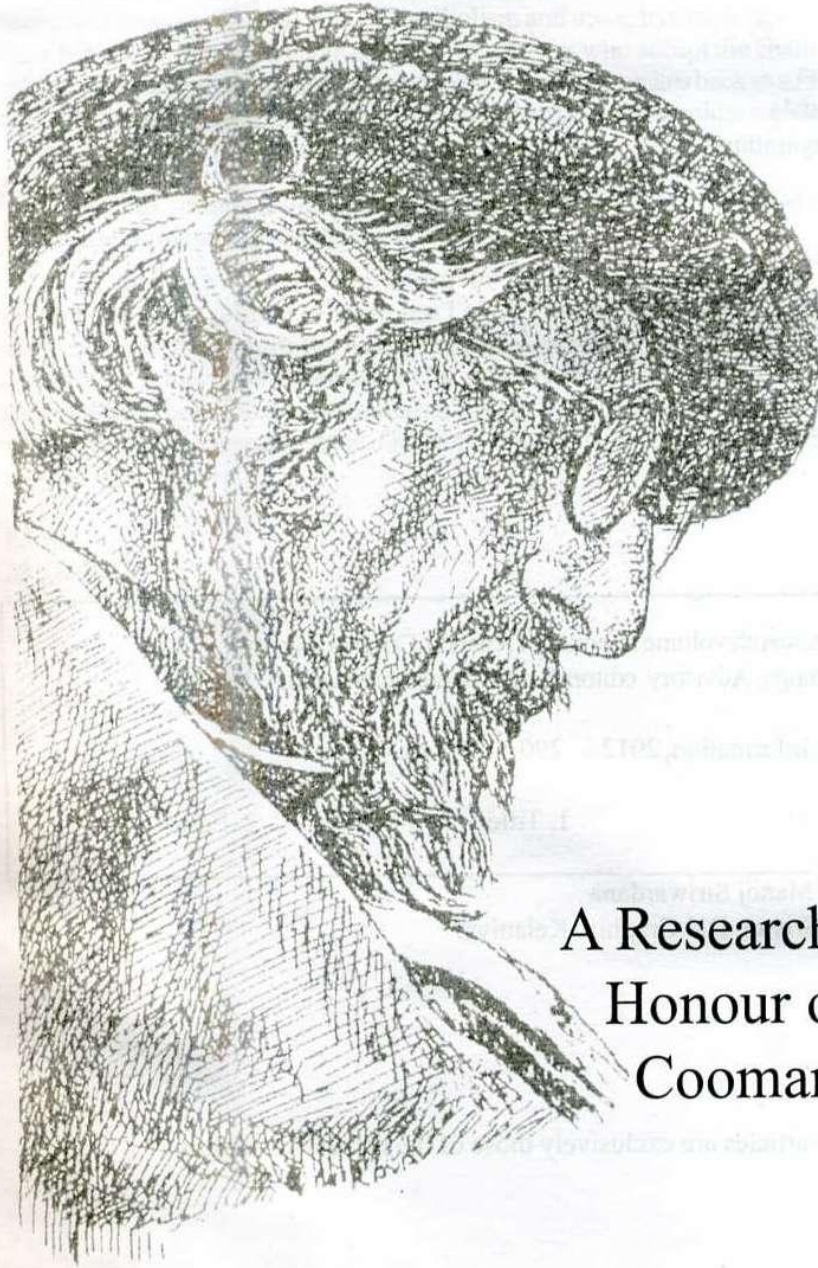# Asian Art and Culture

A Research Volume in
Honour of Ananda
Coomaraswamy

Kings, Monks and Pre-colonial States: Patrons of the Temple of the Sacred Footprint

Premakumara De Silva[1]

Introduction

This paper focuses on the relations between the kings, monks, and the temple during 'pre-colonial' histories to assess the impact of the changes that occurred after the Sri Pada temple was 'politically recognised' by the pre-colonial 'Buddhist' states. I closely examined both the connections and continuities and the breaks and shifts between the different 'centres of powers', which politically recognised Sri Pâda as a centre of worship from the early part of the 12th century. As Nissan and Stirrat point out, in pre-colonial states; ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences were not used as the basis for inclusion or exclusion from the polity. At various times groups would speak alternative languages, adhere to alternative religions and claim alternative identities (1990: 26). As Tambiah, Anderson and Stein show, the pre-modern states of South and Southeast Asia, despite variations in detail, emerge as relatively loosely structured organizations built upon the bases of heterogeneity, relativity, and continuity, and on the ideal of the delegation of power from the centre (cf. ibid: 24). This S. J. Tambiah describes as a 'Galactic Polity' (1976, 1985) and Burton Stein formulates as a 'segmentary state' (1980). In my view, such differences were evidently tolerated at the pre-colonial Sri Pâda, which had been continuously patronized by the pre-colonial states. Though Buddhist monks had controlled the Sri Pâda temple and Buddhist kings lavishly patronised it, alternative religious belief and practices were never excluded from pre-colonial Sri Pâda. Instead, they were accommodated and recognised.

