

*Moonstone advertised for
auction at the Bonhams auction
in London, United Kingdom
- The study report*



Wijerathne Bohingamuwa

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Foreword and acknowledgements

I had just returned to Oxford after six months of intense field work in Sri Lanka when Dr. Senarath Dissanayake, Director General, Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka informed me about the Bonhams London auction where a moonstone, allegedly of Sri Lankan origin, was advertised for sale. He requested me to examine the artefact and send him a report. I was more than delighted to undertake the task but the difficulty was finding published literature and good quality photographs of Anuradhapura moonstones. Pictures published in the web were of limited use for this research. Dr. Dissanayake kindly sent me a scanned copy of Charles Godakumbure's *Sandakadapahana* - moonstone. Mr. Dhanesh Visumperuma, Dr. Kavan Ratnatunga, Mr. Chandima Ambanwala and Mr. Anuradha Piyadasa and few other colleagues in Sri Lanka got in touch and gave their fullest support in finding materials I wanted. Mr. Piyadasa coordinated a tour for Dr. Ratnatunga and Mr. Ambanwala to visit Anuradhapura to examine the moonstones which bore close resemblance to the moonstone in London, particularly moonstone number 10 of Godakumbure's 1967 publication. They provided me high resolution photographs of necessary moonstones. Mr. Piyadasa, through his colleagues, measured the thickness of Anuradhapura moonstones for comparison with that of the moonstone in London. The continuous online dialogues and sharing of views among this group outside mainstream archaeology (barring Ambanwala, I think) was very encouraging.

With regards to the identification of the material of the moonstone Dr. Arjuna Thanthilage, Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology and Mr. Pathmakumara Jayasinghe, Central Cultural Fund (CCF) and Dr. Sanjeewa Malaviarachchi, Department of Geology, University of Peradeniya (Directed by , Prof. C. B. Dissanayke, Director, Institute of Fundamental Studies), examined the photos sent by me and communicated their views. Dr. Peter Ditchfield of the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and History of Art, Oxford University kindly examined rock sample taken from the moonstone in London. Prof. Sudarshan Seneviratne on his own contacted me and shared his views via Skype.

However, this study could not have been possible without the support of H.M.K. Herath, First Secretary (Cultural and Events), Sri Lanka High Commission, London who negotiated with the Bonhams and made arrangements to examine the moonstone. Dr. Alice Bailey, Head of Department for the Islamic Indian Art Department, who represented Bonhams during the inspection of the artefact, extended her fullest support. Miss Kaushalya Gunasena of the Central Cultural Fund read the draft of this report and did some word processing work.

I am thankful to all of those mentioned above. Without your support writing of this report could not have been possible.

1. *Background*

Publication of a web advertisement by the London based antiquity auctioneers Bonhams on January 10th 2013 under the title of “Rare Buddhist Anuradhapura period (377 BC - 1017 AD) Indian carved stone temple step discovered by Bonhams in a Devon garden will be sold in London¹” created a considerable public and media interest in Sri Lanka². Not surprisingly so as the artefact claimed to have originated from the Buddhist heritage of the island. The general demand by the public, media and even some reputed scholars of archaeology and art history was to take measures for the return of the artefact to Sri Lanka. The Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka, rightfully, decided to verify the authenticity and if possible to establish the provenance of the artefact by physical examination and research as a prerequisite for initiating the necessary course of action. Hence the author³ was formally appointed to undertake this task on behalf of the Director General of Archaeology, Sri Lanka. Here is the resultant study report.

2. *Methodology*

Firstly, published photographs and reports of the moonstone on sale were studied. This was followed by studies of Sri Lankan moonstones, particularly those from the Anuradhapura period, for comparison and identification of similar counterparts. Published reports and photographs as well as recent photos taken specifically for present study by colleagues⁴ in Sri Lanka were used for this purpose. Thickness of the stone slabs of some Anuradhapura moonstones were measured again with the help of colleagues in Sri Lanka for comparison.

¹ http://www.Bonhamss.com/press_release/12509/

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21137743>

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/news/25130-auctioning-moonstone-in-uk-comes-under-limelight.html>

<http://www.nation.lk/edition/news-online/item/14864-efforts-to-reclaim-historical-artifacts-abroad.html>

<http://www.sundaytimes.lk/130127/plus/heritage-under-the-gavel-29978.html>

³ Wijerathne Bohingamuwa, Senior lecturer, Department History and Archaeology, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka and currently a doctoral candidate at the School of Archaeology, University of Oxford.

