

= Gal Vihara =

The Gal Vihara (Sinhalese : ගැල් විහාරය) , also known as Gal Viharaya and originally as the Uttararama , is a rock temple of the Buddha situated in the ancient city of Polonnaruwa in North Central Province , Sri Lanka . It was fashioned in the 12th century by Parakramabahu I. The central feature of the temple is four rock relief statues of the Buddha , which have been carved into the face of a large granite rock . The images consist of a large seated figure , another smaller seated figure inside an artificial cavern , a standing figure and a reclining figure . These are considered to be some of the best examples of ancient Sinhalese sculpting and carving arts , and have made the Gal Vihara the most visited monument at Polonnaruwa .

The images of Uttararama follow a different style from the images of the previous Anuradhapura period , and show some significant differences . The identity of the standing image is subject to a certain amount of dispute among historians and archaeologists , some of whom argue that it depicts the monk Ananda rather than the Buddha . Each of the images have been carved in a way that uses a maximum possible area of the rock , and their heights seem to have been decided based on the height of the rock itself . Each statue appears to have had its own image house , as indicated by the remains of brick walls at the site . The Uttararama was where Parakramabahu I held a congregation of monks to purify the Buddhist priesthood , and later drew up a code of conduct for them . This code of conduct has been recorded in an inscription on the same rock face containing the images of the Buddha .

= = Uttararama = =

The Gal Vihara or " rock monastery " (so named after the large rock face where the four images of the Buddha were carved) was originally named Uttararama " the northern monastery " . It is located in Polonnaruwa , and according to the Ceylonese chronicles was one of the more prominent of the hundred temples built throughout Lanka by King Parakramabahu I (1153 - 1186) . The Mahavamsa mentions that Parakramabahu I had his workmen build three caves in the rock after finishing the temple : the Vijjadhara Guha (cave of the spirits of knowledge) , the Nissina Patima Lena (cave of the sitting image) , and the Nipanna Patima Guha (cave of the sleeping image) . Although they are described as " caves " , only the Vijjadhara Guha is a cave , while the others were image houses similar to the Thivanka and Lankathilaka , with their walls connected to the rock face . These walls , which were evidently decorated with frescoes , have since been destroyed and only their bases now remain ,

By the time Parakramabahu I ascended to the throne , the Buddhist priesthood in the country was divided into three fraternities : Abhayagiri vihāra , Jetavanaramaya and Mahavihara . He held a congregation of monks to reconcile the three fraternities , and " purified the order " by expelling corrupt monks . With the help of the elders of each fraternity , he later drew up a katikavata (" code of conduct ") for Buddhist monks and recorded this in an inscription at Uttararama . The area in front of the images , which now resembles a terrace , is believed to be the location of the assembly hall where this congregation was held . The inscription recording the code has been carved on the flat , polished rock face between the Vijjadhara Guha and the standing image .

The Uttararama was abandoned during the fall of the Kingdom of Polonnaruwa . It had functioned as an educational establishment from its inception to its abandonment , being a centre of Buddhist education in the country .

= = Images = =

The main feature of Gal Vihara is the four images of the Buddha that have been carved on a single , large granite rock face , considered to be among the best examples of the rock carving and sculpting arts of the ancient Sinhalese . The rock has been cut almost 15 feet (4.6 m) deep to create a rock face to accommodate the statues , and is the only example in the country where a natural rock has been excavated to this extent for such a purpose . The images position the temple

alongside some of the most significant monuments which survive from the ancient kingdoms of Sri Lanka , and make it the most celebrated and visited temple in Polonnaruwa . Three of the images are quite large ; the smallest of them is more than 15 feet (4 @. @ 6 m) tall , and the largest is more than 46 feet (14 m) long . However , the fourth image is just over 4 feet (1 @. @ 2 m) and located inside an artificial cavern carved into the rock . A seated image is on the left side of the rock , and to the right is a cavern and another seated image . Further to the right are a standing image , and then a reclining image . Unlike other statues of the same period (such as the one found in the Lankathilaka image house) , they are all well preserved , and therefore provide a good indication about less well @-@ preserved examples . The size of each image seems to have been decided based on the height of the rock at that point , so that the maximum possible area could be used for it . According to the archaeologist Senarath Paranavithana , the images were evidently coated in gold in their early years . The style of the images differs somewhat from that of statues from the earlier Anuradhapura period . The most notable changes are the broader forehead in the Gal Vihara images . The robe is carved with two parallel lines , rather than the single line seen in the Anuradhapura period , influenced by the Amaravati school of art .

