

Early City-States in South Asia

Comparing the Harappan Phase and Early Historic Period

During the early to mid-third millennium B.C., the Harappan phase of the Indus Valley Tradition of Pakistan and western India developed one of the most extensive urban cultures in the Old World (Kenoyer 1991a; Shaffer 1991). Excavations have been carried out at numerous sites during the past seventy-five years and are still going on at the largest of the urban centers as well as at smaller regional settlements. While considerable advances are being made in understanding the origins and character of the Indus Valley Tradition through multidisciplinary archaeological research, no bilingual tablets or lengthy texts have yet been discovered, and the Indus Valley writing system remains undeciphered. The lack of ancient chronologies, king lists, economic texts, and sociopolitical and religious documents have made it difficult to resolve important questions about the time frame for the transition from pre-urban to urban forms and the nature of the political organization of these cities.

The degree to which these Harappan cities were integrated politically, socioeconomically, and ideologically is the focus of current research at three of the major cities.¹ Archaeological excavations and numerous problem-oriented studies, ranging from the analysis of architectural and craft technologies to subsistence, are providing scholars with considerable new data for reconstructing the growth and character of Harappan cities.²

This chapter will focus on new discoveries and interpretations about the physical structure and growth of three major Harappan-phase urban centers and how the organization of these cities can be correlated with general models of social and political organization. The first section will summarize the geographical context and chronology of the Indus Valley Tradition and provide some background on settlement patterns and urban organization. Following this is a discussion of the types of city-states represented in ancient Indian literature during the Early Historic period (600–300 B.C.). The final section focuses on the political organization of Harappan-phase cities and examines the applicability of the city-state model to this initial urbanism in South Asia.

Geographical Setting of the Indus Valley Tradition

A brief outline of the geographical setting of the Indus Valley Tradition and its cities is essential for understanding the environmental context for the development of early state-level society (Fig. 4.1). During the

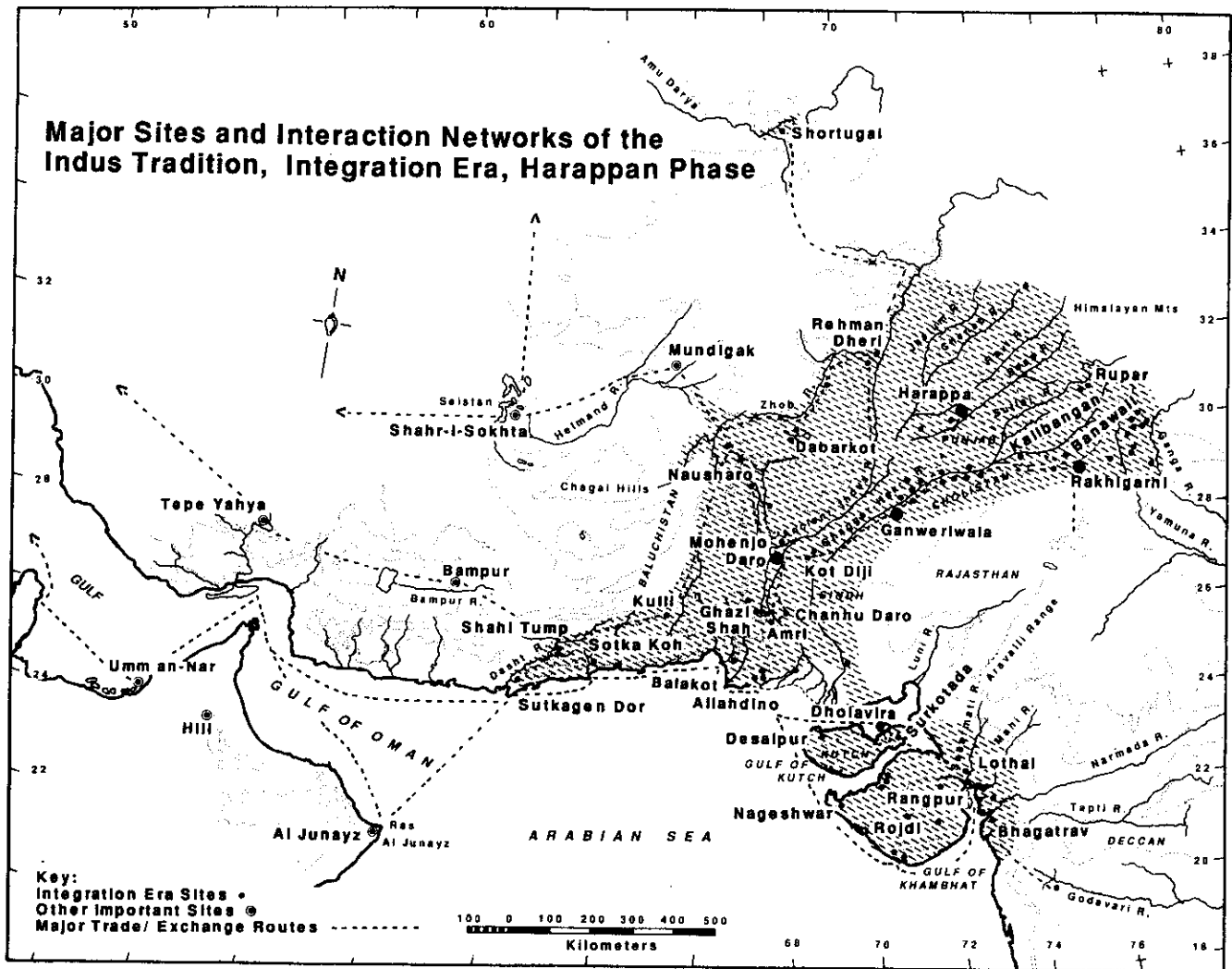


Figure 4.1. Major sites and interaction networks of the Indus Valley Tradition.

mid-third millennium B.C., the greater Indus Valley was watered by two major river systems, the ancient Indus River and the now-dry Ghaggar-Hakra River (Flam 1986, 1991; Lambrick 1964). This second river is generally agreed to be the legendary Saraswati River, known from Vedic and later Sanskrit texts (Wilhemly 1969). Flowing parallel to each other, the rivers created a wide floodplain with extensive areas for grazing and agriculture. Surveys along the dry bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra indicate that it supported numerous settlements, including two extremely large cities, Ganweriwala and Rakhigarhi, comparable in size to the excavated sites of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa (Mughal 1990c, 1991). This archaeological data supports the textual information that proclaims the ancient Saraswati as a great river with many populous settlements along its course.