⁴ Mr. Anuradha Piyadasa, Dr. Kavan Ranatunga, Mr. Dhanesh Visumperuma, Mr. Chandima Ambanwela

Subsequently, arrangements were made, through the Sri Lankan Mission in London, to physically examine the moonstone advertised for auction in London by Bonhams (herein after MBAL). Thus a physical examination of the artefact was conducted with assistance of and in the presence of H.M.K. Herath, First Secretary (Cultural and Events), Sri Lanka High Commission, London and Dr. Alice Bailey of the Bonhams on 11th February 2013. Measurements of the artefacts were taken and photographic recordings were done. A small sample of the artefact was taken from opposite side of the carved surface and from edges without any significant visible damages the moonstone. The sample was meant for laboratory analysis to identify the material. Collected sample was examined at the Oxford University Research Laboratory for Archaeology and History of Art. Photographs were examined by Sri Lankan experts in the subject (discussed below) for the identification of the rock type used for the MBAL- for the purpose of comparison with those of Anuradhapura moonstones.

3. Physical examination

3.1 Description of the moonstone

The MBAL measures 146 cm (along the straight edge of the half lotus side) X 123 cm (at the longest point from the half lotus end to the semi-circular edge). Thickness of the moonstone varies from 14 cm in the semi-circular end to 18 cm in the centre of the half lotus end of the moonstone. The author could not, obviously, weigh the object and it is reported to weigh three quarters of a ton⁵. The artefact is perfectly preserved (discussed below) except for the slight damage to the tusk of the last elephant in the southern most end of the animal procession panel. Effects of fungi growth, however, is clearly visible on the carved surface where as the opposite side is rather fresh.

3.2. Material of the object

For the purpose of identification of material, a small sample of the artefact was taken from the opposite side of the carved surface and from the edges. Moreover close up photographs of the reverse side and the half lotus-end edge of the moonstone was also obtained. They clearly indicate that the material used for this artefact is stone⁶, though rock type was unclear immediately. Hence these photos were sent to Dr. Arjuna Thantilage of the Postgraduate Institute Archaeology and Mr. Pathmakumara Jayasinghe, geoarchaeologist of the Central Cultural Fund for material identification. They confirmed that the material was

⁵ http://www.Bonhamss.com/press_release/12509/

⁶ There was an initial suspicion as to whether the material was stone or something artificial

stone. However both claimed that the photographic evidence was not conclusive enough to identify the rock type beyond doubt. Nevertheless after a long on-line discussion about the small sample that the author had obtained, Mr. Jayasinghe concluded the material to be weathered gneiss (Pers.com.). Similarly, Dr. Thanthilage considered the rock type to be metamorphic and probably gneissic rock (Pers.com.).

Meanwhile, the small rock sample collected from the London artefact was examined at the Oxford University Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art. This is what Dr. Peter Ditchfield who examined the sample had to say:

“The rock fragments are rather small but appear to consist of quartz, feldspar and mica and thus has a granitic composition. There is no visible fabric or foliation in the small subsample. So I would favour the description of granite rather than gneiss, this is not to say that the sample cannot be a gneiss but only that there is no evidence of this in the subsample provided. Based on this subsample I would characterise the sample as a granite or micro granite due to the relatively small crystal size (Dr. Peter Ditchfield, Pers.com.).”

Due to the apparent differences of opinions with regards to the identification of the material, a third opinion was desired. Hence Prof. C. B. Dissanayake, one of the premier geologists in the country (Sri Lanka) and the director of the Institute of Fundamental Studies, Kandy was consulted and photos were sent for his identification. He in turn directed Dr. Sanjeewa Malaviarachchi, Department of Geology, University of Peradeniya to study these photos. Dr. Malaviarachchi observed that the “rock is similar to the wide-spread granitic gneiss (high-grade metamorphic rock) found in the North Central Province in Sri Lanka” and “clear gneissic foliation”.... is visible. This is “a very common feature found in similar rocks of Sri Lanka.... The granitic gneiss rock is usually foundin Anuradhapura area” and “in the Polonnaruwa area. (Malaviarachchi Pers.Com.).

