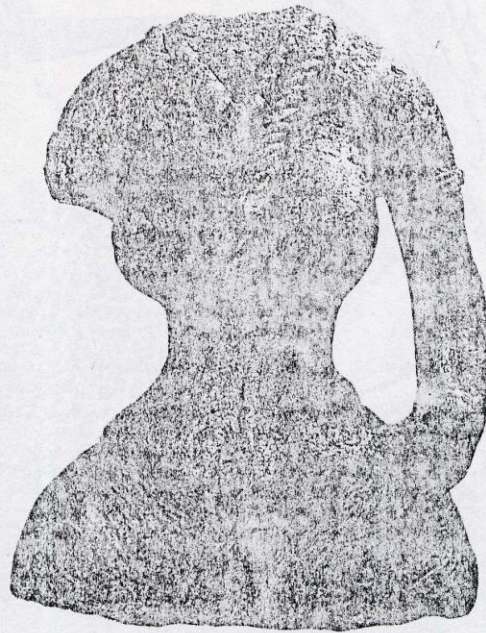


SOUVENIRS FROM SIGIRIYA

The latest discoveries from Lanka's famed rock fortress have shed new light on early island tourism.



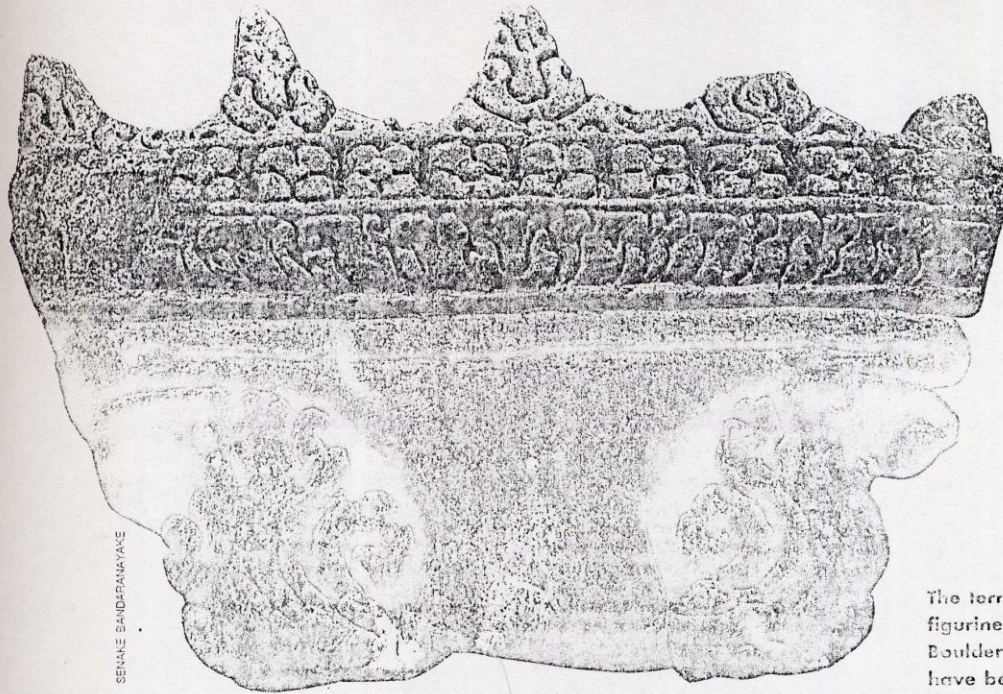
THEY ARE AMONG THE MOST INTERESTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL finds from nearly a decade of Cultural Triangle excavations: Miniature terracotta figurines found in the debris of collapsed structures in the Boulder Garden area, at the base of the western slopes of the great Sigiriya rock. The structures themselves are Buddhist monastic remains dating from the post-Kasyapan era, i.e. circa 500 A.D. onwards.

Most of the figurines appear today as female torsos, modelled in the familiar "classic-realist" style of the Middle Historical period (circa 6th to 13th century). All are damaged and some are mere fragments, including sadly lost limbs and heads. A few examples retain enough of their original form to testify to their high artistic quality. The modelling of the figurines shows a characteristic concern with three-dimensional form and a sensitivity to both anatomical and decorative detail. From their archaeological context and style we may tentatively date them to a period between the 7th and the 10th centuries.

The rock fortress of Sigiriya is perhaps the single most remarkable memory for visitors to Sri Lanka. Rising some 600 feet above the surrounding jungle, this amazing monolith is home to a ruined royal palace and Asia's oldest surviving landscaped gardens. But it is the rock's fabled frescoes that have amused, amazed and tantalized visitors for centuries.

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The terracotta figurines found in the Boulder Garden area have been dated to a period between the 7th and 10th centuries. There is little doubt they are models of the figures depicted in the famous frescoes, designed as souvenirs for visitors wishing to take away a memory of their visit to Sigiriya, just as today's tourists buy postcards.

of a gana and females dug up from the pleasure gardens at Sigiriya (Plate 3)". ASCAR 1967-68 records the discovery of a figurine not far from the location of the present finds: "below a rock boulder to the west of the cave under the Cistern rock". The figure is described in the following way: "Three parts of a weathered statue of a female figure with an elaborately ornamented headdress and jewelled band at the waist ... This statue may be held to represent a goddess (possibly Tara) or a queen of Kassapa's court" (page G73). ASCAR 1968-69 records that "two terracotta human figurines" were "found in the excavations at the northern gate and moat and were deposited in the museum study collection" (page G52).

2. The finds include three corsos which retain substantial sections of the breasts, shoulders, waist and a part of the lower garment, six others which have only the breasts, shoulders and waist, either in a well-preserved or fragmentary form; five pieces in which only the waist and lower garment can be seen; two heads and part of an arm. This comes to a total of seventeen pieces.

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