

MAHASENA AND DHATUSENA

King Mahasena

King Mahasena was the youngest son of King Gothabaya. During his reign, he was responsible for the destruction of several Buddhist temples, as he had been misguided by his teacher, the Priest Sanghamitta. Later, realizing the error of his ways, he rebuilt and restored many of the temples he had ruined, and also built new dagobas such as the Jethavanarama.

Mahasena did a lot for agriculture by building sixteen tanks which provided nearby paddy fields with water. Of these sixteen, the Kandhalai tank and the Minneriya tank are the largest.

The great surgeon

Some forty years after King Mahasena's death, Sri Lanka was ruled by a king named Buddhadasa who was reputed to have been a great physician and surgeon. He ruled for twenty nine years and was succeeded by his second son, Mahanama. It was during Mahanama's time that the famous Chinese traveller, Fa Hian, and the Hindu sage, Buddhaghosa, visited Sri Lanka.

King Dhatusena

Some time after King Mahanama's death, the throne was taken possession of by a prince named Dhatusena. King Dhatusena built several forts and Buddhist buildings, but his greatest works were the eighteen tanks that he built. Probably the most magnificent of these was the Kala Wewa.

Dhatusena had two sons, Kasyapa and Mugalan. Kasyapa, misguided by his cousin, imprisoned Dhatusena and became king. He made his cousin a General, and it was this General who led Kasyapa to believe that King Dhatusena had hidden a great amount of treasure with the intent of giving it to his younger son.

Kasyapa demanded the treasures from his father, but Dhatusena replied that he had none. Kasyapa persisted and finally Dhatusena sent word saying that if taken to the Kala Wewa, he would point out the treasure. He went down to the beautiful tank that he had built and upon return he told his son that the only treasure he possessed was the Kala Wewa.

Enraged, Kasyapa ordered the General to kill his father. The General walled up Dhatusena and left him to die of suffocation and starvation.

Sigiriya

During this time, Mugalan went over to India to collect an army in order to fight his brother. Fearing this, Kasyapa fled to the Central Province and made his home in a big rock which was later named Sigiriya (lion's rock).

The Sigiriya rock had steps whose either side was flanked by two stone lions. Its inside walls were adorned by frescoes, which are visible even today. Kasyapa built gardens, reservoirs and passages in and around this rock, and lived there for

eighteen years before dying doing battle with his brother (it is said that he killed himself when faced with the prospect of fighting Mugalan's army).