

CBSE Class 12 History

Part-I: Chapter 1

BRICKS, BEADS AND BONES: The Harappan Civilisation

Revision Notes

Key concepts in nutshells

1. Period:-

- i. Early Harappan culture - Before 2600 BCE
- ii. Mature Harappa culture - 2600 BCE to 1900 BCE
- iii. Late Harappa culture - After 1900 BCE
- iv. Extent of Harappan civilisation:-
 - i. Northern boundary- Manda Southern Boundary- Daimabad
 - ii. Eastern boundary- Alamgirpur Western boundary- Sutkagendor Characteristics of the Harappan Civilisation.

Time Line 1

Major Periods in Early Indian Archaeology

2 million BP (Before Present) Lower Palaeolithic

80,000 Middle Palaeolithic

35,000 Upper Palaeolithic

12,000 Mesolithic

10,000 Neolithic (early agriculturists and pastoralists)

6,000 Chalcolithic (first use of copper)

2600 BCE Harappan civilization

1000 BCE Early iron, megalithic burials

600 BCE – 400 CE Early Historic

I. Subsistence strategies

- i. The Harappans ate wide range of plants and animal products.
- ii. Animal bones found at Harappan sites include those of cattle, sheep, goat, buffalo and pig.
- iii. The bones of wild species found suggest the Harappans hunted these animals themselves or obtained meat from other hunting communities. Bones of fish and fowl are also found.

iv. Agricultural technologies:

Representations on seals and terracotta sculpture indicate that the bull was known, and archaeologists extrapolate from this that oxen were used for ploughing.

Terracotta models of the plough have been found at sites in Cholistan and at Banawali. Evidence of a ploughed field at Kalibangan has also been found. Traces of irrigation canals have been found at Shortugahi in Afghanistan. Traces of rainwater harvesting found in Dholavira in Gujarat through water reservoirs.

II. MOHENJODARO: A planned urban city

Two Sections of settlement:-

I. The Citadel

These were constructed on mud brick platforms and were walled, which meant that it was physically separated from the Lower Town

These include the warehouse - a massive structure of which the lower brick portions remain.

The upper portions, probably of wood, was – the Great Bath. It was a large rectangular tank in courtyard surrounded by a corridor on all four sides.

II. The Lower Town

It had carefully planned drainage system. The roads and streets were laid out

along an approximate “grid” pattern.

It provides examples of residential buildings. Many were centred on a courtyard, with rooms on all sides.

Every house had its own bathroom paved with bricks, with drains connected through the wall to the street drains.

The uniqueness of the structure, as well as the context in which it was found (the Citadel, with several distinctive buildings), has led scholars to suggest that it was meant for some kind of a special ritual bath.

III. Social differences

Burials: At burials in Harappan sites, the dead were generally laid in pits. Sometimes, there were differences in the way the burial pit was made. Some graves contain pottery and ornaments, perhaps indicating a belief that these could be used in the afterlife. Jewellery has been found in burials of both men and women.

Looking for “luxuries”: The artefacts are classified as utilitarian and luxuries by the archaeologists. Utilitarian objects are of daily use made fairly easily out of ordinary materials such as stone or clay. Luxuries are those items if they are rare or made from costly, non-local materials or with complicated technologies. The situation becomes more complicated when we find what seem to be articles of daily use, such as spindle whorls made of rare materials such as faience.

IV. Craft Production

Chanhudaro is a tiny settlement exclusively devoted to craft production, including bead-making, shell-cutting, metal-working, seal-making and weight-making.

The variety of materials used to make beads is remarkable.

Techniques for making beads differed according to the material.

Nodules were chipped into rough shapes, and then finely flaked into the final form.

Specialised drills have been found at Chanhudaro, Lothal and more recently at

Dholavira.

Nageshwar and Balakot were specialised centres for making shell objects – including bangles, ladles and inlay.

Centres of production: Archaeologists identified centres of production by looking for raw materials and tools used.

Waste is one of the best indicators of craft work. Sometimes, larger waste pieces were used up to make smaller objects.

These traces suggest that apart from small, specialised centres, craft production was also undertaken in large cities such as Mohenjodaro and Harappa.

V. Strategies for procuring material

Procured from the subcontinent and beyond: The Harappans procured materials for craft production in various ways.

Terracotta toy models of bullock carts suggest that this was one important means of transporting goods and people across land routes.

Another strategy for procuring raw materials may have been to send expeditions, which established communication with local communities.

Contact with distant lands: archaeological finds suggest that copper was also probably brought from Oman, on the southeastern tip of the Arabian peninsula. Mesopotamian texts datable to the third millennium BCE refer to copper coming from a region called Magan, perhaps a name for Oman.

Other archaeological finds include Harappan seals, weights, dice and beads which suggests contacts with regions named Dilmun (probably the island of Bahrain), Magan and Meluhha, possibly the Harappan region.

It is likely that communication with Oman, Bahrain or Mesopotamia was by sea. Mesopotamian texts refer to Meluhha as a land of seafarers. Besides, we find depictions of ships and boats on seals.

