

DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE

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Monastery plan and social formation: the spatial organization of the Buddhist monastery complexes of the Early and Middle Historical period in Sri Lanka and changing patterns of political power.

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The most substantial body of artefacts that have survived from the Early and Middle Historical period (EMHP) in Sri Lanka (circa BC 250 to AD 1300; see Table 1) are the skeletal remains of Buddhist monastery complexes widely distributed throughout the country.¹ We may estimate that there are between 2000 and 3000 such monastery sites, containing a total of between 50 000 and 75 000 individual structural units, dating mostly from the MHP. The excavation and documentation of these complexes has gone on for nearly one hundred years and, understandably, is still far from complete. The best-known and most important concentrations are found around the principal politico-urban centres of the EMHP, particularly the ancient cities of Anuradhapura (3rd century BC to 10th century AD) and Polonnaruva (11th to 13th century).

The buildings in these monastery complexes were largely residential, with centrally-located ritual and 'ecclesiastical' structures. They had brick masonry substructures and timbered superstructures, with the marginal use of stone for internal columniation and external detailing. Very little has survived of the original decoration and nothing whatsoever of the superstructures, other than tile debris. The surviving substructures and ground plans of individual units and complexes, however, tell us a great deal about the technology, planning mathematics, architectural symbolism and social meaning of these monuments, which represent the most significant and extensive material remains of the cultural product and cultural 'symbolism' of the society of the EMHP.

As far as the existing evidence indicates, Sri Lankan Buddhist monastery types show a relatively continuous history of development throughout the EMHP. Monastery sites at major centres such as Anuradhapura, which was