

THE ECOLOGY AND THE ARCHAEOLOGY
OF THE FORMATIVE PERIOD IN SRI LANKA

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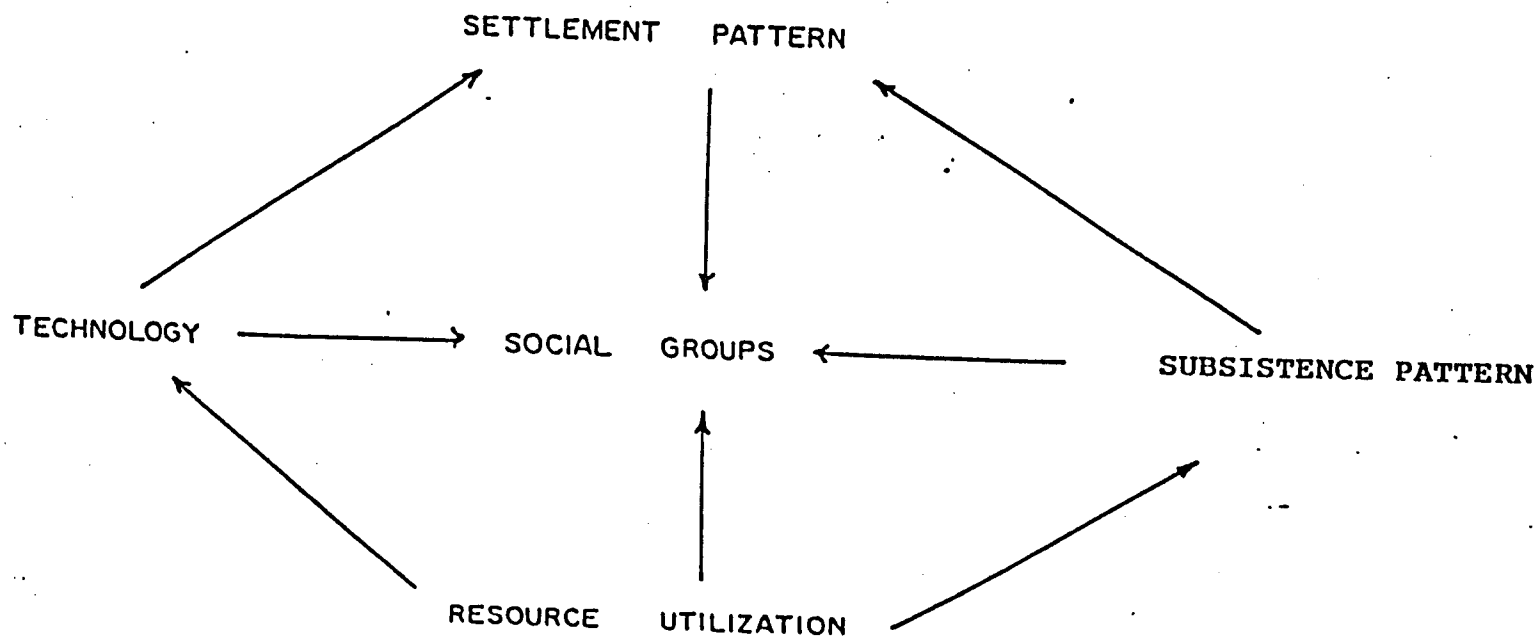
The Proto and Early Historic period (B.C. 7th Century to 3rd Century A.D.) can be identified as the Formative Period in the history of Sri Lanka. It is so identified because social economic, political and cultural institutions emerged in a recognizable form for the first time during this period. These institutions shaped the character, personality, and the individuality of our culture and civilization.

Human interaction with a particular physical zone and its environment results in the emergence of the eco-system or habitat.

A particular eco-system of the formative period may be identified in the following manner. The first is the natural sphere. This is found in the physiography, climate, and natural resources (soil, water, mineral - floral - faunal resources).

The second is the interacting sphere. Society interacts with natural sphere through different avenues. The settlement pattern evolved by the community, the technology used by them, the nature of resource utilization, and the subsistence pattern associated with the resident community.