The relationship between the king and the temple, as many anthropologists who study mainly South Indian temples (e.g., Appadurai 1981, Fuller 1984, 2003,) explain, was always linked with the expansion of royal hegemony over people. According to them the king's hegemony was displayed and regenerated through his sponsorship of major rituals and gift giving to the priests and regional subordinates, and through state administrative apparatus. As Appadurai puts it, widespread relationships of Hindu kings to South Indian temples implied a continuous dependence of the sovereignty of human rulers on their transactions with the paradigmatic sovereigns enshrined in temples (1981: 214). The relationship between king and temple seems to have been generally the case in Sri Lanka as well. For example, H. L. Seneviratne (1978) has shown that in the Kandyan kingdom, state ritual demonstrated a similar relationship although, in Kandy, this relationship linked a divine king and a sovereign paradigm of the

[1]Professor, Head/Department of Sociology, University of Colombo.

Buddha. Winslow (1984) has similarly shown in the Kandyan state that the gods could also have served as paradigms. And Obeyesekere has even suggested that the hierarchical model of the pantheon and the political order of the Kandyan state has the power of incorporating (1963, 1966) outlying regions into the centralised polity. In this chapter, as far as the Sri Pâda temple is concerned, the nature of the relationship between king and temple is not only explained in relation to the Kandyan state, but also to other previous centres of power too. So, I want to discuss the significance of the 'politically recognised' Sri Pâda temple in relationship to the different 'centres of pre-colonial power', which had the quality of accommodating diverse identities at large within segmented or incorporated political situations in the pre-colonial states[1]. The transactional and redistributive relationship between the king and temple helped the king to publicly legitimise his hegemony not only over the temple areas but also the areas beyond the temple. The king exercised his authority over temples as well as their surrounding regions by controlling and maintaining the temples' administration and ritual order. The way in which they ordered and re-ordered Sri Pâda temple's administration and ritual order in different 'regimes of power' is the central theme of this paper. But, such projects of ordering Sri Pâda temple affairs in the colonial and postcolonial powers will not be discussed in the paper (see De Silva 2005). Let me start my inquiry by exploring the historical juncture of the emerging of Sri Pâda temple as a pilgrimage site of the (pre-colonial) state recognition.

Sri Pâda Temple as a site of Royal recognition

The cult of worshipping the footprint in Buddhist societies in South and South-east Asia is undoubtedly an ancient religious practice. However, there is no definite historical evidence about exactly when the cult was popularised in the Buddhist cultural regions. In the case of Sri Lanka some argue that the worship of the footprint can be traced back to the 2nd century BCE, but the site of worship was historically not the exact place where present worship takes place (Sri Pâda) (Ranavalla 1965: 187-219). Ranavella argues that the present pilgrimage site (Sri Pâda) of footprint worshipping emerged around the 10th century CE. There is good reason to accept his argument because, after the 5th century Mahavamsa documentation, of the Buddha's mythical engagement with Sri Pâda, it is hard to find textual or archaeological information on any significant human engagement at Sri Pâda before the 10th century. As Paranavitana puts it 'It is in the reign of Vijayabahu I [1055-1110], we have the earliest historical evidence in the chronicles and in inscriptions for the cult of the Footprint on Adam's peak' (1958: 12). I want to make clear that this particular historical moment marked, as I will explain later, the beginning of the state or king taking seriously (or "politically recognizing") Sri Pâda affairs in their court

---

[1] Appadurai (1981), Susan Bayly (1989) and recently Mark Whitaker (1999) have continued this view in their Hindu Temples studies. Susan Bayly in her massive work on Islam and Christianity in South India has shown that despite formal allegiance to different religious traditions, 'The sharing of …themes and principles of worship transcended divisions of community or confessional attachment' (1989: 455). This she describes through 'circuits of mutual influence'. Whatever the case in south India, in Sri Lanka these 'circuit of mutual influence' have had a long history. As I have partly explained in this paper Sri Pâda temple has for centuries been part of an international circuit, which includes Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist worlds than Bayly's interpretation of the South Indian material would allow.

[2] R.A.L.H. Gunawardena says that evidently this shrine (Sri Pâda) was known and revered even at the time when the Mahavamsa was written (1979: 233). This may be true, but in my view until early 12th century Sri Pâda was not a sacred site recognised by the state.

agendas. In other words, the institutionalisation of footprint worship under the Buddhist states began, I would argue, only after the early 12th century[2]. One could argue that superficially there was no kind of a state link in place prior to that historical moment. As a preamble to that, let me sketch out the geographical and political formations of ancient civilization on the island, in which Sri Pâda emerged as a state-recognised centre of worship, or more precisely pilgrimage. I am sure, it will at least in part answer the above question.

