

Megalithic burials and the Anuradhapura factor

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So far more than 50 megalithic burial sites have been documented in Sri Lanka. They are widely associated with the proto-historic Early Iron Age of Sri Lanka, which ranges from 1000-500 BC (Deraniyagala, 2004). The Ibbankatuva megalithic cemetery near Dambulla is dated to ca. 400 BC and Pinwewa Galsohonkanatta, near Yapahuwa is dated to ca. 112 BC (Wijayapala, 1997). Both dates indicate that they belong to the Early Historic period.

Despite the discovery of megalithic cemeteries throughout many parts of the island there is an obvious paucity of this type of burial in the Anuradhapura or its immediate hinterland which is located in the Upper Malwatu Oya region. However the river valleys immediately above and below the Upper Malwatu oya area reveal a significant concentration of Megalithic burials, i.e. the Yan Oya burial complex situated north of Anuradhapura and the Upper Kala Oya burial complex situated immediately south of the Malwatu Oya (Seneviratne, 1984). The only evidence discovered so far which alludes to the megalithic mortuary trait in Anuradhapura was discovered through the Anuradhapura Salgahawatta excavations (ASW 2) where structural period J3 (1472) revealed a circular pit which are reminiscent of pit burials discovered from peninsular India and contained among other things BRW bowls but devoid of human remains, (Coningham, 1999).

The aim of this paper is to describe probable burial sites discovered through surveys conducted by the Upper Malwatu Oya Exploration project and to also to discuss possible reasons for the obvious absence of megalithic burial sites from the Anuradhapura area.

Key words: Megaliths, Anuradhapura, ASW2

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