The combined alluvial plains of these two rivers are

divided into two distinct regions, the Punjab (land of five rivers) in the north and Sindh in the south. To the northeast, the relatively flat plains of the Punjab merge into the drainage system of the modern Yamuna and Ganga rivers to the east, where numerous Harappan-phase settlements have been discovered.

The regions controlled by the cities of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra rivers were previously thought to have been limited to the floodplains, but current research indicates that there were numerous Harappan-phase settlements in the highlands to the west (Besenval 1992; Mughal 1992). Southeast of the combined delta of the two rivers lies the region of Kutch and the larger peninsula of Saurashtra, separated from the Indian subcontinent by the estuaries and shallow bays of the Rann of Kutch. Both regions appear to have been insular during the Harappan phase. A fifth major city of the Indus Valley Tradition, Dholavira, situ-

ated on a small island that commands access to the regions of Kutch and Saurashtra, has been recently excavated.

On either side of the alluvial plain were regions with localized agricultural and grazing land, as well as resource areas for important raw materials such as minerals and metals needed to supply the specialized industries of the cities. To the west were the piedmont and highland zones of Baluchistan and Afghanistan. In the east, the mineral-rich region of the Aravalli Mountains stretched from north to south, parallel to the Ghaggar-Hakra. Along the southern periphery, the rich marine coast extended from the Makran in the west across the delta to the coast of Gujarat. The total area encompassed during the Harappan phase was between 650,000 and 800,000 square kilometers (Kenoyer 1991a).

Two different weather systems dominated this vast geographical region, a winter cyclonic system in the western highlands and a summer monsoon system in the peninsular areas (Snead 1968). Studies of global climatic fluctuation do not support claims of significant climatic changes during the period of the Indus cities, although there is some evidence for a stronger summer monsoon and more seasonal fluctuation of temperatures from 7000 to 5000 B.C. (prior to the rise of cities; Kutzbach and COHMAP Members 1988:1049–1050). It appears that the overall climate has remained the same since at least 7000 B.C. (Raikes and Dyson 1961), which covers the period of the Indus Valley Tradition and the subsequent phases of the Indo-Gangetic Tradition. Any localized shifts in rainfall would have resulted from short-term climatic fluctuations in the two dominant weather systems. Documented environmental changes can be attributed to changing river-flow patterns and erosion from human activities, including overgrazing, deforestation, and irrigation (Misra 1984; Raikes and Dyson 1961).

The environmental and geographical context in which the first urban centers of the Indus Valley Tradition developed was vast and included diverse ecosystems juxtaposed in complementary patterns. Four large inland cities and numerous smaller regional towns dominated the floodplains of the major river systems as well as the highland regions to the west (most of Pakistan and northwestern India), while a fifth city and associated towns dominated the insular and coastal regions of what is now known as Kutch and Gujarat in western India.

Table 4.1
Selected Chronology of the Indus and Indo-Gangetic Traditions

| Archaeological/Historical Events | General Dates |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| "Mesolithic" transition | 10,000–6500 B.C. |
| Indus Valley Tradition | |
| Early Food-Producing Era, Neolithic/Chalcolithic | ca. 6500–5000 B.C. |
| Regionalization Era, Early Harappan Phase | ca. 5000–2600 B.C. |
| Integration Era, Harappan Phase | 2600–1900 B.C. |
| Localization Era, late Harappan Phase | 1900–1300 B.C. |
| Post-Indus or Indo-Gangetic Tradition | |
| Regionalization Era | |
| Painted Grey Ware | +1200–800 B.C. |
| Northern Black Polished Ware | (?700) 500–300 B.C. |
| Early Historic Period begins ca. 600 B.C. | |
| Buddha (Siddartha Gautama) | 563–483 B.C. (or 440–360 B.C.) |
| Panini (Sanskrit grammartian) | ca. 500–400 B.C. |
| Alexander of Macedon receives "submission" and becomes the "ally" of Ambhi, King of Taxila | 326 B.C. |
| Integration Era | |
| Mauryan Empire | |
| Chandragupta Maurya | ?317–298 B.C. |
| Kautilya (Minister of Chandragupta, possible author of <i>Arthashastra</i>) | |
| Bindusara | 298–274 B.C. |
| Ashoka | 274–232 B.C. |

Chronology

On the basis of radiometric assays from a wide range of sites covering most of the region, the general chronology of the Indus Valley Tradition is firmly dated (Table 4.1). The earliest date for the rise of large urban centers is around 2600 B.C. during the Harappan phase, but there is some evidence for the presence of multitiered settlement patterns during the preceding Early Harappan phase (Mughal 1991), specifically the period from approximately 3300–2600 B.C. While most of the literature has emphasized the abandonment of cities at the end of the Harappan phase (1900 B.C.), current research at Harappa and other sites suggests that much of the greater Indus Valley continued to be dominated by localized polities with fairly large settlements (Kenoyer 1991b, 1994). Late Harappan settlements persisted until at least 1300 B.C., and there is no clear break in Gujarat or in the Ganga-Yamuna region between Late Harappan and subsequent cultural developments.

