

# **A Study of Bones and Ivory Objects of the Jethavanarama Buddhist Monastery Complex at Anuradhapura**

**Ven. Uduwila Uparathana**

## **Introduction**

The main archaeological research has been carried out at the Jethavanarama Buddhist monastery complex for making out the structure of the great stupa. The excavations, explorations and other archaeological activities were conducted for identifying the ancient materials and monuments. A number of artifacts were found from the site such as bones, beads, ivory, pottery, iron, tiles, terracotta, etc. The excavations were conducted from 1983-84 to modern period by the Jethavanarma archaeological project. These investigation have been

done especially at the north “ayaka”, of the stupa. A number of bones and ivory objects were discovered by the C.C.F. from that place. At the western “ayaka” excavations have been done in 1989 also unearthed the game objects which were made of ivory. The excavation season has been conducted on stupa, near “chaturasra” square of the top of the stupa and found artifacts in 2000. The especial bones found in the gold clips are very significant. Apart from that a number of fish bone “beads” found from the site. That reveals about some primary ritual practices and some “*Tantric*” and “*Vjrayana*” influences at that period. “*Matshya*” is the main symbol of the Tantric teaching which have been given many opinions<sup>1</sup>.

### Methodology

- Classifying and analysis of the objects.
- The measurements were taken from relevant places of the object by using a Digital caliper.
- Comparisons with other objects were done through literature.

- Studied the Tripitaka discourses to recognize that monastic usage of faunal remains, and further excavation reports and some research article published were studied for getting clear idea about site, locations, and the findings.
- As the ivory objects were not allowed to taken out and handled, or photographs, therefore they were drew by using H.B. no 2, 4 pencils for the explanations.



(The aerial photograph of the Jethavanarama Buddhist monastery complex)

## Game Objects

The northern "ayaka" excavation was a specific project at the Jethavanaramaya. Because most of artifacts came to light from that place. The special finding was in three types of ivory game objects (dadu keta). These were in three sizes such as "small, average, and large". The smallest object is about "2.5x1.2" in size. There are rounded shape decorations (dots) on the surface and opposite side. This was completely made of ivory. The medium size object is "1.8x1" c.m. in size. This game piece also in decorated as rounded shape at the two corners of the sides.

The third game object "2.5x1.3" c.m. is in size. This is very significant one, compares with those two other artifacts. The size and decorations are somewhat in detailed. There are three rounded shapes (dots) creations on the surface of the object, those are look like the flowers or star marks. There are four petals orientated as flower with five perforated signs.

These all are well preserved finds which hardly could find out from the soil or the underground such as in

Anuradhapura. However the questions are arisen with regard to these types of objects as functioning behind those, and why do them enshrined these kind of artifacts at the very holly place such as Stupa. It may have descended from generation to generation as their treasure. The depositors may have thought that holly objects for their values, and offer to stupa by remembering all their relations who were dead and gone. Other idea is this artifacts may had been used to counted the frequency of Buddhist mantra or stanzas when they chanting. During the Buddha's living period the ivory made objects were allowed to use for the Buddhist monk<sup>2</sup>.

## The Cover of Falm-leaf Manuscripts

The falm manuscripts cover which made of ivory has been found from the northern "ayaka" of the stupa in 1983<sup>3</sup>. This has been used as a falm leaf manuscript cover for important Buddhist text. From the very beginning of writing it was used rock surfaces as writing material.

*Vessagiriya, Mihinthalaaya, Kaludiyapokuna*

are the places where those inscriptions had been discovered. But during 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. the falm leaves

(puskola) came to know as very familiar material for writing. Most of the Buddhist doctrines have been kept on this kind of materials. They were considered as holly religious books. ‘**Jethavanarama**’ monastery was the one of the main education Centre of the Mahayana Buddhist monks. Thus the residential monks may have used these palm leaves manuscripts for writing their doctrines and *manthras*.

