
Brief Introduction to Ancient Relationship Between Sri Lanka and India (10th Century BC to 10th Century AD): Evidence from Sri Lanka

Madhumali A. K. R.¹ and P. R. A. Buddikasiri²

- ¹. Department of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Kandy Road, Dalugama, Kelaniya - 11600, Sri Lanka (Email: rangikathilakarathna8@gmail.com)
 - ². Sichuan University, No. 24 South Section 1, Yihuan Road, Chengdu – 610 065, China (Email: asanka.buddikasiri8@gmail.com)
-

Received: 18 July 2019; Revised: 09 September 2019; Accepted: 17 October 2019

Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology 7 (2019): 571-580

Abstract: Sri Lanka and India can be identified to be countries in the Asiatic zone. Recent development projects and other reasons have caused these two countries to enjoy cordial relations. These relations are not in fact of modern construction but a continuation of such relations since ancient times. To investigate these historical claims, archaeological evidence in the form of material factors can be deemed reliable. Any potteries, iron tools and other artefacts with archaeological value found in Sri Lanka are identified to have foreign and local origins. As in such cases, relationship between Sri Lanka and India with archaeological value will take priority in this paper.

Keywords: Archaeological Evidence, Historical Sources, Anuradhapura, Buddhism, Trade, Sri Lanka, India

Introduction

Sri Lanka and India can be identified to be countries in the Asiatic zone. This introduction would serve as background information in respect to Sri Lanka's contact with the rest of the civilized world from ancient times. Sri Lanka was known as Taprobane, Palesimundum, Serendib and Sinhaladipa in ancient times to the Indians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs and others. The country is located across the main shipping lanes of Asia and was strategically placed across the Indian Ocean for all seafaring, trade, commerce and religious propagation activities, etc. Its seaports played a key role in such foreign contact and related activities. According to the chronicles, Ceylon had been populated from the 6th Century BC. The maritime trade of the Indian Ocean can be traced back to the dawn of civilization as early as the third millennium BC, when the Harappan merchants of India traded with Mesopotamia through the ports of the Persian Gulf. Up to the time of 8th century AD foreign trade activities in the Indian Ocean were carried out by various such as Persians, Ethiopians, Chinese and many others. However, relations between India and Sri Lanka are not limited to trade. In

particular, the location of the two countries was very important for the development of relations between Sri Lanka and India. There was also a political, religious and economic impact on the development of relations between Sri Lanka and India in ancient time.

Objective and Methodology

The main objective of this research paper will be to identify the historical relationship of India and Sri Lanka by studying archaeological evidence and historical sources. In this, information about the regions where artefacts were found in and cultural, societal, economic, political and religious relations will be reviewed. This research will utilize various literature, archaeological references and excavation reports to back up the facts.

