

The 'Wet Technique' as Traditionally the Most Used Method in Marine Shelled Mollusc Collecting

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There are numerous edible molluscs in Sri Lanka including both bivalves and gastropods. Marine molluscs contribute to a considerable percentage of human food requirement. Consumption of these shelled animals has developed among maritime communities which is sufficient to fulfil their domestic demands. They have methods to collect these shells. The objective of this paper is to identify this technique as a way to recognize what prehistoric Sri Lankans relied on to molluscs collecting. Studying present cultures is important for Archaeomalocology to understand the food habits in both past and present societies. Dietary value of two major classes of molluscs, *bivalves* and *gastropods* are studied from three locations, i.e. Kalpitiya Ânavāsala (KA), Vennappuwa (VP) and Beruwala Dummalamodara (DM). Shell samples were collected from the kitchen middens in the selected regions, participant observation and interviews were made with locals. The study revealed the following: all marine mollusc species live in sub littoral to deep sea, and consequently practical aid is needed to collect them. Two techniques can be identified in mollusc hunting, i.e. wet technique and dry technique. Some prehistoric shell midden sites can be analogically compared with modern kitchen middens. There is no large accumulation of shells in both middens, except for discarded shells of several meals. Thirteen main edible species were identified from the kitchen middens of KA. Another four species were recognized from other two locations. In the KA example, three types are major in the middens, i.e.

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Pugilina cochlidium, *Paphia* sp., *Gafrarium tumidum* and others are minor, but they do not indicate their dietary importance which is negligible. The possibility exists that gatherers use wet technique and collect all edible species. Above mentioned species are higher in total biomass and easy to collect. Except *Turbinella pyrum*, *Murex ramosas* and *Lambis chiragra*, other's habitats are in sandy bottoms, inter-tidal flats, sub-tidal flats and on muddy sand flats seaward from mangrove forests. Above three species are collected by diving. The study concludes that prehistoric Sri Lankans used the 'wet technique'. Dry technique can only be identified with the dredging in pearl fishery which was used only for a few years in the last century. Currently nets are used for the cephalopod fishing (octopus, cuttlefish, etc.).

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