This manuscript cover which made of Ivory shows special features with decoration with star marks. Still that is well preserved and housed at Jethavanarama museum.

The function behind this cover will be very interested study, especially this documental object may have been used as a cover of very important and spiritual Buddhist discourse such as ‘*piruvana poth vahanse*’ (*pirith potha*) *Jathaka poth vahanse*’ (*jathaka potha*) etc. Finally it might have been enshrined in stupa as a holly object.

## Combs

From the ancient time ladies were much fond of the beauty culture and maintained their skin and hair with various kind of tools. They used natural herbal items as ingredients to make this beauty pack. Thus the comb is playing an important role as a main daily used equipment. The combs which made with tortoise shell have been utilized mostly by the common people. But the ivory items or combs seemed to have used by higher families in the society<sup>4</sup>. The excavation at northern ‘**ayaka**’ at **Jethavanarama stupa** is revealed that how the people handled daily used items. There are two types of ivory combs found from the site such as double side comb and single side combs. These were created very smoothly and sensitively. The technique usage for the tools making have become highly development. This kind of materials and items were imported to Sri Lanka from the other countries like China, Persia (modern Iran.) India and Rome etc.<sup>5</sup>. The interesting finding was the debris of the ivory from Jethavanaramaya which implied the manufacturing practices of the items<sup>6</sup>. The ivory combs offered to the stupa as sacred objects, Sociologically this

kind of items had been used by rich families in ancient times, Later period these objects have been kept as their memorial items, thus they have been become sacred items. That is why these kind of equipment enshrined at the stupa. Even in modern day people enshrined their daily used items to the stupas such as necklace, bangles, coins, rings, gold and silver items etc. The people of the country think it makes more powerful merits to go to the heaven and achieve the final goal of everlasting Nibbhana. (See fig: 07)

The hair pins which made of ivory were found from the southern “ayaka” of the stupa<sup>7</sup>. These artifacts show the simple technique without any decorations, but the functioning of the tools show very complex social hierarchy.

### Ivory Railing

This is a replica of stone railing at Jethavanarama monastery, which made of ivory. It can be seen well preserved stone railing at the site. This replica is very similar with the original monument<sup>8</sup>. Thus the two suggestions can be given regard to this object, this ivory

railing may have been used as a model or dummy for constructing the main stone railing at the site, other wise this object have been created according to that stone monuments in later period by an artist. The decorations and other creations are alike in both, the rounded flower shapes and geometrical features can be found in both railings.it was well finished work by gaining smooth surface. This artifact is “3.5x3.5”c.m.in size. (See fig: 10)

### Handle of the Winnowing Fan

Northern “ayaka” was contained a number of treasures at the Jethavanarama stupa. The winnowing fan handle which made of ivory is the most stunning finding in 1983 excavation session<sup>9</sup>. According to the Mahavamsa there were thousands of Buddhist monks at thejethavanaya<sup>10</sup>. The winnowing fan was the main item which used by the Bhikkus in day today life. Even in the modern period this item utilized in very common manner. The ivory handle used not only in ancient time but also in medieval period by the higher class bhikku such as chief incumbent of the Sanga community of the monks or

sangaraja bhikku<sup>11</sup>. That means it was the valuable reputation for the monk who handled winnowing fan with ivory handle. The artifact which was found from the northern "ayaka" not a just simple object, it was decorated by using semi precious gems and smooth carvings.

### Caskets and Pinnacles

The casket usually highly venerated object which uses for enshrining the relics of the Buddha and other high spiritual Bhikkus like Arahant in the Buddhist order. Normally casket with the relics had been found from some of the stupas. The northern "ayaka" excavation revealed these casket and pinnacles both together. The pinnacles are in coiled shape and various kind of size and seventeen artifacts were unearthed by excavating<sup>12</sup>. According to the shapes of the objects, it can be imagined that they were as complete stupa, later were broken and presently appeared as pieces of casket and pinnacles.