In classical times the three major divisions of monarchical power were constituted as Rajarata or Pihiti rata, the centre of civilization in the North Central Province; Ruhuna, in the very south, which was extended at times to the Kalu Ganga (river) in the Western Province; Mayarata, which constituted much of the modern Western Province. The fourth region, Malayarata, was forested and desolate hill country and was practically ignored in ancient classification. Basically, Sri Pâda was located in the South-western part of the forested Malayarata and present part of Sabaragamuva of the Mayarata[3]. Neither the Malayarata or the Mayarata civilizations were as important as Ruhuna and the Rajarata. Mainly, because of their geographical formations: Malayarata was forested and hilly while in the Mayarata excessive rainfall did not permit the development of a hydraulic civilizational model like that of Ruhuna and Rajarata. Geographical factors also perhaps account for the virtual absence of monumental archaeological remains. According to the Mahavamsa, Malayarata was still a wilderness in the 12th century. It was difficult to penetrate owing to the mountains and danger from wild animals and was shut off from intercourse with other men, being traversed only by footpaths. Hence, under these conditions Sri Pâda was not a popular pilgrimage site during either of the two classical civilizations, particularly Rajarata, until the regime of Vijayabahu I of Polonnaruva was established in the 12th century. However, this does not mean that prior to this there had been no 'pilgrimage' at Sri Pâda. Perhaps, initially, this mountain might have been a religious site for the Väddâ [hunters], a group of indigenous people. Because, Sri Pâda was situated in the middle of the Väddâ's country, Sapara (väddâ) + Gamuva (the province of the hunters).

Moreover, the Mahavamsa, the Buddhist chronicle, also confirmed this region as the country of the Väddâ, since the days of the first father of the Sinhala group, Prince Vijaya, in the 6th century BCE. Vijaya initially married a demoness named Kuveni but later rejected her to marry a Tamil princess from South India. From this legitimate union sprung the Sinhala people. Vijaya's two children with Kuvani fled the area after her death: 'fleeing with speed they went thence to the Samantakuta (Sri Pâda). When he grew up, the son, the elder of the two children, took his own sister for his wife, and multiplied with sons and daughters' (Mv.vii 67). They dwelt in the surroundings of Samantakuta; since then this area has become the settlement of the Väddâ and so is now called "Sabaragamuva". Moreover, they were in the territory of the god Saman, who was according to Mahavamsa "resided in the Samantakuta" (ibid.). This account from the Mahavamsa perhaps also accounted for a piece of folklore that I have gathered from this region. In a story, the footprint of the Buddha on the mountain (*Samanala*) was discovered by the Väddâ, known as *malvatu* Väddâ (Väddâ of the flower garden). Similarly, the 15th

---

[3]   It has been asserted in some historical accounts that Sri Pâda fell under the jurisdiction of the kingdom of "Ruhunu Rata". But it is hard to find historical or archaeological material to prove such connections.

century poetry called *Parevi Sandçsaya* refers to daughters of Väddâs in the area below Samanala (Sri Pâda), in Sabaragamuva.

According to Obeyesekere (2002) Väddâs claimed that the deity Saman was one of their ancestors before he foolishly invited the Buddha to the Väddâ's country (*vädi rata*). Also, Bambura Yaka of the Väddâs of the Seligmans' day (1911) was traditionally propitiated in the Sabaragamuva Province. Obeyesekere explains Bambura was adopted by the Sinhala in Sabaragamuva and Western provinces for one very good reason: hunting. For him, some practice hunting as a way of life, some use it to supplement rice cultivation (1984:305-306). This habit according to Obeyesekere began to change when a monastery or temple was established in a village and the people become more Buddhist, although individuals continue to hunt everywhere in Buddhist Sri Lanka (ibid.). In the fifteenth century Buddhism was firmly established in this region, particularly in the coastal areas, and also in parts of the interior. This would *ipso facto* have produced a change in hunting as a general pattern of life in many areas under Buddhist influence. Even had hunting existed, it would have inevitably been culturally devalued (ibid.). If Sri Pâda were a site of Väddâ's worship, as Obeyesekere (2002) explains quite reasonably, the movement from Väddâ to Buddhist (which parallels the movement from hunting to agriculture) would probably lead us to conclude that Sri Pâda was a site of Buddhist worship in the first place.

If this is the case we can speculate that the site of Väddâ worship might have been transformed into a site of Buddhist worship by the emerging Buddhist state. It is probable, then, that Sri Pâda was a popular sacred destination for Buddhist pilgrims prior to the 12th century. As early as the 10th century, according to Iban Batutta, the first Muslim (Arabic) pilgrim, Soleyman had visited the site. But regardless of who worshipped at or occupied Sri Pâda before the 12th century, my argument is that Sri Pâda was "politically recognized" as an important site of Buddhist pilgrimage only after the 11th century. Before then it was neither 'politically' or religiously recognized as an important site for the royal courts in the earliest centre of Sinhala Buddhist classical civilization in Anuradhapura. However, Sri Pâda was on the royal agenda of the Polonnaruva royal courts, which were established after the collapse of Anuradhapura at the end of 10th century, but Sri Pâda remained important and its popularity continued to increase after the great hydraulic networks of the dry zone, based in Polonnaruva, collapsed under the attacks of South Indian invaders, particularly Magha of Kalinga in 1214. Thus, the thirteenth century saw the centres of political power move south-west, first to Dambadeniya, then Yapahuva, then Gampola, and finally to Kotte in the Western Province and Kandy in the Central Province. Each of these "centres of power" that emerged on the periphery of the "hydraulic" Rajarata civilization took Sri Pâda affairs seriously in their royal court agendas.

