

WORLD REPORTS ON UNDERWATER CULTURAL HERITAGE



COUNTRY	Sri Lanka		
STATE PARTY	No	DATE	
SOURCE	Palitha Weerasinghe	DATE	
LEGISLATION	The Antiquities (Amendment) Act, No. 24 of 1998; Antiquity Ordinance 2000		
COMPETENT AUTHORITY	Department of Archaeology		

Underwater Cultural Heritage of Sri Lanka – Country Report

Historical Evidences of Sri Lankan seafaring.

The naval history of the country goes back to 3rd century BC according to the inscriptions found across Sri Lanka. Especially, the Polonnaruwa (North-central Province), Duvegala inscription found with a symbol of a ship is significant evidence of the island's seafaring capability (fig. 01). In addition, the Kurunegala (North-western Province), Paramakannda inscription going back to 2nd century BC mentions a sailor (fig. 02). According to the above evidence there were a number of ports around the island and they functioned for over 2000 years.

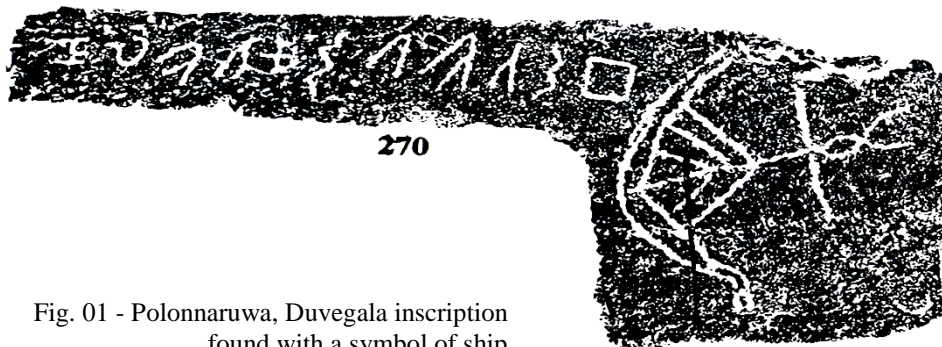


Fig. 01 - Polonnaruwa, Duvegala inscription found with a symbol of ship

Text : Barata-Śāgarakitaśa lene

Meaning : The cave of Lord Sangharakkhita.



Fig. 04 - Kurunegala, Paramakannda inscription

Text : Paramuka-Abaya-puta param[u]ka-Tiśa duta-[na]vikaha lene

Meaning : The cave of the chief Tissa, the envoy-mariner,

son of the chief Abhaya, [is given] to the Sangha.

History of Underwater Archaeology in Sri Lanka

“Although Sri Lanka is situated at the crossing of all shipping routes in the Indian Ocean, the archaeologists have usually occupied themselves with the countless inland sites and paid no attention to maritime archaeology. The state became aware of the accidental discovery of a silver wreck in the early 1960s, when it became the object of studies of Peter Throckmorton. Good intentions notwithstanding, no steps were taken towards the development of maritime archaeology. With the radical changes to its economy during the early 1970s and as scuba-diving enthusiasts discovered its attractions, Sri Lanka became a ‘sun, sand and sea’ destination and embraced tourism as the major source of income. This led to the destruction of wreck sites and to illicit trade in maritime artifacts. The entire scene was uncontrolled and unregulated: more material and knowledge was lost than we can imagine.

In the 1980s the initiative was taken not by archaeologists, but by scientific bodies and non-professional enthusiasts. However, the lack of funding and will to further the project on part of the state department of archaeology delayed its realization. In 1990 a very ambitious international conference to celebrate the department’s centenary stimulated public interest in maritime archaeology, the subject of one season resulting in an agreement between university and cultural institutions in Sri Lanka and the Western Australian Maritime Museum to raise interest in maritime archaeology among a group of archaeology students. The ancient port site of Galle was used as training ground. At the same time, a data base of wrecks on the site was being created. The success of the first season in 1992 led to another in 1993. In 1995 the interest was revived and in 1996-97 the state funded an exploration and rescue project including the development of the site into a commercial harbour. The project has had notable consequences. First, it brought about the first scientific exploration of the sea bed. Second, regulatory measure have been put in place, requiring maritime archaeology to be included in Environmental Impact Assessment for two new port sites” (Lt.com S. Devendra).

