



# The Archaeologist Dressed in White: In Memory of Siran Deraniyagala

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When I first met Dr. Siran Deraniyagala, dressed entirely in white, including his shoes, he reminded me of the popular French singer Joe Dassin who, in the 1970s, was admired for his white-attired elegance. After that first meeting I always saw him in white. This was quite uncommon for a field archaeologist! Also uncommon was his intelligence and integrity. He was considered one of the best archaeologists in Asia, noted for his rigour and technical expertise. Siran Upendra Deraniyagala, born on 1 March 1942 in Ratnapura, was the third of four sons of P. E. Pieris Deraniyagala, then Director of the National Museum of Ceylon (1939-1963). Young Siran was educated at St. Thomas' College, Mount Lavinia. It is no exaggeration to say that he was the most qualified Sri Lankan archaeologist in independent Sri Lanka, having trained at Trinity College, in Cambridge and at the University of London, and later at Harvard University.

In 1968, he joined the Department of Archaeology of Sri Lanka as Assistant Commissioner for Scientific Excavations. In the course of his career, he conducted major excavations at many protohistoric and prehistoric sites in Sri Lanka, including the citadel of Anuradhapura, Bellan-Bandi Palassa, Wet Zone Caves, Ratnapura and sites within the Iranamadu Formation. Apart from the extensive studies of the prehistory of Sri Lanka, his main contributions are on the reddish-brown earth formation of Iranamadu and the alluvial beds of Ratnapura. He introduced stratigraphy, radiometric dating, faunal and floral analyses.

When Sri Lankan archaeological exploration was dominated by the ultra-nationalist politics of some, Siran Deraniyagala felt the need to open the doors to foreign delegations. Between 1992 and 2001, when he was Director General of Archaeology, archaeological delegations from the United States, Poland, Japan, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, India, Czech Republic and especially Germany began scientific excavations. He had led more than 20 national and international projects in Sri Lanka. When I, as director of the French Archaeological Mission in Sri Lanka, first undertook my archaeological projects on the island in 1995 he remained steadfastly by my side in all my projects, for which I am deeply grateful. Foreign archaeologists who have worked with him will say the same about his unfailing support and his scientific collaboration. Siran Deraniyagala took Sri Lankan archaeology to the zenith and will always be remembered for his immense scientific contribution to the field.

ANCIENT LANKA 

*Volume 1 (2022): Siran Deraniyagala Commemoration Volume*

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