

## VEDDA ROCK ART IN SRI LANKA DEPICTING REPTILES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE GOLDEN GECKO, *CALODACTYLODES ILLINGWORTHORUM* (REPTILIA: GEKKONIDAE)

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### Introduction

The Sigiriya frescos and some temple paintings from Sri Lanka represent ancient art forms that are known the world over. However, there are many artistic creations of a primitive character, consisting mainly of drawings or scribbling done on rock surfaces of caves or rock shelters, that need the attention of modern scholarship. These caves were earlier used since pre-Christian times as monastic dwellings, and a few of them are still used by Buddhist monks to this day. A conspicuous feature of these caves are the carved drip-ledges on the brow that serve to prevent rain from dripping into the cave interior; and occasionally, the donor's inscriptions are carved in a visible place on the rock. During a recent study in the Nilgala forest which lasted 38 days, seven caves with drip-ledges were observed, but only in two of them did we observe rock inscriptions. These inscriptions belong to the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. (de Silva *et al.*, 2004). Subsequently, the Veddas

have begun to use most of these caves until recent times. The Veddas, until the recent times were a forest-dwelling aboriginal hunter-gathering group of people. Presently, at Nilgala Buddhist monks use two of these prehistoric rock caves as their abode at Nilgala.

As regards rock art from other countries, although differing in style and medium, rock art depicting the natural world is virtually ubiquitous (Clottes 2002). Among the most well known examples are the Palaeolithic images of Ice Age mammals in the Lascaux Caves of France, but representations of reptiles are also common and occur, for example, in the rock art of Africa (Campbell 2001), Australia (Morwood 2002) and North America (Coy *et al.* 1997), as well as that of India (Chakraverty 2003). Such images have been made until recent times, and in some cases are still being created, by groups of people who maintain an intimate existence with nature.