

Archaeological Landscape of the Lower Montane region of Sri Lanka: socio-religious aspect of archaeological sites

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Abstract: The objective of the study is to survey the emergence and the development of the early human settlements in the middle Mahaweli river basin. This area represents the lower montane region of the island. The lower montane region of Sri Lanka belongs to the area from 1000 to 3500ft above the mean sea level. The Archaeological and historical evidence shows that the middle basin of the river Mahaweli has been thickly inhabited by humans since early Holocene. The continuity of the cultural activity of the middle and lower Mahaweli basin can be traced up to the 18th century and onwards. However, the middle part of the river basin has been neglected archaeologically during the last 100 years of research in the island due to some practical reasons. The textual information and cursory observations suggest that the middle Mahaweli basin has a great potential of cultural continuity from the pre- history up to the late historic period. 900 BCE demarcates the emergence of the early agricultural practice and the beginning of the use of Iron in Sri Lanka. Beyond that point the gradual expansion of the settled agricultural communities is evident throughout the island. In spite of that, the knowledge about the development of human settlement of the lower montane region is scarce. This scarcity is crucially influential to understand the subsequent developments in the middle basin of the river Mahaweli towards its upper reaches. In this research it is expected to unearth a set of field data, which will be able to support to understand the contribution of the human settlements to the cultural development of the island as a whole throughout the history. Within this context it is significant that almost all the archaeological sites have been directly connected to religion that embraced by the settlements in the vicinity, which will give an insight in to the religio-cultural aspect of heritage in ancient Sri Lanka. Moreover, current socio-economic development of the country, including in the lower montane region, and rapid demographic expansion threatened the survival of archaeological landscape of the respective locations. Therefore, survey, recording and study of this endangered archaeological heritage is crucially important for the future of the island.