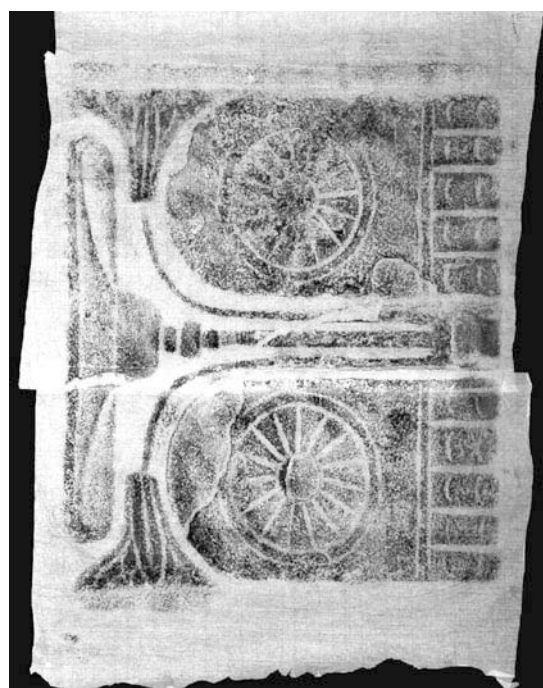


Fig. 20. Jētavanarāma Museum No.3
47×27, toe: 11 wheel: 22,
Umbrella and lotus

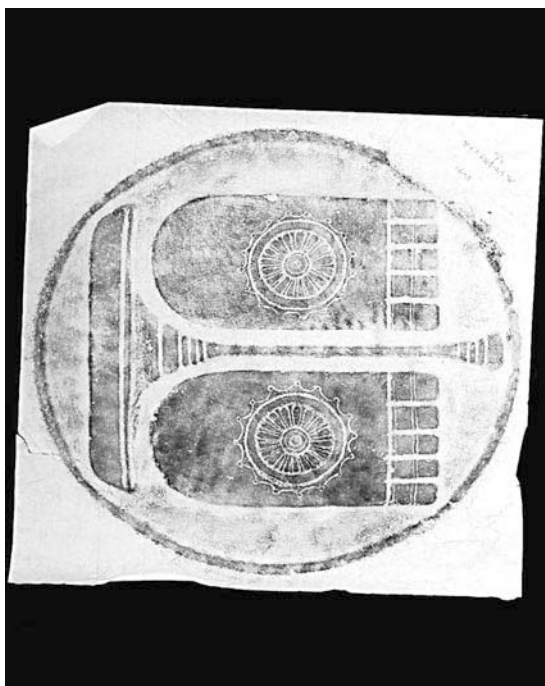


Fig. 21. Jētavanarāma Museum No.4
39×19.5, toe: 6 lotus: 12.5
Umbrella

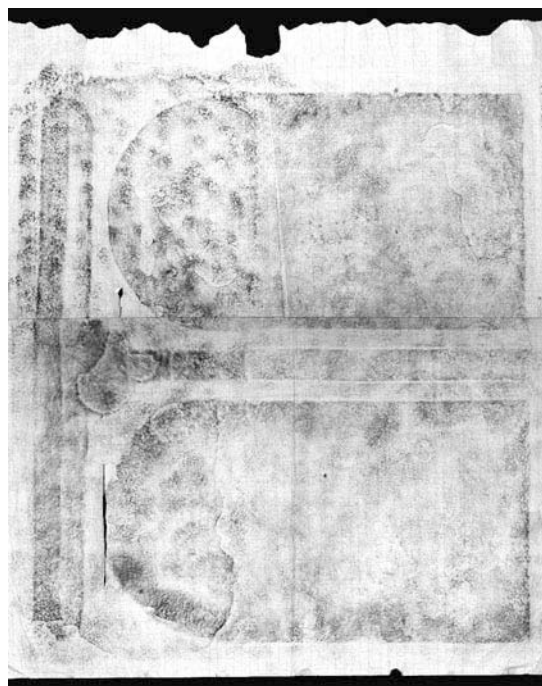


Fig. 22. Abhayagiri Stūpa No.1
77×44, no toe
Umbrella

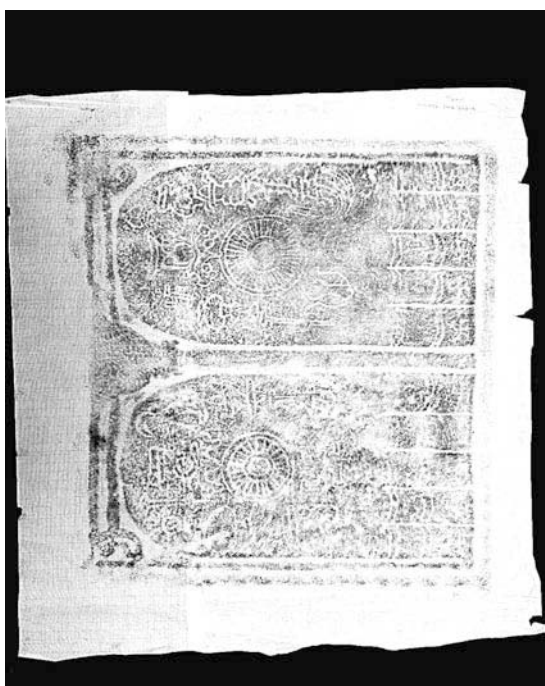


Fig. 23. Sōmavati
70×38, toe: 16, 卐, wheel: 17, 14