ECO-SYSTEM DURING THE FORMATIVE PERIOD
(PROTO AND EARLY HISTORIC SRI LANKA)



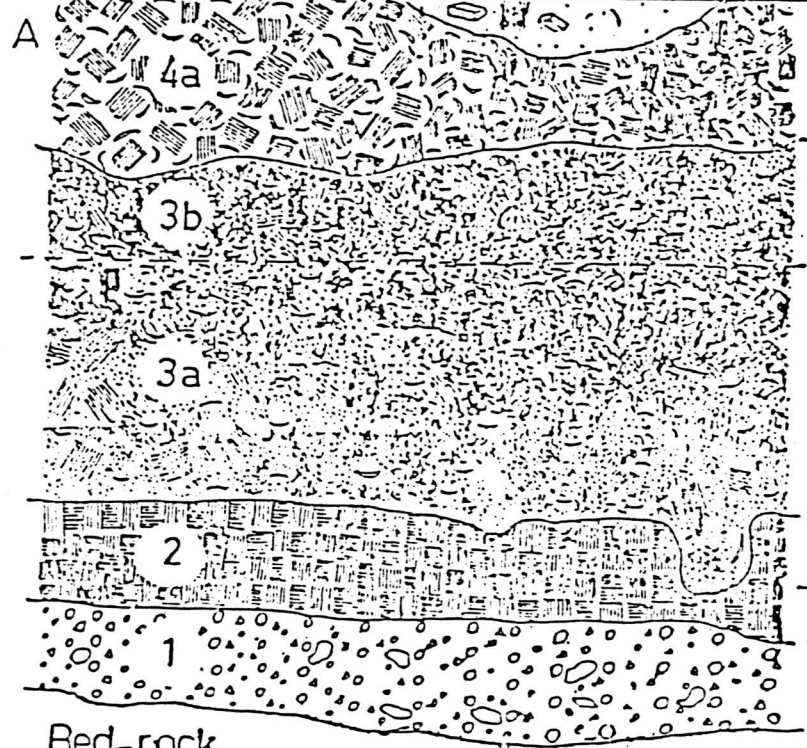
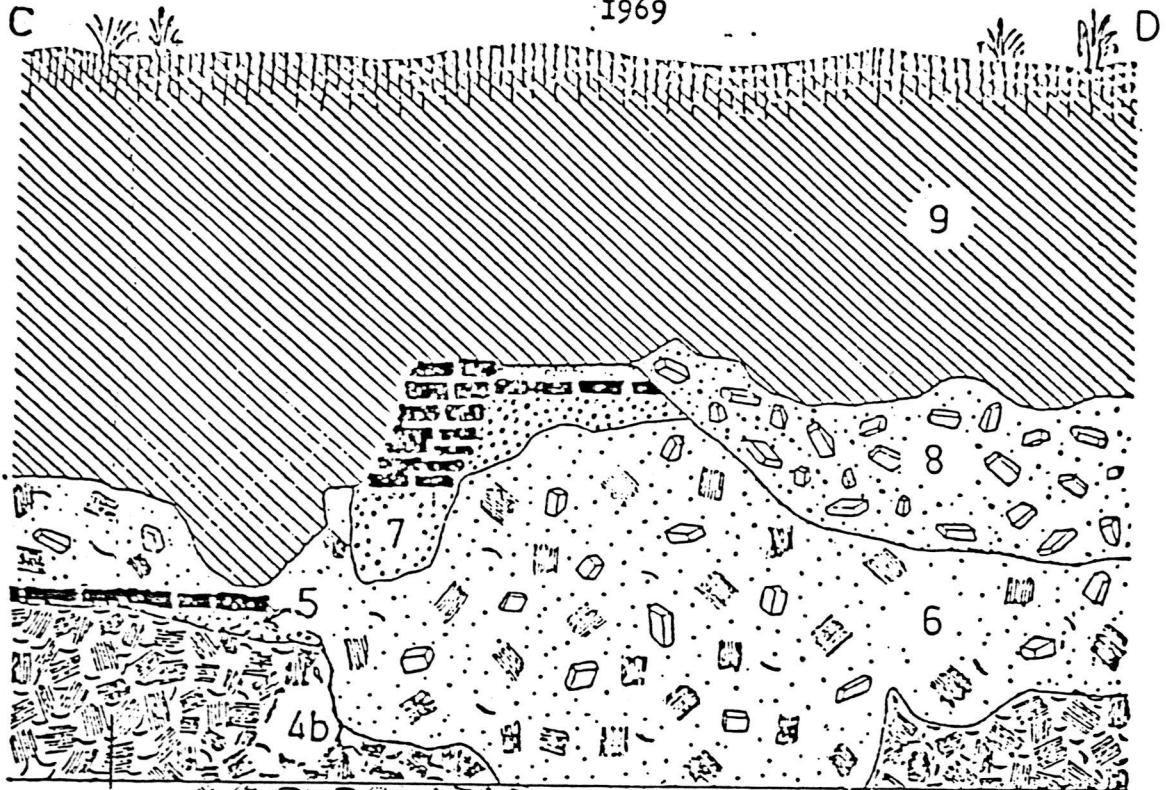
The Pre Historic Mesolithic people of Sri Lanka were nomadic hunter-gatherers. Their habitat was found within "shifting ecological boundaries". During the formative period, for the first time, there was a coincidence between the cultural zone (Archaeological Region) and the Physical Region (eco-system or habitat). This is because, with the introduction of iron, agriculture, irrigation and craft activity, the earliest village settlements emerged as permanent habitation centres during the Proto-historic period. The cultural remains of these resident communities are found in the form of archaeological evidence from various physical regions or eco-zones.