Some scholars feel that the transition from the Early Harappan to the Harappan phase occurred over 100–150 years (Jansen 1991, 1993; Possehl 1990). Others hold that it was a more gradual process over a longer period of time (Kenoyer 1991a, 1991b, 1994; Mughal 1990a, 1991), a view supported by recent excavations at Harappa, the only large urban center that has been extensively excavated. Preliminary reports from excavations at Dholavira in Kutch suggest that this site might also have begun its regional importance just prior to the Harappan phase (Bisht 1989, 1990), but the chronology and the cultural/stratigraphic sequence are not fully published. No Early Harappan-phase settlement has been established at Mohenjo-daro because there have been no excavations in the waterlogged lowest levels of the site. However, this site too will probably reveal an earlier phase of incipient urban development.

The other two large sites, Ganweriwala and Rakhigarhi, have not been excavated, but numerous Early Harappan sites (regionally identified as Kot Dijian, Sothi, or Hakra cultures) have been located in their hinterlands, suggesting that they too may have begun as regional centers during the Early Harappan phase and then gradually developed into major urban centers during the subsequent Harappan phase. When excavations are carried out at these sites, they will provide important comparative data for understanding whether the transition to major urban centers was gradual at all the settlements or only at Harappa. It would not be surprising to find that the transition occurred at different rates in the different environmental and geographical contexts of the vast Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra river systems.

Settlement Patterns

The organization and function of Harappan-phase cities is critical to understanding their political and economic role in specific geographical regions (Fig. 4.1). They represent the largest settlements within a multitiered settlement system, and their location can be correlated to a strategic position in terms of geographical and economic dominance.

At present it is possible to identify five settlements of greater than 50 hectares—Mohenjo-daro (+200 ha), Harappa (+150 ha), Ganweriwala and Rakhigarhi (+80 ha), and Dholavira (100 ha). The four inland centers are located at approximately equivalent distances in a zigzag pattern that covers the northern

Table 4.2
Distances between the Major Urban Centers

| Cities | Total Area (hectares) | Distances to Other Cities | | Hinterland (km ²) |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----|-------------------------------|
| | | Cities | km | |
| Rakhigarhi (RKG) | +80 | RKG–HAR | 350 | 106,225 |
| | | RKG–GNW | 407 | |
| Harappa (HAR) | +150 | HAR–GNW | 280 | 128,800 |
| Mohenjo-daro (MD) | +250 | MD–GNW | 308 | 169,260 |
| | | MD–HAR | 570 | |
| Ganweriwala (GNW) | +80 | GNW–DLV | 558 | 108,280 |
| Dholavira (DLV) | 100 | DLV–MD | 448 | ? |
| | | DLV–GNW | 523 | |

Ghaggar-Hakra and Gangetic plain, the Punjab, Cholistan, and Sindh (Table 4.2; Mughal 1991; Possehl 1990). Because we do not know how much of each city was occupied at a specific time, it is not possible to accurately estimate the population, although some scholars have proposed numbers ranging around 30,000–40,000 (e.g., Fairervis 1975).

The hinterland controlled by each city is difficult to estimate due to the lack of extensive regional studies, which have been hindered by the proximity of four of the largest cities to strategic international borders. A rough estimate of the hinterland for each of the inland cities can be derived by arbitrarily defining borders at a halfway mark between each of two or three cities and eliminating uninhabitable areas. On the basis of such calculations, the hinterland of each of the largest cities would range from approximately 100,000 to 170,000 square kilometers (Table 4.2).

Mohenjo-daro is located on a Pleistocene ridge that sits like an island in the floodplain of the Indus River. It is thought that the Indus flowed to the west of the site during the Harappan phase (Flam 1981), and this would have put Mohenjo-daro in a central position between the two river valleys, where it dominated trade routes leading to the passes in the Bolan Valley to the west and the north-south trade from the coast near modern Karachi.

Harappa is likewise situated on a ridge between the Ravi River and the modern Sutlej River. The Sutlej

was probably captured by the Beas River, which in the past would have flowed east of Harappa. The Sutlej would have had a different watershed and joined the Ghaggar-Hakra system. Harappa would have dominated north-south movement along the river floodplains leading from Mohenjo-daro to the northwestern passes and east-west trade toward the resource areas of modern Rajasthan.

Rakhigarhi and Ganweriwala appear to have been located along the Ghaggar-Hakra (ancient Saraswati) River system, and, in addition to dominating the vast agricultural lands of this river, they would have controlled the movement of resources from the eastern desert regions and funneled goods upriver from the Rann of Kutch. Each of the inland cities was surrounded by a floodplain that had agricultural and grazing land, abundant wild game and fish, and considerable wild plant resources. In the absence of extensive irrigation systems, this diverse resource base and the economic networks linking the cities to regional production centers are thought to have been important in the rise and survival of such large cities (Kenoyer 1991a; Weber 1992).

The fifth site, Dholavira, was situated on an island in the Rann of Kutch, which has some alluvial patches that could have been cultivated and extensive grasslands that would have been suitable for grazing after the annual monsoon rains. Although the island has good underground water in sandstone aquifers, the extensive system of stone drains on the site were probably needed to catch and direct rainwater to reservoirs inside and at the edge of the city. The major support for the population probably derived from trade with Kutch, Saurashtra, and the core areas of the Indus Valley to the north. The island could have monitored shipping of raw materials and subsistence items between these regions, and it may also have had a role in external trade to the Arabian Gulf.

In contrast to the equidistant spacing of the major urban centers (except for the insular site of Dholavira), the distances from the major urban centers to smaller regional centers and rural settlements vary considerably (Fig. 4.1) and may reflect irregular networks that were defined by accessibility along rivers or overland routes as well as sociopolitical alliances.

The other levels of settlements range in size from 1–5 hectares, 5–10 hectares, and 10–50 hectares. Sites of less than 1 hectare are thought to reflect the temporary occupations characteristic of nomadic pastoralists or itinerant artisans. A final category of sites

invisible archaeologically would be communities that live on boats; they were essential for riverine commerce and communication (Kenoyer 1991a).

