



# THE BUDDHIST HERITAGE REVEALED BY EXCAVATIONS AT KURUNDI



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பௌத்தாலோகக் கட்டிட அமைதி மன்றம்  
BAUDDHALOKA FOUNDATION



**The Buddhist Heritage Revealed  
by Excavations at Kurundi**

Editor  
**Ama H. Vanniarachchy**

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# Bauddhaloka Foundation

## 2024

### The Buddhist Heritage Revealed by Excavations at Kurundi

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## PREFACE

The Kurundi monastery which is situated in the Mullaitivu district of the Northern Province, Sri Lanka is one of the most remarkable archaeological sites in the country.

This monastic complex is a complete monastery consisting of a stupa and image house, which are essential architectural features of a panchawasa monastery. The Anuradhapura period stūpa at the Kurundi monastery is the only lotus-shaped (padmakara) stūpa discovered so far in Sri Lanka. This stupa is built of kabok stone (laterite). The entire monastery complex was spread across an area of more than five hundred acres; yet, only a small area including the above-mentioned stupa and image house has been subjected to archaeological exploration and excavation.

According to ancient literature sources and inscriptions, the history of the Kurundi monastery dates back to the 3rd - 2nd centuries BCE. As the Pali chronicles reveal, King Khallatana (103 - 110 BC) of Anuradhapura built a monastery at this place. Since then, Kurundi monastery has been patronized by various Sinhala kings and ministers for more than a thousand years. According to ancient inscriptions, various kings including King Vijayabahu the Great (1055 - 1110 CE) of Polonnaruwa developed the monastery into a vast spread monastic complex.

In 1895 J.P. Lewis, reports an interesting folklore that was among the locals living in Kurundi at that time, which reveals the religious significance of this place. According to this folklore, Gautama Buddha visited Kurundi during his second visit to Sri Lanka, making it a sacred land that was sanctified by the visit of the Buddha. This historical event must have happened in 523 BC.

Based on modern research, it is widely accepted that the Kurundi monastery was one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka. According to ancient chronicles in Sri Lanka, after the arrival of Arhat Mahinda thero to Sri Lanka in 247 BC, Tripitaka Atuwa (commentary) was written in Sinhala / Hela language. Among such main commentaries composed in the Sinhala language is the Kurundi Atuwawa (commentary), which was composed at the ancient Kurundi monastery.

However, disaster struck to this sacred place when Kalinga Maga invaded Sri Lanka in the 13th century CE. The latest archaeological excavations at Kurundi reveal that this place faced severe destruction during wars and invasions.

After Magha's invasion, gradually kingdoms shifted towards the Southwest of the island, resulting in the abandonment of the Kurundi monastery. Since then, from time to time, attention has been given to the Kurundi monastery.

After the end of the war in 2009, attention was given to the many thousands of archaeological sites and monuments in the North, among which Kurundi monastery is one.

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In such a background, when I was the president of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress, venerable Galgamuwa Santabodhi Thera, who had a great interest in reviving the ancient Kurundi monastery, visited the Congress and explained the many obstacles in dealing with this ancient monastic site and asked for necessary support. By that time, I had worked as an advisor to the Department of Archeology, and had given financial support to the archaeological survey work of the Anuradhapura Vijayarama ancient site. As a result, the survey work of Kurundi commenced, I agreed with the Department of Archeology and provided the necessary financial support to preserve this unique heritage and to safeguard it for the future.

With the supervision, guidance, and academic contribution of the Department of Archaeology, the heritage management work at Kurundi was conducted with the financial support of the Bauddhaloka Foundation. What is been revealed through archaeological research at Kurundi, adds new facts to the Sri Lankan history, that we know so far. Research and heritage management work at Kurundi continues and through such work, more fascinating information about the monastery will be revealed in the future.

Today, archaeological excavations of the Kurundi stupa and image house are completed. The stupa conservation work is also completed. Archaeological conservation work of the image house should be done immediately.

This book was composed and published by the Bauddhaloka Foundation to mark the event of launching the Excavation Report titled, "Buddhist Heritage Revealed by Excavations at Kurundi" of the Department of Archaeology and handing it over to the Bauddhaloka Foundation.

I highly appreciate the support received by the Department of Archeology and all the relevant officials including the Subject Minister, The Secretary of the ministry, and other Government Departments in these activities.

Mr. Sampath Gurusinghe, the Archaeological Research (Excavation) Officer, has carried out the work very diligently in this archaeological conservation work. I thank him and the staff of the Department of Archeology for that. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to Miss Ama H. Vanniarachchy, who wrote this book in a very short time, and everyone who supported this cause.

**JAGATH SUMATHIPALA**

President - Bauddhaloka Foundation

Vice President - World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB)

