

A Palaeographical Study of the Letter ‘A’ through Inscriptions from the Sacred City Anuradhapura

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පුරා අක්‍ෂර රූප විද්‍යානුකූල ව සිංහල අක්‍ෂර මාලාවේ පළමු සංකේතය ‘අ’ අක්‍ෂරය යි. එමෙන් ම මෙම රූපය වාග්විද්‍යානුකූල ව ස්වර කාණ්ඩයට අයත් කණ්ඩක ශබ්දයක් ලෙස පිළිගැනේ. වර්තමාන පර්යේෂණ පත්‍රිකාවෙන් සුදානම් වනුයේ අනුරාධපුර පුජා භූමිය පුරා පැතිර ඇති ශිලාලේඛනවල විද්‍යමාන ‘අ’ අක්ෂරයේ හැඩ රූප, ලක්ෂණ හා ශෛලිය අධ්‍යයනය කිරීම යි. මෙහි දී තත් භූමියේ ඇති ක්‍රිස්තු පූර්ව පළමුවන සියවසේ සිට ක්‍රිස්තු වර්ෂ දහතුන්වන සියවස දක්වා ඇති ශිලාලේඛන තෝරා ගනු ලැබේ.

කාලයට හා අවකාශයට යටත්ව ‘අ’ අක්‍ෂරයේ විවිධ ලක්ෂණවලින් යුත්ත හැඩරූප හා ඒවා ලිවීමේ ශෛලිය පිළිබඳ අධ්‍යයනය කිරීම අරමුණු කෙරේ. ඊට අදාළ ව මෙම රූපවල ක්‍රමික විකාසයත් වර්ධනයත් අවබෝධ කර ගැනීමට අපේක්‍ෂා කෙරේ. තව ද මෙහි දී බ්‍රාහ්මී අක්‍ෂර මාලාවෙන් සංවර්ධිත ඉන්දියානු ‘අ’ අක්‍ෂර රූප සමග පවතින සමවිෂමතා හා බලපෑම් සංසන්දනය කෙරේ.

තෝරාගත් ශිලාලේඛන පූර්ව පර්යේෂණයට ලක්කර ඇති අතර එහි දී ‘අ’ අක්‍ෂරය පිළිබඳ වැඩි අවධානයක් සිදුකර නැත. එම උග්‍රතාව පූර්ණත්වයට ගෙනඒම මෙම පත්‍රිකාවෙන් අපේක්‍ෂා කෙරේ. තව ද අධ්‍යයනය සඳහා **Epigraphia Zeylanica** හා **Inscriptions of Ceylon** යන ග්‍රන්ථවලින් ස්පර්ශ ලාංඡන ලබාගත් අතර ක්‍ෂේත්‍ර පර්යේෂණ මගින් අක්‍ෂර රූපවල දළ සටහන් හා අත්පිටපත් සකස් කර ගන්නා ලදී. ශිලාලේඛනවල කාලය, අක්‍ෂර රූප විද්‍යාත්මකව හා මහාවංශයේ රාජ වර්ෂවලට අනුරූපව සකස් කර ගන්නා ලදී. තත් කාලයට හා අවකාශයට යටත් ව සිංහල ප්‍රාකෘත හා මධ්‍ය සිංහල භාෂාවලින් ලියන ලද ශිලාලේඛන පමණක් තෝරා ගැනීමට සීමා පැනවිණි.

අනුරාධපුර පුජා භූමියේ භාවිත 'අ' අක්ෂරය සරල ජ්‍යාමිතික ලක්ෂණවලින් ආරම්භ වී කුෂාණ, ක්ෂත්‍රප, සාතවාහන, කදම්භ, ඉක්කවාකු, ගුප්ත හා ග්‍රන්ථලිපිවල ලක්ෂණවලින් සම්මිශ්‍රිත ව වර්ධනය වී ඇත. එය ක්‍රිස්තු වර්ෂ දොළොස්වන හා දහතුන්වන සියවස්වල දී තම අන්තය වූ සිංහල හැඩරූපවල ලක්ෂණ පෙන්වමින් එහි පූර්ණ ස්වරූපයට පත්ව ඇත.