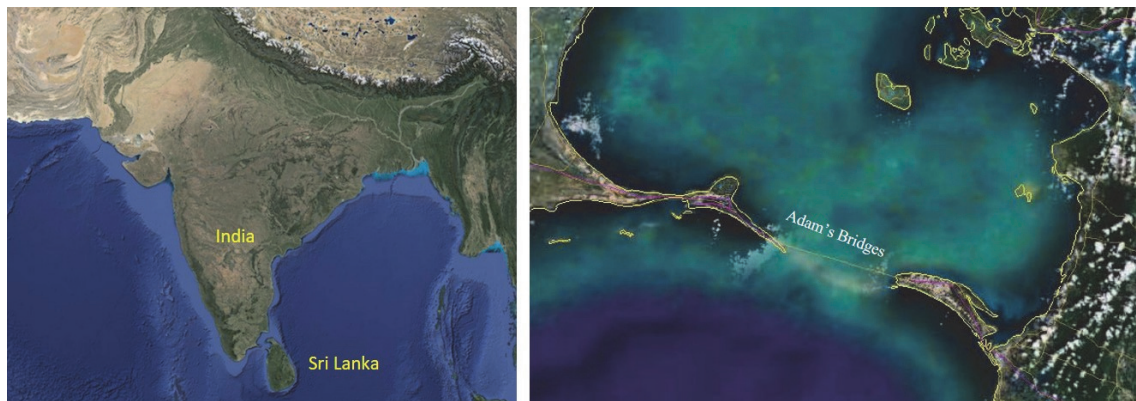


Figure 1: (a) Location of India and (b) Adam's Bridge

Location of the Countries

Sri Lanka and India are located in South Asia (Figure 1a). The location of the two countries is very close. The width of the intervening sea between India and Sri Lanka at the narrowest point (Adams's Bridge) being about 32 kilometres (Figure 1b). Location was important to have a strong relationship between Sri Lanka and India from past to present. Actually, from the past, Sri Lanka and India have been one of the main trading centres of the East and West part (Liyangamage 2000: 1).

Relationship of the Countries

The study of the relationship between India and Sri Lanka can be identified as having a long history. "Pangaea" was a first land in the world. From that time on, Sri Lanka and India have been geographically linked (Cooray 1984; Wijesooriya 2007) (Figure 2). However, after the subsequent geographical changes, Sri Lanka got separated from India and other countries. By the way, Sri Lanka and other countries have established relationships based on trade. But trade alone has not led to the development of relations between Sri Lanka and India. Especially, Buddhism is the main factor that contributed to the growth of relations between Sri Lanka and India in the Anuradhapura kingdom. Further details of relations between Sri Lanka and India are also proven in Prehistoric and Proto-historical periods. This research article mentions

the relationship between Sri Lanka and India during the Proto-historical period and the Anuradhapura period.