Emergence of Sri Pâda as a site of monarchic politics

Why did Sri Pâda became a "politically" important and religiously 'popular' site for Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist communities on the island just after the 11th century or even before? My argument here is that the emergence of Sri Pâda as an important and popular pilgrimage site probably occurred after the Mayarata [consisting of the present-day Western Province, parts of Sabaragamuva, and the North-Western Province] became prominent through foreign trade, particularly the rise of Indian maritime trading. In other words, as we shall see, Sri Pâda had become a politically recognised

religious site after the establishment of a centre of power, which flourished largely on the surplus of the trade-based economies in the Mayarata civilization. Part of this argument is inspired by Gananath Obeyesekere, who argues against both 'positivist' and 'nationalist' readings or understandings of Sri Lankan history.

Obeyesekere points out that Sri Lankan historians have been firmly of the opinion that the abandonment of the Rajarata-centred northern dry zone civilization due to the invasion of South Indian rulers eventually led to a real discontinuation of the Sinhala civilization[4]. Obeyesekere strongly argues against this premise. He shows that the major cause of decline of not only Rajarata but also Ruhuna hydraulic civilization was social motivations and economic imperative rather than migration to the southwest. He further argues that

> The collapse of the northern dry zone civilization after Magha was at best a necessary condition for the abandonment of Rajarata, but it was not a sufficient one. There is no doubt that the invasion of Magha was socially disastrous and demoralizing for the Sinhalas, but the viability of the civilizations that were established later in the south and west indicates that the kings could have staged a comeback had they wanted to do so. But there was a lure that prevented them and impelled them to the western coast—trade (1984: 8).

Also he shows that by the thirteenth century the ports of the Western and Southern provinces [from Waligama in the southeast to Colombo, and perhaps even further north to Chilaw and Kalpitiya] had come into prominence, particularly with the advent of trade with the Arabs. Control of this lucrative source of income produced a movement to the Wet Zone from both directions, from Rajarata as well as Ruhuna (ibid). Obeyesekere concludes his argument by emphasising that 'the movement southwest after the thirteenth century did not imply any real discontinuity in Sinhala civilization, as many historians claim. It simply meant that the Mayarata took on a new prominence: after the thirteenth century the capital of the Sinhala kings was established there, and it was there that the Sinhala Buddhist civilization continued to flourish'. But Obeyesekere recognizes the Kandyan civilization as not old, continuing tradition; for him 'it was a relatively new phenomenon with a heavy overlay of later South Indian influence' (1984: 8-9).

I have located my argument in this 'transformation' but at the same time I do not totalise pre-colonial socio-cultural formations when I explain how Sri Pâda became a 'politically' important and 'religiously' popular pilgrimage site in the new economic conditions of the Mayarata. It is my intention to show how a different Sri Pâda emerges under different power constituencies, which were primarily based on a newly-emerging trade economy[5]. Similarly, Sri Pâda and its surrounding area became a place not only of worship, but also of economic viability for foreign traders, particularly the Chinese, Persians, Arabs and South Indians. One possible reason for that would be a recognition of Sabaragamuva as a source of precious gems and spices. Before such recognition, a large part of Sabaragamuva

---

[4]   I think their work has to be understood as a product of the "oriental positivist historiography" about Sri Lanka.

[5]   See: Bopearachchi, Osmond & R.M. Wickremesinhe (1999).

[6]   There are still some village names referring to Vadda in Sabaragamuva such as Vaddagala (Vadda rock), Vadda Ela (Vadda canal) and Vadihena (Vadda hena). Bailey refers to place names in this area like Vadi pangu (Vadda share of land), Vadi kumbura (Vadda fields), and Vadivatta (Vadda gardens) (Seligmann and Seligmann 1911: 09) (cf. Obeyesekere 1984: 304).

probably consisted of isolated villages and tribal groups of Väddâs[6]. Obeyesekere says 'It is likely that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and earlier, the Sabaragamuva area was populated with Väddâs, since it was generally isolated and forested. Even after the Sinhala civilization was firmly established in the south and west much of this area was remote and inaccessible' (1984: 304).

