

The Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) Project: The Hinterland (phase II), Preliminary Report of the First Season 2005*

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Introduction

The UNESCO World Heritage site of Anuradhapura is one of Asia's major archaeological and pilgrimage centres. The walled core of the city measured 100 hectares and was surrounded by a 25 square kilometre spread of monasteries (Seneviratne 1994). The Sri Lankan capital for 1500 years, its kings constructed 100m high brick *stupas* and three vast reservoirs, one containing 1288 hectares (Fig. 1). Although located in the centre of the island, the city attracted pilgrims from across South and East Asia and also functioned as a hub for Indian Ocean trade as indicated by evidence of lapis lazuli, Greco-Roman glass and metalwork, early Islamic glass and glazed ceramics and East Asian ceramics (Coningham 1999, 2006) (Fig. 2). Although the city developed on the northern plain of Sri Lanka's 'Dry Zone' with a carrying capacity of 0.4 individuals per square kilometre, its hydraulic system ensured the

supply of water (Brohier 1954; Coningham & Allchin 1995). The city and hinterland are generally believed to have been abandoned at the end of the first millennium AD due to pressure from the expansionist kingdoms of South Indian (De Silva 1981; Coningham and Lewer 2000). The city's growth has been traced over the last thirty years through excavations at Anuradhapura (Deraniyagala 1992), and in particular, excavations sponsored by the Society for South Asian Studies, The British Academy, The Ancient India and Iran Trust and the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research at trench Anuradhapura Salgaha Watta 2 (ASW2) have presented the development of a small Iron Age village into a mediaeval metropolis (Coningham 1999). The appearance of early Brahmi script, monumental works, irrigation, imports and craft specialisation has been mapped against this process, providing a unique model of Early Historic urbanisation within South Asia (Coningham 2006).



1. View of Ruvanvalisaya or Mahathupa across the Basavakulam at Anuradhapura.

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