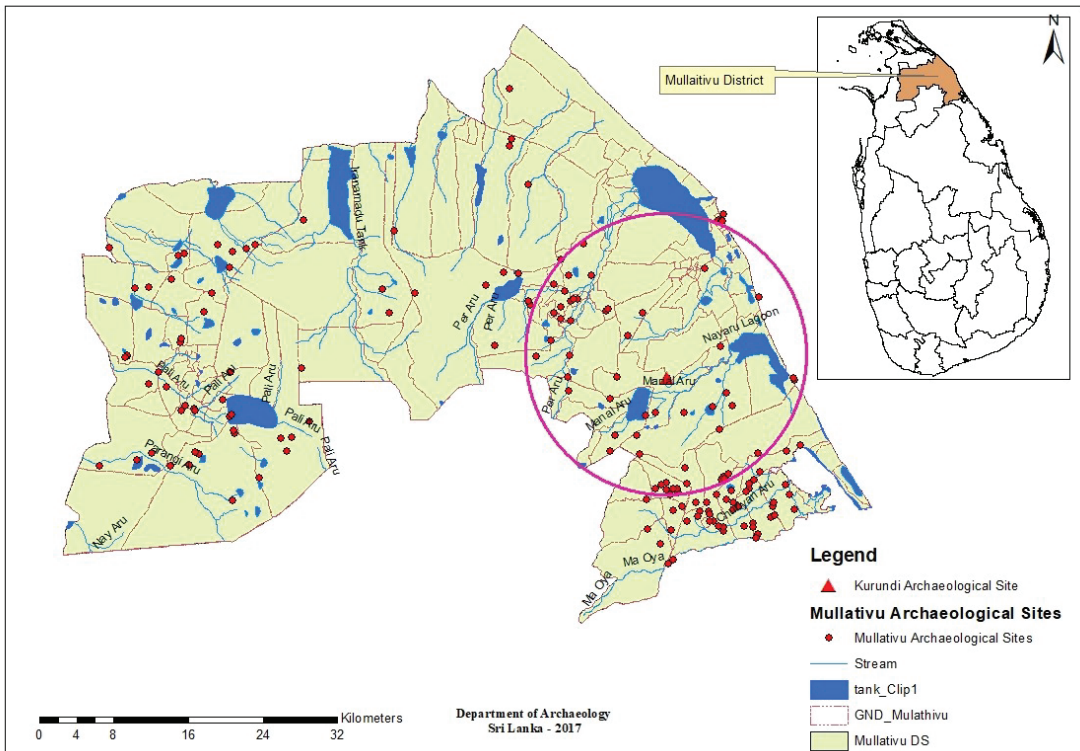


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**In  
Memory of,  
Humanitarian U.W. Sumathipala**



## Archaeological Sites in Mullativu District



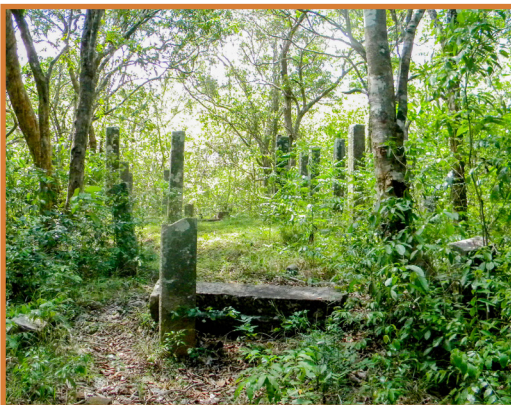
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## Mullaitivu Kurundi Buddhist Monastery

Sri Lanka is an island with a high density of archaeological heritage. Its rich legacy has given birth to valuable engineering remains, art, architectural, and irrigational remains that connect the island nations' present to its past.

Among such thousands of ancient monastic sites on the island, the Kurundi ancient Buddhist monastery or the Kurundawashoka ancient temple at Mullaitivu is a place that has gained national importance during the past couple of years.

The objective of this booklet is to present to you a brief history of this ancient Buddhist monastery, the recent heritage management work, and how it is not going against any national or international archaeological conservation laws and policies.



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## Mullaitivu Kurundi Ancient Buddhist Temple

### *A brief history*

Bordered by four districts (Mannar, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, and Trincomalee) and the Indian Ocean, the Mullaitivu district covers an area of 2,617 square kilometers. Mullaitivu district is an area that is rich with an abundance of archaeological heritage that dates back to the early historical period of Sri Lanka.

The Northern part of Sri Lanka was known as Nagadeepa, or Nakadiva, and belonged to the Uttara passa administrative area during historical times. The area was also part of the Pihiti rata and the Raja Rata, which is known as the cradle and hub of the Sinhalese civilization.

As written in the research publications of Puravidya Chakrawarthy, Purawidya Paryeshanashuri most ven. Ellawala Medhanandha thero, there are archaeological remains of ancient Buddhist monasteries, irrigation work, and inscriptions in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the island, more than it is in the Southern part of the island.

### *A 2nd-century BC Buddhist temple*

The temple is first mentioned in the 33rd chapter of the Mahavamsa (5th-century Pali chronicle). It says that King Khallatanga (110-104 BC) built the Kurunda pasaka temple. Locals also believe that Buddha visited this place during his second visit to Sri Lanka. A stupa, an image house, a 9th-10th century inscription of a Sinhala king, Buddha, and Bodhisattva statues are found at this place.

According to the Sri Lanka Kadayim book, ancient Sri Lanka had three administrative divisions: Ruhunu, Maya, and Pihiti. Out of the three, the Pihiti country (Pihiti Rata) is considered the heartland of the Sinhalese civilization, and it is also called the Land of the Kings (Raja Rata). Kurundi Gamu Rata which was located in the Pihiti rata, was the ancient Kurundi Ratta area.

It is recorded that the Hela Atuwa called Kurundatta Kathawa was named after the monastery as it was composed at this place. King Khallatanaga built this monastery during the 2nd century BC and the monastery is mentioned as the Kurundawashoka and Kurundakapasaka monastery in the 5th century Pali chronicle, Mahavamsa.

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The venerable Ellawala Medhanandha thero explains that Kurundawashoka was a shortened form of Kurundavapi Ashoka, which means that the monastery was built near the Kurundu wewa or tank.

The term Kurunda is echoed in all these references and mentionings.