The author is no expert to comment on these observations, other than to admit that the rock sample was too small as mentioned by Dr. Ditchfield as well. In fact Dr. Ditchfield himself admitted that the rock could very well be gneiss and only he does not see evidence of foliation in the sample. As such the author is inclined to go by the view of the local experts. Mr. Pathmakumara Jayasinghe says that the mostly used rock type in historical buildings and artefacts in ancient Sri Lanka is gneiss⁷. **Use of a rock type commonly found in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa region (and perhaps used for making moonstones in Sri Lanka) is not necessarily an indication for the artefact to be of Sri Lankan origin. Similar rock types are available elsewhere as well. Nevertheless this evidence is important for the evaluation of the overall findings.**

⁷ Pathmakumara Jayasinghe

2.3 *Description of the carved panels*

The semi-circular slab of stone out of which the moonstone is carved, as it is the case with most Sri Lankan moonstones, is divided into five panels /semi-circular rows containing motifs of different well known themes. The innermost centre of the moonstone is decorated with the usual half lotus enclosed by a line of petals in bud (six complete petals and two half petals at the either ends) and then a line of open petals (seven complete petals and two half petals at the either sides) which are beautifully carved and in excellent preservation (Fig: 6 - 9). Immediately beyond this half lotus, is the panel with the procession of swans carrying lotus buds in their beaks (Fig: 6, 7 & 17). They are eleven in number and interestingly the first of the swans in the left corner has its head turned backwards as is the case with the moonstone number 10 in Godakumbure's (1967) publication (here in after NMG 10). It does not carry a lotus bud instead it has its beak touching an object that may be identified as a stylized *Punkalasa* perhaps! (Fig: 6 & 7). The rambling creeper is the subject of the next semi-circular row (Fig: 6, 8 & 15). Beautifully carved creeper is similar to that of depicted in the NMG 10 referred to above. The penultimate row is carved with the procession of four animals, namely elephant, horse, lion and the bull respectively (Fig: 6, 8, 10, 12 & 18). They are pursuing one another from left to right. While two bulls and the two horses are depicted in the same single stance, other two animals are shown in different postures. There are nine animals all together in this row: three elephants; pairs of horse, bull and lion. The procession begins and ends with an elephant. The differences in the posture are mainly noted in the trunk and legs; the first one has its trunk raised over the horse's back, the middle one folded backwards and kept below its mouth while the last one has its trunk in its normal position extended downwards. Two horses depicted in this row are artistically less realistic than other animals. Depictions of bulls are more natural as compared to other animals, though bulls in other moonstones such as the one about 100 m west of *Rathnaprasadaya*, which Dr. Paranavitana considered to be the most beautiful of all Sri Lankan moonstones, are carved with finer details and appears very natural. The difference in the posture observed in the lions is in their tails. In general, the row of animals is similar to that of MNG 10. This similarity is observed in their number, sequence and postures. However the animals depicted in the Anuradhapura moonstones are more natural. Same could be said about the fire flames of the outer-most row of the moonstone (Fig: 6, 8, & 15), i.e. MBAL is poor in quality and craftsmanship. This is true for the MBAL in general.

3. *Provenance and authenticity*

In dealing with the artefacts removed from its original context, that is the unprovenanced artefacts, the first step and perhaps the far most important aspect is to established their provenance and authenticity. This is a challenging task as the looters, dealers and the auctioneers are smart and experienced enough to conveniently conceal both to avoid any

legal and ethical charges that are level against them. The Lydian Hoard issue is a case in point. Auctioneers are well aware of all international conventions as well as local legal frameworks and hence escape being charged. However they will still want their artefacts to be associated with historical significance to increase the market value.

With regards to the moonstone in question, the Bonhams in their web advertisement attributed it to Buddhist art and architecture tradition of Anuradhapura period. The long title itself, to author, was very carefully phrased to create controversy and strike the sentiments of mass and media and thereby publicity, which they achieved remarkably.

The advertisement goes on to record that *“The beautiful 1,000 year old pre-Hindu stone step is one of only six examples known to date from this period, making this discovery the seventh⁸. The temple step is a feature unique to Sinhalese architecture in Sri Lanka”*. (Emphasis is mine). The Bonhams is said to have encountered the artefact at the garden of Mrs. & Mrs. Hickmott in Devon. However with regard to its history Bonhams records that “the house in Sussex (where the moonstone was found first) had been bought from a tea planter in the 1950's and the stone had been moved six times. Mr. Michael Hickmott, the husband of the owner of the moonstone, reportedly told BBC Sinhala Service⁹ that her wife was only four years when her family moved to their Sussex house.