Sri Pâda and Sabaragamuva without doubt emerged due to their importance in the trade-based Mayarata civilization. Arab Muslims, who were involved in active trade before the advent of the Portuguese, established a dominant economic position in port settlements in this region (Arasaratnam 1964) and later many of them migrated to the interior Kandyan Kingdom, where they engaged in bullock transport and a diverse range of other occupations (Dewaraja 1986). Interestingly, those Arab Muslim groups who settled on the coast as well as in the interior by and large maintained their ethnic and religious identity, distinct from their Sinhala neighbours (Obeyesekere 1984: 307-308). South Indian immigrant groups who settled in this region, however, lacked the uniform character of the Muslim settlements. There were different types of immigrants - soldiers, merchants, tribesmen, Buddhists, and Hindus, as well as other types of settlers, and later most of them were incorporated into the Sinhala social structure and converted to Sinhala Buddhists (ibid). For example, one late immigrant group, the Salâgama caste of the west coast, were weavers from South India, probably from the Malabar Coast, and many of them came in the Dutch period. Today most of them are Sinhala-speaking Buddhists. Similarly the major wave of Karava (fishermen) immigration to the west coast occurred after the fifteenth century; today they are mostly Sinhala-speaking Buddhists or Catholics (see Roberts 1982; Jayawardene 2000).

In addition to that, the area was also subject to foreign and colonial influences beginning in 1505, the date of the Portuguese arrival. High population concentration, economic advancement, learning and religious revival activities occurred at this time. Kelaniya, with its temple, was obviously important even prior to the emerging Mayarata[7]. Interestingly, however, Jonathan Walters, in his *The History of Kelaniya* shows that the rise of Kelaniya as an important religious site did not happen later than early medieval times: 'a complex web of associations with Kelaniya initiated in early medieval Sri Lanka and developed into the present' (1996: 14). In this regard Walters' argument sheds some light on my own argument because, generally, pilgrimage sites like Kelaniya had also emerged under the socio-political and economic conditions which were also relevant to Sri Pâda. While other religious sites such as Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva remained, until they were discovered by the "archaeological project" of British Ceylon in the nineteenth century, Kelaniya and Sri Pâda continued to flourish as the main religious sites for the newly-emerged Mayarata civilization. Even today the majority of pilgrims visiting Sri Pâda come from the regions under the old Mayarata. Moreover, the geographical location of Sri Pâda made it visible to people who lived in most parts of the South-western coastal region of the old Mayarata. Its visibility even goes many miles beyond this region across the South-western seas from where it could be seen, like an unusual pinnacle landmark for the sea traders heading to South-western ports of the island. The rise of the trade-based South-western region attracted competing trading groups, whose numbers swelled in the medieval period, although there is evidence that these mercantile groups had had a strong influence since the 10th century (Codrington 1916). Such groups came either from the Middle Eastern or Far Eastern regions. In fact, groups from neighbouring South

---

[7]   For example: The vast literary output of the Kotte (1410-1544) and Matara periods (1750-1850) and emerging of well-known Buddhist monastic centres such as Keragala, Vidagama, Totagamuwa.

India, in my view, not only carried on trade with Sinhala kings but also brought their faiths, myths and practices and articulated them at sacred sites like Sri Pâda (see De Silva 2008).

Let me explain now how Sri Pâda became a 'religiously' popular and "politically" important site for the different royal courts of the Mayarata civilization, which were heavily dependent on foreign trade. Each of the royal courts that came to prominence after Rajarata civilization took Sri Pâda as an important site of pilgrimage and made it a central religious site by not only spending and granting considerable wealth to those royal courts through their "restoration projects" but also by making pilgrimages themselves to Sri Pâda. Under each royal restoration project, the administration (including the appointment of monks to the temple management) and ritual structure of the temple were remade or recreated according the interest of each royal court agenda. As the chief patron of Buddhism, the king watched over not only Buddhist temporalities, but also the monkhood itself. Whenever disputes occurred among monks, the king acted as the ultimate arbiter, as in lay disputes, and he maintained the internal discipline of the monkhood. Like Southeast Asian Buddhist kings, he acted as the guarantor of the social order and the source of prosperity (see Tambiah 1976).

Institutionalisation of Sri Pâda under King Vijayabahu I

According to the Mahavamsa and the remaining archaeological evidence, the recognition of Sri Pâda as a national sacred site of Buddhism did not occur later than the early 12th century. It was during the reign of King Vijayabahu I (1070-1110) in Polonnaruva that Sri Pâda affairs first entered the royal court agenda. Before Vijayabahu came to power the island was a principality of the South Indian invaders from Cola. Then Vijayabahu was a chieftain of Ruhuna and successfully raised the standard of revolt against Cola, eventually establishing the Sinhala royal court in Polonnaruva. But this was temporary. In 1214 Magha of Kalingha landed in Sri Lanka with a large army and destroyed the kingdom of Polonnaruva. In this political turmoil the centre of the Sinhalas' political power moved towards the Southwestern region of the island and there the Mayarata civilization began.

