

# Harappan Art

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The South Asian Proto historic period is well known for Harappan civilization. The settlements ranging from Ghaggar - Hakra and Gangetic plain , Punjab , Cholistan and Sindh also Makran and Gujarat.

Other river based civilisations contemporary to harappans were Mesopotamia, China , Egypt ,these civilisations are considered urban civilisations. **V.Gordon Childe** who propounded the 10 characteristics of urban centres , in which craft specialisation ,an important feature for development of an urban centre, also the abstract thinking of ideas contributing towards centralised control ,social stratification.

## **Civilisation Is Represented In Three Phases;**

### **1) Ravi phase 2) Kot Diji phase 3) Harappan phase**

Some of the urban characteristics of the civilisation began to be visible in the Kot diji phase but the major changes of urbanisation mainly took place in the Harappan phase.

Archeological studies of urbanism , craft specialization are considered major indicators of socio-economic complexity , stratification and centralised control.

**POSSEHL** points out some aspects which makes Harappan phase urban; social stratification, state organisation, settlement patterning etc. also the trade with Mesopotamia led to rapid development of Harappans around 2550 B.C.

Craft specialisation became evident in regionalisation era, **Kenoyer, Wright** comments that goods were distributed locally and regionally. Harappans did not produce its art per say; in its majority, most of the art it produced is utilitarian, votive and ritualistic in character.

**Architecture** as a visual form of art , the civilisation is famous for its excellent town planning skills , use of sun dried bricks, drainage system,granaries , citadel(great bath) etc. accompanied with excellent water supply through wells , apart from the river.

**Jensen**, in his study on Mohenjo-daro , talks of three basic architectural units, In first group he talks of several private houses situated toward a central space, with one or more private wells. Second group includes large houses with different sized rooms and different entrances. Perhaps the outer rooms served as living-workshops attached to central larger houses.

large public structures in third group, having open access from one area to another e.g. "Great Bath" , and the "granaries" ,the Great Bath, has N-S staircase , Bitumen coating ,and rooms nearby considered to be part of some religious activity.

Other architectural units , including the Stadium at Dholavira, the settlement is famous for pillar bases, made of dressed and polished stone , small columns in dholavira , perhaps used for preventing egress and ingress. From an artist point of view they are tapered.

## ***J. M Kenoyer Classifies the Harappan Crafts into different categories;***

- a) *Local rawmaterial and simple technologies – terracotta, housebuilding, ceramic production;*
- b) *Non-local material and simple technologies – stone working, Flint knapping ;*
- c) *Local rawmaterial and complex technologies – Bangal production;*
- d) *Non-local RawMaterial and complex technologies – seal production, metal working.*

**Objects made by craft specialists were thought to be important for supporting the state and therefore production was closely monitored and generally standardised.**

## ***Seals***

Large variety of seals, generally made up of steatite, sometimes made up of copper, faience and terracotta. Carved seals first appeared in kot diji phase sites like Kunal , Rehman dheri etc. generally the seals are square in shape and were

inscribed with variety of motives, animal - bull with or without hump, elephant, tiger , etc ,also depiction of trees and human figures (pashupati seal).

The complex nature of harappan iconography is evident from abstract designs like the ‘swastika’ Found on seals.

The pashupati seal , which is understood as a man with a horned headdress , in a seated posture (yogic) , on a raised platform and around him are 4 animals - elephant, tiger , rhinoceros ,bull , **huntington** believes that these animals represented economic life of harappans (dairy/meat).

**Shubhangna Atre** has identified the “pashupati” on the seal as a female divinity , whom she calls “lady of the beasts”and the animals behind her justify her appellation.

The various use of steatite not only as raw material but had significant socio-religious function also, even today similar material is used in various things (protective amulets, utilitarian work). The procurement of steatite would’ve involved medium long distance trades and the areas where these seals are found perhaps point towards social stratification, centralised control etc revealing socio-economic, political and religious aspects .

Boss type seals are circular or dome-shaped boss with a central hollow from Harappan phase 3A & 3B, also by 3C boss found on the square seals in convex form.**Fairservis** believe that different kinds of symbols on the seals may reflect some kind of clan system .

**Kenoyer** talks about the religious importance of the crafts , he says availability of terracotta figurines were confined to small areas but seals were common to large extent , reflecting importance to beliefs serving to maintain social and religious authority within and also among different settlements. situating craft areas inside fortified cities ,and in return of protection of goods and crafts , some taxation might be present in import of raw material and export of finished goods.

#### *Sculpture & Figurines*

The material, form ,decoration of the sculptures ,are believed that these were employed according to the concept Harappans represented , the symbolic importance and also the availability.

**Sharry R Clark** talks about the clay used for making figurines to show a connection of the figurine with mother earth.