Although the size of settlements varies considerably and the settlements are scattered over a vast geographical area, the presence of distinctive seals with writing, chert weights for commerce and taxation, and a wide range of other artifacts indicate that the communities living in these settlements were integrated into a single cultural system. This integration would have been reinforced by the political, economic, and ideological dominance of the five major urban centers and their regional centers.

Harappan-Phase Urban Organization

The Harappan-phase cities have been featured in most anthropology and archaeology textbooks for decades, but the generalizations popularized by Pigott (1952) and Wheeler (1968) have become so distorted that it is necessary to correct some of the misconceptions.

Rather than a standard division of the cities into a high western “citadel” and a lower town to the east, each city is made up of a series of mounds oriented in different directions. Harappa (Fig. 4.2) and Mohenjo-daro (Fig. 4.3) both have a high rectangular mound on the west and extensive mounds to the north, south, and east. At Mohenjo-daro the other mounds are significantly lower, but at Harappa two of the eastern mounds (Mound E and the modern Harappa town) are almost as high as the western mound (Mound AB), and there are extensive low mounds to the west of Mound AB. At Dholavira (Fig. 4.4) there is a single walled mound that is internally subdivided into three or four walled sectors, which is highest in the southern sector, rather than the western sector, as at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. To the west and northwest, outside the walled mound, are scattered low mounds with remains of Harappan houses that represent suburban areas of the city (Bisht 1989).

In all three cities, each mounded area or sector has a distinct layout of streets that can be characterized as an irregular grid network. Even though they are aligned in the same basic direction, the street plans for each mound at Harappa represent different episodes of city development. At Mohenjo-daro, where considerable documentation is available for different sectors of the city, there are significant differences in street alignment between the citadel and the lower

Site Plan of Harappa, Punjab, Pakistan

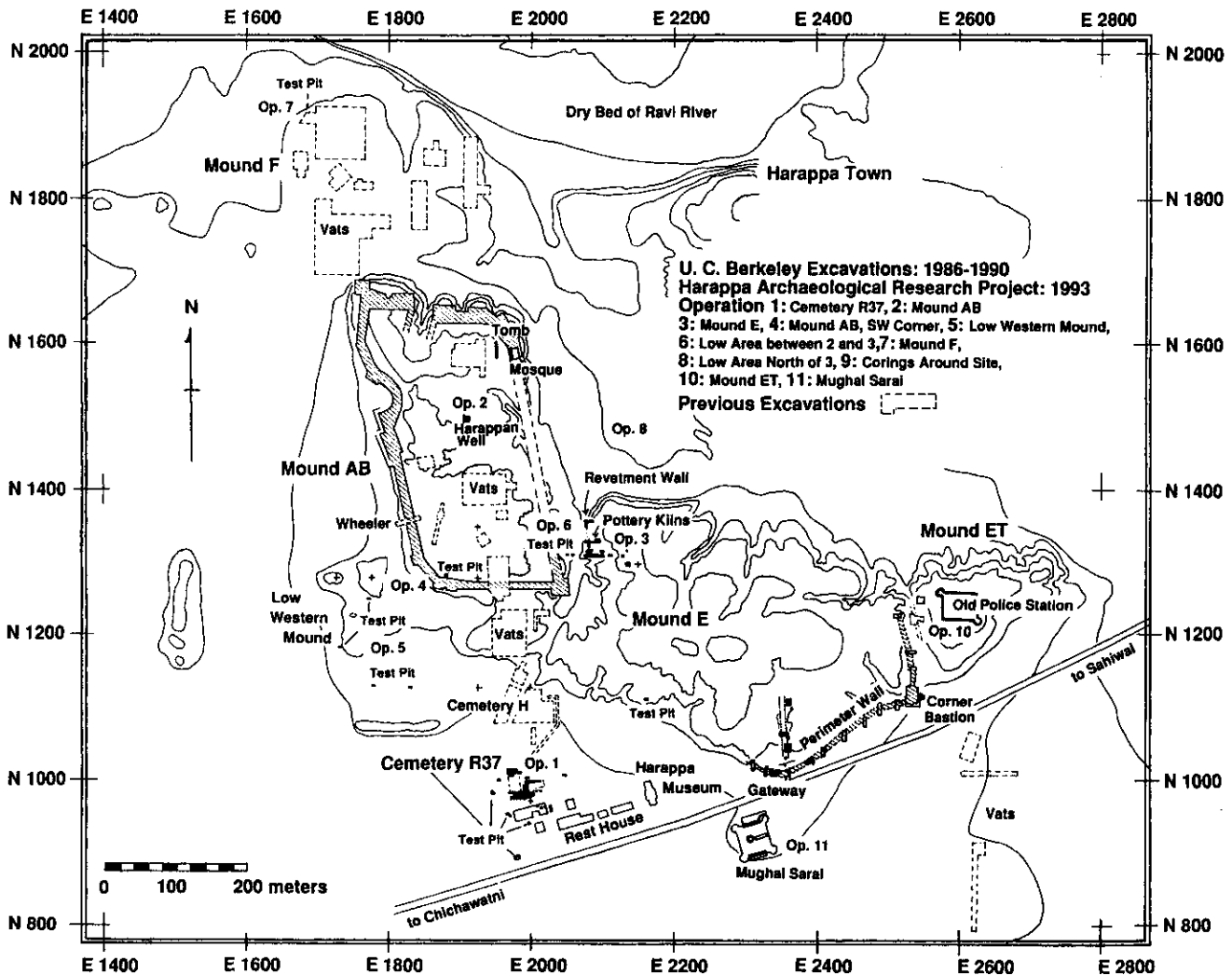


Figure 4.2. Harappa site plan, 1994.

town. Furthermore, changes in the alignment of streets and houses over time probably reflect gradual changes in the cardinal reference points (e.g., stellar east-west projections) used by the architects (Jansen 1978, 1980).