Umbrella, conch shell, fly-whisk, pair of
fish, vajra

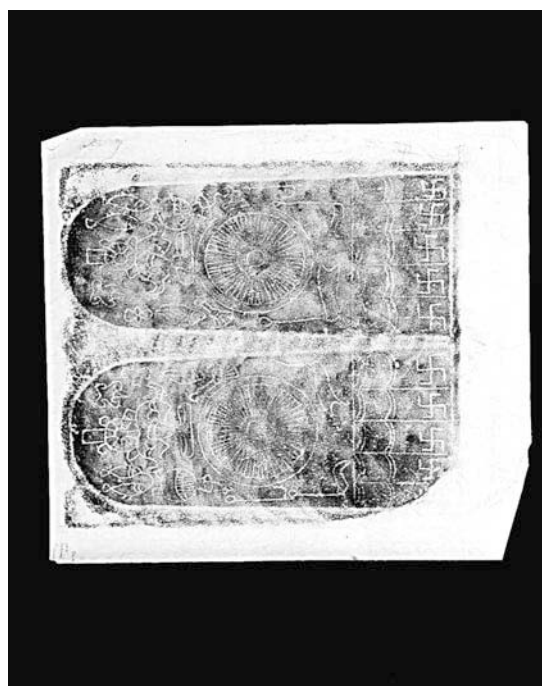


Fig. 24. Colombo National M. No.1
55×24.5 (heel side), toe: 14 卐,
wheel: 17
conch shell, umbrella, swastika, pair of
fish, flag, fly-whisk, streamer, goad,
filled-pitcher, *srivatsa*, vajra, auspicious
seat

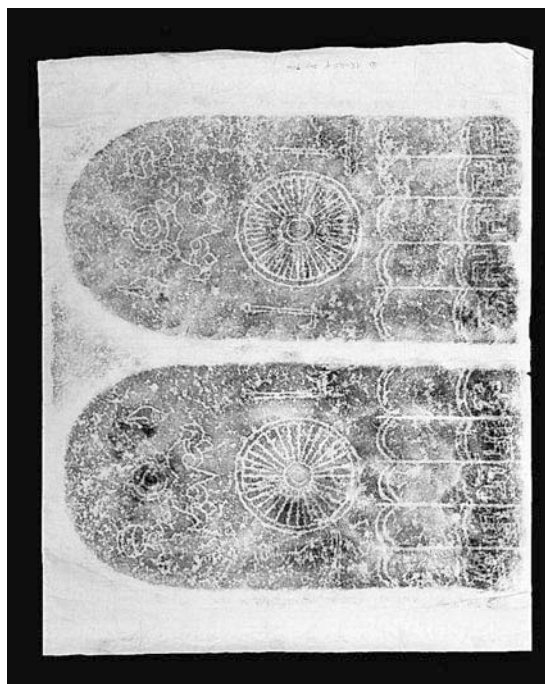


Fig. 25. Isurumuniya
64×33, toe: 22, 卐, wheel: 18
conch-shell, umbrella, goad, filled-
pitcher, swastika, vajra

