The production of a new spatial consciousness of the Sacred city of Anuradhapura in later-19th century British Colonial incorporation of Lanka
What is Anuradhapura?

- It is the oldest known Lankan capital,
- Lasting for over 1500 years, from the 6th century BC to the 11th century AD.
- The first planned town in independent Ceylon (Sri Lanka after 1972).
- The year after independence in 1948, the Ceylonese government inaugurated the Anuradhapura new town planning project.
The goal(s)

- Explore the making of a new spatial consciousness of Anuradhapura in the nineteenth century by the British, which eventually fetishized the place.

How is the context created?
“Ceylon was, in the olden time, known by the name of Serendib. In the enchanting “Arabian Nights,” frequent mention is made of the island, as the theatre of many of the gorgeous scenes that are so splendidly depicted in those eastern tales. Serendib has ever been a terra incognita, and, therefore, a land of story and romance” (1, De Butts 1841).
Colonial Familiarization: From Terra Incognita to Anuradhapura

Major Thomas Skinner described in 1832, "...no one that I could ever hear of had travelled through it [Anuradhapura], not even a government agent, and from the fact of its being so completely a terra incognita. I took an unusual interest in exploring it (1891, 162)."
Approaching the unknown: Materials

Splendid past
A conceptual order of the space
Approaching the unknown: People

Dreadful present

“The country, I am sorry to say, is rapidly becoming depopulated by disease and drought; it is distressing to behold the fearful objects which constantly meet the eye. By opening up the country, its further deterioration may be arrested, and the Government will be redeemed from the reproach of receiving for its grain tax a commutation of 1d. a bushel.”

(Skinner, 1891; 165)

“... give these poor wretches good water, good air, by clearing the jungle round the villages, and good food by abundant rice crops, and you will perform a greater cure than all the doctors and hospitals in Ceylon can ever effect.”

(W. Gregory, 1894)
“Anuradhapura is emphatically a city of the dead. Scarce a step can be taken, but the eye falls upon some memorial of the past. The mounds one carelessly passes are the sepulchers of kings; the bricks that the foot strikes are the remains of palaces. Clear where one will, and pillars, doorsteps, figures of janitors, carved in stone, are disclosed. Amidst a silence as profound as that of the grave, rise the colossal remains of a city whose wall, sixty-four miles in circumference, once echoed with the merry voices of children, while processions of kings and priests wound along the broad pavements of the now deserted courts, and prostrated themselves before the richly endowed shrines.”

L. Liesching – Assistant Government Agent – April 02, 1870
Ordering space on the ground

Ceylon in the end of the nineteenth century
Ordering space on the ground

- A secular town was developed against the backdrop of the royal and religious ruins.
"... instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in space ... we fall into the trap of treating space as space `in itself '... and so fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities" (Lefebvre, 1991, 90).

Anuradhapura as a provincial capital in 1903
Re-appreciation of Spatial relations

- Dharmapala connected the **Buddhists’ rights to religious spaces**.

- As part of this mission, he led the restoration of historical Buddhist sites in India, especially Bodh Gaya, from the occupation of non-Buddhists, i.e., the Hindus.

- In Ceylon, Anuradhapura was developed into a central space of this nascent ‘spatial-consciousness’ of the Buddhist revival.
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