

**THE IFS ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAM AND THE STUDY OF
HISTORICAL URBANIZATION IN SRI LANKA IN THE CONTEXT OF
GLOBAL CYCLES OF DEVELOPMENT**

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Part I

Islands, we might well say are excellent laboratories for studying the dynamics historical change. The relative geographical isolation of Sri Lanka a small island at the southern most extremes of the civilized Old World, makes it a valuable field for basic research in archaeology. The IFS Archaeology program has developed into a multi-faceted, umbrella project linked with a number of other institutions such as the PGIAR, the Universities of Kelaniya and Peradeniya and the Cultural Triangle. It attempts to bring together some of the most important aspects of advanced guard, problem-oriented research in Archaeology, investigating specific Sri Lanka data in terms of general theoretical problematics in the historical and social sciences. The different subject areas being researched by the IFS Archaeology group and other associated specialists include : PHEH settlement patterns; ecozone, natural-resources and human environments; urbanization; history of science and technology; archaeo-metallurgical studies; prehistory and what is presented here is a broad review of the Sri Lankan data on urbanization in order to draw attention to generalized patterns of trans-Asian historical development. This study takes its place within the frame-work of two major theoretical problematics - one, a group of questions regarding urban genesis and urban function; two, the problem of why the technologically advanced, substantially-urbanized, substantially-mercantilist societies of Asia failed - in the period between the 11th and the 15th centuries -

to generate the dynamics and momentum that produced the modern transformation which took place in Europe from about the 15th and 16th century onwards.

Each one of the countries of the South Asian region has significant and unique contributions to make to the study of these problems. Looked at in a long-range perspective we are able to propose at least three global cycles of historical evolution relating to the phenomena of urbanization in South Asia and beyond. The first of these cycles is associated with the great chalcolithic bronze age transformation that took place in the 3rd and 2nd millenium B.C. in Africa (in the Nile Valley), in three key nuclear zones in Asia. (i.e. Mesopotamia, the Indus valley and the Yellow River valley) and in South-east Europe the second cycle begins with the generalized diffusion of iron technology in the Old World through the 1st millenium B.C., culminating in the emergence of a number of historical civilizations. The 'first' urbanization in Sri Lanka, represented by the mey site of Anuradhapura, is located within this time horizon.

The third cycle overlaps the second. It has its roots in the 7th century, with the end of the classical era in Europe and West Asia, the dynamic rise and expansion of Islam, the exponential developments of the civilizations of Post-Guptan South Asia and Tang China, and the emergence into the full light of history of Japan, Korea and South-east Asia. This third cycle has its culmination in the developments of the post-13th century period - that critical period which saw the dynamic rise of Europe.

The 11th/12th/13th century marks, a critical watershed in the Asian historical trajectory. In Sri Lanka, in particular, as in Sotheast Asia, this boundary is as or more important as that of the 7th/8th century.

Our hypothesis of the 'second urbanization' belongs to this time horizon.

The urban forms of the first urbanization in Sri Lanka are important for the evidence they provide with regard to the spatial morphology or urban centres, the social meaning and function of the urban form, the internal organization of space, general evidence of urban lifeways, and so on. The cities of the first urbanization were the great power centres of a dominantly centralised state. They are characterized by a geometricality of form and a monumentality of structures, reflecting the nature of their relationship with the other constituent elements of the society at whose centre they stand. The 'second' urbanization sees a fracturing and dispersing of this systemic-concentration of power. It is marked by the decentralization of polity, the emergence of multiple kingdoms and mini-and micro-polities associated with a variety of urban and port centres - all manifestations, in my estimation, of a new historical dynamism in which commerce, mercantilism and cosmopolitanism played a significant if as yet incalculable role. The long-range implications arising from our investigation involves the question why this dynamism failed to respond to the challenges that arose in a fourth cycle of global change that begins in the 15th and 16th century.