It had been assumed that the various mounds at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa were contemporaneous and that each city was divided into distinct functional sectors, the western mounds being administrative centers and the lower mounds representing habitation and industrial areas for the common populace. This simplistic interpretation is no longer supported by the available evidence, which indicates shifting centers of power within the city and the presence of habitation and industrial areas in each of the major mounds (Kenoyer 1991b; Pracchia et al. 1985; Vidale 1990). This irregular and dynamic process of city growth is

well documented in historical cities throughout the world and should not be discounted when looking at the first cities. When seen from this perspective, the various mounds that make up each of the Harappan cities come to have a very different significance, possibly reflecting changing centers of power among ruling elites and merchants.

City Walls and Foundation Platforms

The presence of walls around specific mounds and even entire settlements is significant for interpreting the role of different sectors of the city or of regional centers scattered around the larger cities. At present there is considerable debate about the function of these mud-brick structures (Jansen 1989; Kenoyer 1991b); some appear to have been freestanding walls

Site Plan of Mohenjo-daro, Sindh, Pakistan

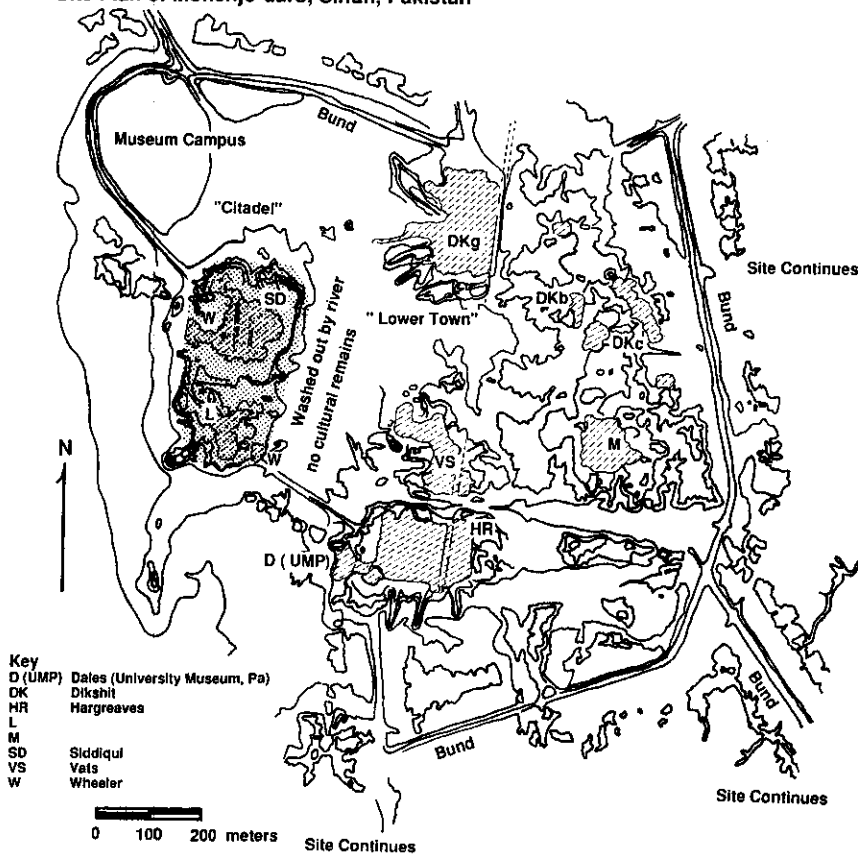


Figure 4.3. Mohenjo-daro site plan. After Jansen (1984b:figure 8.2).

Site Plan of Dholavira, Gujarat, India

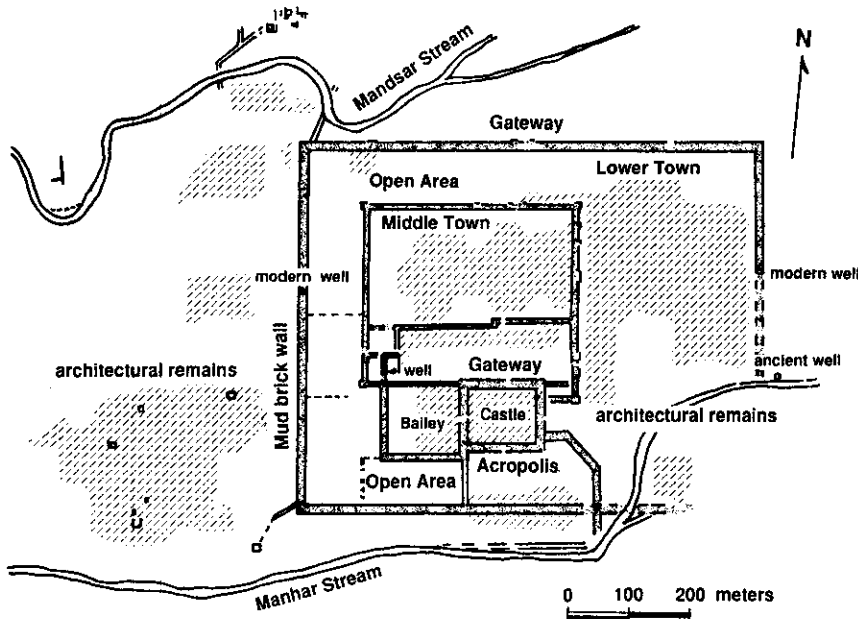


Figure 4.4. Dholavira site plan. After Bisht (1989).

associated with large brick gateways, while others may have functioned primarily as revetments or foundation platforms.

The presence of massive walls around Harappa was noted by the earliest excavators (Vats 1940), but it was not until Wheeler's excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro that the topic of walls became critical. Wheeler found a massive mud-brick wall around Mound AB at Harappa, which he labeled defensive (Wheeler 1947). At Mohenjo-daro he found a similar wall and gateway around the "citadel" mound (Wheeler 1972). Although Mackay tried to locate a wall around the Lower City at Mohenjo-daro, he was unsuccessful because of the high water table (Mackay 1938).

