

## Urban Planning

The Harappan Civilization's most important feature is its town planning. Each and every Indus city was divided into two parts — the citadel (the elevated area) and the 'lower town'. Prominent buildings of the citadel were the granary, the assembly hall and the Great Bath. The cities, both in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, were located on the river banks. The streets were aligned following a grid pattern. This is one of the most defining characteristics of this civilization. The main streets, some as wide as 30ft, were laid out in accordance with the grid plan. These were some of the features of the cities.

- The streets were straight and intersected each other at right angles, dividing the cities into several large rectangular blocks. Fire-burnt bricks were used for paving the streets. Street corners were rounded in order to make the movement of heavy carts easier.
- There were channels of water-supply drainage and granaries, paved bathrooms and sewage. All the waste water from the house drains was emptied into the street drains. Such an advanced sewage system was one of the most distinguishing features of the Harappan cities.
- Each house had a courtyard and the kitchens were generally placed in a covered corner of the courtyard.
- The buildings were made of brick and wood.
- All the houses had a good ventilation system and spacious rooms with bathrooms.
- The doors and windows of the houses opened on the street side and not on the main road.



▲ Drains at Mohenjodaro

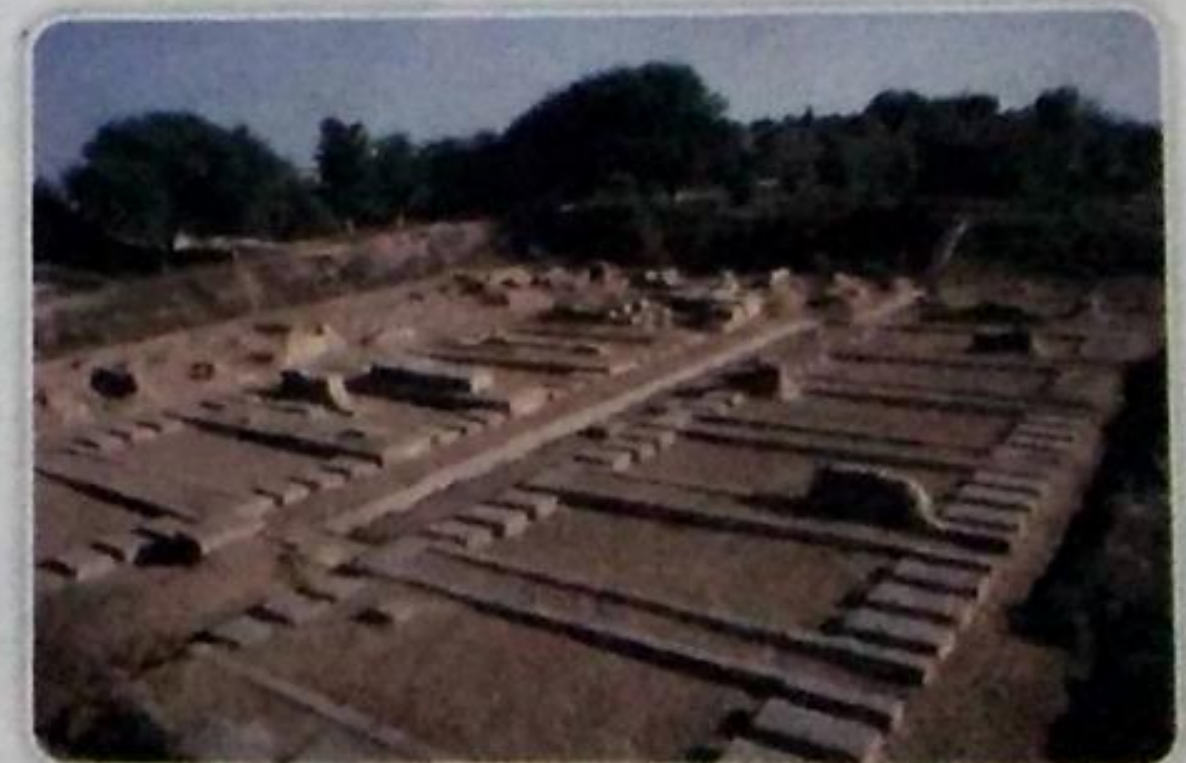
The contribution of the Harappans to architecture is evident from the two magnificent public buildings — the Great Bath and the granaries.