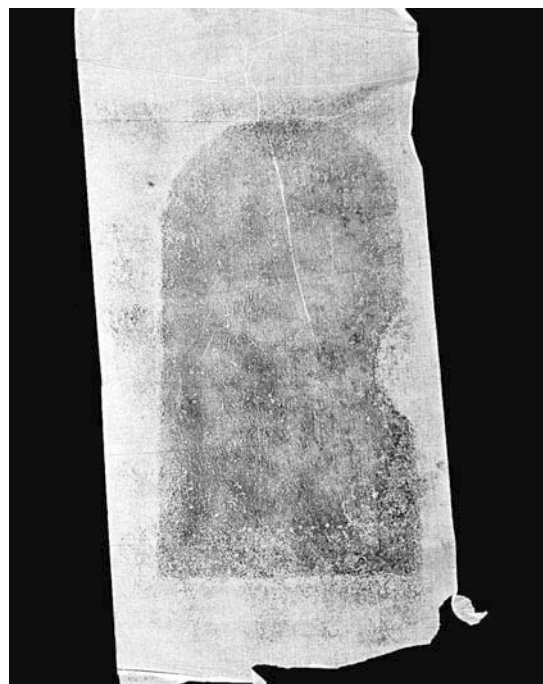


Fig. 26. Mirisavatiya stūpa
74×40, (heel side 36)
No toe, no marks

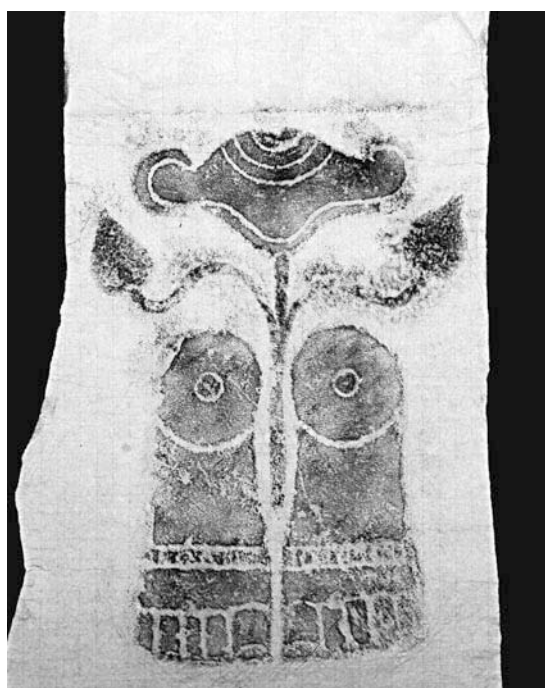


Fig. 27. Kattusara (Refectory) Anurādhapura
Umbrella and lotus

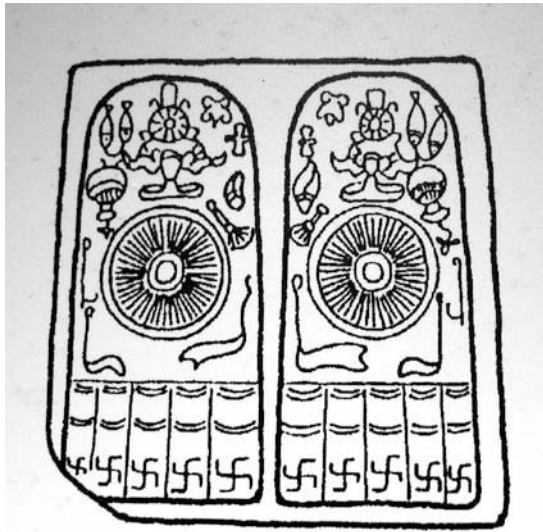


Fig. 28. Footprint of the Colombo National museum



Fig.29. Same to the Fig. 28

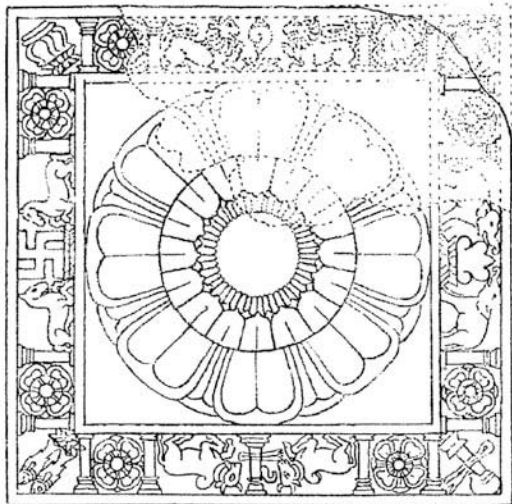


Fig. 30. Aṣṭa-mangala from Anurādhapura

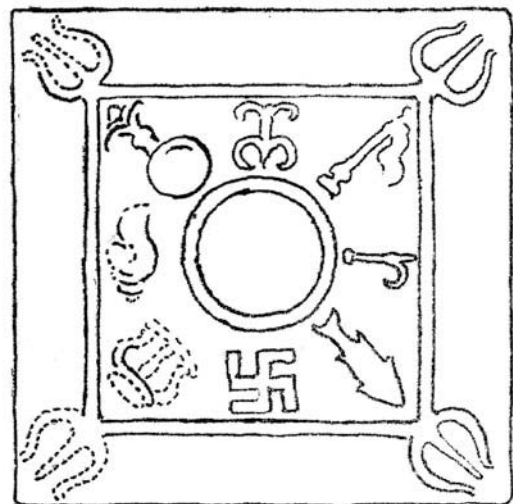


Fig. 31. Aṣṭa-mangala from Polonnaruwa



Fig. 32. Aṣṭa-mangala from Tantirimallē