**Huntington** says, "*they do not appear to be the tentative formulations one would expect in a beginning art tradition.*"

Female figurines are globular with conical breasts , depicted with headdresses wearing jewellery consisting of a short torque, necklace(multi-stringed), earrings and painted bangles ,85% of the figurines are decorated with narrow skirts.

The earlier representations were generally in seated positions with joined legs or sometimes with flattened lower bodies , by period 2 we see geometric decorations and by period 3 figurines with locked hairs (bun) became common.

The male body is often depicted with male genitalia also with exaggerated nipples, the genitalia apart from a physical representation perhaps of cultural significance also, **Clark** believes that mixed attributes in figurines (few) and consistency in representation of the upper body of male and female gives evidences towards of equality in notion towards sex and gender.

The two dimensional figurines made out of molds and adorned with necklaces , earpieces , narrow skirts , a few depicted with headdresses with no sex characteristics. These figurines are evident at sites like mohenjodaro & lothal.

In bronze sculptures the dancing girls from mohenjodaro is prominent With abnormal hand size , wearing bangles above the elbow in one hand , with hair bun, **Marshall** says that these ornaments adorned by the dancing girl may not be of bronze probably they’re made of shell and he relates the custom of wearing shell bangles above the elbow starting from the wrist ,common in India in the present times.

Apart from the dancing girl another bronze figure of a slender lady with a hair knot from mohenjodaro

Of the three dimensional stone statues, the two male figures are evident

- a) Red sandstone male torso
- B) Steatite bearded man

The bearded man is depicted with may be a robe covering the left shoulder and seems to be in a meditative position(half closed eyes) , with short beard style and with braided lines, ordinary sized nose, with armlet on right hand.

**Mackay** talks of the half closed eyes that maybe it was a one of features of yogic meditative state.

There is some kind of similarity within these sculptures with the sumerian sculptures like rigid head , shaved upper lip , eyebrows in relief position etc suggesting exchange of ideas i.e trade

### **Ornaments**

Variety of ornaments in different sizes, shapes (barrel shaped, disc shaped, cylindrical) with decorations-( incising or painted) with different quality of raw materials such as steatite , Carnelian , Lapis lazuli and other raw materials such as terracotta or faience were widely used.

In mature phase ;long biconical beads of terracotta painted in red, sometimes in order to imitate the stone beads , steatite was found colored in red and white ,incised or inlaid, similarly the same pattern was followed for faience beads.

The different varieties of bangles, beads styles and the raw materials in the harappan phase can be used in understanding how harappans wanted to differentiate a diverse urban population. Similar shapes, styles but different raw materials can be interpreted as the need to reinforce general cultural beliefs and aesthetics, this aspect of similar beads or bangles but different raw material is evident in all societies where valuable raw material was not available to all.

**J. M. KENOYER** Talks of the possibility;how there was a differentiation in society such as carnelian and gold ornaments were ornamented by people of higher status and the ornaments made from Terracotta may have been worn by people of lower status, he talks that how the there may have been hierarchization even among artist who working on carnelian and gold to that working on steatite and terracotta.

**Mackay** feels that Elite Crafts like long carnelian beads and copper objects manufactured at Sites like Chanhudaro, and artisans involved in production of local goods perhaps for trade are found at sites where there is resource concentration like Nageshwar [shell working site]

The formation of kin relations between producers and consumers , according to kenoyer may have been resulted from long distance trading (shell , agate bead trading) , and the maintenance of trade networks and the control of redistribution by authority or elites perhaps important for reinforcement of socio-economic order.

### **Pottery**

A wide variety of pottery, mostly wheel made , but some exceptions of handmade pottery also, pottery is generally of red clay with designs in black , decorated with fine geometric designs , several animal, plants and trees designs are also evident.The animal motifs continue from the early to the mature phase ,domestic as well as wild animals are seen on the pottery , like the Goat motif at amri, dog and elephant trunk motifs at rehman dheri etc.Harappan Pottery consists of glazed, polychrome, incised , perforated and knobbed.

The fine wares like pedestaled bowls, dishes and S-shaped jars. Plain pottery was also prevalent like medium storage jars with or without pointed bases,round based cooking pots etc.

Pottery Kilns spread across mohenjodaro , nausharo , chanhudaro etc suggesting firing of pottery.

To **sum up** we can say that the Harappans produced excellent quality of art , with aesthetic standards but was a part of say votive , ritual etc activity and the trade or exchange of goods could only be possible if there was a presence of surplus in the society, so that the abstract ideas and vivid imagination comes to being, thus producing art.

Standardised weights and seals reflect some kind of central authority but when we talk of standardised goods like pottery or ornaments perhaps reflects similar aesthetics.

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