යතුරු පද :- අනුරාධපුර පුජා භූමිය, ශිලාලේඛන, 'අ' අක්ෂරය, ලේඛන කලාව

Introduction

The letter 'A' is the first letter of the alphabet and it is a vowel sound letter according to the place for its articulation. The present study attempts to understand the palaeographical features of the letter 'A' through inscriptions from Anuradhapura sacred city and it covers the period from the 1st century BCE to the 13th century CE. There are about hundred inscriptions found inside the city area. However, for the present study, fourteenth inscriptions are selected with estampages which are visible to find.

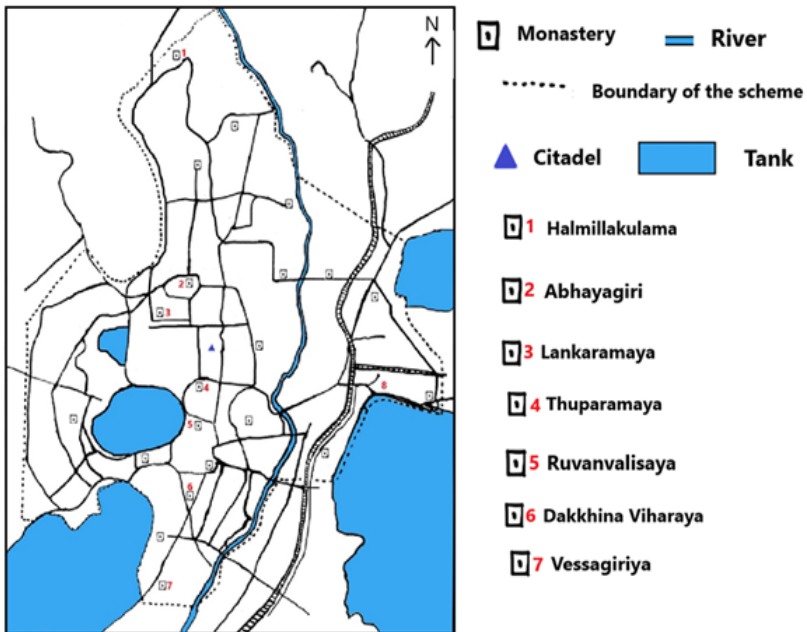
Study Area

The study area is covered under the Anuradhapura sacred area planning scheme represented by the department of town and country planning. The sacred city Anuradhapura is located in the Nuvaragam Palata Central division in the Anuradhapura district of the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. In the eastern part of Anuradhapura sacred city, the river Malwathu Oya flows in a northerly direction and Halpanu Oya, the canal, also flows between the Ruvanmalisa-viharaya and Jetavanaramaya monasteries in a northerly direction. The hummock boulders of gneiss rock that stand not far apart from each other from south to north lie in the western part of the site.

Brief History of the Study Area

Anuradhapura was first established by the king Pandukabhaya in the 4th century BCE as the capital city of his kingdom. It was being laid as the metropolis for different Sinhalese and Tamil kings till Mahinda V whom Rajaraja, the Chola emperor, captured in 1017 CE.

It became an important ancient trade center in Sri Lanka which was famous amongst foreign traders who came via the shipping roads. In Sri Lanka, this was the international educational center influenced by the Mahayana and Theravada sects of Buddhism.



Previous Works

These inscriptions have been studied by scholars **Edward Muller (1883)**, **D. M. De. Z. Wickremasinghe (1912; 1933)**, **Senarath Paranavitana (1943; 1970; 1983; 2001)**, **A. H. Dani (1963)**, **Saddhamangala Karunaratna (1984)**, **Sirimal Ranawella (2001)**, and **Bandusena Gunasekara**.

