

# The state of theocracy: defining an early medieval hinterland in Sri Lanka\*

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*The ancient Sri Lankan city of Anuradhapura is currently the subject of one of the world's largest and most intensive archaeological research projects. Having traced its growth from an Iron Age village to a medieval city, the research team now moves to the task of modelling the surrounding landscape. Three seasons of fieldwork have located numerous sites of which the most prominent in the urban period are monasteries. Here is a clue about how the early urban hinterland was managed which has implications well beyond Sri Lanka.*

*Keywords:* Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, heterarchy, monasticism, survey, theocracy

## Introduction

The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Anuradhapura is one of Asia's major archaeological and pilgrimage centres. The Sri Lankan capital for 1500 years until 1017 AD (Coningham 1999: 15), its rulers constructed monasteries and lakes, and attracted merchants involved in Indian Ocean trade. Although excavations have traced its growth from an Iron Age village to a medieval city (Coningham 1999; 2006), we know almost nothing of the role played by communities in its surrounding plain. As a result, a team of archaeologists, geoarchaeologists and archaeological scientists from the Universities of Durham, Bradford, Kelaniya, Leicester and Stirling developed a project to model pre-urban and urban networks within the plain and to assess the

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Received: 27 November 2006; Accepted: 18 January 2007; Revised: 30 March 2007  
antiquity 81 (2007): 1–21

\* This article was previously published in *Antiquity* Volume 81 number 313, September 2007 p. 1–21