### Other Marine Objects

The north "ayaka" excavation is usual significant regard to artifacts which were made out earlier. Here it was found marine shells and oyster as enshrined objects at the Sthupa. Normally oysters are used as holy objects at the temples and other holy places in Sri Lankan society.

And it was believed that oyster (hak bella) as an auspicious item which was included eight auspicious item "astamangala" in Buddhist culture. There were various kind of oysters in variety in shapes. The clock wise coiled objects is consider as "dakshinavruthasanka" this is the highly spiritual items which mention in Mahayana Bhodisathwa concept<sup>13</sup>. This item is believed to gained serenity for the users.

The sea shells were found from the place which used as pendants or ornaments. Cluster of shells show the way of utilized them. These types of marine items give the important clues regard to exchanging patterns in ancient society, and relationship between marine and inner city of Anuradhapura. It displayed of trade and foreign intervenes at the Jethavanarama monastery too.

Other specific findings were the beads which made of fish vertebrae. Large sized of fish bones have been used to make these beads, the technique which had been followed creating objects were cut off rib parts from the body of vertebrae and rub till become smooth surface and drilled very sensitively. These types of artifacts are given an important identity and relations of the fisher men behavior with Jethavanarama monastery. Fish bones may have been collected from archaeological deposit by using the main techniques. The simplest is to collect bones by hand during the excavation as the deposits are trowelled away<sup>14</sup>.

### **The Buddhist Concept of the Faunal Remains**

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. it was much flourished society in India. Especially we call that second urbanization. In the same time people used luxurious items and objects for their day today lives, and they offered those thing to the monastery too. The furniture and other equipment which made of animal bones and skins were utilized by the monks and Buddha was allowed to have them. The utensils such as,

- Knife.
- Spoons.
- Slippers.
- Some cloths.
- Bed covers.
- Stands for begin bowls.
- Bags.
- Treat. Etc.

These were made of bones and skins of cattle. Sheep, Goats, tiger, Ivory, shark teeth, etc.<sup>15</sup>.

### **The Furniture**

There were 12 kinds of furniture items which used by the lay people and monks. Most of them made of wood, iron, faunal bones and skins, mixed with gold and gems. These objects were decorated by using lion, tiger, elephant, and some other flower figuring. In the Buddhist tradition it has been pointed out that, the monk who use these items should not be interested on them. Nevertheless it would be effected their final goal.

- Asandi.

- Pallanka- this is a portable bench such as throne, which made on woods and carved with animal figures.
- Gonaka – covered with goat skin.
- Chittaka – covered with black color goat skin.
- Patika – covered with white goat skin.
- Patalika – covered with goat skin and decorated in flower figures.
- Thulika – covered with cotton layer.
- Vikatika – decorated in lions and tiger figures and covered with goat skin.
- Uddalomi – double side covered with goat skin.
- Ekanthalomi – only one side covered with goat skin.
- Kattissakassata – covered with gold thread.
- Koseya – covered with gold and gem<sup>16</sup>

Apart from that there were more valuable cloths which made of animal skin. Most of them has been used by higher class people, sometimes monks also used that materials to make bed cover and chair covers. Some of them are-

- Ajinappaveni –the cloth made of tiger skin.

- Muwasam - the cloth made of deer skin.
- Kadalimigapavara –the made of wild cat or poll cat skin.<sup>17</sup>

These types of skin covers were very smooth and comfortable for the body. It was hard to find, if someone use this materials he would be the rich person in the society.

In the Theravada tradition these type of utilization of faunal remains can be identified. Buddhism never gave to any encouragement to kill animal for flesh and other purposes. But it gives the freedom to used faunal parts for wellbeing of the human life. Because in biologically and ecologically it should be happened in the society. Even in modern day drums, some furniture like stool, cupboard, winnowing fan, casket, medicinal equipment, slippers, bags, umbrella with the faunal parts are used by the monks and in the monasteries in Sri Lanka.