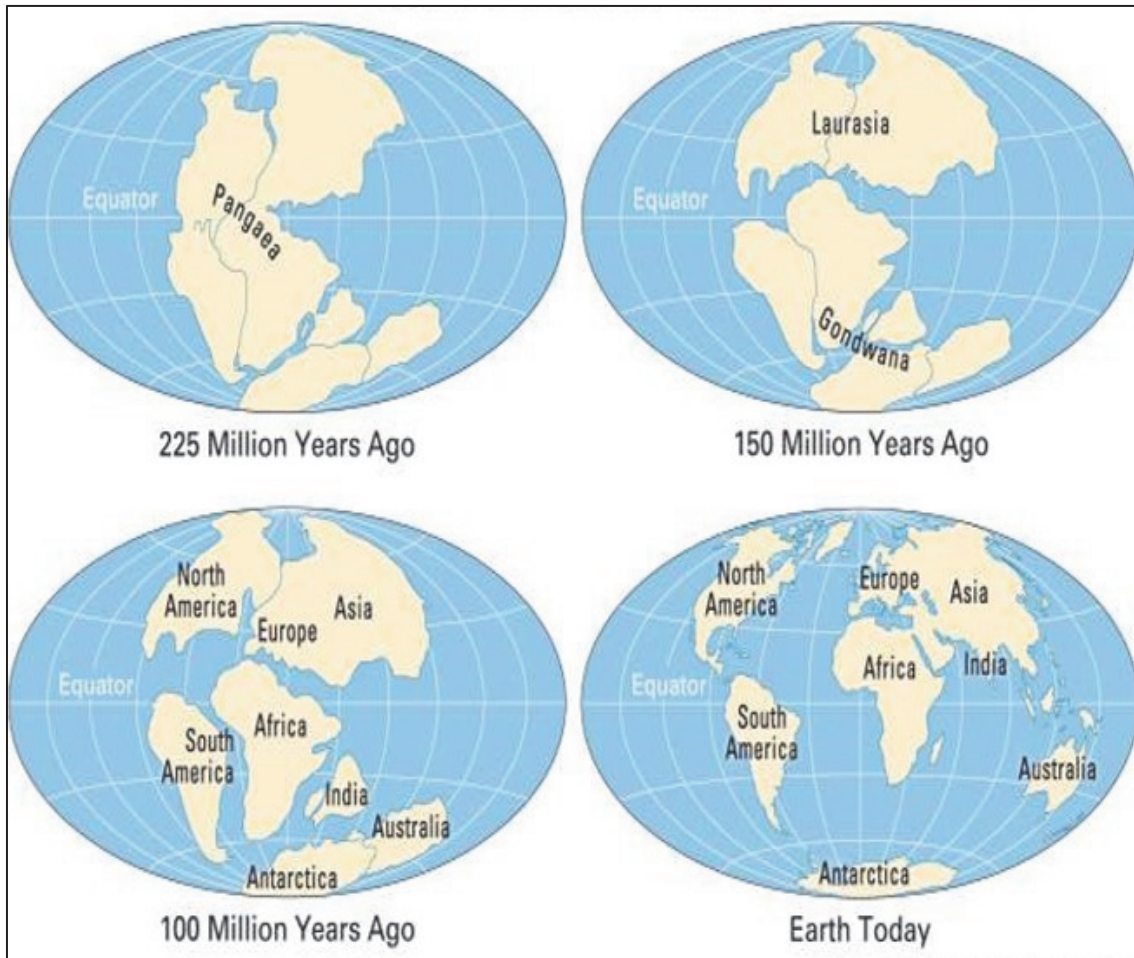


Figure 2: Earth in different time periods
(Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geological_history_of_Earth)

Despite its obvious affinities with India, Sri Lanka nevertheless developed a unique identity over the ages that ultimately set it apart from its neighbour. Cultural traits brought from India necessarily underwent independent growth and change in Sri Lanka, owing in part to the island's physical separation from the subcontinent. Buddhism, for instance, virtually disappeared from India, but it continued to flourish in Sri Lanka, particularly among the Sinhalese. Moreover, the Sinhalese language, which grew out of Indo-Aryan dialects from the mainland, eventually became indigenous solely to Sri Lanka and developed its own literary tradition.

Proto-historic Period

The transition period between the end of the Stone Age and the initial stage of the historic era can be described as a significant proto-historical period (Bandaranayake 1992). This historical period can be considered as a phase based on metal technology, moving beyond the stone. There is no written evidence of this era, and only

archaeological evidence can be considered. According to the archaeological research carried out in Sri Lanka, a number of cemeteries of the megalithic culture have been uncovered. These include Ibbankatuwa, Manthai, Beragala, Kantharoondi, Pomparippuwa, Pinwewa, Ranchamadama, Yatigalpoththa, Nikawalamulla, Siyambalagaswewa, Mamaduwa, Dummalasuriya, Kokabee, Haldummulla, Hatharabage, Kalotuwawa, Wadigawewa, Divulwewa, Jinwewa, Kareinagar Jaffna and Dewalapola. However, many of the Proto-historical evidence in Sri Lanka have been identified as having a similar relationship with South India's features (Deraniyagala 1990). Especially we can find similar relationship between Sri Lanka and India like pottery, beads and burial shapes. If we focus on the beads found in Sri Lanka, it is very useful to understand relationship in two countries (Francis 2002). The Ibbankatuwa beads necklace is a special artefact found in Sri Lanka. Carnelian, agate and some other minerals include in the necklace. However, as per the opinion of experts, these minerals are not available in Sri Lanka and have been imported from India (Figure 3) (Deraniyagala 1990; Bopearachchi 2014).



Figure 3: Ibbankatuwa Beads



Figure 4: BRW, Pomparippu

Proto-historic Sri Lanka was more closely linked with South India. In the excavations conducted at Gedige in Anuradhapura, Pomparippu, Kantarodai and Ibbankatuwa, substantial quantities of potsherds were found which are parallel the Iron Age and early historical wares of South India, such as Megalithic Black and Red Ware and the Rouletted Ware (Figure 4) (Deraniyagala 1972, 1986, 1992 for excavations at Gedige, Anuradhapura; Begley 1970 for Pomparippu; Begley 1967 for Kantarodai; and Weisschaar 1992 for Ibbankatuwa). This evidence confirms the relationship between Sri Lanka and India in the proto-historic period.