Interestingly, prior to such political shifts, Sri Pâda began to emerge as a pilgrimage site of national importance under the Buddhist kings of Polonnaruva. According to well-known medieval historian R. A. L. H Gunawardana, pilgrimages to worship at the important shrines scattered over the island became a common practice in this period (1979: 233). Significantly, following the capture of Polonnaruva, Vijayabahu I himself left on a pilgrimage lasting three months (ibid). Unlike his predecessors, Vijayabahu took Sri Pâda seriously as a site of pilgrimage and constructed it for the first time as a sacred place of royal recognition. Under his patronage Sri Pâda temple was built and in order to maintain it several villages were also granted. Some of the hugely productive villages were directly granted for the benefit of Buddhist monks and the pilgrims who visited to the pilgrimage site. In addition, he made new pilgrimage paths, renovated the old ones and erected pilgrims' rests (*ambalama*) along the paths. Finally, he dedicated the temple and its property to the Buddhist monk community. This, Vijayabahu I's pioneering "ordering project" for Sri Pâda temple was vividly recorded in the great chronicle, Mahavamsa, and on the rock inscription kept by Vijayabahu himself to mark his pious activities at Sri Pâda.

---

[8] This inscription is situated at one of the ten villages he had donated to Sri Pâda known as Ambagamuva.

According to his inscription he performed several meritorious acts at the sacred footprint (*padalasa*)[8]. Among them, he offered his own bejewelled crown to the sacred footprint, along with jewellery and precious gems; various canopies, flags, banners and different kinds of incense were also offered. Moreover, Vijayabahu instituted the maintenance of repairs, paintings and lighting of lamps at the temple; he constructed the lower terrace for pilgrims from the low caste groups (*adama jati*[9]) visiting Sri Pâda temple. He also made a large protective wall around the temple with two gateways, fitted with locks and keys, leading to two different pilgrims' paths.

The inscription further explains how he made the arrangement to supply facilities to pilgrims who visited Sri Pâda temple. For example he opened up several food donating centres (*dansala*) at the pilgrims' resting places (*ambalam*) he had erected. More importantly, to ensure maintainance of the temple organization, he dedicated ten hugely productive villages and declared them free from taxation[10]. The money thus saved was to be spent on the pilgrims and the monks of Sri Pâda temple but employees of the Royal family, wayfarers, tramps, hauling labourers, bullock carters and offenders were not allowed to benefit from them. He assigned some of his council members to maintain and facilitate the services that he had inaugurated at Sri Pâda (EZ vol. ii 202-218).

Interestingly, the Mahavamsa also recorded Vijayabahu's pioneering project at Sri Pâda as follows[11]:

> With the wish that all the people who trod the difficult road to worship the footprint of the Sage (Buddha) on the Sumanakuta mountain might not become weary, he granted for the dispensing of gifts, the village called Gilimalaya[12] where there were rice fields and the like, and had rest-houses built on the road past Kadaligama [Kehelgamuwa] and on the path from the province of Huva [Uva] hither, granting villages to each of these and after having the words "In future kings shall not take possession of these" engraved on a stone pillar the Monarch set this up (Cv. 60. 64-67)[13].

---

[9] It is not clear what Vijayabahu I meant because the word "*Jati*" has different connotations, sometimes meaning "caste group", sometimes "national" (ethnic groups). However, I know that until recently the Rodiya people (an out caste group) were not allowed to enter the Udamaluawa (upper stair) of the Sri Pâda temple, but I did not see any such practice today. However, the chief deity priest of the shrine of God Saman told me that he has noticed that most of the people of this caste usually visit Sri Pâda at the end of the pilgrimage season.

[10] Namely Kehelgamuva, Tiniyagala, Soragoda, Liyavala, Badulla, Udu-ho, Makulumula, Ambagamuva, Valigampola and Ulapana (EZ: vol. ii p217). Today none of these villages belong to Sri Pâda temple.

[11] The chronicle devotes an entire chapter to a description of the work of the king for the welfare of the sangha and the laity. Restorations and fresh grants of villages to about twenty-one monasteries are mentioned in the chronicle (see Gunawardana 1979: 87-89).

[12] This village is situated about 15 km from Ratnapura along the road leading to Sri Pâda [Palabaddala]. Currently, the hereditary services provided by the villagers of Gilimalaya to Sri Pâda pilgrims have ceased.

[13] The land grant of Gilimalaya, which is mentioned in Cûlavamsa and substantiated in the stone pillar inscription of Gilimalaya (Paranavitana 1958:12)erected by Vijayabahu I parallel to the Ambagamuwa inscription. However, because of decay of the inscription on the pillar the detail of the grant is hardly recorded. But Gunawardana records that this pillar inscription is a duplicate of the Ambagamuva inscription (1979: 233) though the names of the villages granted remain different.

In my view, taking control of Sri Pâda under the Buddhist state at this historical juncture was politically important because by this time most of the trading groups from the Middle East and the Far East had begun to establish a "spiritual connection" with Sri Pâda by claiming it as a place of their own worship (see De Silva 2008).

