

Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)
Supplementary Study Material

Module 2: Indus Valley Civilisation

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Harappan Culture: Bronze Age Urbanization in the Indus Valley

- In 1853, A. Cunningham, the British engineer who became a great excavator and explorer, noticed a Harappan seal. The seal showed a bull and six written letters.
- In 1921, the potentiality of the site of Harappa was appreciated when an Indian archeologist, Daya Ram Sahni, started excavating it. At about the same time, R.D. Banerjee, a historian, excavated the site of Mohenjo-daro in Sindh.
- Large-scale excavations were carried out at Mohenjo-daro under the general supervision of Marshall in 1931. Mackay excavated the same site in 1938. Vats excavated at Harappa in 1940. In 1946 Mortimer Wheeler excavated Harappa.



- In Pakistan, Kot Diji in the central Indus Valley was excavated by F.A. Khan, and great attention was paid to the Hakra and pre-Hakra cultures by M.R. Mughal. A.H. Dani excavated the Gandhara graves in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan.
- Harappan culture-It developed in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent. It is called Harappan because this civilization was discovered first in 1921 at the modern site of Harappa situated in the province of Punjab in Pakistan. Many sites in Sindh formed the central zone of pre-Harappan culture. This culture developed and matured into an urban civilization that developed in Sindh and Punjab.
- The central zone of this mature Harappan culture lay in Sindh and Punjab, principally in the Indus Valley. The Harappan culture covered parts of Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and the fringes of western UP. It extended from the Siwaliks in the north to the Arabian Sea in the south, and from the Makran coast of Baluchistan in the west to Meerut in the north-east.
- Nearly 2800 Harappan sites have so far been identified in the subcontinent. They relate to the early, mature, and late phases of Harappan culture.
- Of the mature phase sites, two most important cities were Harappa in Punjab and Mohenjo-daro (literally, the mound of the dead) in Sindh, both forming parts of Pakistan. Situated at a distance of 483 km, they were linked by the Indus.
- A third city lay at Chanhudaro about 130 km south of Mohenjo-daro in Sindh, and a fourth at Lothal in Gujarat at the head of the Gulf of Cambay. A fifth city lay at Kalibangan, which means black bangles, in northern Rajasthan. A sixth, called Banawali, is situated in Hissar district in Haryana.
- It saw two cultural phases, pre-Harappan and Harappan, similar to that of Kalibangan.
- The Harappan culture is traceable in its mature and flourishing stage to all these six places, as also to the coastal cities of Sutkagendor and Surkotada, each of which is marked by a citadel.
- The later Harappan phase is traceable to Rangpur and Rojdi in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat. In addition, Dholavira, lying in the Kutch area of Gujarat, has Harappan fortification and all the three phases of the Harappan culture.
- These phases are also manifested in Rakhigarhi which is situated on the Ghaggar in Haryana and is much larger than Dholavira.
- In comparative terms, Dholavira covers 50 ha but Harappa 150 ha and Rakhigarhi 250 ha. The largest site is Mohenjo-daro, which covers 500 ha.



The Indus valley civilisation is also called the Harappan culture. Archaeologists use the term “culture” for a group of objects, distinctive in style, that are usually found together within a specific geographical area and period of time. In the case of the Harappan culture, these distinctive objects include seals, beads, weights, stone blades and even baked bricks. These objects were found from areas as far apart as Afghanistan, Jammu, Baluchistan (Pakistan) and Gujarat. Named after Harappa, the first site where this unique culture was discovered the civilisation is dated between c. 2600 and 1900 BCE.

Town Planning and Structures

- Both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had a citadel or acropolis, occupied by members of the ruling class. Below the citadel in each city lay a lower town with brick houses, that were inhabited by the common people.