Massive mud-brick walls were subsequently identified at almost all the smaller sites—Lothal, Kalibangan, Surkotada, Sutkagendor (Wheeler 1972), Dholavira (Bisht 1989), Nausharo (Jarrige 1988), and Rehman Dheri (Durrani 1988; Durrani et al. 1991). With the exception of Kalibangan, these walled settlements consisted of a single outer wall; in some cases there was an internal dividing wall as well. At Kalibangan, a "citadel" in the west was subdivided into two sectors, while a large "lower town" in the east was surrounded by a single wall (Lal 1979; Thapar 1975).

These discoveries made it appear as if the larger sites had a walled citadel and an open lower town, while at the smaller sites, the entire city was walled. The most common interpretation of this pattern was that a ruling elite lived in defensive and administrative isolation, and the hinterland was dotted with smaller walled settlements or colonies (Wheeler 1972). This interpretation is proving incorrect at both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. At Harappa, in addition to the well-known wall around Mound AB, there is evidence of a massive mud-brick wall around three sides of Mound E and along the southern edge of Mound ET. Traces of what appear to be a mud-brick wall have also been noted to the north of Mound F (Dales and Kenoyer 1993; Meadow and Kenoyer 1994), indicating that each of the major mounds might have been enclosed by mud-brick walls.

At Mohenjo-daro, research by a German and Italian team revealed the presence of a massive mud-brick platform/wall around the citadel mound (Jansen 1989) and a similar mud-brick structure along the southern edge of the Hr Area in the lower town (Leonardi 1988). The two mud-brick platform/walls are almost identical in construction and size to the city

walls found around Mound E and Mound ET at Harappa. If they are walls rather than foundation platforms, as suggested by Jansen (Jansen 1987, 1989), then each of the major mounds at Mohenjo-daro would have been a separate entity encircled by massive mud-brick walls, as was the case at Harappa.

Harappa Site Plan and City Organization

Harappa is composed of several mounded areas that have different orientations and shapes (Fig. 4.2). The north-south parallelogram of Mound AB covers approximately 7 hectares and rises some 6–8 meters above the surrounding plain. To the north is a lower area, Mound F, covering approximately 10 hectares. Southeast of Mound AB is a long east-west mound that is over 13 hectares in area and, at its highest point, some 7 meters above the plain. To the east is a lower mound, Mound ET (Old Police Station Mound), which covers approximately 5.5 hectares. North of Mound E and ET is the modern town of Harappa, which is built on a mound of more than 20 hectares; its north-central portion is almost as high as Mound E and Mound AB (Fig. 4.2).

Mound AB is surrounded by a well-defined mud-brick wall or revetment that is more than 13.7 meters wide at the base and tapers to the top level of the mound on all but its eastern side. Mound AB has at least two sets of gateways, one in the west and one in the north. The mud-brick walls around Mound E are smaller, ranging from 4.5 to 9 meters wide, and they appear to have functioned as revetments along the western and eastern edges of the mound. They were freestanding along the southern perimeter. In the 1990 excavations, an impressive baked-brick gateway was found at the center of the southern wall (Kenoyer 1991b), and in 1994 a second gateway was discovered at the juncture of Mound E and Mound ET. The freestanding mud-brick wall continues along the southern perimeter of Mound ET, but further excavations are needed to determine if it encircles the mound. In 1997 traces of a mud-brick city wall were found along the north edge of Mound F, indicating that this suburb of Mound AB was also enclosed by a mud-brick wall.

Identical types of ceramics, figurines, inscribed seals, and terra-cotta and faience tablets (made from the same mold) have been found at the four major excavated mounds—E, ET, AB, and F. These artifacts demonstrate that the mounds were inhabited contemporaneously during the Harappan phase, but on the basis of deep stratigraphic sequences, it is clear that

they were not all founded at the same time and that they grew at different rates.

Based on the most recent excavations in 1996 and 1997, the earliest settlement appears to have been spread out between the northern part of Mound AB and the northwestern corner of Mound E, dating from the Early Harappan period (3300 B.C.) (Period 1 and 2). This settlement gradually became larger and these areas continued to be inhabited through the Harappan (Period 3) and Late Harappan (Period 4 and 5) Phases (Kenoyer 1991b). The southern part of Mound AB and the eastern portion of Mound E appear to have been established later, at the end of the Early Harappan Phase or possibly at the beginning of the Harappan Phase (2600 B.C.). Mound ET is a suburb of Mound E and grew up outside of the eastern city wall of Mound E. Eventually it too was encircled by a massive mud-brick wall and a southern gateway was established. The lowest levels of Mound ET reveal habitation during the latest part of the Early Harappan (Period 2) and then it continued to be inhabited throughout the Harappan and Late Harappan Phases. In much the same way, Mound F appears to be a northern suburb of Mound AB that was founded slightly later than the other three mounds, but all were inhabited contemporaneously at the height of the Harappan phase (around 2000 B.C.). The area of modern Harappa also appears to have been occupied during the height of the Harappan phase and during the Late Harappan phase, but until excavations can be carried out in the core area, we will not be able to determine when this area was first inhabited.

The city wall and gateways around both Mound E and ET reveal three major episodes of rebuilding and repair that appear to cover the 700 years of the Harappan phase. A parallel sequence of repeated repairs and rebuilding was identified by Wheeler for Mound AB (1947). Both Mound AB and E/ET had gateways that led into the mound, but there is no evidence of a causeway or road that went from one mound to the other.

Studies are currently under way to correlate the wall repairs of the two mounds to determine if the repairs occurred simultaneously or at alternating times. If the repairs were undertaken simultaneously, it would suggest that the same civic authority maintained both walled mounds and that the city as a whole experienced cycles of growth and decay. An alternating sequence of repairs, however, would indicate that the mounds developed in a contrasting and competitive pattern, where one was being maintained

and developed while the other was falling into disrepair. The continuous and, at times, massive accumulations of garbage during phases of disrepair suggests that both mounds continued to be occupied by significant populations, even though one mound may have been better maintained at any one time.