Anuradhapura Period

The history of Sri Lanka begins when the city “Anuradhapura” became the capital of Sri Lanka. Anuradhapura was the first kingdom of Sri Lanka. King Pandukabaya (437

BC to 367 BC) is the first king of Anuradhapura kingdom and last king is the king V Mihidu (1001 AD to 1017 AD) (Wilhelm 1950). According to this information, the Anuradhapura kingdom has been a kingdom for more than 1500 years. During this period an overall development can be noticed in the economic, political and cultural realms along with the flourishing of Buddhism (Wilhelm 1950). Most information reveals that Sri Lanka and India had a close relationship during the Anuradhapura period (Bandaranayake 1984). In this research, the relationship between Sri Lanka and India is described in several sections.

Political Relationship

These data were derived from Pali chronicles and Sinhala literature. However, source indicates that Sri Lanka and India have a very close political relationship. According to the Sinhalese tradition, as recorded in the Mahavamsa, the first Indian settlers on Sri Lanka were Prince Vijaya and his 700 followers, who landed on the west coast near Puttalam (5th century BC) (Wilhelm 1950). They had been banished for misconduct from the kingdom of Sinhapura in northern India by Vijaya's father, King Sinhabahu. Vijaya married a Yaksha princess and had two children by her. Later he drove her and the children away and sent to the Madurai court in India for a Pandu (probably referring to the Pandya dynasty) princess and wives for his 700 followers.

Vijaya settled down to reign as king after a ceremonial enthronement and marriage and founded a dynasty. He had no heir to the throne, and toward the end of his reign he sent for his younger brother at Sinhapura. The brother, unwilling to leave his native land, sent his youngest son, Panduvasudeva, to Sri Lanka. Panduvasudeva landed with 32 followers at Gokanna (now Trincomalee) on the east coast. He was enthroned at Upatissagama and continued the Vijaya dynasty (Wilhelm 1950). After that, the village of Anuradhapura became the abode of the first king of Sri Lanka in that time. King Panduvasudeva also brought his queen from India for diplomatic power.

Archaeological evidence has indicated that settled life, agriculture, tank irrigation, use of iron and pottery were features present before the Indo-Aryan migrations. During the early phases of these migrations, a synthesis seems to have taken place between Indo-Aryan, pre-Indo-Aryan, and possibly Dravidian elements to create the early Sinhalese culture of the Anuradhapura period, which spanned the 3rd century BC to the 10th century AD. The chronicle account of Vijaya's confrontation with the Yakshas and the search for consorts in the Pandu kingdom of Madurai (if this may be presumed to be the Pandya Tamil kingdom of southern India) point to such integration.

In any case, Indo-Aryan settlements grew in different parts of the island from about the 5th century BC. The settlers came in numerous clans or tribes; the most powerful were the Sinhalese, who eventually gave their name to the descendants of the various groups. The earliest settlers were those on the west-central coast, who pushed inland along the Malwatu River and founded a number of riverbank villages. Their seat of government was Upatissagama.

