

The Terracotta Hoards as Remnants of Rituals Practiced at Elephant Kraals in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The terracotta hoards found in Sri Lanka have been vividly interpreted. The close relationship of these hoards with elephants has been pointed out by the present writer in series of research presentations based on his chance discoveries in 1983 at Manawewa near Inamaluwa in the Sigiriya – Dambulla region.

Three hypotheses have been postulated by the present writer after his excavations at Manawewa in 1992.

1. A forgotten cult of worshipping elephants
2. Rituals practiced for protecting crops and lives from wild elephants
3. Rituals practiced before catching wild elephants

Despite these three hypotheses are still to be verified, the writer is inclined towards the third hypothesis as the most appropriated and most probabilistic pursuit for understanding ambiguous terracotta hoards in Sri Lanka. The present paper is an extension of this hypothesis in the same line that these terracotta hoards as remnants of rituals practiced at elephant kraals in Sri Lanka which were used for catching wild elephants in a mass scale from time to time. The following facts will be examined in this regard in detail with little known aspects of rituals practiced at elephant kraals.

1. Terracotta hoards dominated by figures of elephants
2. Odd looking female figures
3. Figures of elephant riders
4. Sites closer to irrigated tanks
5. Representing a mono cultural phase
6. Terracotta hoards found in elephant tracks
7. Some hoards found in Aiiyanayaka Temples

We know from some Colonial administration reports that rituals practiced before having elephant kraals were performed at Aiiyanayaka temples. Some other sources reveal that odd looking figures symbolizing prostitutes were kept in Kraals to attract wild elephants. The kraals were practiced near irrigation tanks and elephant tracts. The mono cultural nature shows that they were not continued as ritual sites.

The writer will elaborate on these facts with his findings of Manawewa excavations. Some other discoveries before and after the Manawewa excavation will be used in support of this hypothesis with ethnographic and literary surveys in relation to catching wild elephants.

Keywords: *Elephant kraals, Wild elephants, Terracotta hoards, Sri Lanka, Manawewa excavation*

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