

MALARIA AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE DRY ZONE CIVILIZATION

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Hitherto there have been two points of view on the effects of malaria in the ancient dry zone civilization. According to Lucius Nichols and several others, malaria was the major factor, which contributed to the abandonment of the dry zone in the thirteenth century A.D. Others such as S. Paranavitana have posed the question whether malaria was the cause or the effect of the decline and fall of the once prosperous and thickly populated dry zone of the island.

Both positions seem to be untenable as fresh research point to the existence of malaria, filariasis and several other contagious diseases in the South Asian belt including Sri Lanka from the early centuries of the Christian era. The term malaria has been coined in Italy in 1690, and introduced into the English language only in 1740, but symptoms associated with the same disease, although the disease itself was known by some other term, and the treatment for the disease had been identified in South Asia in the ancient past.

Thus it can be concluded that malaria was endemic in South Asia and that it had not played any role in the collapse of the dry zone civilization. The collapse of the civilization had not contributed to the initial emergence of malaria in Sri Lanka either, but it would certainly have contributed to the spreading of the disease intensely in subsequent centuries.