## Great Bath

It was one of the largest and most significant structures in Mohenjodaro, measuring  $108 \times 180$ ft, with a bathing pool 39ft long, 28ft wide and 8ft deep. It consisted of an open quadrangle and verandahs on four sides. The water for the Great Bath was supplied by a well situated nearby. The pool was cleaned periodically by discharging the water into a drain connected to the main drain on the street. The pool was made watertight with burnt bricks and mortar lined with bitumen and gypsum. There were rooms for changing clothes. The Great Bath may have been used as a religious ritualistic bath.

## Granaries

The granaries were found at four different sites — Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Lothal and Kalibangan. At Mohenjodaro, it measured  $45.71\text{m} \times 15.23\text{m}$ . At Harappa, each of them measured  $15.23\text{m} \times 6.09\text{m}$ . There were working floors which consisted of circular brick platforms. These floors



▲ Granary



were used for threshing grains. The granaries had proper ventilation to prevent grains from becoming mildewed.

## Trade Practices

The Harappans had a highly developed trade system. They shared trade relations with other parts of India as well as many other countries. Trading activities were carried out both internally as well as externally.

- Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Lothal were centres for metallurgy.
- Lothal and Chanhudaro were places where beads were manufactured.
- External trade was carried on extensively. It is evident from the Harappan artefacts and seals that have been unearthed in other parts of the world. Mesopotamian evidences indicate that trade relationships existed between them and the Harappans sometime around 2350 BCE.
- Lothal was an important trading coastal town from where trade with Mesopotamia and other West Asian cities was carried out.
- Gold was imported from Karnataka and Afghanistan. Copper was mainly imported from Rajasthan and South India.
- Evidences prove that the barter system was the most popular method of trade.



▲ Ship engraved on seal

## Review

1. Describe the extent of the Harappan Civilization.
2. Why do you think town planning was an important characteristic feature of the Harappan Civilization?
3. Describe the trading activities carried out by the Harappans.

