

Rulers of the Indus cities

Indus rulers appear to have governed their cities through the control of trade and religion rather than military might. There is no evidence of monuments built to commemorate the rulers and there is no indication of warfare and weapons of offence. The rulers carried seals with animal symbols and writing and wore ornaments of rare material. Each larger city was probably organised as a city-state.

The political organisation of the cities was probably not a hereditary monarchy. Numerous large buildings and public spaces in the lower town seem to indicate the presence of several distinct elite groups. Local leaders would have been responsible for the maintenance of well-planned streets and housing, wells and drainage facilities. They also created an urban society composed of different social levels. Artisans, agricultural labourers, administrative leaders, traders, ritual leaders and political rulers lived together in walled cities divided into well-defined neighbourhoods.

The square stone seals with writing and animal depictions were important symbols of power. These distinctive seals appeared with the rise of the cities and then disappeared with their decline. Other objects, e.g., distinctive painted pottery, elaborate ornaments, metal tools, cubical stone weights also disappeared with the loss of the script.

Symbols of power

- **Zebu bull** symbolises the leader of the herd, virile and strong. It probably represents the most powerful clan in Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The script accompanying the animal could refer to royal titles.
- **Elephant** these seals are of medium size and are primarily found in Mohenjodaro and Harappa. These were probably attached to goods that were being traded. These seals were probably used by minor

administrative officers.

- **Male water buffalo** assumes a posture of defence as if protecting the herd and the females, representing fertility and protection. These seals were probably used by minor administrative officers.
- **Tiger** these seals are primarily found in the larger cities. These seals were probably used by minor administrative officers
- **Unicorn** appears to be a very important symbol of the elite and traders. These seals are found at almost all sites in the Indus Valley and even Mesopotamia. The unicorn is depicted assuming various postures and were probably made by local artisans at all major sites. These seals were probably used by the aristocracy or merchants directly involved in governing the different settlements and assuming the economic and political power in the major cities.

(Kenoyer 2000)