

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

Robin Coningham<sup>1</sup> & Prishanta Gunawardhana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Archaeology, Durham University, UK*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka*

### ABSTRACT

The ancient Sri Lankan city of Anuradhapura is currently the subject of one of the world's largest and most intensive archaeological research projects. Although excavations have traced the growth of the city from an Iron Age village to a medieval city, archaeologists know almost nothing of the role played by communities in its surrounding plain. Four seasons of fieldwork have located numerous sites within the city's hinterland, the most prominent of which are monastic sites. In contrast, there is a paucity of permanent urban settlement, suggesting that monasteries played a dual role as religious and secular administrators, and that villages were temporary and mobile. Such a model is supported by archaeological evidence from Indonesia, Cambodia and Central America – the so-called 'Tropical Forest Civilisations.' This newly identified phenomenon is completely at odds with established historically-derived models of Early Historic South Asia.

**Key words:** *Anuradhapura, Theocracy, Urbanism*