The contemporaneity of these walled mounds raises the question of their function. Only 40 meters separates the high-walled northwestern corner of Mound E and the equally high-walled southeastern corner of Mound AB. At this distance it is possible to stand on one mound and shout greetings or insults to someone on the other mound. In between the two mounds is an eroded slope with traces of an open drain or road surface.

Three basic functions, which are not mutually exclusive, can be suggested for the walls at Harappa: military defense, flood protection, and economic/political control. If the walls surrounding the mounds were built for defense, then we should expect to see some evidence for conflict, such as weapons, projectiles, and burned or damaged structures. So far, no evidence of that nature has been found. The second possible function is protection from flooding, but the only ancient damage to the walls appears to derive exclusively from seasonal weathering and rainwater erosion. Flood deposits have been found at the site, but they are limited to the lower-lying habitation areas north of Mound E. Similar layers of alluvium have been found covering vast low-lying habitation areas at Mohenjo-daro, so it would appear that, while periodic flooding occurred at these sites, it did not erode or undermine the massive city walls. The remaining interpretation for the function of the walls is economic/political control. Evidence for this is less direct and is based on the presence of administrative and public buildings; workshops for specialized crafts; administrative devices such as seals, sealings, and weights; and distinctive patterns of elite artifacts such as ornaments, ceramics, and residences.

The generally poor preservation of architecture at Harappa has made it difficult to identify house plans and to define the function of specific buildings. The only large building found in excavations by Vats (1940) is the so-called Granary, located on Mound F, which is built on a massive mud-brick foundation (50 by 40 meters) that would have supported a substantial superstructure—a palace or temples, public meeting place, or public storeroom. Extensive excavations on the higher Mound AB to the south have not revealed any comparable administrative or public struc-

tures, and only limited areas have been exposed on Mound E and Mound ET. Because of the nature of the excavations and the poor preservation, architectural comparisons cannot be made between the mounds at Harappa. Mohenjo-daro and Dholavira, on the other hand, do have the appropriate architectural data and are discussed below.

Other types of evidence for economic and political control at Harappa are seen in the fluctuations in maintenance of city drains, walls, and gateways; the distribution of workshops and industrial areas; and artifact patterning. Each of the major excavated areas in Mounds AB, F, E, and ET reveal sequential phases of city maintenance and neglect of drains and street plans. Debris from workshops and industrial areas, many of which produced similar types of artifacts, have been located on all four mounds (Kenoyer 1991b). Important evidence for commercial or ritual interaction between communities on each mound is seen in the common types of ceramics, figurines, ornaments, and—most important—the common occurrence of sealings made from the same mold (Meadow and Kenoyer 1994). The fact that molded tablets with script and ritual motifs made from the same seal have been found on all four mounds indicates not only their contemporaneity but also commercial and/or ritual interactions between the inhabitants of these distinct sectors of the city. These different types of data suggest that, although the mounds were separated by walls and access was controlled by gateways, the sectors were integrated into a single large city.

Mohenjo-daro Site Plan and City Organization

The western "Citadel" mound is the highest at Mohenjo-daro, rising some 6 meters above the plain in the south and up to 12 meters above the plain in the north, where a Buddhist *stupa* and monastery of the historical period have been found (Fig. 4.3). The mound covers approximately 6.6 hectares and is encircled by a massive mud-brick wall/platform that has eroded down to the modern plain level. Many of the largest and most well-known buildings of the Harappan phase are located on this mound, such as the large colonnaded building with a specially designed water tank, usually referred to as the Great Bath. Adjacent to this is the foundation of a massive building that probably had a wooden superstructure. Often referred to as a granary, this building was probably a

large public structure, but it is not clear if it was a storehouse, a temple, or some form of administrative building. Two other major buildings with large open areas and colonnades have been labeled the Assembly Hall and the College. The rest of the mound is composed of smaller domestic units, with bathing platforms, wells, and small internal courtyards. While the large public structures may reflect "an aspect of combined or indiscriminated religious and secular administration" (Wheeler 1968:46–47), they appear to have been used at specific times as workshops by shell workers or leather workers, and the Granary was even truncated to construct the Great Bath. This pattern is significant because it indicates a distinct phase of urban decay on this mound—indeed, there were probably numerous such cycles during the life of this sector of the city.

To the north and south of the citadel mound and far to the east of the lower town are the scattered tops of small mounds buried more than 2 meters deep under sandy alluvium. In contrast to the small high mound, the lower town to the east consists of a series of low mounds covering more than 80 hectares. Four major north-south streets and four equally wide east-west streets divide the mounds into major blocks; there are also numerous smaller streets and alleyways (Jansen 1987).

The lower town has a very complex history that I will not discuss in detail here (see Jansen and Tosi 1988; Jansen and Urban 1984, 1987). Suffice it to say that numerous phases of rebuilding and reorganization are being identified in the context of both individual habitation units and entire neighborhoods. Most of the excavated architecture can be grouped into blocks of houses that represent periodic reconstruction and modifications of space and orientation.

Large building complexes have been identified in the various sectors of the lower town that compare in size to those found on the citadel mound to the west. None of these buildings has the type of colonnades seen in buildings on the citadel mound, but any one of them could have been used as an assembly area or public gathering place. One structure, House A1 in the Hr Area, is even thought to have been a temple, a palace, or the house of an elite family (Jansen 1985).

These large public and possibly ritual or administrative structures in the lower town may represent elite or administrative/ritual centers that competed with those found on the citadel mound. They could also reflect a shift of power to different areas of the city at different points in time. Attempts to relocate the

artifacts from the different architectural units at the site may shed light on the internal chronology of Mohenjo-daro in the future (Jansen 1984a), but it is not possible to differentiate them chronologically at this time.

