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Bellan-bandi Palassa, Sri Lanka: Formation processes of a Mesolithic open-air site identified through thin section micromorphology

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Introduction

Bellan-bandi Pallassa is one of the most important pre-historic sites in Holocene Sri Lanka with the majority of Sri Lanka's pre-historic human skeletal material, popularly know as Balangoda Man, coming from this location. The site, discovered by Arthur Delgoda of Morahala, was excavated over several seasons in the late 1950's and early 1960's by P.E.P. Deraniyagala, yielding thirteen flexed human burials and a large collection of faunal remains and stone artefacts that provided the foundation for comparative assessment of ethnic origins (Kennedy, 1965; Deraniyagala, S.U.;1992). Subsequent excavation in 1971 attempted to clarify the stratigraphic and chronological context of the site; radiocarbon measurement yielded a date of ca. 2,070 years BP, considered to be too young and contaminated, and a thermo-luminescence measurement on fired quartz crystal directly associated with one of the burials gave a date of 6,500 ± 700 years BP, although again the date was considered young (Deraniyagala and Kennedy, 1972; Deraniyagala, S.U.;1992).

In this paper we set out to characterise the local environments of the burials and associated artefacts, thus addressing a significant omission in the analyses of the site so far. To do so we consider the soils and sediments from archaeological contexts as records of the environment in which they have been formed.

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