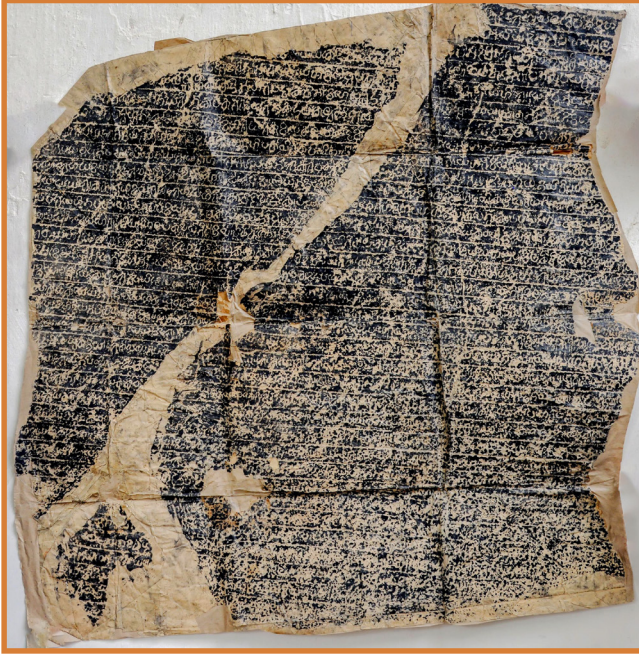
The current name, Kurundama, is also derived from this ancient name. These clearly show that since the time of the arrival of Arhant Mahinda in the 3rd century BC, when Sinhala Attakatha or commentaries were started to be composed, the Kurundagama village and monastery flourished. The name also has not been changed and is continued to date.

According to the Sinhala literature of Attakatha, one Attakatha was committed to writing at this monastery. There are a large number of attakatha texts mentioned in the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. According to the remaining data, there are 28 attakatha (commentaries) in Sri Lanka. Pachchariya-attakatha is the commentary that was written on a pahura or a little boat. The stone inscription at Raigama Pokunuwita temple mentions an attakatha of this name. Among the 28 attakatha, the Kurundi attakatha was written at this ancient Kurundi monastery and little is known about the Kurundi attakatha.

All this evidence points out the fact that the Kurundi ancient monastery was a flourishing Buddhist monastery since the early historical times and it was located in a Sinhala Buddhist settlement. Evidence also proves that hundreds of Buddhist monks lived in the monastery. In another ancient text called Manorathapurani, one of the monks is referred to as Kurundaka Wasi, which means he was a resident monk of the Kurundi temple. In Attakatha this monk is referred to as Pussamitta thera.

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## Kurundi Fragmentary Slab Inscription



This inscription was first recorded by J.P. Lewis in his *Manual of the Vanni District*. There were 19 lines in the inscription out of which 16 have been preserved in part. A letter is about 10 inches in height. The script and the letters fit into the latter 10th-century Sinhala.

The inscription is dated from the eighth regnal year of a king who used the name Sirisnagabo and who was the son of a king who reigned under the same regional name Sirisangabo and a queen named Agasu(da)m Sangbad.

There were two kings in the latter part of the Anuradhapura period who went by this name: Udaya IV (946-956) and Mahinda IV (956-972). There were two kings whose fathers had borne the same regnal name. The Father of Udaya IV was Kassapa IV (898-914), and Udaya III (935-938) was the father of Mahinda IV. Amongst Udaya IV and Mahinda IV, Udaya IV's mother was a queen who bore the name Deva (Dev Gon Biso Rajna) in several inscriptions. Therefore, we can safely assume that the king mentioned in this inscription is King Udaya IV.

This inscription is a record of a Kathikawatha, a set of rules agreed upon by the common accord of the monks. According to the inscription, the Kathikawatha was related to the AbhayaIsripavi, and a Padhanaghara attached to it, which was called Ananda Piyangala.

*Information courtesy - G.S. Ranawella (2004), Kurundannmale Fragmentary Slab Inscription, Inscriptions of Ceylon, Volume V, Part II, Department of Archaeology, Colombo. 221-224 Lewis, J.P. (1895), A Manual of the Vanni Districts, Ceylon, H.C. Cottle, Acting Govt. Printer, Ceylon.*