They have discussed these inscriptions to realize the language and historical, social, religious and cultural points as well as to understand the script. However, none of them has sufficiently explained the script A with its own identity and the gradual evolution through the frame of reference.

Research Problem

The present research intends to explore how the diverse forms of the letter A were used in the sacred city area. It intends to study the chronological changes that occurred from the 1st century BCE to the 13th century CE.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives are attempted the following steps:

- To study the writing techniques of the letter ‘A’.
- To know the gradual evolution and development.
- To compare and understand the conformation, difference and diffusion with Indian letter ‘A’.

Methodology

Literature survey

The early reports have been studied to realize the location of inscriptions, to understand the basic information to document the details from the published estampages and plates of inscriptions. The estampages used for the present study were published from the books **Epigraphia Zeylanica I, III and IV** and **Inscriptions of Ceylon I, II and V**.

Field Work

The field work was carried out by exploring the site to understand the present location of inscriptions. The photographs and autographs of inscriptions were documented to understand the basic knowledge of writing.

Contextualizing the scripts in the time brackets

The inscriptions in the 1st century BCE were selected to be classified the scripts which are not thickened on the top because the exact period of these records cannot be historically defined. However, from the beginning of the 1st century CE, the inscriptions are categorized under the reign of kings mentioned in the documents. The time period of reigns was deduced by combining the epigraphical details with the chronicle **Mahavamsa**. The time reign of the kings was selected under the Christian era based on 544-543 BCE as the year of Buddha's death.

Limitation

For the present study, the latter 'A' of the first latter of the alphabet and also the stone inscriptions which were written by Sinhala language have been selected. Other latters and inscriptions are not discussed in this work.

Inscriptions under Study

1. Vessagiri Cave Inscriptions

For the present study, nineteen inscriptions were selected from the site Vessagiriya. D. M. De. Z. Wickremasinghe first published this in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I, pp. 12-21**. Lately Senarat Paranavitana has included it in **the Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. I, pp. 6-7**.

2. Abhayagiri Rock Inscription

This inscription is engraved on the hummock-boulder in the Sudassana Padanaghara at Abhayagiri-viharaya. S. Paranavitana has discussed this as No. 94 in the **Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. I, pp. 7**.

3. The Vessagiri Rock-Inscription of the King Ila-Naga (33-43 CE)

This inscription is engraved close to the highest point on rock No. B at Vessagiriya. The inscription was also studied by S. Paranavitana in the **Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. II, pt. I, pp. 48-51**.

4. The Perimiyanikulama Rock Inscription of the King Vasabha (66-110 CE)

This was engraved in the rock shelter Sudassana padānaghara at Abhayagiri-viharaya. This inscription was first published by E. Muller as No. 7 in the Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon, pp. 27, 73 and also D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe has studied it for **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I, pp. 66-67**.

5. The Ruvanmali Dagaba Slab- Inscription of the King Gajabahuka-Gamaṇi (113-135 CE)

This inscription, now at the Colombo Museum, was discovered at the Ruvanmalisa dagaba. This inscription was first published by **E. Muller as No. 5 in Ancient Inscriptions in Ceylon, pp. 27, 73.** S. Paranavitana finally discussed this inscription with text and explanation in **the Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. II, pt. I, pp. 86-87.**

6. The Abhayagiri Pavement- Inscription of the King Kaniṭṭha Tissa (166-184 CE)

This inscription was engraved on the pavement in front of the southern vahalkaḍa of the Abhayagiri dagaba. This has been inspected and commented upon by S. Paranavitana in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. III, pp. 252- 259** as well as in **the Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. II, pt. II, pp. 150-154.**

7. The Dakkhiṇa Thupa Pavement- Inscription of the King Siri-Naga I (188-208 CE)

This was discovered on the pavement of Dakkhiṇa thupa in 1948. It is written on seventeen granite slabs used on the pavement of the stupa. S. Paranavitana also published it with text and explanation in **the Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. II, pt. II, pp. 161-172**