- The arrangement of the houses in the cities is that they followed a grid system, with roads cutting across one another virtually at right angles. Mohenjo-daro scored over Harappa in terms of structures.
- The most important public place of Mohenjo-daro seems to have been the great bath, comprising the tank which is situated in the citadel mound, and is a fine example of beautiful brickwork. It measures 11.88×7.01 m and 2.43 m deep. Flights of steps at either end lead to the surface, and there are side rooms for changing clothes. The floor of the bath was made of burnt bricks. Water was drawn from a large well in an adjacent room, and an outlet from the corner of the bath led to a drain. The great bath was primarily intended for ritual bathing. The large tank found in Dholavira may be compared to the great bath.
- In Mohenjo-daro, the largest building is a granary, 45.71 m long and 15.23 m wide. In the citadel of Harappa, however, we find as many as six granaries. A series of brick platforms formed the basis for two rows of six granaries. Each granary measured 15.23×6.09 m and lay within a few metres of the river bank. The combined floor space of the twelve units would be about 838 sq. m.
- To the south of the granaries at Harappa lay working floors consisting of the rows of circular brick platforms. Wheat and barley were found in the crevices of the floors. Harappa also had two-roomed barracks which possibly accommodated labourers. In the southern part of Kalibangan too, there are brick platforms, which may have been used for granaries.
- The drainage system of Mohenjo-daro was very impressive. In almost all the cities, every house, large or small, had its own courtyard and bathroom. In Kalibangan many houses had their own wells. Water flowed from the house to the streets which had drains. Sometimes these drains were covered with bricks and sometimes with stone slabs. The remains of streets and drains have also been found at Banawali.



Kalibangan and Lothal had fire altars, where sacrifices may have been performed. It is on the Citadel that the evidence of structures that were probably used for special public purposes were found- This include the warehouse – a massive structure of which the lower brick portions remain, while the upper portions, probably of wood, decayed long ago.

✓ Number of wells in Mohenjodaro was about 700.

Agriculture

The furrows discovered in the pre-Harappan phase at Kalibangan indicate that the fields were ploughed in Rajasthan during the Harappan period. Stone sickles may have been used for harvesting the crops.

- *Gabarbands* or *nalas* enclosed by dams for storing water were a feature in parts of Baluchistan and Afghanistan.
- Two types of wheat and barley were grown. A substantial quantity of barley was discovered at Banawali.
- As early as 1800 BC, the people of Lothal grew rice, the remains of which have been found. Food grains were stored in huge granaries in both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, and possibly in Kalibangan.
- The Indus people were the earliest people to produce cotton, and because of this, the Greeks called the area Sindon which is derived from Sindh.



- ✓ Cotton was probably grown at Mehrgarh from about 7000 years ago. Actual pieces of cloth were found attached to the lid of a silver vase and some copper objects at Mohenjodaro.
- ✓ Millets are found from sites in Gujarat. Terracotta models of the plough have been found at sites in Cholistan and at Banawali (Haryana). Archaeologists have also found evidence of a ploughed field at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), associated with Early Harappan levels.
- ✓ Traces of canals have been found at the Harappan site of Shortughai in Afghanistan, but not in Punjab or Sind. water reservoirs found in Dholavira (Gujarat) may have been used to store water for agriculture.

Domestication of Animals

- Evidence of the horse comes from a superficial level of Mohenjodaro and from a doubtful terracotta figurine from Lothal. The remains of a horse are reported from Surkotada, situated in west Gujarat, and relate to around 2000 BC
 - Harappans in Gujarat produced rice and domesticated elephants which was not the case with the Mesopotamians.
- ✓ Terracotta toy models of bullock carts suggest that this was one important means of transporting goods and people across land routes.

Technology and Crafts

- ❖ The impurities of the ores show that copper was obtained from the Khetri copper mines of Rajasthan, and from Baluchistan. Tin was possibly brought from Afghanistan, although its old workings are stated to have been found in Hazaribagh and Bastar. The bronze tools and weapons recovered from the Harappan sites contain a smaller percentage of tin.
- ❖ A piece of woven cotton has been recovered from Mohenjo-daro, and textile impressions have been found on several objects. Spindle whorls were used for spinning. Weavers wove cloth of wool and cotton. Huge brick structures suggest that bricklaying was an important craft, and attest to the existence of a class of masons. The Harappans also practised boat-making. Seal making and terracotta manufacturing were also important crafts.



The Harappans probably got copper from present-day Rajasthan, and even from Oman in West Asia. Tin, which was mixed with copper to produce bronze, may have been brought from present-day Afghanistan and Iran. Gold could have come all the way from present-day Karnataka, and precious stones from present-day Gujarat, Iran and Afghanistan.

- ✓ Miniature pots of faience, perhaps used as perfume bottles, are found mostly in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, and there are none from small settlements like Kalibangan. All the gold jewellery found at Harappan sites was recovered from hoards.
- ✓ Red colour of carnelian was obtained by firing the yellowish raw material and beads at various stages of production. Nodules were chipped into rough shapes, and then finely flaked into the final form. Grinding, polishing and drilling completed the process.
- ✓ Specialised drills have been found at Chanhudaro, Lothal and Dholavira. copper was also probably brought from Oman, on the southeastern tip of the Arabian peninsula. A distinctive type of vessel, a large Harappan jar coated with a thick layer of black clay has been found at



Omani sites. Such thick coatings prevent the percolation of liquids.

