

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE PROGRAMME IN THE BIBLE-NILGALA REGION, SRI LANKA: SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

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Introduction

The Bible-Nilgala region is situated within Sri Lanka's Intermediate Dry Lowlands (Deraniyagala 1992: 2) and administratively it belongs to the Monaragala District of the Uva Province. The archaeology of this region has only been confined to the knowledge derived from several isolated research attempts carried out since the early part of the twentieth century (Sarasin & Sarasin 1908; Seligmann & Seligmann 1911:1 Deraniyagala 1992: 1-22). Until recently archaeological research on the island has been concentrated, with a few exceptions, on the nuclear/core areas in the north central and south-east of Sri Lanka. Peripheral regions like the Bible-Nilgala area in the Uva Province have long been neglected in archaeological research in the country. The overall objective of the present investigation was to collect information on archaeological and historical resources in the Bible-Nilgala region.

Methodology

The study area was investigated with the assistance of 1:50,000 and one-inch topographic map enlargements, two Trimble Geo XT handheld GPS units and a Trimble Total Station.

Results and Discussion

In 2006 (June to July) the Bible-Nilgala region was brought under scientific investigation through a collaborative programme undertaken between the Department of Archaeology of the University of Peradeniya, the Government Department of Archaeology in Sri Lanka and the Department of Anthropology, California State University of USA. The field programme was co-directed by Prof. Sudharshan Seneviratne and Dr. D.K. Jayaratne both of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peradeniya and Dr. Carl J Wendt of the Department of Anthropology of California State University, USA.

The archaeological reconnaissance programme was initiated in a lightly populated 58 Sq. km area of the Bible-Nilgala region. The archaeological team visited 21 sites and identified a wide range of sites in the study area. The explorations brought to light several prehistoric cave sites in the study area.

There are several Early Brahmi inscriptions on the Kahattahels caves and also several dripledge caves have been found at Makara cave, Andagala cave and Galkotte. Andagala is one of the most extensive archaeological sites in the Bible- Nilgala area and consists of at least four dispersed architectural

groupings containing stone buildings, massive stone terraces and drip-ledge caves. An iron production site was found at Purekandura during the exploration in this region. A remarkable finding was the remains of an ancient roadway which connected Anuradhapura to Tissamaharama in the past.

Although the study area is one of the undeveloped regions in the country at present, from the above study it is clear that this region seems to have been an important settlement region of Sri Lanka in the past due to the wealth of archaeological remains found.

Conclusion

On the basis of recent surface explorations, this area appears to have much potential for Pre, Proto and Early Historic investigations and therefore, may probably reveal more evidence on ancient settlements in this region.

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