

**THE SETTLEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE  
SIGIRIYA - DAMBULLA REGION**

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The "archaeological Landscape" of the Sigiriya - Dambulla region is one that largely dates from the early and middle historical period (EMHP : circa 3rd century BC to AD 13th century). Straddling the national East-West watershed, this area formed an important focus of communications. It is an intermediate or transition zone between the ancient core regions around the Anuradhapura, Polonnaruva and 'Kurunegala' systems" and also between the dry zone plains and the central mountains.

In this area, as in other parts of Sri Lanka, previous archaeological and epigraphical studies have provided us with an extensive knowledge of the EMHP.

However, this has been largely confined to the study of monumental complexes, royal and elite inscriptions and political and religious history -- mostly relating to the apex or superstructure of the historical society. Similarly, excavations were almost invariably limited to the study of monumental remains and, more recently, to stratigraphic investigations of sites associated with such remains. The present project can be seen as one of the pioneering attempts to develop a research strategy to investigate the ancient 'settlement network' and man-environment relationships in a diagnostic micro-region of the Sri Lankan dry zone, around the major historical and archaeological centres of Sigiriya and Dambulla.

It includes the identification and analysis of habitational sites, irrigation systems, and craft production and distribution centres, as well as the study of relevant aspects of central foci such as the 5th century AC politico-urban complex at Sigiriya, the major monastic

centres such as Dambulla and Pidurangala, the monastery and fortress sites at Nuvaragalkanda, and the megalithic cemetery complex at Ibbankatuva.

The project will progressively employ multi-disciplinary research methodologies incorporating the historical, social and natural sciences, and is based on a diachronic and multilinear view of social dynamics.

The preliminary fieldwork was restricted to the upper catchment areas of the Kiri-Oya, Sigiriya-Oya and Mirisgoni-Oya basins, to the urban habitation site in the eastern precinct at Sigiriya and some selected, rock-shelter monastery sites.

The results obtained far exceeded expectations. 85 archaeological sites, 79 of them previously unknown, were identified. Most of them are ancient village settlements, based on either tank irrigation or spring water sources. Nearly 80 village irrigation tanks and a number of iron production and stone quarry centres were recognized and investigated.

The presentation at the annual review will include an overview of the survey and an examination of the theoretical and problematic concerns that form the conceptual basis of the project.