Tradition attributes the founding of the kingdom of Anuradhapura to Pandukabhaya, the third king of the Vijaya dynasty. With its growth as the strongest Sinhalese kingdom, the city of Anuradhapura and the nearby settlements flourished. The kings built up the city and developed it for urban life as they extended royal control over villages and outlying settlements. With the establishment of strong government, the population grew and the kingdom expanded into the north-central region. From the 7th century AD there was an increase in the involvement of south Indian powers in the island's politics and in the presence of Tamil mercenaries in and around the capital. Manavamma, a Sinhalese royal fugitive, was placed on the throne in 684 AD with the support of the Pallava rulers of south India. Manavamma founded the second Lambakanna dynasty, which reigned in Anuradhapura for about 400 years. The dynasty produced a number of distinguished kings, who consolidated and extended Sinhalese political power. During this period, Sinhalese involvement with southern India was even closer. Sinhalese kings were drawn into the dynastic battles between the Pandyas, Pallavas, and Colas. Invasions from south India to Sri Lanka and retaliatory raids were a recurrent phenomenon. In the 10th century AD the island's political and military power weakened because of regional particularism and internecine warfare; the Colas—hostile because of the Sinhalese alliance with Pandya—attacked and occupied the Sinhalese kingdom in 993 AD and annexed Rajarata (in the north-central region of Sri Lanka) as a province of the Cola empire. The conquest was completed in 1017 AD, when the Colas seized the southern province of Ruhuna.

Buddhism

Buddhism was first brought to Sri Lanka by a mission sent out from eastern India during the reign of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (c. 273–232 BC). The leader of the mission to Sri Lanka, Mahendra (Mahinda), is described as Ashoka's son. Mahendra and his colleagues travelled to the Mihintale hill (the site of some of the earliest inscriptions), 8 miles (13 km) from Anuradhapura. There they chanced to meet the Sinhalese king Tissa, to whom they delivered a sermon on Buddhism. The king was brought into the Buddhist fold, and he invited Mahendra and his followers to the city. The missionaries were settled in a royal pavilion in the city park of Mahamegha, where they preached first to members of the royal family and then to the common people. Many embraced the new religion, some taking holy orders and joining the Buddhist sangha (community of monks). The king donated the Mahamegha park to the sangha. Meanwhile, the monastery of Mahavihara was established, and it became the prime centre of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Mahendra sent for his sister Sanghamitta, who arrived with a branch of the Bo tree (at Bodh Gaya), under which the Buddha had attained enlightenment. The sapling was ceremonially planted in the city. Sanghamitta founded an order of nuns, and a stupa (shrine), the Thuparamacetiya, was built by the king for popular worship. Thus, with the founding of these and other institutions, Buddhism became an established religion in Sri Lanka.

Through the conversion of King Tissa and the missionary activity of monks in the villages, by the 2nd century BC the Sinhalese had accepted Buddhism, and this faith

helped produce a unity and consciousness on which subsequent political and economic strength was founded. However, it should be recognized that while the monastic chronicles accord the pride of place to Buddhism, other religions also were practiced on the island. Jainism, for instance, probably represented another major religious tradition, and a Jain monastery is mentioned in the Mahavamsa. The chronicle also indicates the presence of Brahmans—Hindus of the highest social rank—in Sri Lanka.

Trade

Trade activities between these two countries had been carried on from very ancient times. Such trade relationships had existed even during the 6th Century BC when Ceylon became an Aryan colony. This information has been recorded in the chronicles, Fa-Hien's records, Jataka stories, etc. (Pujavaliya 2005: 206; Jatakas vol. II: 196; Divyavardana 532). There were two aspects to the trade transactions between the two countries. Firstly, there was the bartering of required items between the countries and secondly the selling of Ceylonese products to foreign merchants by Indian traders at their beach bazaars. This was so because at that time Ceylon had trade relations only with South India. This state of affairs becomes evident after a study of Greek and Roman trade records and history. Greek and Roman literature indicate that in the earlier phase of Rome's trade with the Orient, they did not visit Ceylon but were content to buy the country's wares at the South Indian ports. This situation changed in the 5th century AD when Indian ships came to Ceylon to sell their goods to Persian merchants. During the period from the 11th century to the 13th century AD, the Indian community had established trade centres in this country and were carrying out trade transactions. Such communities were identified as Ainnurruvar, Nanadesi, Valachiyar and Cetti. Inscriptions show that they conducted their trade activities in Ceylon at the locations named as Vahalkada, Viharahinna, Padaviya and Dambulla (Pathmanathan 2000: 492-497). During the Kotte reign Indian traders had pursued their commercial activities while residing in towns close to the sea ports of Ceylon (Paravi 108; Gira 104; Kokila 57, 59, 93).

