

EARLY IRON AGE BURIAL TYPOLOGY AND MORTUARY PRACTICES IN SRI LANKA

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The term Early Iron Age in Sri Lanka's context denotes the period which succeeds the Stone Age. The Early Iron Age sites of Sri Lanka are tentatively dated from the beginning of first millennium B.C. to the 2nd /1st century B.C. Forty seven Early Iron Age settlement (habitation and burial) sites have so far been brought to light in Sri Lanka.

The main objective of the present research is a study of the Early Iron Age burial typology and the nature of the mortuary practices in Sri Lanka. Of the forty seven sites belonging to the Early Iron Age of Sri Lanka, forty are burial sites. Broadly, we can divide the Early Iron Age burials in Sri Lanka into two main categories, namely, (1) Sepulchral: cist, urn and pit, and (2) Memorial: Dolmen.

The mortuary practices of the people vary among communities and the Early Iron Age people of Sri Lanka continued the old traditions of mortuary practices with some new additions.

By and large most of the Early Iron Age burials are multiple in characters. Most of the single burials are extended inhumation with some orientation. It also appears that most of the Early Iron Age people of Sri Lanka were practising cremation, as evident by the presence of calcined bones with ashes and charcoal.

It was a normal practice during the Early Iron Age to inter offerings along with the mortuary remains. The Early Iron Age burial essentially represents ancestor worship and a belief in life after death. From the above study we can conclude that the burial typology of Sri Lanka is not as complex as in Peninsular India and that the Early Iron Age people of Sri Lanka were practising primary and secondary burial systems.