== = Seated image == =

The large seated image is 15 feet 2 @. @ 5 inches (4 @. @ 636 m) tall , and depicts the dhyana mudra . The seat was carved in the shape of a lotus flower , its base decorated with carvings of flowers and lions . The statue sits on a carved throne , decorated with makara images , with four small images of the Buddha (identical to the larger image) carved inside small chambers . This is an unusual feature in ancient Sinhalese sculpture , and is presumably the result of Mahayana influence .

== = Vidyadhara Guha == =

A small statue only 4 feet 7 inches (1 @. @ 40 m) in height , but similar in appearance to its larger neighbour , is located inside the artificial cave named the Vidyadhara Guha . The cave was created by carving 4 @. @ 5 feet (1 @. @ 4 m) into the rock , leaving four square shafted stone columns at the sides of the 26 @-@ foot (7 @. @ 9 m) wide and 12 @-@ foot @-@ 9 @-@ inch (3 @. @ 89 m) high opening . The base of the lotus shaped seat of the Buddha image here is also decorated with designs of lions . A throne and a parasol are carved behind it , more elaborate in design than the larger image . A prabhamandala , or halo , is carved behind the head of the statue , which rests between two four @-@ armed deities . According to archaeologist H. C. P. Bell , the god on the right is Brahma , and the god on the left is Vishnu . The walls of the cave were once decorated with frescoes , traces of which remain in the two corners at the back of the cave .

== = Standing image == =

The standing image is the focus of much discussion among historians and archaeologists , since there is a general belief that it is not a statue of the Buddha . The image is 22 feet 9 inches (6 @. @ 93 m) tall , and stands on a low pedestal shaped like a lotus . It leans back in a relaxed manner , its arms folded across its chest . The statue 's face carries a sorrowful expression and the reclining image ? which depicts the Buddha 's parinirvana ? lies next to it , which has led some to believe that it is the monk ?nanda , who is lamenting the Buddha 's demise at his deathbed . The remains of the walls , however , indicate that the two images were once in separate chambers , rather than next to each other . Paranavithana believes that the statue is of the Buddha , which depicts the para dukkha dukkhitha mudra or " sorrow for the sorrow of others " . However , this is a rarely used gesture in Sinhalese sculpture , and is seen at only a few locations in the country . Another possibility is that the image shows the Buddha during his second week after enlightenment , which he spent gazing at the Bodhi Tree in gratitude for providing him shelter . The image is not mentioned in the Chulavamsa , which only mentions the other three . While this may be an indication that it is not an

image of the Buddha , it is also possible that it may have been made at an earlier period than the others .

= = = Reclining image = = =

At 46 feet 4 inches (14 @. @ 12 m) in length , the reclining image is the largest statue in Gal Vihara , and also one of the largest sculptures in Southeast Asia . It depicts the parinirvana of the Buddha , who is lying on his right side with the right arm supporting the head on a bolster , while the left arm lies along the body and thigh . The palm of the right hand and the soles of the feet have a single lotus flower carved on them . Charles Godakumbure , a former Commissioner of the Archaeological Department of Sri Lanka , has stated that the bolster upon which the Buddha rests his head has been so well carved that it looks like a cotton stuffed pillow rather than one carved from rock . The upper foot ? the left foot of the image ? is slightly withdrawn to indicate that the image depicts that the Buddha has attained parinirvana , and is not merely lying down . Unlike the other images , the reclining image does not have a decorated pedestal , and lies on levelled bare rock . On the wall behind the image , several sockets have been carved into the rock , as well as the remains of two stone columns , suggesting that its now missing image house had a wooden roof .