

ANOTHER APPROACH TO THE *MALAYA DESA* IN ANCIENT SRI LANKA: NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL REVELATIONS IN AND AROUND PAHALA-MAWELA TEMPLE AT KADUGANNAWA

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Introduction

The central hill region which had been named as *Malaya Desa* (=Malaya Country) in the historical age has not got the due recognition as far as archaeological researches are concerned. Prof. Sudharshan Seneviratna has attempted to shed new light on the archaeological findings on the region and the purpose of the paper is to add some facts to support his argument. The main focus of this paper is to explore some findings that were obtained through basic archaeological researches in and around *Pahala Mawela Rajha Maha Vihara*.

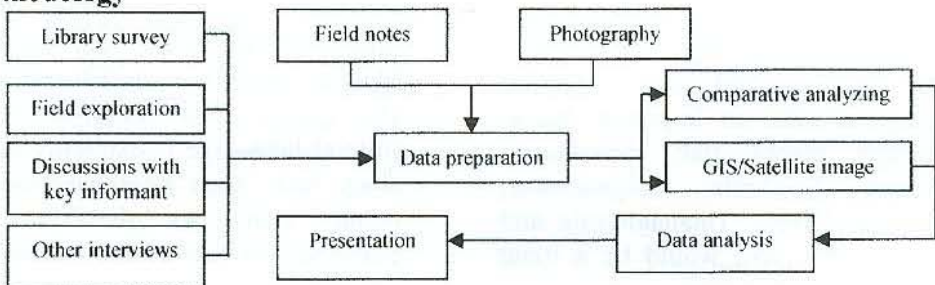
Pahala Mawela Viharaya of Pahala Kadugannawa has been named as *Walagamba Viharaya*, as well as *Mawela Rajamaha Viharaya*. It is situated in Makadawara Grama Niladari Division of Mawanella DS Division in Kegalle district of Sabaragamuwa Province in Sri Lanka.

According to Ancient Divisions it belongs to *Gane Pattuwa* of *Satara Korale*.

Researchers have paid a little attention to the site and, it should be mentioned here that H.C.P. Bell, in his Report on Kegalle District (1904), included a summarized description of the site. Rev. Pannila Saranankara identified the site as Mawela Viharaya following the descriptions in *Vihara Asna* or *Nam Pota*, a famous educational text during the Kandyan period.

It is said, that according to ethno-archaeological evidence, this temple was built by King Walagmbahu. There is, however, another belief that Queen Henakanda Bisso Bandara built this temple during the Gampola Kindom. The historical data related to the site can be traced back to Pre-Christian times.

Methodology



Equipment: 20 meters measurement tape, a pair of binoculars, GPS equipment, and a Digital Camera.

Archaeological Evidence

In this site there are five drip-ledge caves. Three of them are in close vicinity of the temple and the other two can be found within a short distance from the site. In the site there are the stūpa house, the image house and the monks' residence. Within the stūpa house there is an 11 Ft. 6in. height stūpa and a 36 Ft. long reclining Buddha statue can be seen and some paintings belonging to the Kandian Period are visible in the Image house.

Epigraphy

Four early Brahmi Inscriptions were discovered from this research. Three of them are cave inscriptions and the other one is inscribed on *Korawakgala*.

[1] [Paru]ma(ka) (Ku)yana ca Gapati
sama Kulasa [lene]

The cave of the chief **Kuyana**
and householder **sama**
family

[2] Batimasa
Of the **Battima**

Discussion

When we probe into the human history of the relevant place, its earliest evidence belongs to the early iron age. Among this evidence drip-ledge caves and early brahmi inscription take an important place. Through places like Pilikuttuwa, Warana, Lenagala, Salgahawane, Atugoda, Divela, Dhanagirigala and Heenatipone there would be a route

from the costal plain to the middle of the country or *Malaya Desa*. Observing the inscriptions, we come across the personal titles of contemporary ruling classes like Parumaka, and Ameta. Around the site there are important provincial ruling places (pre-state chieftains) like Yatahalena, Bambanragala and Gonawatta. Importantly Mawela is situated in a place where possible interconnection is observable with these places.

The routes started from the harbors at Gokanna, Matota, Dambakolapatuna and joined together in Anuradhapura and stretched towards southern region, passing Dambulla-Matale to reach *Malaya Desa*. Similarly, a route came from the east passing Mahiyangana and Hunnasgiriya to enter *Malaya Desa*. Above mentioned route from the West, we can safely surmise, might have reached Malaya rata through the wet region. (Research on the intermediate region has revealed that some raw material and minerals of *Malaya Desa* were transported to such places in the intermediate region like Dambulla and Ibbankatuwa to be turned into finished commodities and they were re-transported to harbors via Anuradhapura). From the very beginning of the historical era this place had been used as a transportation center and further research regarding transportation from *Malaya Desaya* via the river *Mahawaluka* to the East is under way. The change that occurred in the cultural landscape is explicitly due to many facts such as some evidence found related to Mesolithic and Neolithic periods in the places like

Warana, Alawala, Attanagoda, Alulena and Dorawakkanda. Some evidence found related to proto-historical era in such places as Kalaotuwawa, Galatara, and above mentioned sites carry some evidence of the early iron age. Thus we have the literary evidence to prove the entrance to the highest plain of *Malaya Desa*.

This evidence will serve to strengthen the archaeological model that studies the transportation and exchange of resources in the central highlands.

Conclusion

From our study we can conclude that the area that ranges from the western region of the island to the central highlands represented three strata. We can develop the following model: Mesolithic > Neolithic > early Iron Age > historic period

Modern day Colombo-Kandy highway is important to the modern Sri Lankan society, and that much importance might be placed on the route that existed from the western part of this island to the Central highlands during the early historic period. Through our study we attempt to shed new light on the transformational routes that did not get due recognition in historical sources. It is possible to reconstruct of such routes existed to the *Malaya Desa* from the Northern, Eastern, Western parts of the country to transport resources.

References

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