By The Eth Pokuna

Posted on



The Eth Pokuna, measuring 159m in length, 52.7m in width and nine metres in depth

Hidden amidst the glory of the Abhayagiri Stupa that towers over the remnants scattered over an area encompassing nearly 500 acres, lies a pond that is little known. Though by no means small in size, Eth Pokuna or the Elephant Pond as it is called, is one of the great marvels that speaks of the ancient irrigation wonders of Sri Lanka.

Words Krishani Peiris **Photographs** Indika De Silva

Scrambling over the various ruins that seem to cover every inch as far as the eye could see, we made our way through in search of the rumoured Eth Pokuna. On the way we passed a mile post with the number ‘5’ etched in black, which seemed to be strangely out of place in this space that encompassed remnants of a past that ran back many centuries. And we surmised that perhaps prior to the rediscovery of this temple complex, a main road may have run through the area.

All too soon we arrived at the Eth Pokuna and the sheer breadth of this impressive structure surprised us. It was clear to us as to why this is reputed to be the largest man-made pond, not only within the Abhayagiri Temple premises but in Anuradhapura as well. Filled with water that seemed to glimmer almost emerald in the sun rays, it is deemed that the pond was used by monks who lived in the surrounding buildings for their daily ablutions and other water related necessities. Though it is not clear as to how the name Eth Pokuna has came in to being, The Maha Bodhi Vanshaya written in the 12th Century refers to two ponds in the Abhayagiri temple complex named Diggal Vila and Masthota pond and also of a Masthota Pirivena. As such some believe that the Eth Pokuna could be the Masthota pond mentioned in this old book.

> Did you know?
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Measuring 159m in length, 52.7m in width and nine metres in depth, the pond has a rectangular shape with all four sides or banks arranged with blocks of stone, trapping the water in its midst. Here and there, uncovered, are what some experts believe to be ruins of an underground channel system that may have carried water to and from the pond to the nearby *Dhana Shala*. Further it is said that, looking at the same channel system, as well as the various stone beams protruding from the banks of the pond, the Peramiyan Kulam as well as the Bulankulama Wewa may have acted as water sources for the pond.

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Clear blue skies speckled with drifting clouds hung over the Eth Pokuna casting a dim reflection in the dark waters of the pond. Crowded with shady trees along its stone banks, we observed many people strolling about or simply sitting down to enjoy the beauty as well as the cooling shelter of the numerous trees. Revelling in this soothing atmosphere we lingered for a while before heading to the Abhayagiri

Stupa…