The Bonhams' website has claimed the moonstone to have originated from Sri Lanka. It says Mrs Hickmott's brother “had seen similar stones in Sri Lanka whilst on holiday...” Further, Dr. Alice Bailey who works for Bonhams and the head of department for the Islamic and Indian Art, found this artefact being identical with “... temple steps...seen in situ in early 19th century photographs of the monuments of Sri Lanka”¹⁰. Moreover Bonhams has reportedly told BBC that “it believed the provenance to be accurate and correct and fulsome and correct and the object is as described”¹¹. In conclusion, Bonhams seems to claim the moonstone is of Sri Lankan origin, though it does not have a history beyond 1950 and how and when it reached Sussex. This is the classical manner in which antiquity dealers get away being charged for looting heritage objects while adding historical significance to artefacts!

⁸ Number of genuine moonstones said to be present in Sri Lanka, as given here, is definitely erroneous.

⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21137743>

¹⁰ http://www.Bonhamss.com/press_release/12509/

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21137743>

The author had a personal meeting with Dr. Alice Bailey¹², during his inspection of the artefact. When asked about the history of the moonstone she said that it is being investigated. However she tried to see a connection between John D'Oyly (1774-1824), a British colonial administrator and representative of the British crown to the Kandyan Kingdom during the time of the last king of Kandy and the importation of this artefact to UK. While Dr. Bailey admitted that she is yet to establishing this link, she drew our attention to the fact D'Oyly's family was living about 10 km away from the Sussex house where the moonstone was first found in the garden of the tea broker. If D'Oyly¹³ was responsible for importing the material, Dr. Bailey thinks, he might have done so to give it as a gift to somebody or for his own artistic and historical appreciation of the artefact. Dr. Bailey was planning to examine the land registry and other relevant offices for reconstructing the history of the artefact. Then the author attempted to contact Hickmott family but these attempts ended in vain and he had to be satisfied listening to the latter's discussion with BBC Sinhala Service¹⁴.

The history of the artefact, for the moment, cannot be established beyond 1950. However there can be no doubt that this moonstone artistically and as a tradition is Sri Lankan and resembles with those found in late Anuradhapura period- more specifically to number 10 moonstone published by Godakumbure (1967 discussed below, MNG 10). However this is not to claim that moonstone in London is a genuine late Anuradhpura period art work.

Resemblance does not equate genuineness and originality. Any cleaver and experienced artist can make a perfect replica and perhaps technology could be used to make even a better copy. This makes the business of determining the originality and authenticity more difficult. Therefore all other possible parameters, however much they could be imperfect, should be considered in arriving at conclusions (discussed below).

3. Observations

3.1 Counterparts among Anuradhapura moonstones

Ideally the author would have liked to study all Anuradhapura period moonstones and publications on Sri Lankan moonstones to compare and identify similar counterparts to that of the London one. Since he is in UK, physical examination of Anuradhapura moonstone was impossible and hence opted to study published material and see as many photographs of moonstones as possible. However the author admits that he did not have access to all

¹² Author wishes to record his appreciation for Dr. Bailey cooperation and sharing her views with him.

¹³ However John D'Oyly lived and passed away in Sri Lanka. He was cremated in Kandy where he lived mostly.

¹⁴ Author wishes to thank Mr. Priyath Liyange, the editor, BBC Sinhala Service

publications on moonstones. Dr. Senarath Dissanayake, Director General, Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka kindly sent him a scanned copy of the Godakumbure's 1967 (reprint) *Sandakaḍapahaṇa* ¹⁵. Other published material included web publications such as Ven. Dhammika's Sacred Island¹⁶. Colleagues in Colombo and Anuradhapura were extremely helpful and went to the extent to go to Anuradhapura to inspect the moonstones mentioned in Godakumbure and Ven. Dhammika (discussed below) and measure the thickness of Anuradhapura moonstones for comparison.

These studies and the online dialogues with the colleagues made it clear that there are two photographs of Anuradhapura moonstones that resemble very closely with the moonstone in London¹⁷. One is the moonstone number 10 of Godakumbure's 1967 publication (*Sandakadapahana* - moonstone)¹⁸ and other is the one published by Ven. Dhammika in his book 'Sacred Island'. In fact it was Mr. Visumperuma and Dr. Ratnatunga (Pers. Com.) who drew the author's attention to pictures of these moonstones first while he was awaiting the scanned copy of Godakumbure's publication. Photographs published in these publications appeared to be exactly the same but it was not clear if both refer to one and the same moonstone. Physical observations conducted by colleagues comprising Dr. Ratnatunga and Mr. Ambanwala as well as Mr. Piyadasa's online discussions with Ven. Dhammika made it clear that both Godakumbure and Ven. Dhammika refer to the same moonstone in a building between *Thuparmaya*¹⁹ and *Ruwanweli Stupa* in Anuradhapura.