8. Vessagiri Rock-Inscription of the King Saṅgha-Tissa (242-246 CE)

This inscription inscribed on a solitary boulder near the rock No. B at Vessagiriya. A notice of it is appeared by S. Paranavitana in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, pp. 218-222** and in **the Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. II, pt. II, pp. 178-180.**

9. The Abhayagiri Thūpa Inscription of the King Maha-Sena (273-301 CE)

The epigraph is on an irregularly octagonal slab of marble found at Abhayagiri-viharaya and now it is kept in the Colombo Museum. This inscription was unearthed in 1893 by H.C.P. Bell. S. Paranavitana also published it with text and explanation in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, pp. 273- 285** and in **the Inscriptions of Ceylon Vol. II, pt. II, pp. 189-191.**

10. The Ruvanmalisa Pillar Inscription of the King Buddha-Dasa

This inscription was engraved on a fragmentary pillar lying on the pavement of Ruvanmali dagaba. S. Paranavitana has studied this in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. III, pp. 120-126.**

11. The Slab-Inscription of the King Khudda-Parinda (338-368 CE)

This slab inscription was discovered from Abhayagiri-viharaya. The scripts of epigraph are engraved on the three sides. S. Paranavitana has studied this in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, pp. 113- 114.**

12. Four rock-Inscriptions from Vessagiriya at Anuradhapura

The inscriptions are engraved on the eastern face of Rock B on the site Vessgiriya. S. Paranavitana has studied this in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, pp. 128- 136.**

13. Inscriptions on the steps near Burrows Pavilion at Anuradhapura

The eight short records are inscribed on steps leading to a ruined shrine near the Burrows Pavilian at Abhayagiri Vihara. S. Paranavitana has studied this in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, pp. 136- 141.**

14. Seven Sinhalese Inscriptions of the Seventh and Eighth Centuries

Out of them, the number four inscription is now kept at the Anuradhapura Museum. The seventh inscription here is engraved on the two stone canoes in Anuradhapura Vihara. S. Paranavitana has studied this in **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. IV, pp. 149- 150.**

15. Anuradhapura-Malvatu-Oya Pillar Inscription of Udaya II

This pillar inscription was found in the jungle near Malvatu-Oya in Anuradhapura. Now it lies at the Anuradhapura Museum. Sirimal Ranavella has studied this in **the Inscription Ceylon, Vol. V, pp. 93- 95.**









16. Vessagiriya Rock-Inscription of Mahinda IV (954-970 CE)

This pillar inscription has been discovered at Vessagiriya and now it lies at the Anuradhapura Museum. D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe has studied it for **the Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I, pp. 29-39.**

17. The Slab Inscription of Queen Lilavati (1197-1200, 1209, 1210 CE)

The slab inscription was found in the village Puliyankulam in Anuradhapura. Now this inscription lies in the Anuradhapura Museum. D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe has studied it for **the**

Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I, pp. 176-182.
Discussion
To study the writing techniques of the letter ‘A’

In the Abhayagiri and Vessagiri Cave inscriptions, The initial letter A is represented by drawing a vertical line with two left strokes - . The vertical line is formed straight. The left strokes move away from the middle-left of the vertical to top and bottom directions without closing anywhere. They were written by straight- , curved-  -or angular- . Therefore, There are three main groups as angular, cursive and angular-cursive. The first form named as the angular shape- -can be seen in cave no.5 of the Vessagiri. The second cursive form-  - is in cave no.2 of the Vessagiri and in the Abhayagiri rock inscription. The third one is referred as the angular-cursive form- , came from in the Abhayagiri rock inscription and also its other form-  - is found in cave no.2 and 5 in the Vessagiri and in the Abhayagiri rock inscription. The third form has sub-varieties as the shapes thus-  .