**Fragments of Kurundi Slab Inscription**

TRANSCRIPT

1	.....yasa tedin dasa athi pätirä raja kaļa Abhā Salamevan Maharadhu puṭ
2	.....maṇḍul raṇḍanā rajliyeḥi miṇi vuṭunuyen siya muṇḍun pāhāyū Lakdiv polo yona parapu-
3	ren himi vū tumā saraṇa niya rasin an raja muṇḍun bises vū tik tedin hiru paļā kevin Mehesuru daļa dāpin Uviṇḍu raja viritin Suriṇḍu pabada denen dinisuru sat
4	setin Kitisuru pāṇa sarin Suraguru somi guṇen nisayuru .....nin sarin kapturu rū sarin Kadap kuļuṇu resen Bosatu meruvan suva sarin sama.....
5	..... hun Abhā Salamevan Maharaj-hu tumā sat lāngū paļamuvana havuruduyehi Āseļa pun saṇḍ avap mashi dasavak dava-
6	s .....Saṅga-aram Sirisaṅbo Rajmaha veherhi vat sirit visinā siya tan saha ..... sasaṇḍā tun nakāhi maha saṅg vathimiyān .....
7	.....pasa evun vana siyenā pate potahi ārū seyin akar vanu isā ... si hadava siṭa pavatnā koṭ me silālekha .....
8	..... Sirisaṅbo Abhaya Maharaj Aga-Su(da)m nam vū Saṅgbaḍ apa māṇiyān isā ...sirit saṇḍahā niyāmakin isā Varad-devu pareyā .....
9	.....katu isā ..... yā Rakranugama yurehi Abhayagiri nakā piļibādi koṭ sa..... kārū Saṅgram Sirisaṅbo Rajmaha veherā .....
10	..... nu koṭ arvanuyehi Navayā saṇḍ avap masā dasavak dasas Daļadāgehi .....me .....raṭ me Abhaya-Isiripavi Piyangala ka..... kāmīyān
11	.....nissan h  sasaṇḍā me Veheraṭ Piyangalaṭ tābu sirit isā vivarupen ek se koṭ tan uvatakā arvayi kāmī sāmiyān kaļa visi-ek .....
12	.....ek pākak Abhayagiri veherā isā ek pākak me veherhi Mahapaḥāhi isā tabanu koṭ vadāļaha vimi kusal kāmī ..... tabaya satu .....
13	.....gahaneḥi seyin me nisagin saṇṭhan vū sirit isā meyaṭ dun kābāli kaṭayutu se isahiya kaṭayutuya isā minisnaṭ kam .....
14	.....naṭ labanuva yutuse isā ek se koṭ arvayi me veherā tabanu koṭ vadāļa sirit pothi ..... sirit liyi Satdevāmi me veherā sirit me veherhi vehe-
15	r kāmīyān ... kāmīyān piļimageḥi sirit pot-hi kī seyin buḍ bataṭ gata yutu isā piļimageḥi ema puda sirit seyimā karanu isā Anaṇḍa Piyangalhi aṭin doļosā .....
16	..... pasā āvū vathimiyān vāsi vathimiyān visiṭā .....
17	.....
18	.....
19	.....

Transcript of the Kurundi Slab Inscription

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## Colonial period records about the Kurundi ancient monastery

The 1895 Manual of Vanni says that the term Kurun - gama is mentioned in the inscription and that “The later Tamil residents built a temple here, and they demolished the vihare built by Sanghabodhi and other buildings and removed nearly all the bricks and the stoneworks to it”

It further says that “Stones were removed from Kuruntanurmali in 1858 I believe, to build the Mullivaikkal temple. The doorway of that temple is constructed of carved stones from Kuruntanurmalai.”

There are many notes from local and colonial scholars about the purposeful vandalization of this place.

A few examples are;

- Report on the Kanakarayan-arua and Eastern Nay-arua Valleys, Irrigation in the Northern Province, Mullattive and Vilankulam Districts, XLVI 1886, Papers Laid Before the Legislative Council of Ceylon during the Session of 1886, George J.A. Skeen, Government Printers, Ceylon. Colombo. H. Parker, 1887

- A Manual of the Vanni Districts, Ceylon, H.C. Cottle, Acting Govt. Printer, Ceylon. J.P. Lewis, 1895

- North-Central, Central and Northern Provinces, Annual Report 1905, Archaeological Survey of Ceylon. H.C.P. Bell, 1909

### *Post-colonial records about the Kurundi ancient monastery;*

- Historical topography of ancient and medieval Ceylon, Royal Asiatic Society, Colombo. C.W. Nicholas, 1963

## Modern Times

In the year 2020, venerable Galgamuwe Santhabodhi thero became the chief incumbent of the temple and if not for his great sacrifices the unjust and violence faced by this ancient temple and the Sinhala Buddhists would have surely gone unnoticed.

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs and the Department of Archaeology devoted their attention and concern to this precious ancient monastery and to preserve and restore the place.

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The former secretary of the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Dr. Kapila Gunawardhane should be remembered for his contribution and devotion.

The President of the Bauddhaloka Foundation (Guarantee) Ltd, Mr. Jagath Sumathipala is the generous patron of all the archaeological work that is presently happening at the Kuruindi ancient Buddhist monastery.

The Bauddhaloka Foundation signed an MOU with the Archaeology Department to sponsor the excavation and restoration of ruins at the site and started the excavation of the stupa mounds in January 2021. Upon completion of the excavation in May 2021, they started the restoration of the stupa. The excavation work of the Kurundi image house commenced in March 2022 and was completed in May 2022. The necessary labor contribution to complete the work in such a short time was mainly provided by the Sri Lankan army (24th Lion Regiment of Alampil Army Camp).

All excavation work was supervised and conducted by the Vavuniya regional archaeology office and the Excavation unit of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka, following the advice and guidance of the Director General of Archaeology.

### **Archaeological Excavations at the Kurundi Image House**

The excavation work of the Kurundi Image House commenced in March 2022 and was completed in May 2022. The necessary labor contribution to complete the work in such a short time was mainly provided by the Sri Lankan army (24th Lion Regiment of Alampil Army Camp).

All excavation work was supervised and conducted by the Vavuniya regional archaeology office and the Excavation unit of the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka, following the advice and guidance of the Director General of Archaeology.

The image house at the Kurundi monastery is surrounded by a wall made of kabok stone and it has a rectangular shape. The walls of the image house are built with bricks and stone pillars, and the roof with terracotta roof tiles. The floor has been layered with stone slabs.

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The top part of the image house and the roof have collapsed resulting in a rubble of terracotta that laid on the floor. During the archaeological survey that was conducted before the excavations, 17 stone pillars were seen standing in their originally fixed places, mostly intact. Remains of more stone pillars and pillar capitals were discovered at the place during the surveys and excavations. Through the excavations ruins of stone pillars and other stone architectural features are discovered such as pillar capitals, ruins of a stone doorway, etc.