The moonstone in London (MBAL) and this particular moonstone (MNG 10) are similar in a number of ways. The number of semi-circular rows/panels of the slab, theme of each row such as motifs, animals, their sequence, number and the posture of each animal are the same. Though thematically and stylistically the moonstones are similar, the one in London is not of the same artistic quality. Author's observations of Anuradhapura moonstones,

¹⁵ Godakumbure, C.E. 1967 (reprint). *Sandakaḍapahaṇa*, Moonstones. Sri Lanka. *Purāvidyā Depārtamēntuva*. Publisher: Colombo, Sri Lanka: Archaeological Department.

¹⁶ Ven. S. Dammika Sacred Island <http://www.buddhanet.net/sacred-island/anuradhapura.html>

The location of this moonstone is given as further along the road from the *stupa* (*Abhyagiri*) in a small temple and he considered it to be the most beautiful moonstone seen at Anuradhapura.

¹⁷ This is by no means to claim that these are the only moonstones which resemble the moonstone in London, but it only shows limitations of resources that were available to author for comparison. Further research may reveal even closer counterparts.

¹⁸ Described to be from a building between *Ruvanvelisaya* and *Thuparamaya*

¹⁹ Dr. Ratnatunga (Pers. Com.) thinks that Ven. Dammika has made a mistake between the text describing the famous Queen's Pavilion moonstone and the image of the one near Thuparama.

particularly those well known ones such as the one which Parnavitana considered as the most beautiful moonstone (situated about 100m west of *Rathnaprasadaya* (location; Chandima Ambanwala Pers. com) and well known *Bisomaligawa* moonstone clearly shows that carvings are far superior and animals and motifs are more natural and realistic than the MBAL. Even the MNG 10, with which the moonstone in London is compared, shows finer details of animals and other decorations (See photographs). Compare the left most/ last elephant in the MNG 10 and MBAL. Note the differences in the tail. The MNG10 elephant has a coiled tail which looks very natural as compared to the straighten tail in the MBAL which is far from being natural. Similarly, compare the majestic and realistic nature of the lion and bull in the MNG10 moonstone (and most of other Anuradhapura moonstones as well) and those of the MBAL. The details of the mane/hair on the neck and the head of the lion and the neck muscle of the bull in the MNG 10 are extremely artistic and natural as opposed to those on the London one. Same is true for the representation of the horse as well.

Having compared MBAL with some of the best moonstones in Anuradhapura, artistic value of the MBAL should not be downgraded. The carvings of MBAL are fascinating in its own right. The rationale behind the comparison between MNG 10 and the one with the Bonhams, as mentioned before, is due to their closeness to one another. What we have observed is, despite stylistic and thematic closeness between the two, there are marked and very sharp differences too. Nevertheless, keeping in mind that two works of art even if made by the same artist are likely to have dissimilarities, we need to look for more evidence before making conclusions about the authenticity. Since the author is left with few options, he attempts at using wear and tear as tool to arrive in resolving this issue.

If we assume that this artefact, based on artistic resemblance as discussed above and as claimed by Bonhams, is datable to the late Anuradhapura period- say 800-950 AD-, then it is over 1000 years old. Moreover, as claimed by Hickmott family, it is transported to UK and moved six times before it reached its final destination- the Bonhams store house where I examined the object. Considering the time that has elapsed and the distance it has travelled as well as the number of times it is said to have moved, the artefacts is likely bear some wear and tear. More over it weighs three quarter of tone, thus handling and moving is difficult and requires heavy machinery²⁰. The carved surface shows the effects of fungi and some weathering, though the opposite side has little such effect as can be observed in the pictures (Fig: 19). Apart from a slight damaged to the tusk of the last elephant in the right most corner of the moonstone there is hardly any evidence of wear and tear in this artefact. Please note the photograph published by the Bonhams in their

²⁰ Our own attempts (by two people) to move the artefact was futile and had to avail the assistance of a machine.

website, reproduced here (Fig: 5)²¹. However the actual artefact shows more weathering than this photo. If buried before any wear and tear, artefacts can preserve perfectly well. But the object in question, as it has travelled a considerable distance, should witness some evidence of travelling and transport. All Anuradhapura moonstones bear clear evidence of polishing and deterioration as they are meant to be stepped upon by everybody who enters the building. The moonstone in question does not bear such clear effect of weathering and polishing it should have, except two swans towards the left corner of the slab. The author admits that this specimen was not perfectly cleaned and it had fungi on the carved surface, which he attempted to clean with the help of a brush.