Archaeological Evidence

According to the above data, there is a close relationship between Sri Lanka and India in the ancient time. In fact, archaeological data is another important factor that confirms this information. Archaeological data can be cited as reliable sources rather than corroborative sources. Accordingly, archaeological data will greatly contribute to further strengthen the relationship between the two countries in this research. Specifically, pottery, beads, coins, inscriptions and many more are antiquities based in this research. These antiquities are sometimes taken from India and are sometimes similar to those in India.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka and India can be identified to be countries in the Asiatic zone. Recent development projects and other reasons have caused these two countries to enjoy

cordial relations. These relations are not in fact of modern construction but a continuation of such relations since ancient times. To investigate these historical claims, archaeological evidence in the form of material factors can be deemed reliable. As we said at the beginning, with the trade, not only goods, but also ideas, cultures, religions and iconographies travelled from one place to the other making the lands around the Indian Ocean one cultural entity in its diverse forms ingeniously completing the sentiments and aesthetics of their respective populations.

References

- Bandaranayake, S. 1992. The Settlement Pattern of the Protohistoric Early Historic Interface in Sri Lanka. In C. Jarrige (Ed.) *South Asian Archaeology, Papers from the Tenth International Conference of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe, Monograph in World Archaeology*. Prehistory Press, Wisconsin.
- Begley, V., J. R. Lukacs and K. A. R. Kennedy 1981. Excavations of Iron Age Burial at Pomparippu 1970. *Ancient Ceylon* 4. Department of Archaeology, Colombo.
- Benedetto, L. F. 1994 (transl.). *The Travels of Marco Polo*. Asian Educational Services, New Delhi.
- Buddhadattha, S. P. 2008. *Kalyani Inscriptions*. Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, Sri Lanka.
- Codrington, H. W. 1924. Ceylon Coins and Currency (CCC). *Memoirs of The Colombo Museum Series No. 3*.
- Cooray P. G. 1997. *Geology, Arjuna's Atlas of Sri Lanka*. In T. Somasekara (Ed.), Arjuna's Consulting Company Ltd, Dehiwala.
- Cooray, P. G. 1984. *An introduction to the Geology of Sri Lanka (Ceylon)*. National Museums of Sri Lanka, Colombo.
- Cowell, E. B. and R. A. Neil (Eds.) 1884. *Divyavardana*. Pali Society, London.
- Deraniyagala, P. E. P. 1958. *Administration Report for the Archaeological Commissioner for the Financial Year 1958*. Archaeological Survey Department, Ceylon.
- Deraniyagala, S. 1972. The Citadel of Anuradhapura 1969: Excavation in the Gedige Area. *Ancient Ceylon No. 2*. Department of Archaeology, Sri Lanka.
- Deraniyagala, S. U. 1990. The Proto and Early Historic Radiocarbon Chronology of Sri Lanka. *Ancient Ceylon Vol. 6* (12). Department of Archaeology, Colombo.
- Dewaraja, L. 2000. Muslim Merchants and Pilgrims in Serendib c. 900 to 1500 A. D. Reflection on a Heritage. In R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, S. Pathmanathan and M. Rohanadeera (Eds.), *History and Archaeology of Sri Lanka*. Volume I, pp. 475–488. Central Cultural Fund, Ministry of Cultural and Religious Affairs, Sri Lanka.
- Epigraphia Zeylanica*. Vol. III. 1933. Sri Lanka: Government of Ceylon and Oxford University Press.
- Epigraphia Zeylanica*. Vol. IV. 1943. Sri Lanka: Government of Ceylon and Oxford University Press.
- Gunawardhana, R. A. L. H. 2003. Seaways to Sileadiba: Changing Patterns of Navigation in the Indian Ocean and their Impact on Precolonial Sri Lanka.