## Points to Remember

- The Great Bath, citadel, seals, Lothal



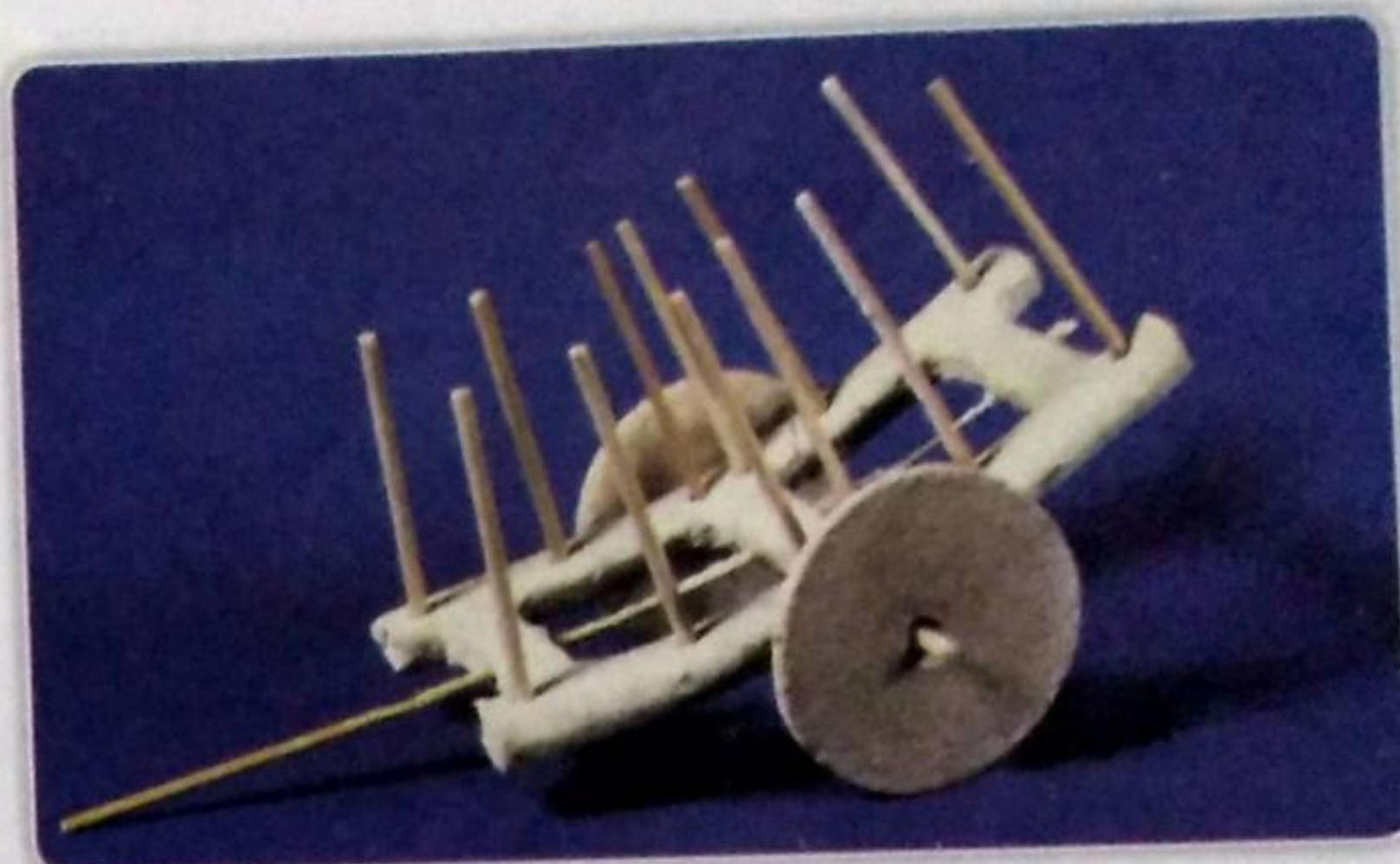
## Arts and Crafts

The artistic skills of the Harappans are reflected in some of the pieces of art found in the excavations such as stone statues, seals and terracotta like these.

- **Dancing girl:** This statue shows a girl in a dancing posture with her right hand resting on her hip. The left arm is almost fully covered with a series of bangles made of ivory or bone. Her hair is neatly tied into a bun and the head is slightly tilted backwards. This piece of art is **made of bronze through a special method** known as the *cire perdue* or **lost wax process**. The wax figure was first covered with a coating of clay. It was then heated which in turn melted the wax. The hollow mould which was thus created was now filled with the molten metal, bronze, which took the shape of the object.



▲ Dancing girl



▲ Toy cart

- **Bearded man:** This stone sculpture shows a man with trimmed beard, half-closed eyes and with a shawl wrapped around his shoulders. It is assumed to be a figure representing a **priest or a noble man**.

- **Terracotta figures:** The Harappans used fire-baked clay or terracotta to make toys and objects of worship. The terracotta figurine of the **Mother Goddess** is a unique piece of sculpture. Astonishingly ornate, this large figurine from Mohenjodaro is an **excellent example of the technical maturity that Harappan artisans had acquired in clay-modelling and baking**. The figure of the Mother Goddess is adorned



▲ Terracotta figurines



with necklaces with cylindrical pendants and an elaborate headgear. The eyes are made up of two round pellets of clay. The recovery of a large number of Mother Goddess figurines almost from every excavated site suggests that the Mother Goddess worship cult was widespread in the Indus Valley Civilization.

## Occupation and Livelihood

The main occupation of the Harappan people was agriculture. Evidences suggest that it was a prosperous civilization. Hence, people had adequate time to engage into other activities like craft making. Some of the widely practised art forms were these.

- **Metal work:** Metals such as copper and bronze were used to make vessels, ornaments, figurines, tools and weapons.
- **Beads and ornaments:** Precious metals and stone such as carnelian, agate and jasper were used to make beads which were used in jewellery. Ornaments like necklaces, armlets, nose rings, head dress and finger rings were worn both by men and women.
- **Other crafts:** These included **pottery making, spinning, carving and weaving.** Many seals have been found with engravings of bull, elephants and unicorns. They even painted pottery with different colours and made geometrical patterns on it.



▲ Mother Goddess



▲ Ornaments

## Script

The Harappans had developed the **art of writing** in which the characters were largely **pictorial but included many abstract signs** as well.

Thousands of inscribed objects have been found in the Indus Valley Civilization. Nearly **90 per cent of them were excavated from the sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro.** Among these objects are **seals**, mostly **carved on steatite**, presenting different shapes, the most common one being the square or rectangular shape. Some of the seals had the image of an animal with a short inscription. The precise use of these items is still unclear. The **inscriptions** are thought to have been **written from right to left.** In spite of many attempts at decipherment, this largely pictorial script is yet to be understood. No underlying language has been identified so far.

