

THE STORY OF HARAPPA

Very often, old buildings have a story to tell. Nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, when railway lines were being laid down for the first time in the Punjab, engineers stumbled upon the site of Harappa in present-day Pakistan. To them, it seemed like a mound that was a rich source of ready made, high quality bricks. So they carried off thousands of bricks from the walls of the old buildings of the city to build railway lines. Many buildings were completely destroyed.

Then, about eighty years ago, archaeologists found the site, and realised that this was one of the oldest cities in the subcontinent. As this was the first city to be discovered, all other sites from where similar buildings (and other things) were found were described as Harappan. These cities developed about 4700 years ago.

Very often, old buildings are pulled down to make way for new construction. Do you think it is important to preserve old buildings?



WHAT WAS SPECIAL ABOUT THESE CITIES?

Many of these cities were divided into two or more parts. Usually, the part to the west was smaller but higher. Archaeologists describe this as the citadel. Generally, the part to the east was larger but lower. This is called the lower town. Very often walls of baked brick were built around each part. The bricks were so well made that they have lasted for thousands of years. The bricks were laid in an interlocking pattern and that made the walls strong.

In some cities, special buildings were constructed on the citadel. For example, in Mohenjodaro, a very special tank, which archaeologists call the Great Bath, was built in this area. This was lined with bricks, coated with plaster, and made water-tight with a layer of natural tar. There were steps leading down to it from two sides, while there were rooms on all sides. Water was probably brought in from a well, and drained out after use. Perhaps important people took a dip in this tank on special occasions.

Other cities, such as Kalibangan and Lothal had fire altars, where sacrifices may have been performed. And some cities like Mohenjodaro, Harappa, and Lothal had elaborate store houses.



HOUSES, DRAINS AND STREETS

Generally, houses were either one or two storeys high, with rooms built around a courtyard. Most houses had a separate bathing area, and some had wells to supply water.

Many of these cities had covered drains. Notice how carefully these were laid out, in straight lines. Although you cannot see it, each drain had a gentle slope so that water could flow through it. Very often, drains in houses were connected to those on the streets and smaller drains led into bigger ones. As the drains were covered, inspection holes were provided at intervals to clean them. All three — houses, drains and streets — were probably planned and built at the same time.

LIFE IN THE CITY

A Harappan city was a very busy place. There were people who planned the construction of special buildings in the city. These were probably the rulers. It is likely that the rulers sent people to distant lands to get metal, precious stones, and other things that they wanted. They may have kept the most valuable objects, such as ornaments of gold and silver, or beautiful beads, for themselves. And there were scribes, people who knew how to write, who helped prepare the seals, and perhaps wrote on other materials that have not survived.

IN THE EARLIEST CITIES

Besides, there were men and women, crafts persons, making all kinds of things — either in their own homes, or in special workshops. People were travelling to distant lands or returning with raw materials and, perhaps, stories. Many terracotta toys have been found and a long time ago children must have played with these. Make a list of the people who lived in the city. Were any of these people listed as living in villages such as Mehrgarh?



NEW CRAFTS IN THE CITY

Let us look at some of the objects that were made and found in Harappan cities. Most of the things that have been found by archaeologists are made of stone, shell and metal, including copper, bronze, gold and silver. Copper and bronze were used to make tools, weapons, ornaments and vessels. Gold and silver were used to make ornaments and vessels. Perhaps the most striking finds are those of beads, weights, and blades.



The Harappans also made seals out of stone. These are generally rectangular and usually have an animal carved on them.

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. Archaeologists have also found spindle whorls, made of terracotta and faience. These were used to spin thread.

Many of the things that were produced were probably the work of specialists. A specialist is a person who is trained to do only one kind of work, for example, cutting stone, or polishing beads, or carving seals.

Not everybody could have been a specialist. We do not know whether only men were specialists or only women were specialists. Perhaps some women and men may have been specialists.

IN SEARCH OF RAW MATERIALS

Raw materials are substances that are either found naturally (such as wood, or ores of metals) or produced by farmers or herders. These are then processed to produce finished goods. For example, cotton, produced by farmers, is a raw material that may be processed to make cloth. While some of the raw materials that the Harappans used were available locally, many items such as copper, tin, gold, silver and precious stones had to be brought from distant places.



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.



FOOD FOR PEOPLE IN THE CITIES

While many people lived in the cities, others living in the countryside grew crops and reared animals. These farmers and herders supplied food to crafts persons, scribes and rulers in the cities. We know from remains of plants that the Harappans grew wheat, barley, pulses, peas, rice, sesame, linseed and mustard.

A new tool, the plough, was used to dig the earth for turning the soil and planting seeds. While real ploughs, which were probably made of wood, have not survived, toy models have been found. As this region does not receive heavy rainfall, some form of irrigation may have been used. This means that water was stored and supplied to the fields when the plants were growing.

The Harappans reared cattle, sheep, goat and buffalo. Water and pastures were available around settlements. However, in the dry summer months large herds of animals were probably taken to greater distances in search of grass and water. They also collected fruits like ber, caught fish and hunted wild animals like the antelope.



A CLOSER LOOK — HARAPPAN TOWNS IN GUJARAT

The city of Dholavira was located on Khadir Beyt in the Rann of Kutch, where there was fresh water and fertile soil. Unlike some of the other Harappan cities, which were divided into two parts, Dholavira was divided into three parts, and each part was surrounded with massive stone walls, with entrances through gateways. There was also a large open area in the settlement, where public ceremonies could be held. Other finds include large letters of the Harappan script that were carved out of white stone and perhaps inlaid in wood. This is a unique find as generally Harappan writing has been found on small objects such as seals.

The city of Lothal stood beside a tributary of the Sabarmati, in Gujarat, close to the Gulf of Khambat. It was situated near areas where raw materials such as semi-precious stones were easily available. This was an important centre for making objects out of stone, shell and metal. There was also a store house in the city. Many seals and sealings (the impression of seals on clay) were found in this storehouse.

A building that was found here was probably a workshop for making beads: pieces of stone, half made beads, tools for bead making, and finished beads have all been found here.