Unavailability of clear evidence of weathering and effect of transport might raise some doubts about the genuineness, originality and antiquity assigned to this artefact. Therefore is this a good quality replica of a late Anuradhapura period genuine moonstone carved by a clever artist at a much later period than claimed?

3.2 Outer edges

Craftsmen of the Anuradhapura moonstones have given careful consideration for the depiction of animals and other motifs more naturally and realistically than getting the fine and sharp outer edges, perhaps with the exception of one Parānavitana considered as the best of all (mentioned above). This is because perhaps the craftsmen had a message/meaning to convey through these motifs and carvings. The outer edges in the Anuradhapura moonstones in general have rather natural looking uneven edges (Fig: 1, 2 & 3)). This is in sharp contrast with that of the moonstone advertised for sale in London of which edges are very finely cut- as if cut by a machine, resembles bullock cart wheel (Fig: 6, 8, 9, 14, & 16).

Does this marked difference in the outer edges of moonstones in Anuradhapura and one in London indicate that the latter is somewhat different to those of genuine moonstones in Anuradhapura?²²

3.3 Thickness of stone slab

The author has never measured the thickness of the Anuradhapura moonstones. Since it was felt that the thickness of MBAL looked much thicker, he wanted to verify this matter. When the author communicated his requirement to Mr. Anuradha Piyadasa, he kindly assisted the author by getting some of these measurements through his colleagues.

²¹ Apologies to Bonhams for not taking their permission to reproduce this photograph. However it is widely reproduced in the media.

²² However author insists that our data on Anuradhapura moonstones in this regard , by no means, is complete

According to these measurements the average thickness of some Anuradhapura moonstones was approximately 5 cm on the circular/outer end of the moonstone slab and 6 cm at the half lotus end or the straight end²³. However as noted above the thickness of the moonstone in London varies from 14 cm in the circular end to 15 cm along the half lotus or the straight end while the centre of the half lotus of the moonstone measured 18 cm.

What does this marked difference in the thickness of the moonstone in London in comparison to those in Anuradhapura suppose to mean? Did the person who got the craftsman to make this moonstone desired a much thicker moonstone for the safe transport over a long distance where as original Anuradhapura moonstones were meant to be placed at nearby sites hence did not require such a thickness?

4. Possible conclusions

Establishing the provenance and authenticity of artefacts detached from their contexts without any record is a challenging task. This is particularly true for artefacts in antiquity market as the auctioneers purposely mask the provenance and true history of the artefact. Moonstone in Bonhams auction in London (MBAL) is no exception. If Bonhams' account is accepted, MBAL is a genuine piece of art and it belongs to the Anuradhapura period of Sri Lankan history. However its history cannot be traced beyond 1950. Though some scholars have traced the genesis of Sri Lankan moonstone to India, developed forms of moonstone as seen in the island are a unique creative work of Sri Lankan Art and Architecture. The MBAL artistically and thematically resembles late Anuradhapura period moonstones, specifically the moonstone number 10 (in Anuradhapura) of Godakumbure's publication 1967 (MNG10). **While there are number of similarities between MBAL and MNG10, there are more important marked differences as well. In short, MNG10 and other known moonstones in Anuradhapura are of very fine quality and details of the carvings are superior.** Craftsmen have given more consideration to finer details of carvings since they had a message to convey and less attention to getting fine edges. The thickness of the stone slabs of Anuradhapura genuine moonstones seems much thinner than that of MBAL. The MBAL shows some evidence of weathering. However considering the antiquity assigned to the artefact and the distance it is claimed to have travelled it may be expected to have borne more evidence of wear and tear. **Perfect preservation of artefacts under favourable circumstances is possible. However when an artefact weighing three quarters of a ton travels over thousands of miles and moves over six times from place to place, it would be expected to witness the evidence of such journey. Such evidence is meagre in the MBAL. Under these circumstances the antiquity and the authenticity assigned to the artefact, naturally, comes under the radar of suspicion. The absence sufficient data - statistical,**

²³ However larger sample of statistics are required to make such a generalization more reliable.