Broadly speaking, Vijayabahu's Sri Pâda institutionalisation project marked the transition of the 'mythic' Sri Pâda into a site of actual pilgrimage. Interestingly, Sri Pâda continuously flourished under the patronage of the royal courts that had formed after the collapse of Polonnaruva royal court, in the trade-based Mayarata civilization. This continued until the whole island came under British occupancy in 1815. For approximately eight centuries Sri Pâda was continually transformed and (re) constructed in response to the changing socio-political and religious circumstances of pre-colonial state powers on the island.

After the work of King Vijayabahu I, King Nissankamalla (1187-1196) took Sri Pâda affairs seriously in his court agenda. Nissankamalla, who had Kalinga (South Indian) ancestry, became a king of the Polonnaruva royal court long after the five kings of Vijayabahu I's lineage. Nissankamalla has now become one of the popular figures in Sinhala popular traditions (see: De Silva 2005). He is equally visible in the island's epigraphical and archaeological records too. In this way he left a large amount of epigraphical evidence of his pious work during his ten years of political power (Gunawardana 1979: 78). For example, the only inscriptional evidence so far found in close proximity to Sri Pâda temple has been identified as a work of Nissankamalla. This cave inscription was erected to mark his royal pilgrimage to Sri Pâda temple and to record the improvements he made to the path up the sacred mountain and the generous gifts he offered to the temple. This royal visit to Sri Pâda was also given prominence in his other inscriptional works particularly that of the vestibule wall of the *Heta-da-ge* of Polonnaruva (see EZ. II.173)[14]. The chronicle Cûlavamsa also confirmed his engagement with Sri Pâda temple and it was noted that: '[W]ith the four-membered army the ruler [Nissankamalla] full of pious devotion, went forth to the Samantakuta [Sri Pâda] and performed there his devotions' (Ch. ii 128).

Nissankamalla was the last of the powerful kings who restored the wealth of Sri Pâda temple. Shortly after his death the Polonnaruva royal court was abandoned as a consequence of the second invasion of Tamil Cholas [Magha: 1215-1236] from South India. Thus the Sinhala centre of power moved further into the southwest region of the island where Sinhala kings (e.g. Vijayabahu III 1232-1236) later built a new royal capital in Dambadeniya.

During the next three centuries, Sri Pâda continued to be a popular centre of pilgrimage, which attracted more pilgrims of various ethno-religious groups, immigrant groups from South India and other foreign nationals, particularly traders who were pursuing Indian maritime trading. The emergence on Sri Pâda of voluminous accounts of voyages is further indicative of their presence at Sri Pâda (see De Silva 2008). Dambadeniya was followed in succession by other power centres, of the same sort as emerged and later fell in the former outback. These were Yapahuwa, Panduvasnuvara, Kurunagala, Gampola, Kotte and Kandy. All these royal courts [kingdoms] that emerged after the 11th century for the most part took Sri Pâda temple affairs seriously in their court agendas.

---

[14]   According to Kirielle Ñanavimala, Nissankamalla recorded his royal visit to Sri Pâda in the seven inscriptional works hi to be found in in different places on the island (see 1942 (2001): 29-32).

Conclusion

To conclude, in this paper I argued that Sri Pâda became a nationally important pilgrimage site, in other words that it began to be recognized as a royal place of worship, with the advent of trade-based Mayarata civilization. Prior to that, as we have seen, it is hard to find any royal patronage or clear connection between the pre-colonial states and Sri Pâda temple. However, we see that the institutionalisation of Sri Pâda as a state-recognised pilgrimage site first became visible under the royal patronage of King Vijayabahu I of Polonnaruva royal court, which was the last centre of power in the "Raja Rata civilization". Since then, as I have explained, Sri Pâda was an important site for all the centres of power which emerged in the South-west [Mayarata] and central Kandyan regions [Malaya Rata] in pre-colonial Sri Lanka. Throughout this long temple history, different centres of power took Sri Pâda temple affairs seriously in their court agendas and put it under the control of Buddhist monks and, on some occasions, Hindu priests. Though, geographically speaking, Sri Pâda remained peripheral to those "centres of power", it was never completely marginalized from them because, as I have explained, Sri Pâda came substantially under their influence through patronage projects such as temple restorations, village grants, the appointment of priests and the making of royal pilgrimages to Sri Pâda by kings themselves. My point is that these kinds of 'royal' connection with the sacred sites in general are not merely religious but also political and economic; through them the centre exercises its power over not only sacred sites but also regions and the people who live in them. In other words, royal ritual connection not only to Sri Pâda temple but also to other temples tied the segmentary state together. With the expansion of royal hegemony, and increasing administrative complexity, gift-giving patterns grew more elaborate and became the prime public expressions of sovereignty (Dirks, 1976: 145). That is why almost all the royal courts [kingdoms] that emerged after the 11th century for the most part took Sri Pâda temple affairs seriously in their court agendas.

Reference

Official Publications
Epigraphia Zeylanica, vol. II, 202-218.

Books, Articles and Thesis
Appadurai, Arjun 1981. *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appadurai, A & Breckenridge 1976. 'The south Indian temple: authority, honour and redistribution'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Vol.10, No 02.