Cultural material can be seen as surface remains, as deposited objects or as stratified artefacts obtainable from vertical excavations. Such remains are found in the form of burial and habitation sites; diagnostic ceramic types such as the Black and Red Ware (BRW), Black Ware and the Rouletted Ware; Brahmi inscription bearing drip-ledge cave shelters and other structural remains mainly associated with Buddhist sites; coins, beads, seals, metal objects etc.

During the formative period, three primary macro-zones emerged in relation to three major physical - environmental regions.

1. Marine-littoral ecology - Coastal region
2. Agrarian ecology - Middle and lower plains
3. Montane ecology - Central hills

SECTION
1969



EARLY HISTORIC

PROTO HISTORIC
(Iron Age Megalithic
Black and Red Ware
Culture)

PRE HISTORIC
(Mesolithic)

Ironstone and
quartzite

Gnessic

Bed-rock

(S. Deraniyagala. Ancient Ceylon No.2. 1972:56)

TABLE I.

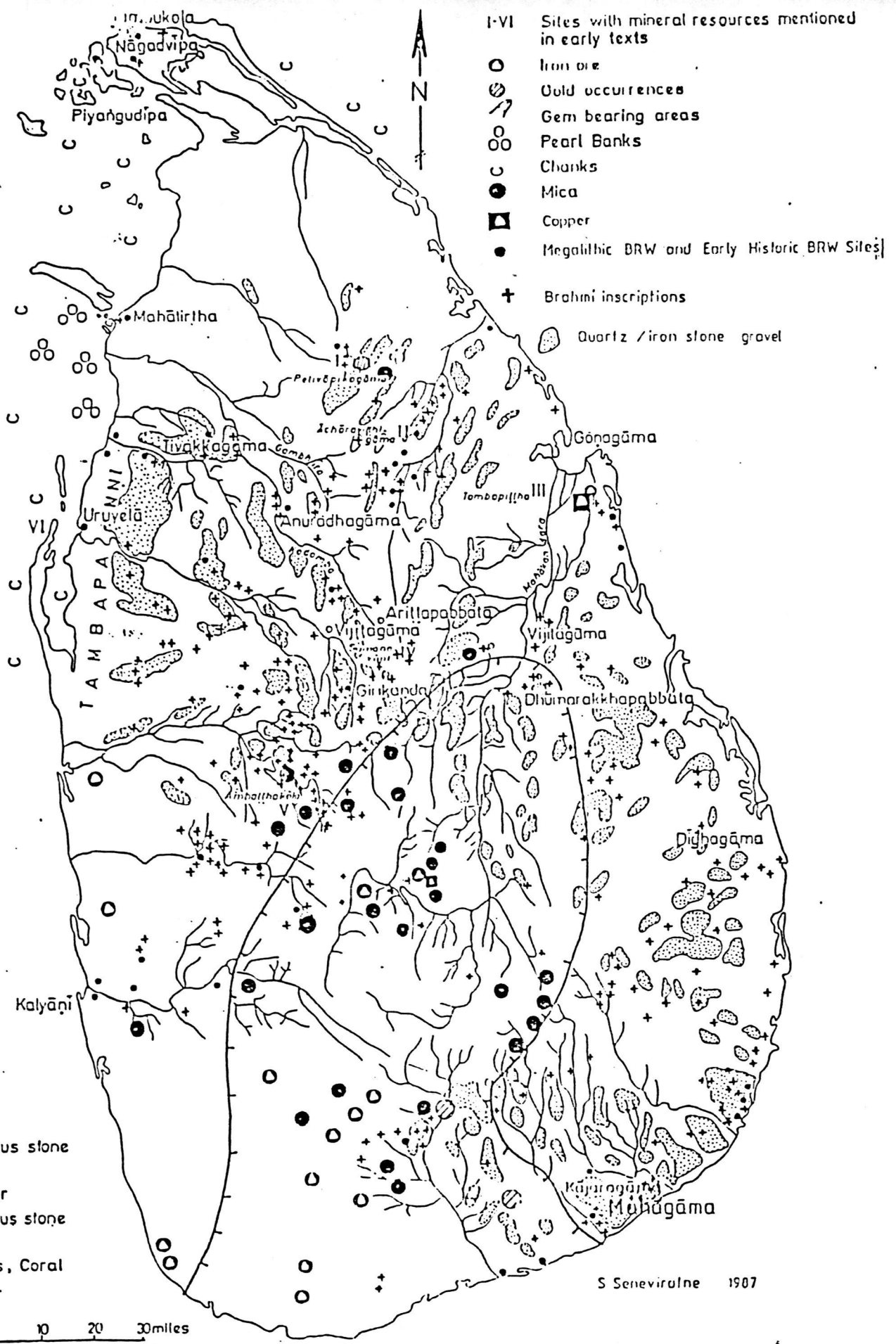
Chronology	Technology	Dominant Culture	Primary Institutional Structure
Pre 6th Century B.C. (Pre Historic)	Stone Age (Mesolithic)	'Balangoda Culture'	Hunting, gathering, fishing; tribal society.
7th to 4th / 3rd Century B.C. (Proto Historic)	Iron Age	Megalithic-BRW	Swidden and plough agriculture, small tanks, pastoral activity, limited crafts, clan-based villages, household economy, chiefdoms.
3rd Century B.C. to 2nd / 3rd Century A.D. (Early Historic)	Iron Age	Indo-Aryan	Urbanization, hydraulic civilization, the script and coinage in use, the emergence of craft and commercial guilds, long-distance trade, stratified society, state formation.