The initial letter A is written by the upper tip of the lower left arm hanged on the middle of the upper left arm in the Vessagiri rock-inscription of the king Iḷa-Naga, the Perimiyanikulama rock inscription of the king Vasabha, the Ruvanmali Dagaba slab-inscription of the king Gajabahuka-Gamaṇi, the Abhayagiri pavement- inscription of the king Kaniṭṭha Tissa, the Dakkhiṇa Thupa pavement- inscription of the king Siri-Naga I, the Vessagiri rock-inscription of the king Saṅgha-Tissa, the Abhayagiri Thūpa inscription of the king Maha-Sena and in the Ruvanmalisa pillar inscription of the king Buddha-Dasa,



Century	Inscriptions	Techniques
1 CE	Vessagiri Rock-Inscription of the King Ila-Naga	අ අ අ
1 CE	Perimiyankulama Rock Inscription of the King Vasabha	අ අ අ
2 CE	Ruvanmali Dagaba Slab- Inscription of the King Gajabahu	අ අ අ
2 CE	Abhayagiri Pavement- Inscription of the King Kaniṭṭha Tissa	අ අ
2-3 CE	Dakkhiṇa Thupa Inscription of the King Siri-Naga I	අ අ අ
3 CE	Vessagiri Rock-Inscription of the King Saṅgha-Tissa	අ
3 CE	Abhayagiri Thūpa Inscription of the King Maha-Sena	අ අ අ
4 CE	Ruvanmalisa Pillar Inscription of the King Buddha-Dasa	අ අ


The vertical line of the letter A from these inscriptions is thickened on the top and it is elongated from the base a little. Sometimes, it is slightly bent to the left. In the Ruvanmalisa Pillar Inscription of the King Buddha-Dasa, the bent vertical line shows the shape as a fish hook.

The left arms get straight, curved or curled. upper left line is thickened on the top. The lower left arm inclines another tip to the right. sometimes this tip is also thickened. The lower left arm becomes shorter than other lines in length.

The Khudda-Parinda inscription presents the letter A in two ways. The first form- අ - shows that the lower arm is longer than upper arm and another one forms that both the left arms became curled shape- අ. The lower tip of the lower arm of this letter meets to the vertical line.

The four rock-inscriptions from Vessagiriya at Anuradhapura represent the two forms of the letter A. The first one is written by the both left arms curled in shape-  - and here the lower tip of the lower arm meets to the vertical line. The next one is formed by dropping the lower left arm. The upper arm ends in a hook open to the left instead of the right curve-  . The second form-  - can be seen in the nscriptions on the steps near Burrows Pavilion at Anuradhapura and in the number four inscription of the seven Sinhalese inscriptions of the seventh and eighth centuries.

The Vertical line of the letter A-  - becomes double in the Anuradhapura-Malvatu-Oya Pillar Inscription of Udaya II. Sometime it shows fish hook shape-  . These forms can be seen in Vessagiriya rock-inscription of Mahinda IV. The left arm is also curled in these both centuries.

In the slab inscription of Queen Lilavati, the right vertical line was shorted and it shows looped-shape angle-  .

To know the gradual evolution and development

In the inscriptions of the 1st century BCE, the letter A is represented by drawing a vertical line with two left strokes. These strokes move away from the middle-left of the vertical to top and bottom directions without closing anywhere. However, in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries CE, the vertical line is thickened on the top and is elongated from the base. Sometimes, it is slightly bent to the left. In the 4th century CE, the bent vertical line shows the shape as a fish-hook.

The upper tip of the lower left arm of the letter came from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries CE is hanged on the middle of the upper left arm and the lower left arm inclines another tip to the right. Moreover, it becomes shorter than other lines in length

although it is longer than upper arm in the inscription in the 5th century CE and in this century both the left arms became curled shape. The lower tip of the lower arm meets to the vertical line.