There are a number of factors that prevent scholars from discovering the mystery of the Indus script.



▲ Pottery



- Languages of ancient times, such as Egyptian, were deciphered as a result of the recovery of bilingual inscriptions by comparing an unknown script with a known one. Unfortunately, no bilingual inscriptions have yet been found with which the Indus script can be compared.
- Another obstacle is the fact that all of the inscriptions found so far are relatively short, less than thirty signs. This means that analysing recurring sign patterns, another technique that can help in finding the meaning of a writing system, cannot be successfully performed for the Indus script.
- The last important reason why the Indus script remains a mystery and possibly the most debated of all is that the language (or languages) that the script represents is still unknown.

## Religious Practices

Most evidences about the religious life of the Harappans come from the excavated seals, terracotta and metal figurines. The religion that they followed is broadly termed as Hinduism but there were no temples. Some of the religious practices are discussed here.

### Forms of worship

These were some of the forms that were worshipped.

- **Worship of Mother Goddess:** The Mother Goddess was believed to represent the Earth. Several terracotta figurines have been found in the Harappan cities with her impression. Some of the figures are smoke stained which suggest that people burnt incense sticks before the figures. They believed in Mother Goddess as a source of energy of creation.
- **Worship of male deity:** A horned three-faced deity who is seated in the posture of a yogi with a horned head dress and is surrounded by animals, an elephant, a tiger, a buffalo, a rhinoceros and two deer at his feet, is depicted in a seal. It is intended to be one of the earliest depictions of the Hindu god Shiva. So, the seal is also known as the Pashupati seal.
- **Nature and its elements:** The Harappan people worshipped trees, animals, birds and elements of nature such as fire and water. The most common animal found on these seals is the bull. They also worshipped the unicorn and some form of *naga* (cobra). The Peepal tree was regarded as a sacred tree.



▲ Mother Goddess

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### Charms and amulets

The Harappans believed in magic and charm as indicated by the **amulets** found at the Harappan sites. It proves that they believed in the existence of ghosts or rather souls.

### Burial rites

It is believed that while some of the Harappan people buried their dead, others cremated them and put their ashes in urns.

### Decline of the Harappan Civilization

The Indus Valley Civilization declined sometime around 1800 BCE. There is no clear evidence which suggests its decline. Some of the popularly believed reasons are:

- **natural calamities** such as floods and earthquakes,
- **the invasion by the Aryans and eventual destruction**, as believed by some historians like Mortimer Wheeler, or
- **deforestation** of the areas that would have led to environmental imbalance.
- Wood was needed to produce bronze, jewellery, bake bricks and make boats and furniture. It is perceived by some schools of historians that this may be one of the reasons that led to the decline of the civilization.

The Harappan culture has, thus, left an indelible mark on the history of India. The specialised skills, architecture and structures, planning of the cities, art and craft and trade practices are some of the distinct features of this civilization which sets it apart from other contemporary civilizations. The ingenuity of the Harappan culture showed that we belong to an urban civilization which was unique in its time.

### Review

1. Why has the Indus script not been deciphered till date?
2. What do you know about the religious practices of the Harappans?
3. What does the discovery of amulets prove about the beliefs of the Harappans?

### Points to Remember

- The human figurines such as the dancing girl made of bronze and the stone statue of the bearded man represent the artistic brilliance of the Harappans.
- Terracotta artefacts found in the excavations were supposed to be used as toys and objects of worship.
- Metal works, beads and ornament-making, weaving and pottery were some of the crafts practised by the Harappans.
- The religious practices of the Harappans were centred around the worship of nature and its elements. Forms such as the Mother Goddess and Pashupati were also worshipped.
- The Harappan civilization declined sometime around 1800 BCE. Natural calamities, foreign invasions and deforestation are considered to be some of the reasons behind its decline.



Answer the following questions.

- With reference to Harappan civilisation, describe the features of the following,

- a. The town planning.
- b. The drainage system.
- c. The houses of the people.

- With reference to the art and crafts of the Harappan civilisation, describe the following

- a. The dancing girl.
- b. The bearded man.
- c. The figurine of Mother Goddess.