- ✓ Mesopotamian texts mention contact with regions named Dilmun (probably the island of Bahrain), Magan and Meluhha, possibly the Harappan region. They mention the products from Meluhha: carnelian, lapis lazuli, copper, gold, and varieties of wood. communication with Oman, Bahrain or Mesopotamia was by sea. Mesopotamian texts refer to Meluhha as a land of seafarers.

Trade and Commerce

- ❖ The Harappans had commercial links with Rajasthan, and also with Afghanistan and Iran. They set up a trading colony in northern Afghanistan which evidently facilitated trade with Central Asia. Their cities also had commercial links with the people of the Tigris and the Euphrates basins.



- ✓ There is evidence in the Khetri area for what archaeologists call the Ganeshwar-Jodhpura culture, with its distinctive non-Harappan pottery and an unusual wealth of copper objects.
- ✓ They established settlements such as Nageshwar and Balakot in areas where shell was available. Other such sites were Shortughai, in far-off Afghanistan, near the best source of lapis lazuli, a blue stone that was apparently very highly valued, and Lothal which was near sources of carnelian (from Bharuch in Gujarat), steatite (from south Rajasthan and north Gujarat) and metal (from Rajasthan).
- ✓ Another strategy for procuring raw materials may have been to send expeditions to areas such as the Khetri region of Rajasthan (for copper) and south India (for gold).

Social Organization

- ❖ Only two localities are attributed to the city of Harappa, its structure evidences three distinct localities, and the latter is true also of Kalibangan and Dholavira. The citadel or the first locality was where the ruling class lived and the lowest tower was where the common people dwelt.



- ✓ At burials in Harappan sites the dead were generally laid in pits. In the excavations at the cemetery in Harappa in the mid-1980s, an ornament consisting of three shell rings, a jasper (a kind of semi-precious stone) bead and hundreds of micro beads was found near the skull of a male.

Polity

- ❖ In the Harappan culture, the citadel may have been the seat of sovereign power, the middle town may have been the area where the bureaucrats lived or the seat of government, and the great granary at Mohenjodaro may have been the treasury. A heap of sling stones and the depiction of a soldier on a potsherd at Surkotada may suggest a standing army.

Religious Practices

- ❖ In Harappa numerous terracotta figurines of women have been found.
 - ✓ A stone statue was labelled and continues to be known as the “priest-king”. The Male Deity in the Indus Valley

- ❖ The male deity(maybe) is represented on a seal. This god(maybe) has three-horned heads, and is represented in the sitting posture of a yogi, with one leg placed above the other. This god is surrounded by an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and below his throne there is a buffalo, and at his feet two deer.

Tree and Animal Worship

- ❖ The people of the Indus region also worshipped trees. Animals were also worshipped in Harappan times, and many of them are represented on seals. The most important of them is the one horned animal unicorn which may be identified with the rhinoceros. Next in importance is the humped bull

The Harappan Script

- ❖ The Harappans invented the art of writing.

Weights and Measures

- ✓ Exchanges were regulated by a precise system of weights, usually made of a stone called chert and generally cubical with no markings. lower denominations of weights were binary (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, etc. up to 12,800), while the higher denominations followed the decimal system.

Harappan Pottery

- ❖ The Harappans had great expertise in the use of the potter's wheel.



Seals and Sealings

- ❖ The greatest artistic creations of the Harappan culture are seals. About 2000 seals have been found, Seals were made of steatite or faience and served as symbols of authority.



Images

- ❖ The Harappan artisans made beautiful images of metal.

Terracotta Figurines

- ❖ There are many figurines made of fire-baked earthen clay, commonly called terracotta.



Stone Work

- ❖ The citadel of Dholavira built of stone is a monumental work and the most impressive among the Harappan citadels discovered so far. In Dholavira, dressed stone is used in masonry with mud bricks, which is remarkable. Stone slabs is used in three types of burials in Dholavira, and in one of these, above the grave there is a circle of stones resembling a Megalithic stone circle.

End of the Indus Culture

- ❖ It is difficult to account for this cultural collapse. The environmental factor may have been important. In the Harappan zone, both the Yamuna and Sutlej moved away from the Sarasvati or the Hakra around 1700 BC. This meant loss in water supply and other varied factors compiled to cause the end.