The moonstone at the entrance doorway of the building was damaged and broken into several pieces. Also, it seems that the moonstone has been dug out and removed to search for treasures.

On the upper part of the building, a small square cement overlay was observed which could be confirmed to have been constructed very recently. This cement construction was completely laid on top of the crumbling old layer of ruins. A few stones were placed on the cement layer and it could be assumed that this has been prepared in this way for a religious purpose.

However, it can be seen that these stone objects placed on the cement overlay for a religious purpose are ruined stone pillars, balustrades (korawakgal), guard stones (muragal), and other stone architectural structures taken from the image house. Apart from the cement layer, a layer of terracotta tiles was also scattered on the mound. This layer of terracotta rubble is also crumbled ruins of a temporary structure built recently in this place.













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## Excavation findings

The archaeological evidence unearthed through the excavations at the image house confirms the fact that this ruined architectural structure was once a Buddhist image house. Also, the later cement construction is a recent addition to the ancient structure, distorting the original built purpose, use, and identity of the Buddhist image house.

The soil layer beneath the first soil layer is a mixture of bricks and clay that was decayed from the walls of this building. At one place in this soil layer, fragments of a marble Buddha statue were discovered. This Buddha statue is assumed to be a standing Buddha statue that was deliberately destroyed during the historic times, most probably during the Cola invasions or, another South Indian invasion during the Polonnaruwa period or the last years of the Anuradhapura period. The remnants of the feet of the seated marble - Buddha statue were discovered during the excavations.

Another fragment of a second Buddha statue was unearthed during these excavations. It is a seated granite Buddha statue that is about 24 cm in height.

Stone slabs were laid on the floor of the image house, resembling the style of paving stone slabs at the salapathala maluwa at Buddhist stupas.

Another finding through the excavations was the unearthing of five stone steps at the main entrance of the image house. Some of these stone steps were broken and also the balustrade (korawakgal) stones of the building were broken into pieces. These balustrades have carvings of makara (a mythical creature common in Sinhalese arts), on top of them, resembling characteristics of classical period arts and architecture of the ancient Sinhalese.

Stone pillars, terracotta roof tiles, bricks, and other decorated stone structures such as balustrades moonstones, and fragments of Buddha and Bodhisattva statues were found during excavations at the image house. A notable amount of bricks and terracotta figurines of vamanas (dwarfs) were found. Also, a notable amount of nails (steel) were found during the excavations.

Remnants of the granite doorway depict beautiful and delicate carvings which is common to the Anuradhapura period arts and architecture.

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In addition to the fragments of the Buddha statues found at the image house during the excavations, the excavations also unearthed fragments of two Bodhisattva statues. The first statue is identified as a Yogi Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva (Bodhisattva as an ascetic). The head, hands, and feet of the limestone statue are destroyed. The statue seems to be subjected to purposeful vandalization that must have perhaps occurred during wars and invasions, rather than due to natural conditions. Archaeological excavations also unearthed the head of this statue. It is a beautiful and delicate head that displays the exquisite artistic skills of ancient Sinhalese artisans. The head of this statue is decorated with a Jata Makuta (the headdress of ascetic bodhisattvas) and a seated Buddha statue - dhyanī Buddha - can be seen on it, which helps us identify this as a Bodhisattva image. The figure is depicted wearing a doti falling up to his ankles. The padmapecta or the lotus stand of the statue was also discovered.

Another Bodhisattva head was also unearthed through excavations and it is identified as a statue of Kumara Bodhisattva or Raja Leela bodhisattva (Bodhisattva in princely attire), along with a part of the feet which depicts him dressed in a doti. The head of his statue is decorated with a decorated royal headdress, once again with dainty carvings.

The scattered and destroyed nature of these statues all over the image house suggests that this place was destroyed during an invasion that happened during historic times.

A few bronze artifacts such as a bronze lamp, a few small bronze statues of satharawaram devi (the four guardian gods of the four cardinal directions), and a dharma-chakra were also discovered during excavations.

Another interesting feature discovered at the image house is that a reclining Buddha image had been the center of attention of the ancient image house. This statue was destroyed during historic times and fragments of it were discovered during excavations. Architectural remains of the stone structures that were used to support the statue and the yantragala of the statue were also discovered. The statue was fixed on a padmapecta. A circumambulation path around the reclining Buddha statue also can be seen, which suggests that devotees performed religious rituals circumambulating around the reclining Buddha statue.

The fragments of the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues discovered during excavations display characteristics of the mid-Anuradhapura period Buddha and Bodhisattva statues.

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The marble standing statue is also in fragments and it is assumed that this must have been about 5 feet in height. The marble stone of this statute is not a stone that is to be found in Sri Lanka. Thus, archaeologists assume that the stone was imported to Sri Lanka most probably from Andra Pradesh, India. The other seated small Buddha statue also displays Buddha image characteristics of the Anuradhapura period.

The excavations revealed that the image house was a fully developed Buddhist image house with three architectural features, the mukha mandapaya, antharalaya, and the garbhagruhaya. Archaeologists also suggest that the image house belongs to the Gandhakuti type of image house. A large number of pottery fragments were found during excavations. Redware pottery fragments that archaeologists assume belonged to the mid- Anuradhapura period were unearthed.

Another fascinating artifact discovered was the large number of terracotta figurines of small vamanas. These were used as decorative motifs of the building. These delicate and beautiful vamana figurines are fine specimens of Anuradhapura period artisans.

Terracotta artifacts such as fragments of elephant trunks (probably used for various rituals), koth karali, and a large number of steel nails were found.