Legislation

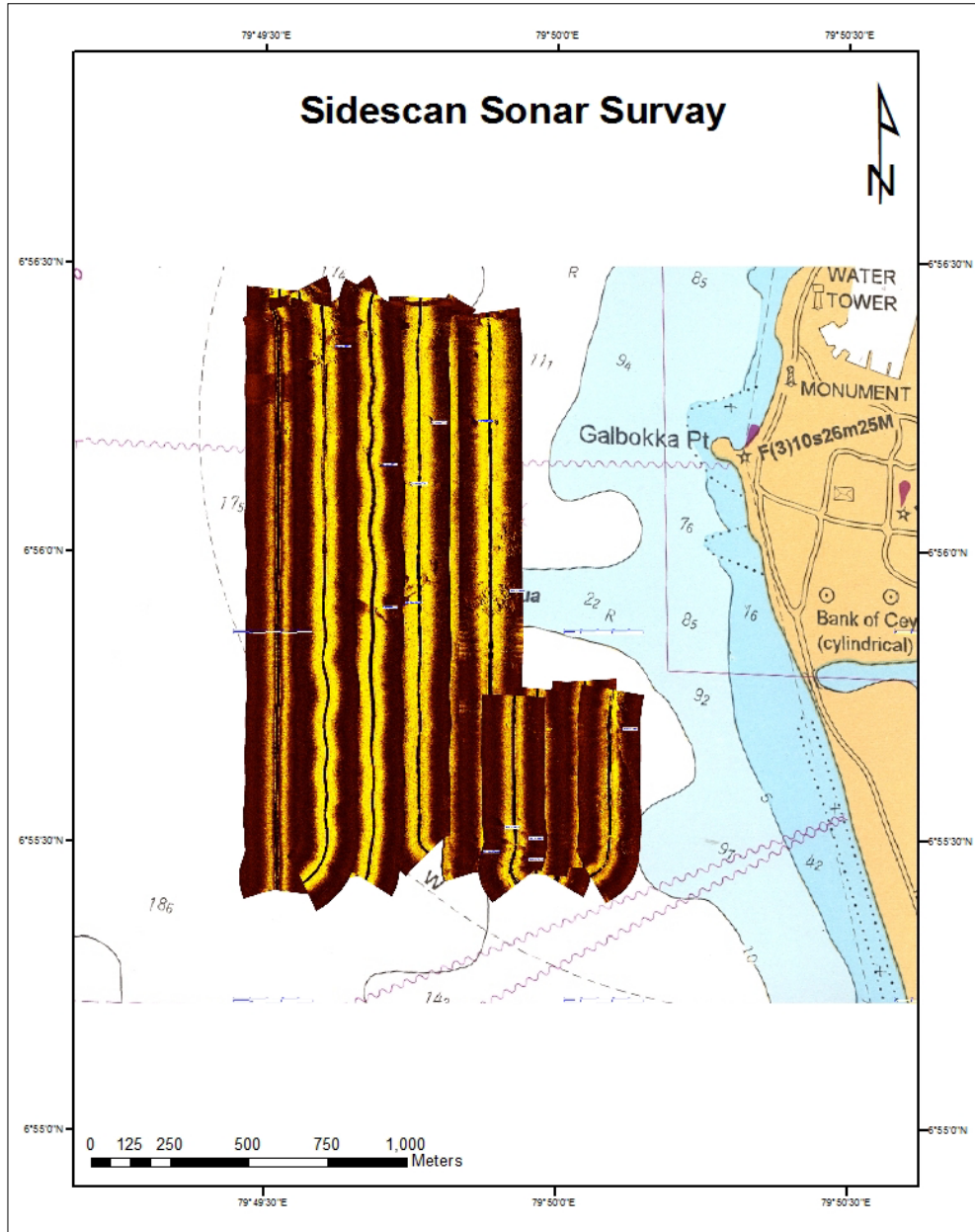
According to The Antiquities (Amendment) Act, No. 24 of 1998 the authorized body concerned with archaeological evidences of the land and also under the territorial sea of the country is the Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka. Since there is a vast array of archaeological data scattered all over the country, whenever any development, industrial scheme or project is proposed by the Government, any other institution or person, such scheme or project shall not be approved or permitted until a report is submitted by the Director General of Archaeology, as to the effects the implementation of such scheme, or project may have upon such land or any antiquities within it. Finally every development project in this country should be subjected to Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA). The project proponent has to allocate a sum not exceeding 1% of total cost of the project for the AIA. These regulations are proclaimed in terms of provisions in the Antiquities (Amendment) Act, No. 24 of 1998 (Annex 02) and Antiquity Ordinance 2000.

Besides this, under the decisions which were taken by the Inter-Ministerial Committee of Sri Lanka on wrecks, salvaging of wrecks has been suspended.

Example for the Archaeological Impact Assessment of the New Colombo Port City Development Project - NCPCDP

Aims of the Survey.

The basic aim of the assessment survey is to get a preliminary idea on the archaeological potential of the proposed area as quickly and as efficiently as possible. The survey of the area was conducted using diver search methods and remote sensing methods to identify the endangered archaeological sites within the development area. Accordingly, this survey is aimed to submit some conditions and alterations to the Director General of Department of Archaeology to recommend, to object or to recommend subjecting such conditions and alterations of the proposed NCPCDP.



Distribution of the sites in the survey area

Map showing the survey tracks of side scan sonar search