descriptive and photographic details as well as scientific evidence of material/rock types used for making moonstones- **of moonstones in the Island and that of the one in London makes it difficult come to a definite conclusion about the authenticity of MBAL. However the likelihood of MBAL being a replica of a genuine moonstone of Anuradhapura period is quite high. Nevertheless this does not mean to completely reject the claim that the MBAL is an original Sri Lankan moonstone.**

Local geologists, archaeologists with scientific background and geo-archaeologists tend to conclude that the material used for this artefact is granitic gneiss (high-grade metamorphic rock) commonly found in the North Central Province in Sri Lanka. Does this support the authenticity of the moonstone or the possibility of the replica, if it is the case, was made in Sri Lanka itself? Further research is needed, in my view, to answer these issues.

5. Some recommendations

1. While our preliminary investigations seem to suggest a high possibility of the moonstone in London (MBAL) being a replica of a genuine Anuradhapura period moonstone, probably of the number 10 moonstone in Godakumbure's 1967 publication (MNG 10) or a similar one, it is exceedingly advisable to undertake further research, inclusive of the scientific analysis of the material, on the moonstones of Sri Lanka and that of MBAL before reaching a final decision. Present study should be considered as a preliminary investigation upon which further research should be based. Data collected by such research may be evaluated by a national committee of experts for reaching at a final decision.

2. Unavailability of sufficient data on moonstones in Sri Lanka is a serious hindrance in this regard²⁴. It is highly desirable and timely that concerted efforts be made to collect all possible data including scientific evidence on the material used for moonstones and such data should be compared with that of MBAL.

3. Our consultation to determine the material/rock type used for the MBAL lead to two different views: local experts concluding it to be granitic gneiss while Oxford expert deciding it to be granite or micro granite. This issue may be resolved by petrological studies of the rock sample or examination of the moonstone by a geologists/geo-archaeologist. It is desirable to compare such data with those of the moonstones in Sri Lanka, particularly from Anuradhapura region.²⁵

²⁴ This is the general situation of most of other sites, monuments and artefacts as well.

²⁵ I would like to mention the work done by CCF geo-archaeologist Pathma Kumara Jayasinghe, as an example.

4. In dealing with the antiquity market not only the national and international laws and conventions such as 1970 *“UNESCO convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property”* to which both Sri Lanka and United Kingdom are signatories should be considered, but also the professional ethics largely agreed by professional and academic bodies of Archaeology and Museums²⁶ should be given due consideration.

5. The officials in the Division dealing with the (illegal) export of artefacts and related matters at the Department of Archaeology should be enlightened in (the local antiquity laws which they are obviously conversant with) all international conventions on heritage to which Sri Lanka is signatory. More over it is necessary to know the antiquity laws and international conventions signed by countries with which they will have to deal in relation to heritage issues and antiquity markets. Knowledge of the professional ethics generally agreed by the archaeological bodies and museums is extremely handy in such efforts.

6. Sri Lankan missions in overseas should be updated with the information discussed in number 5. Such information helps them in taking prompt and efficient actions with regards to Sri Lankan heritage objects in the country they are stationed.

6. Beyond the issue of moonstone in London

1. It is highly enviable to take this opportunity to reflect on Sri Lanka's antiquity laws, the national policies and priorities concerning the heritage in the island. As it is clear from the issue of the moonstone, the island lacks a satisfactory inventory of archaeological sites, monuments and artefacts. This is particularly true for the areas recently liberated. Limited resources available to the Department Archaeology make this task extremely difficult. However strenuous and collective efforts should be made to survey the island and inventorying sites, monuments and artefacts, by mobilizing resources available in other relevant institutions particularly those in the archaeology departments in universities and the large number of graduates graduating from these universities annually. Considering the rapid development projects that are underway in Sri Lanka after the war, making such an inventory and a national data base a prime importance.

2. **Decisions on national heritage issues such as the moonstone in London advertised for auction should be firmly based *only* on the antiquity laws of the island and international**

²⁶ It is largely agreed that the purchase of artefacts from the antiquity market indirectly finances and legitimizes the looting.

conventions to which Sri Lanka is signatory and professional principles and ethics universally agreed.