Since the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues were destroyed and found in fragments scattered around the place and in various soil layers, archaeologists suspect that they were subjected to purposeful vandalization. Archaeological excavations also revealed that this place has gone through damages and vandalizations various times, on three occasions. They are,

1. Damage caused by an invasion
2. Damage caused by natural causes
3. Damage caused by treasure hunters

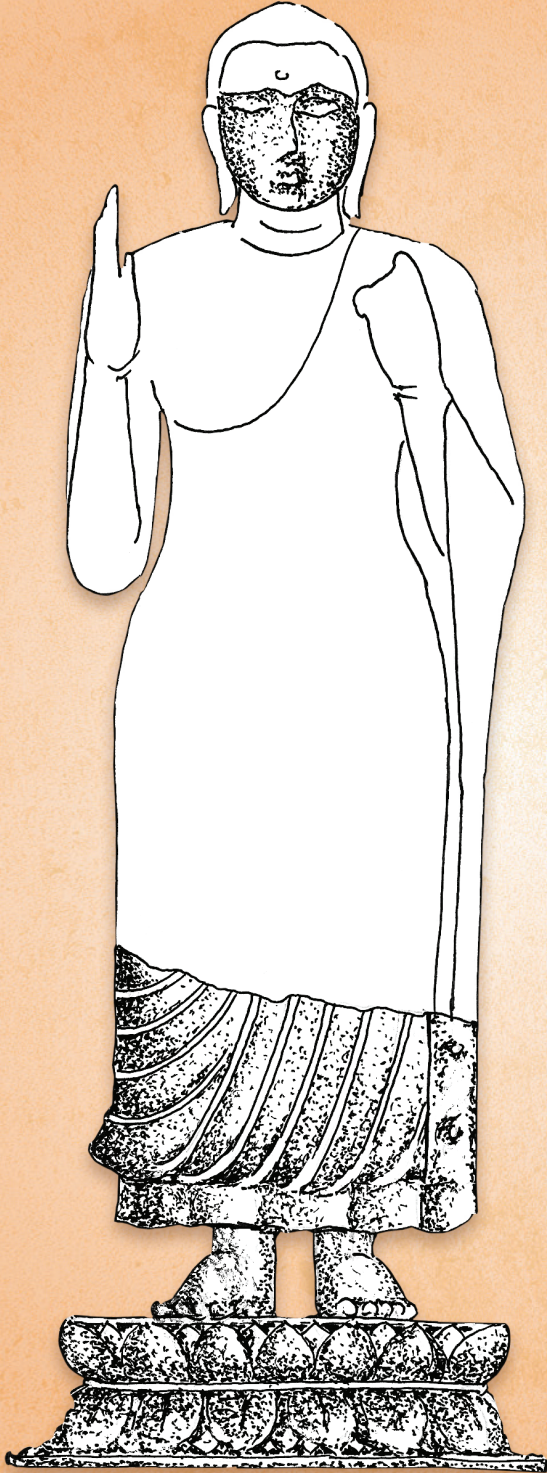
The invasion which has caused severe damage to the statues, could have been during the wars and invasions during the last years of the Anuradhapura period or even during the Polonnaruwa period. The discovery of two coins from the Polonnaruwa period suggests that this place was venerated during the Polonnaruwa period, which makes us assume that the invasions happened during the last years of the Polonnaruwa period.

The evidence we have so far is more than sufficient to identify the architectural building as a Buddhist Image House.











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## **The Image House at the Kurundi Ancient Buddhist Monastery is a Buddhist Image House**

Closely studying the stone, terracotta, marble, limestone, bronze, and steel artifacts unearthed at the image house suggests that the place was an active Buddhist religious structure during the Anuradhapura period and perhaps during the Polonnaruwa period too.

Some of the stone structures such as the plain moonstones, steps, and stone pillars display characteristics of early Anuradhapura period arts, approximately belonging to the early Christian era.

It is a fact that the Buddha statue was not venerated in the Buddhist world before the 1st century AD. Hence, these Buddha statues and the image house perhaps a later addition to the much older Kurundi Buddhist Monastery, after the Buddha statue was added as an object of veneration to the Buddhist world.

The Bodhisattava statues suggest the Mahayana influence and perhaps they were added to the image house during or after the 6th - 7th centuries.

The Buddha statues and Bodhisattva statues are absolute evidence of the Buddhist identity of this architectural structure. It was constructed for the veneration of the Buddhist devotees. Thus, the purpose and the identity of the Kurundi ancient monastery are established.

No statue or architectural feature belonging to any other religious group, sect, or cult is been found here through archaeological explorations and excavations. Also, the carvings and architectural features such as moonstones, balustrades, guard stones, pillars, roof tiles, floorstone slabs, yantra stones, and padmapectas are all Buddhist architectural features that can be seen elsewhere in the country at Buddhist monastic sites, ancient and modern. The bronze figurines of gods (four guardian gods of the four cardinal directions) are also a common feature at Buddhist monastic sites. The terracotta vama figures are commonly used in Buddhist architectural structures for decorations by ancient Sinhalese artisans.

These archaeological discoveries unearthed during excavations have added to the understanding and solidified the enlightening of the Buddhist identity of the ancient Kurundi Buddhist monastery that is already established by literature and inscriptional evidence.

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## Conservation work at the ancient Kurundi Temple

### *Religious value and livingness of heritage*

This brief explanation is to enlighten our readers that the conservation and maintenance work at the Kurundi Ancient Temple is 'archaeological conservation work' and does not violate any accepted national and international laws, policies, or practices.