- In S. Bandaranayake, L. Dewaraja, R. Silva and K. D. G. Wimalarathne (Eds.) *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 17-36. Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka.
- Gunawardhana, V. D. S. (Ed.) 2001. *Gita Sandesha*. Samayawardhana Book Shop (Private) Ltd, Colombo.
- Himi, A., A. Dissanayake and S. Hemachandra (Eds.) 2001. *Vamsattappakāsini*. Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, Sri Lanka.
- Hussain, M. (Ed.) 1953. *The Rehla of Ibn Batuta*. Oriental Institute of Baroda, Baroda.
- Indrapala, K. 1963. The Nainativu Tamil Inscription of Parakramabahu I. *University of Ceylon Review* XXI (1): 68-70.
- Kiribamune, S. 2000. Role of the Port City of Mahatittha. In R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, S. Pathmanathan and M. Rohanadeera (Eds.), *Trade Network of the Indian Ocean*. Volume I, pp. 435-454. Central Cultural Fund, Ministry of Cultural and Religious Affairs, Sri Lanka.
- Kiribamune, S. 2003. Muslims and the Trade of the Arabian Sea with Special Reference to Sri Lanka from the Birth of Islam to the Fifteenth Century. In S. Bandaranayake, L. Dewaraja, R. Silva and K. D. G. Wimalarathne (Eds.), *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 171-183. Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka.
- Nicholas, C. W. 1959. Historical Topography of Ancient and Medieval Ceylon, *JRACB* VI.
- Perera, B. J. 1951. The Foreign Trade and Commerce of Ancient Ceylon - The Ports of Ancient Ceylon. *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 1(2): 109-119.
- Perera, B. J. 1952. The Foreign Trade and Commerce of Ancient Ceylon - Ancient Ceylon and its Trade with India. *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 1(3): 192-204.
- Prematilleke, P. L. 2003. Chinese Ceramics Discovered in Sri Lanka – An Overview. In S. Bandaranayake, L. Dewaraja, R. Silva and K. D. G. Wimalarathne (Eds.), *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 225-236. Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka.
- Shasthri, N. 1939. *Foreign Notices of South India from Megasthenes to Ma-Huan*. University of Madras, Madras.
- Shukri, M. A. M. 2003. Arabic (Sufic) Inscriptions in Sri Lanka. In S. Bandaranayake, L. Dewaraja, R. Silva and K. D. G. Wimalarathne (Eds.), *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 191-200. Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka.
- Siriweera, I. 2002. *Rajarata Shishtacharaya saha Nirithadiga Rajadhani* p. 123. Dayawansha Jayakodhi Saha Samagama, Colombo.
- Siriweera, W. I. 2003. Pre-colonial Sri Lanka's Maritime Commerce with Special Reference to its Ports. In S. Bandaranayake, L. Dewaraja, R. Silva and K. D. G. Wimalarathne (Eds.), *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 117-126. Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka.
- Suraweera, A. V. S. (Ed). 2006. *Thisasra Sandesha*. S. Godage International Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, Sri Lanka.

- Tampoe, M. 2003. Tracing the Silk Road of the Sea: Ceramic and Other Evidence from the Partner Ports of the Western Indian Ocean (8th-10th Century A.D). In S. Bandaranayake, L. Dewaraja, R. Silva and K. D. G. Wimalarathne (Eds.) *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea*, pp. 77-96. Central Cultural Fund, Sri Lanka.
- Tennent, Sir J. E. 2006. *Ceylon. Vol. I*. Tisara Prakasakayo Ltd, Colombo.
- Wijesooriya, W. A. D. A. 2007. *Geology. The National Atlas of Sri Lanka*. Survey Department, Sri Lanka.
- Wilhelm, G. (Ed.) 1950. *Mahāvamsa*. The Ceylon Government Information Department, Colombo.