Photographs of Anuradhapura Moonstone number 10 (MNG 10) and Moonstone in London for auction (MBAL)

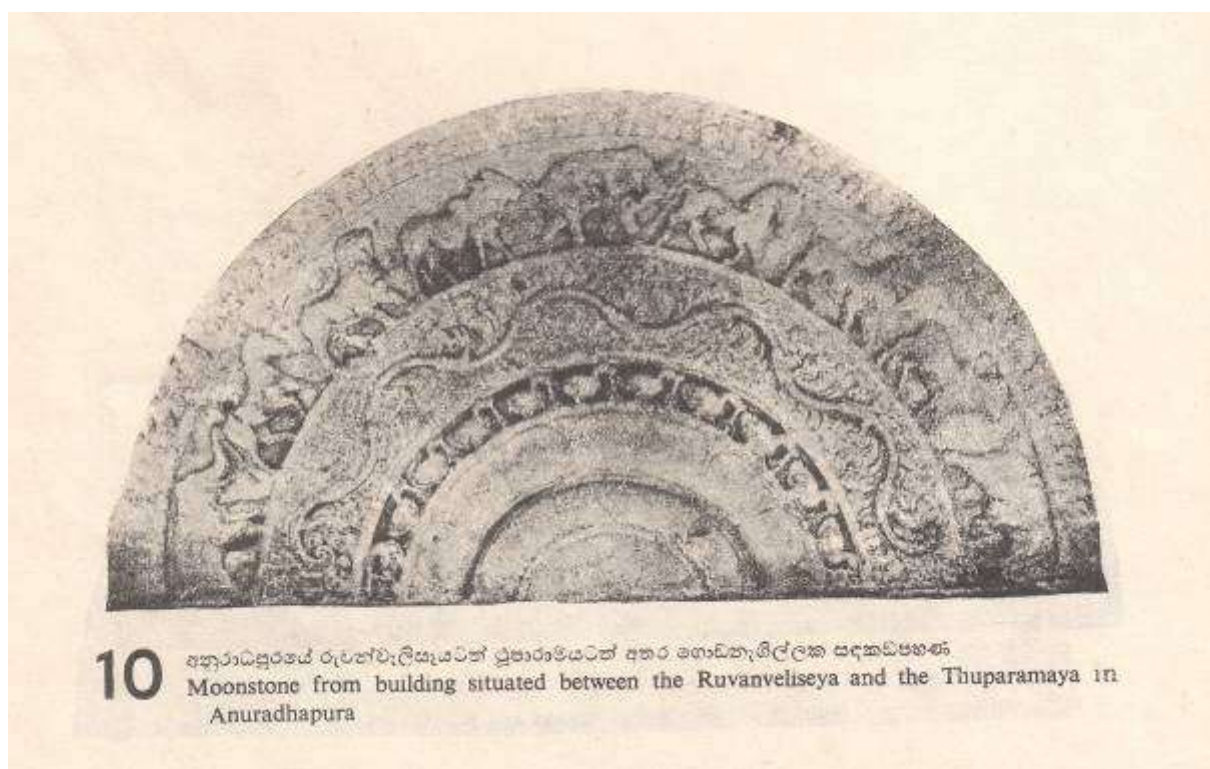


Figure 1: Anuradhapura number 10 moonstone (MNG 10), Godakumbure 1967 (1982)



Figure 2: MNG 10, Photo taken by Ambanwala on 11th February 2013



Figure 3: MNG 10, Photo taken by Ambanwala on 11th February 2013



Figure 4: Moonstone (MNG 10) published in Ven. S. Dhammika (2007)



Figure 5: Moonstone published in Bonhams's (MBAL) website for auction in London



Figure: 6 & 7 Moonstone in London (MBAL)





Figure 8 & 9: MBAL, note perfectly semi-circular sharp edges with almost no damages





Figure 10: MBAL: Bull Figure



Figure 11: Bull Figure in MNG 10



Figure 12 : Lion Figure in MBAL



Figure 13: Lion Figure MNG 10

Note the differences in Bull and Lion figure depicted in the Anuradhapura number 10 moonstone and Moonstone in London



Figure 14: MBAL, Note the relief



Figure 17: MBAL, Row of Swans and Half lotus



Figure15: MBAL, Note the Rambling Creeper, Bull and the Elephant



Figure 18: MBAL, Horse Figure



Figure 16: MBAL 10, Note the thickness of the slab and the sharp edges



Figure 19: MBAL, Reverse side View



Figure 20: Satellite image showing the location of the Anuradhapura moonstone number 10

Moonstone advertised for auction at the Bonhams auction in London, United Kingdom- The study report, submitted to the Director General, Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka, written by Wijerathne Bohingamuwa.

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