What distinguishes religious heritage from secular heritage is its inherent 'livingness', that the religious values carried by a stupa embodying the living Buddha, for example, can only be sustained by ongoing processes of physical renewal of the stupa. Therefore, the primary goal of conservation becomes continuity itself, based on processes of renewal that continually revive the cultural meaning, significance, and symbolism attached to heritage.

The differences between 'religious heritage' and 'heritage' are that religious heritage has been born with its values in place, while with other forms of heritage, we need time and distance to be able to ascribe values to heritage. If responsibility for the religious heritage is retained by the 'associated community', then its protection is assured from within, while benefiting from the conservation expertise acquired through dialogue with the conservation community.

Living religious heritage is of particular importance, given its vital role in conveying, expressing, and sustaining the faiths that give spiritual identity, meaning, and purpose to human life. Understanding living religious heritage requires recognizing that the intangible significance of tangible religious objects, structures, and places is the key to their meaning. The tangible and intangible cannot be separated since all cultural material has intangible value.

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## Conservation of Kurundi Stupa

Kurundi is a heritage site under the existing law of the country which is identified as an archaeological reserve. What you do with such a site is given in the Antiquities Ordinance under which reconstruction of a stupa is not prohibited.

There is no universal law that defines what you do with (interventions) a heritage site or an archaeological site. Nothing prevents the Department of Archaeology from reconstructing a stupa in an archaeological site as has been done since the 60s. From an international perspective, interventions of a site such as Kurundi should be based on an assessment of all its values and not just its archaeological value.

Being part of a living heritage site, all its values such as historical, religious, and archaeological have to be taken into account when defining different conservation interventions. Considering the religious significance of a stupa, the Buddhist community decided to reconstruct stupas that are in ruined conditions, which is a long-established tradition in this country.

In ensuring continuity of forms, in effect, 'living' heritage values are being elevated above the more familiar 'documentary' or 'historical' heritage values. The primary goal of conservation becomes continuity itself, based on processes of renewal that continually 'revive the cultural meaning, significance, and symbolism attached to heritage'.

Such discussions have led to many conclusions:

1. As a result, efforts to conserve tangible and intangible living religious heritage deserve particular support for their role in supporting and testifying to the nature of our search for the fundamental meaning of human existence.

2. The care of this heritage is primarily the responsibility of the religious community for whom this heritage has importance, at local and/or global levels. The conservation of living religious heritage is ideally initiated by the religious community and carried out in collaboration with conservation professionals and all those concerned.

Religious values in a multicultural context are also discussed. Respect for religious values in a multicultural context (or of particular orientations within a single religion) is essential for promoting peace and a tolerant society and is best promoted through strengthening interfaith dialogues on conservation issues.

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In Sri Lanka, we have reconstructed many stupas with the addition of large amounts of bricks to regain the form suitable for worship. Principles for such interventions are still being discussed with no coherent agreements at the international level.

The conservation of the stupa and image house at Kurundi oscillates between traditional conservation and modern materialistic conservation views.

The legal authority over the Kurundi site is with the Department of Archaeology. Ensuring its protection and other archaeological and research work is the professional responsibility of the Department of Archaeology. Any other institution or political party cannot distract that legal authority. Current archaeological works at the site are not violating the rights of an individual or a group; instead, that is an official intervention in safeguarding a people's heritage that has a Buddhist cultural identity. If one says the work (conservation, restoration, excavations, publication, etc), is illegal, what the Department of Archaeology has done for the past 132 years is illegal, unscientific, and anti-social.





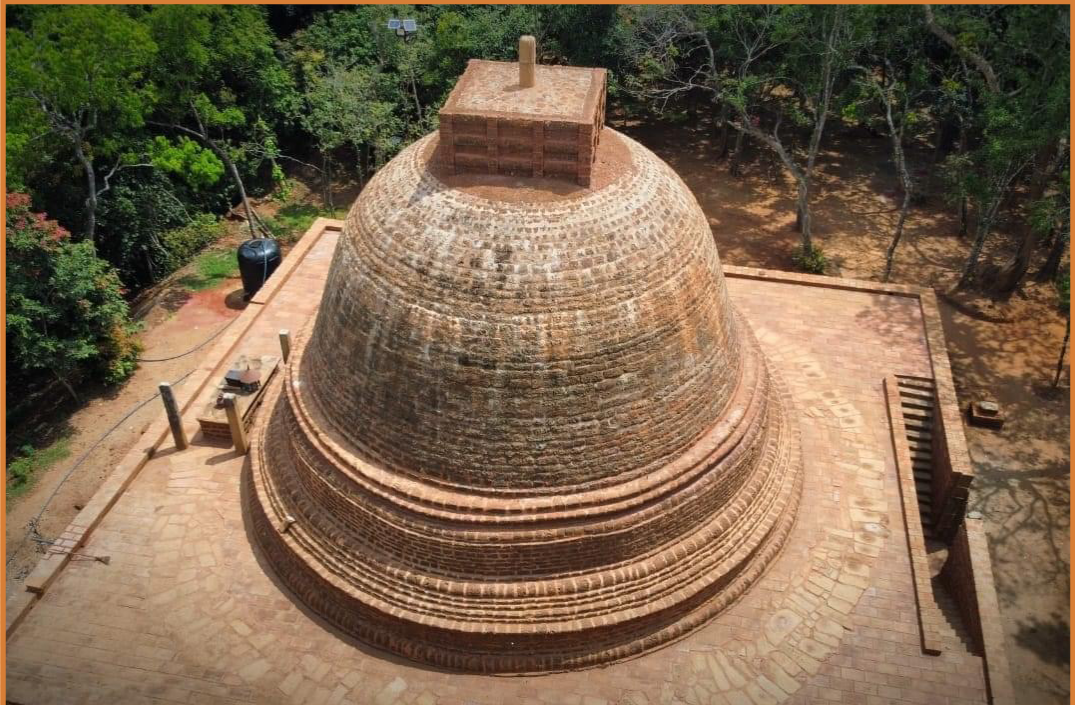














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## **Conservation is not ‘new construction’**

Restoration and reconstruction work based on revealed archaeological data comes under conservation and is not at all considered new construction.