### Conclusion

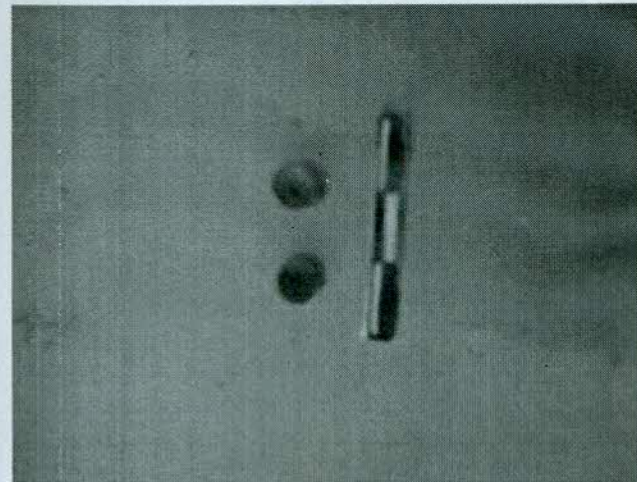
These all are well preserved artifacts which hardly could laid out from the soil such as Anuradhapura.



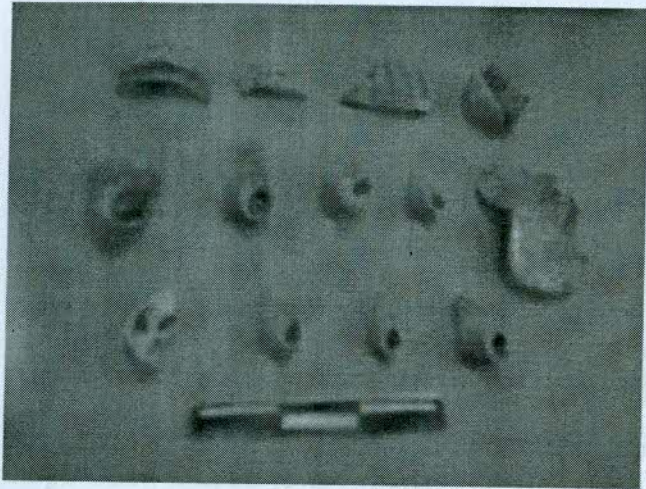
However the questions are arisen with regard to these types of artifacts based on the functions. Why these artifacts have been shrined at the sthupa? These items may have been used for day today life as usual materials, and later people may have kept those objects as memorial pieces of their ancestors. It may have descended from generation to generations as their treasure. Even in modern day people enshrine their valuable items to the stupa when it open to the society for offering. Thus the social hierarchy can be understood by studying these materials and monuments. It is able to be noticed that believes of the common people on the materials. It is revealed the functioning and relationship between common people and Buddhist monasteries. It can be identified the materials what they utilized as valuable items .It gives very authentic details of foreign relationship with Sri Lanka.



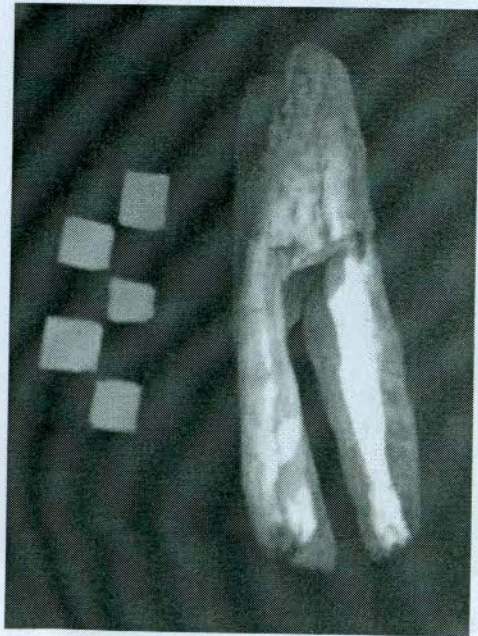
(Large size fish bead. figure 01)



(Fish beads. figure 02)



(Marine mollusks. figure 03)



