

## Portraiture in the Buddhist Image House

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Stone Inscriptions (*SelLipi* and *Tam Lipi*) and donor inscriptions by kings(*Sannasa*)and ministers (*Tudapath*) on copper and palm leaf show an unbroken tradition from the early years of Buddhism in Sri Lanka how the upper strata of the *Radala*(Royalty)were responsible for the erection and maintenance of temples and monasteries up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These records have been useful to identify some of the figures of laymen on the walls of the Image House as donors of that particular temple. They usually stand closest to the entrance of the sanctum and sometimes are shown carrying offerings to the Buddha or worshipping him, adjacent to the main image. The tradition of depicting monks who nurtured a certain tradition of Teacher- Pupil-Tradition (*ŚīśyaśīśyānuParamparawa*)or mentored the building of a particular Image House can be traced back to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century in the Kandyan Region (*Udarata*).

Individualized figures are seldom in the Kandyan School of Art (*UdarataSampradāya*). As such, a convincing identification of a statue or painting is impossible. Nevertheless, regarding the identification of the figures of Duttagāmini at the AnuradhapraRuvanveliseya and of Parakramabāhu I at the PolonnaruwaPothgulVehera, no questions are raised today, although we do not have any epigraphical evidence for identification. Similarly the figure of King *KīrtiSrīRājsamha* in cave no 2 of Dambulla seem to be undisputed sans evidence in situ. A similar statue in the pose of worshipping is seen in cave no 3 is left without identification. With the help of external information regarding the administration of the area and the mentor of the temple, two figures have been identified in the *Medawela Raja MahāVihāraya* as *DunivlaNilame* and the image in the *DambadeniyaRaja MahāVihāraya*, too has been identified as *MēgastenneAdigar*. In the *Dankirigala Len Viharaya* cave temple the local tradition is cherished that the *LewkeDisāwa* is shown on the wall facing the Buddha Statue. As no inscriptions are available for identification, in these early royal figures, the naming the images is disputed.

It is however intriguing that the figure of a King appears in mans if theseKandyan temples such as Danture, Debaragala, and many *TampitaViharas* and the even Temple of the Tooth.As the King *KīrtiSrīRājsamha* is not recorded to have supported these temples through a donor inscription, the figures have not been regarded as the initiator of the Revival Movement.The first question that arises, is if these identifiable figure due to a fixed iconography, can be regarded as “Portraits”.

Shifting to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the *ThimbirigasyāyaIsipathanārāmayaportraits* of the members of the Family of Pedris are shown, which strictly follow the rules of portraiture practiced by British painters. Although the paintings of the Image House haven been attributed to Sarlis, these somber full seize portraits facing the sanctum juxtapose the Sri Lankan mural art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and portraiture introduced by the British.

The scene of laying of the foundation to *KelaniyaRajamhāviharaya* by Helena Wijewardana and members of her family, is an interesting mixture of two styles. Although the body of the Buddhist monks and laymen are not individualized in this scene, SoliasMendis superimposes faces that seem to have carefully copied photographs of donors and mentors. The murals of the *MeddepolaRajamahāviharaya* which are dated to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some mentors too seem to have portrait like features.

A trend can be carefully observed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition of painting the face as a portrait of a deceased chief monk to adorn the entrance to his funeral pyre in the south also testifies for a tradition that evolves out from a further development from photograph to monochrome painting.

The over 100 temples documented in the Samkathana Project on documenting evidences of Discourse Communities have revealed many individualized images of donors and mentors which can be regarded as portraits. The paper argues that portraiture was not solely introduced to Sri Lanka by the British Academic artists, but may have had a tradition that can be traced to themid18<sup>th</sup> century.

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