Ariyapala, M.B.1968. *Medieval Sinhalese Society* Colombo: Lakehouse.

Bastin, Rohan 2002. *The Domain of Constant Excess: Plural Worship at the Munnesvaram Temples in Sri Lanka.* New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Bayly, C.A.   1996. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bayly, Susan   1989. *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beal, Samuel   1993. *Travels of Fah-hian and Sung-yun, Buddhist Pilgrims from China to India.* New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

Berkwitz, C. Stephen   2004. *Buddhist History in the Vernacular: The Power of the Past in Late Medieval Sri Lanka.* Leiden – Boston: Brill.

Bopearachchi, O & R.M. Wickremesinhhe, 1999. Ruhuna. *An Ancient Civilisation Re-visited. Numismatic and Archaeological Evidence on Inland and Maritime Trade,* Colombo.

Chaudhuri, K.N.   1985. *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Codrington, H.W.   1916. 'Diary of Mr. John D'Oyly, 1810-1815', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch,* vol. xxv, no 69.

De Silva, Premakumara 2005. Sri Pada: Diversity and Exclusion in a Sacred Site in Sri Lanka. Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Edinburgh.

2008. ' Hindu and Muslim Connections to Sri Pada' In *Religion in Context* (ed.) Jayadeva Uyangoda, Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Devaraja, Lona 1994. *The Muslims of Sri Lanka.* Colombo: Lanka Islamic Foundation.

Franklin Presler 1987. *Religion under Bureaucracy: Policy and Administration for Hindu Temples in South India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fuller, Christ .J 1984. *Servants of the Goddess: The Priests of a South Indian Temple.* Cambridge University Press.

1988. 'The Hindu Temple and Indian Society'. In Michael V. Fox (ed.) *Temple in Society.* Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

2003. *The Renewal of the Priesthood: Modernity and Traditionalsim in a South Indian Temple.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Geiger Wilhelm 1908a. *Introduction. In the Mahavamsa.* London: Pali Text Society.

1908b. *The Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa and their Historical Development in Ceylon.* (Transl. E.M. Coomaraswamy) Colombo: H.C. Cottle.

Gunawardana, R.A.L.H.   1979. *Robe and plough: monasticism and economic interest in early medieval Sri Lanka.* Tucson: Arizona University Press.

1990. 'The people of the lion: the Sinhala identity and ideology in history and historiography', In J. Spencer (ed.) *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict.* London: Routledge.

Hallisey, Charles   1988. '*Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka*' Ph.D dissertation, University of Chicago.

    2003. 'Works and Persons in Sinhala Literary Culture'. In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* (ed.) Sheldon Pollock. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jayawardane, Kumari   2000. *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Bourgeoisie Sri Lanka.* Colombo: Social Scientists' Association

Kemper, Steven   1984. 'The Buddhist Monkhood, the Law, and the State in Colonial Sri Lanka.' In *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no.03.

Malalgoda, Kitsiri   1973. 'The Buddhist-Christian confrontation in Ceylon 1800-1880, *Social Compass* vol. xx: 2, 171-200

    1976. *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900: A study of Religious Revival and Change.* London: University of California Press.

    1993 (1969). 'Millennialism in Relation to Buddhism'. Colombo: Studies in Society and Culture Series.

Obeyesekere, Gananath   1979. 'The Vicissitudes of the Sinhala-Buddhist Identity through Time and Change' In. M. Robert (ed.) *Sri Lanka Collective Identities*. Colombo: Marga Institute.

    1984. *The Cult of the Goddess Pattini*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

    1992. 'Myth and Political Legitimization at the Sacred Centre in Kataragama, Sri Lanka' In Bakker Hans (ed.) *The Sacred Centre as the Focus of Political Interest*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten.

    2002. 'Where Have All the Vaddas Gone? Buddhism and Aboriginality in Sri Lanka' In Neluka Silva (ed.) *The Hybrid Island: Culture crossings and the invention of identity in Sri Lanka,* Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1-19.

Paranavitana, Senarat   1958. *The God of Adam's Peak*. Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae Publishers.

Pieris, Ralph   1956. *Sinhalese social organization*. Colombo: University of Ceylon Press.

Ranavella, Sirimal   1965. '*Sumanakutaya*', In Sri Buddhadatta Veshisa Kalapaya (ed.) Bambarande Siri Seevali. Maradana: Anula Muddranalaya.

Roberts, Michael   1982. Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of Karava Elite in Sri Lanka. Cambridge University Press.

Seneviratne, H.L   1978. *Rituals of the Kandyan State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stein, Burton   1980. *Peasant, State and Society in Medieval South India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Tambiah, S.J   1976. *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

1986. *Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantaling of Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Walters, Jonathan   1996. *The History of Kelaniya*. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association.

Whitaker, Mark   1999. *Amiable Incoherence: Manipulating Histories and Modernities in a Batticalao Hindu Temple*. Amsterdam: VU University Press.