The Burra Charter says that all work that has been done to maintain the cultural value of a site is conservation and this includes maintenance, protection, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, etc. Bringing a place back to its original state as close as possible to the original state is called reconstruction. In addition, Fielden defines conservation as integrated reinforcement and rehabilitation. Internal quality control and prevention of theft and malicious damage are also conservation activities.

The best way to preserve buildings is to rehabilitate or reuse them, abiding by their original purpose. Relocation of decayed parts to maintain their aesthetic harmony is considered in this conservation process.

Based on archaeological data, the ancient physical structure was planned to be completed and that is known as the reconstruction conservation method. If monks were residing and Buddhist rituals were practiced there, then that is rehabilitation; which is practicing the building’s original use. Safeguarding the site, avoiding theft, and maintaining the site is also a form of conservation.

Considering all these, the archaeological work that has been done at Kurundi temple by any means cannot be interpreted as illegal according to local and international laws or policies. Also, based on these laws, policies, and charters, none of these constructions falls under new construction work; they all are archaeological conservation work or heritage management work.

## **Preserving Living Traditions**

It must be taken into consideration how the relevant culture has traditionally preserved its heritage in the past when the archaeological heritage of a living culture is subjected to conservation. These traditional knowledge systems are also part of heritage. Local heritage should not be completely subjected to foreign conservation methods. Heritage should be conserved by preserving its liveliness. To continue in a ruined state for a longer time results in the death of the culture.

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## Conservation based on archaeological data

When it comes to Stupa Conservation, the international charters have some interesting mentionings. According to the Venice Charter, the level of restoration should be decided on the nature of the factors. Authentic texts, laws, and policies should be used in this process and It also states that the changes made over time should be respected while preserving the building. When these are applied to the issue at Kurindi, the problem can be solved; the needed restoration work can be done based on the archaeological facts.

When saying that the time-to-time constructions of the place should be respected, the 1890s kovil is not considered because it was built by severely challenging the originality and the identity of the building. As Bell and Lewis have described, it is an 'invasion'. It is an encroachment, illegal construction, and an attempt to erase the original identity of an ancient place.

According to the Burra Charter, conservation should require minimal physical intervention and should be done with attention to the cultural significance of a building. The building or its function should be a remnant of its historical location. If there is sufficient evidence of the original condition of the physical materials of cultural importance and the physical materials can be brought back to their original condition, restoration should be done. If these are applied to the Kurundi temple, then; The physical locations of the buildings have been discovered archaeologically and their original plans are understood. Conservation plans have been prepared by taking into account the existing data. Their cultural values are based on Buddhist ideologies. When considered culturally, the Stupa and Pratimagruha are considered sacred buildings.

Bernard Fielden pointed out that the conservation process is often distorted due to political pressures directed by religious and ethnic groups. This is what happened at Kurundi temple. Preservation is not just a matter of physical intervention and the intangible process associated with place identity should also be preserved. That is what the ancient kings also did. Unfortunately, in modern conservation, accepting this concept was delayed until the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is a serious crime to erase and distort the original identity of a historical site or monument. Religious harmony or coexistence is not allowed to distort a place's historical identity.

It is important to be sensitive to communities' religious needs when conducting conservation. This is also mentioned in international statutes. According to heritage management experts and international and national heritage management laws

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and policies, there is no obstacle to creating conservation methods that are suitable for one's country and culture within the basic model.

## **Previous Research Work at Kurundi**

In 1895 J. Henry Lewis reported about the archaeological ruins he witnessed at Kurundi or Kurundumalaya in A Manual of the Vanni Districts, Ceylon. According to what is reported in this, in November 1890, a pillar inscription of King Mahinda V was copied. Henry Parker has also reported about Kurundumalaya in his writings.

Former Archaeology Commissioner of the Department of Archaeology H.C.P. Bell in 1905 writes in detail about Kurundumayala in the administration report.

Venerable Ellawala Medhanandha thero has also written about Kurundi monastic ruins in his publications.

In May 1933 78 acres, 2 rood, and 4 perches of land that consists of Kurundimalaya ancient archaeological ruins were declared by Gazette as an Archaeology Reserve. Once again in 2013, another gazette was published declaring the Kurundi Archaeology Reserve.

According to archaeological reports, the Kurundi ancient Buddhist monastery is not an isolated monastery. There had been a bigger architectural complex in the vicinity and ruins of this vast spread architectural complex have been discovered. These ruins are been identified as belonging to the Anuradhapura period. The pillar inscription of King Mahinda V is also located among these ruins.

Ruins of a complex architectural structure including stone pillars, ruins of a stone bridge, and pottery fragments are spread in this area. The 1905 administration report of the Department of Archaeology and the Manual of the Vanni District has written records about these ruins. However, as per archaeological reports, an archaeological survey has not yet been conducted about these architectural ruins. It is also reported that the place has been vandalized by treasure hunters and also subjected to purposeful vandalizations, including the pillar inscription of King Mahinda V which is now shattered into several pieces.



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