Different communities lived within these broad regions and shaped their subsistence pattern - technology - settlement pattern upon the resources available to them. Therefore, each community evolved its own micro eco-zone or habitat within the broader macro zone.

Resources capable of sustaining communities were distributed in an uneven manner in these macro and micro eco-zones. Some were better endowed with resources over other zones. Such areas had : a better supply of water, fertile soil, large tracts of flat land, useful raw material, conditions for population (demographic) growth and communications. These are called nuclear areas or areas of attraction. Such areas had maximum potential for development.

As opposed to this, areas having less useful resources are called peripheral areas or areas of isolation.

The uneven distribution of resources resulted in the uneven development of institutions. By the Early Historic period, areas of attraction or nuclear areas came to be identified with the agricultural plains. These areas witnessed a rapid growth in their social, economic, political and cultural institutions. The emergence of the kingdoms of Anuradhapura and Magama, as the most developed areas, during the Early Historic period was based on this situation.



- I-VI Sites with mineral resources mentioned in early texts
- Iron ore
- ⊗ Gold occurrences
- ◇ Gem bearing areas
- Pearl Banks
- ⊂ Chanks
- Mica
- ◻ Copper
- Megalithic BRW and Early Historic BRW Sites
- + Brahmi inscriptions
- ▨ Quartz / iron stone gravel

- I Precious stone
- II Gold
- III Copper
- IV Precious stone
- V Silver
- VI Pearls, Coral

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