VI. Seals, Script, Weights

Seals and sealings were used to facilitate long distance communication. The

sealing also conveyed the identity of the sender.

An enigmatic script: Harappan seals usually have a line of writing, probably containing the name and title of the owner. Scholars have also suggested that the motif (generally an animal) conveyed a meaning to those who could not read. Most inscriptions are short, the longest containing about 26 signs. Although the script remains undeciphered to date, it was evidently not alphabetical as it has just too many signs – somewhere between 375 and 400. The script was written from right to left.

Weights: Exchanges were regulated by a precise system of weights, usually made of a stone called **Chert** and generally cubical, with no markings.

Metal scale-pans have also been found.

VII. Ancient Authority

There are indications of complex decisions being taken and implemented in Harappan society.

Palaces and kings: A large building found at Mohenjodaro was labelled as a palace by archaeologists but no spectacular finds were associated with it. A stone statue was labelled and continues to be known as the “priest-king”.

Some archaeologists are of the opinion that Harappan society had no rulers, whereas other archaeologist feels that there was no single ruler but several rulers, Mohenjodaro had a separate ruler, Harappa another. While some believe that there was a single state.

VIII. The End of the Civilisation

There is evidence that by c. 1800 BCE most of the Mature Harappan sites in regions such as Cholistan had been abandoned. Simultaneously, there was an expansion of population into new settlements in Gujarat, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh.

Several explanation for the decline of Harappan civilisation are climatic changes, deforestation, excessive floods, the shifting and/or drying up of rivers.

The end was evidenced by the disappearance of seals, the script, distinctive beads and pottery, the shift from a standardised weight system to the use of local weights; and the decline and abandonment of cities.

IX. Discovering the Harappan Civilisation

When Harappan cities fell into ruin, people gradually forgot all about them.

Cunningham's confusion: The first Director-General of the ASI, Cunningham used the accounts left by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims who had visited the subcontinent between the fourth and seventh centuries CE to locate early settlements. A site like Harappa, which was not part of the itinerary of the Chinese pilgrims and was not known as an Early Historic city.

A Harappan seal was given to Cunningham by an Englishman. He noted the object, but unsuccessfully tried to place it within the time-frame with which he was familiar.

It is not surprising that he missed the significance of Harappa.

A new old civilisation: In 1924, John Marshall, Director-General of the ASI, announced the discovery of a new civilisation in the Indus valley to the world.

It was then that the world knew not only of a new civilisation, but also of one contemporaneous with Mesopotamia.

Marshall tended to excavate along regular horizontal units, measured uniformly throughout the mound, ignoring the stratigraphy of the site. This meant that all the artefacts recovered from the same unit were grouped together.

New techniques and questions: Since the 1980s, there has also been growing international interest in Harappan archaeology.

Specialists from the subcontinent and abroad have been jointly working at both Harappa and Mohenjodaro.

They are using modern scientific techniques including surface exploration to recover traces of clay, stone, metal and plant and animal remains as well as to minutely analyse every scrap of available evidence. These explorations promise to yield interesting results in the future.

Time Line 2

Major Developments in Harappan Archaeology
Nineteenth

Century

1875

Report of Alexander Cunningham on Harappan seal

Twentieth

Century

1921

M.S Vats begins excavations at Harappa

1925 Excavations begin at Mohenjodaro

1946 R.E.M. Wheeler excavates at Harappa

1955 S.R. Rao begins excavations at Lothal

1960 B.B. Lal and B.K. Thapar begin excavations at Kalibangan

1974 M.R. Mughal begins exploration in Bahawalpur

1980 A team of German and Italian archaeologists begins surface exploration

at Mohenjodaro

1986 American team begins excavations at Harappa

1990 R.S. Bisht begins excavations at Dholavira

I. **Problems of Piecing Together the Past**

It is not the Harappan script that helps in understanding the ancient civilisation.

Rather, it is material evidence that allows archaeologists to better reconstruct Harappan life. This material could be pottery, tools, ornaments, household objects, etc.

Organic materials such as cloth, leather, wood and reeds generally decompose, especially in tropical regions. What survive are stone, burnt clay (or terracotta), metal, etc.

Classifying finds: One simple principle of classification is in terms of material, such as stone, clay, metal, bone, ivory, etc. The second, is in terms of function. Archaeologists have to decide whether, for instance, an artefact is a tool or an ornament, or both, or something meant for ritual use.

Sometimes, archaeologists have to take recourse to indirect evidence. For instance, though there are traces of cotton at some Harappan sites, to find out about clothing we have to depend on indirect evidence including depictions in sculpture.

Problems of interpretation: Early archaeologists thought that certain objects which seemed unusual or unfamiliar may have had a religious significance.

Attempts have also been made to reconstruct religious beliefs and practices by examining seals, some of which seem to depict ritual scenes.

Others, with plant motifs, are thought to indicate nature worship.

Several reconstructions remain speculative at present.