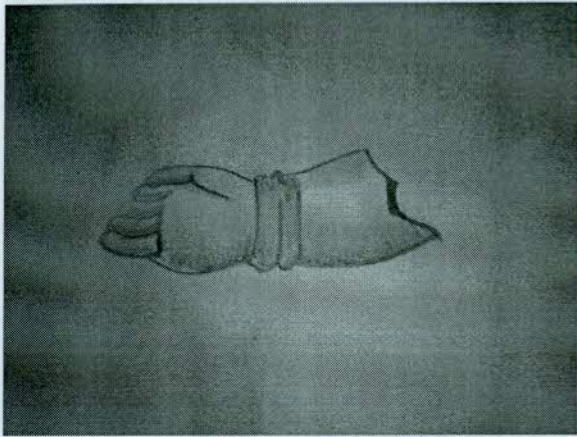
(A knife handle. figure 04)



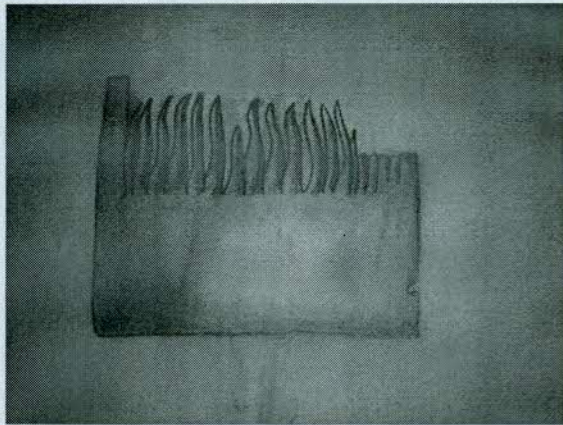
(Modified turtle shell. figure 05)



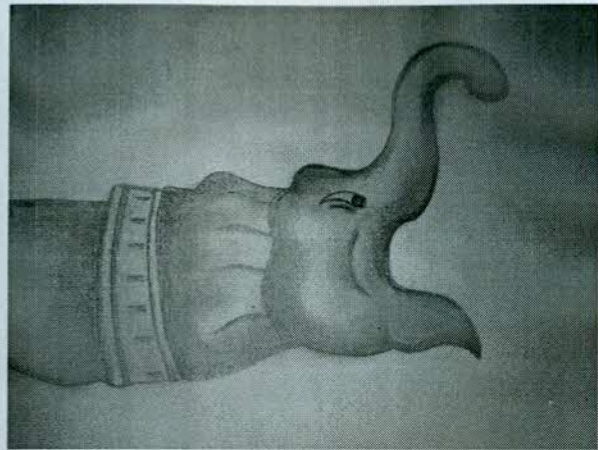
(Fish beads. figure 06)



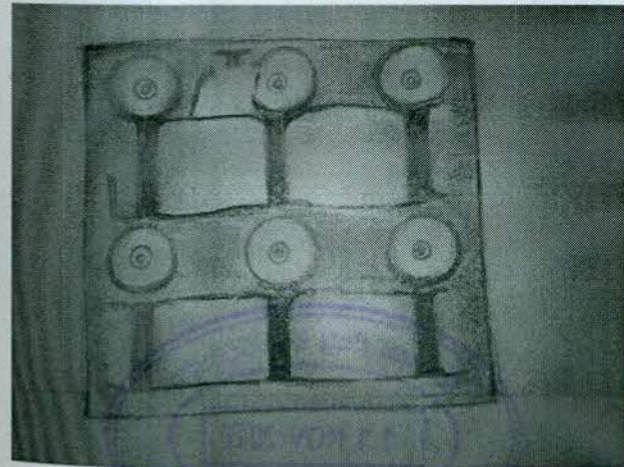
(Ivory made hand. figure 07)



(Ivory made comb. figure 08).



(Ivory made "makara muka". Figure)



(Ivory made railing. figure 10)

## End Notes

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