

Soft power of Western Sabaragamuwa region

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The Sabaragamuwa Region has not been identified as having a unique cultural heritage at par with the Upcountry Kandyan Region and the Southern and Western Maritime Region. The Western part of the modern province includes the ancient *Pahala Bulathgama*, *Hatarakorale*, and *Satkorale* served at the buffer region to the Upcountry. The core area is also called “*Deyyane Rata*” (Country of the Gods), with its seats of ecclesial power in Pelmadulla, Kiriella and at Srī Pāda.

The jungle tracks that connected the *Mahavāsala* in Kandy to the seats of maritime power of the Dutch VOC in the South, were linked by networks of *Pirivenas* (seats of leaning) and *Devalas* (seats of divine power): They have been traced from our library research and field trips. These mapping exercises are the base of the ongoing research.

The soft power of the Cave Image Houses of this region will be highlighted in this presentation. According to the palm leave manuscripts, Cave Image Houses were rare in the vicinity of royal city but common in the periphery of the kingdom, jungles and boundaries where political power contested such as caves where monks lived in meditative seclusion. As our current research shows, they were also centers of resistance against the Dutch and later British which is a less discussed area.

The Master-Pupil Traditions established by Ven. Velivita Saranamkara in mid 18th century show later continuations in two main traditions in the south: The ‘*Vehalla* Tradition’ and ‘*Mulkiriga* Tradition’. The final outcome of the current research that will be showcased at the conference is how the master-pupil-traditions which connected Cave Image Houses on the jungle tracks of Sabaragamuwa created a protective soft power of the region. The ongoing research funded by the AHEAD Project for the Faculty of Humanities has brought light to many unknown geo-political aspects of this region.

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