In the 6th century CE, the lower left arm is dropped and upper arm ends in a hook open to the left instead of the right curve. The vertical line becomes double in the 9th century. Sometime it shows fish hook shape in the 10th century CE. The left arm is also curled in both centuries. In the 13th century the right vertical line was shorted and it shows looped-shape angle.

Centuries	gradual evolution and development	Centuries	gradual evolution and development
1 st Century BCE	𑀧 𑀧 𑀧 𑀧	6 th Century CE	𑀧𑀧
1 st Century CE	𑀧𑀧 𑀧𑀧 𑀧𑀧	7 th Century CE	𑀧𑀧
2 nd Century CE	𑀧 𑀧	8 th Century CE	𑀧
3 rd Century CE	𑀧 𑀧 𑀧𑀧 𑀧 𑀧 𑀧 𑀧	9 th Century CE	𑀧
4 th Century CE	𑀧 𑀧	10 th Century CE	𑀧𑀧
5 th Century CE	𑀧 𑀧	12 th , 13 th Century CE	𑀧𑀧

To compare and understand the conformation, difference and diffusion with Indian letter ‘A’

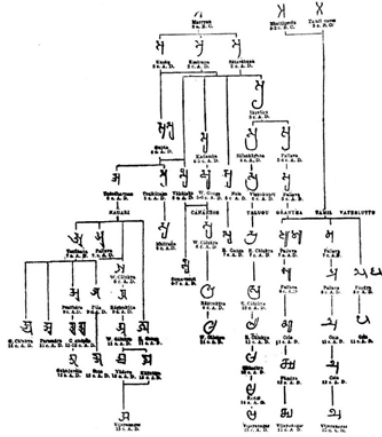
The letter A shows simple geometrical configurations in the Ashoka inscriptions- 𑀧, 𑀧 and also in the Naneghat inscription- 𑀧 𑀧 and the Hatigumpa inscription in India. These simple varieties can be seen in the Vessagiri Cave inscriptions and the Abhayagiri rock inscription.

Kshtrapa- ୟ and Kushana and Satavahana inscriptions- ୟ - show the growth into a thick top and inner curve in the left limb. The vertical stroke is lengthened. These techniques are parallel with inscriptions from 1st century CE to 4th century CE, (**Dani. A.H, 1963: 38, 55-62, Singh.A.K, 1990: 23-24**)

The writing styles of the fish hook vertical line represented in Ruvanmalisa Pillar Inscription of the King Buddha-Dasa can be seen in Ikshvaku- ୟ and Kadamba- ୟ inscriptions.

The forms- ୟ, ୟ, ୟ - of the Gupta inscriptions present that the left limb hangs down from the triangular head and ends in a hook open to the left instead of the right curve. Two arms of the lower curve are shown projected from the left vertical. Lower arm was dropped in Gupta letters sometimes. The Maukharis also employed this shape- ୟ, ୟ, (**Singh.A.K, 1990: 23-24**).

The curl vertical line becomes angular and sometimes, it becomes double in Pallava inscriptions- ୟ, ୟ, ୟ, ୟ . The both left arms are curled in a loop and double vertical are joined in a rectangle in Chola-Granta lipi in 11th CE- ୟ. The double vertical is shortened in Pandya Ganta lipi in 13th CE- ୟ (**Mangalam. S. J, 1988: 24-26**).



The Development of the Letter A of the Alphabet during the Centuries (Sivaramamurti. C, 1999: 57)

Observation

From the 3rd century BCE to the 1st century CE, the letter A was written by simple geometrical tools. From the 1st century CE to 3rd century CE, the writing technique shows the growth into a think top with parallel the Kushana, Kshatrapa and Satavahana inscriptions. In the 4th century CE, The letter was written by Kadamba and Ikshvaku styles. In the 5th to 8th CE, The inscriptions show their own identity with the Gupta styles. In the 9th and 10th CE, the letter A shows its own evolutional features and it is sometimes parallel with Granta lipi. In the 12th and 13th centuries, the letter A of Sinhala reached its maturity.

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