As at Harappa, workshops and industrial areas have been found in all the excavated sectors of Mohenjo-daro, indicating the dispersed distribution of specialized crafts throughout the city (Pracchia et al. 1985; Vidale 1990). Some workshops might have been established at different chronological periods, and in many cases they were located in abandoned buildings or administrative structures as the function of a neighborhood changed over time (Vidale 1990). Studies of street and building alignments, as well as artifact styles, indicate that many of the different sectors were inhabited contemporaneously, and studies currently under way will allow more detailed chronological correlation. An important indication of the contemporaneity of the Dk and Vs areas of the lower town is seen in the presence of two terra-cotta tablets with script and a rhinoceros motif made from the same mold.

Specific artifacts from Mohenjo-daro can be matched to identical objects found at Harappa. Many seals found at Harappa might have been produced at Mohenjo-daro and vice versa (Rissman 1989). More specifically, a terra-cotta tablet with script and a rhinoceros motif, made from the same mold as the tablets recovered at Mohenjo-daro, has been found at Harappa on Mound E (Meadow and Kenoyer 1994). This discovery relates both these major urban centers chronologically (during the Harappan phase) and demonstrates commercial or ritual interaction between individuals in both cities. Stoneware bangles (worn by elites) made with clays characteristic of Harappa have also been found at Mohenjo-daro and vice versa (Blackman and Vidale 1992), and similarities in lapidary work, shell work, ceramics, and numerous other well-known crafts indicate strong commercial and technological connections between the two cities.

Other categories of artifacts, however, suggest that certain social or ritual aspects of the two cities were distinct. Stone sculptures of seated male figures (such as the famous Priest King), copper tablets, and a wide variety of terra-cotta objects have been recovered at Mohenjo-daro but not at Harappa. Similarly, tiny rectangular inscribed tablets, female figurines, and composite animal and human figurines are common at Harappa but rare at Mohenjo-daro. These regional differences are also visible in ceramic styles (Dales

1991), architectural details, and general site layout (Jansen 1978, 1980; Kenoyer 1991b; Mughal 1990b).

This evidence suggests that, although certain general features of economic and social organization, as well as ritual practices, were shared, there were regional differences that served to distinguish some of the communities living in these two major cities. Such regional differences are even more pronounced at the island city of Dholavira in Kutch.

Dholavira Site Plan and City Organization

Dholavira (Kotada) is located on Kadir Island (Fig. 4.4) just north of the large island of Kutch (Bisht 1989:403). Kadir Island is only 196 square kilometers in area, but Dholavira would have been able to control shipping through the Rann between Saurashtra and the delta of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra Rivers. It is not possible to determine the hinterland of the city, but it probably controlled at least the island of Kutch (21,000 km²) and the north coast of Saurashtra.

Originally it was thought that the initial occupation of Dholavira represented colonists from the Indus Valley, who brought with them a full-blown culture of the Harappan phase, but later excavations revealed ceramics identical to those of the Early Harappan (Kot Dijian) culture (Bisht, personal communication). At present, the details of the internal chronology have not been sorted out. There may have been an Early Harappan settlement, but the major period of expansion and occupation belongs to the Harappan and Late Harappan phases, after which the site appears to have been largely abandoned.

The city layout is very different from Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, in that it consists of a series of three nested rectangular walls, with the highest area located to the south on the highest point of a low hill. The outer wall enclosed an area of approximately 47 hectares (Bisht 1994) and was constructed entirely of mud brick, with large square bastions and two major gateways located at the center of the northern and southern walls. Four gateways have been identified in the center of each of the walls of the middle town, as well as in the four walls of the acropolis (Bisht 1989). Like most sites in Kutch and Gujarat, the houses and drains are made with sandstone blocks (dressed and undressed) and clay mortar combined with some mud-brick superstructures.

Inside the outer wall is a fortified middle town (9 ha) and an acropolis (9 ha) which sits approximately

13 meters above the lower town (Bisht 1989). A large rectangular open area or plaza and an entrance ramp are situated directly below the major north gateway of the acropolis, and numerous large open spaces are found within the different walled areas. Some of these open spaces appear to have functioned as reservoirs that would have been filled with seasonal rainwater. The reservoirs account for 17 hectares (36 percent of the walled areas), and an additional reservoir has been identified outside the city wall (Bisht 1994). To the west, outside the walled city, are additional areas of habitation, which bring the total area of the site to approximately 100 hectares (Bisht 1989).

One of the most important discoveries at Dholavira is a large inscription found in a room associated with the northern gateway of the acropolis. This inscription, the largest example of writing ever discovered in the Indus cities, consists of ten symbols, each measuring approximately 37 centimeters high and 25–27 centimeters wide, is made from a white gypsum paste inlay that appears to have been set into a wooden plank. Bisht thinks the inscription is a signboard that would have been visible throughout the city if it had been mounted above the gateway or on top of the walls (1994).

Large buildings in the acropolis area may represent administrative or ritual structures, and some of the open areas in the city could have served as markets or public gathering places. Various types of craft activity areas have been located within the lower town, including agate bead making, shell working, and ceramic production. Habitation and craft activity areas in the lower sectors of the city are organized in blocks divided by north-south and east-west streets.

Artifacts found at Dholavira seem to reflect several source areas or spheres of influence. Some objects might have been produced in the core areas of the Indus Valley and brought to the site by colonists or traders. Other objects are clearly copies of Harappan-style ceramics and seals made from local materials by local artisans. A third category of objects represents the indigenous stylistic traditions of Kutch and Saurashtra (Bisht 1994, personal communication).

The presence of different types of artifacts suggests that the city was composed of a mixed population of Harappan elites and artisans from the inland regions, as well as local populations who maintained their own cultural traditions or a synthesis of Harappan and indigenous elements. Bisht feels that Dholavira represents a Harappan outpost or colony that was established to exploit resources needed by inland sites

in the core areas of the Indus Valley, and when the inland sites began to decline, the region was gradually abandoned (1989:406–407).

While this brief discussion does not do justice to the many important new discoveries at the site, it illustrates the features common to the other Indus cities—a walled settlement, similar planning of architecture, streets, and drainage systems; the use of sophisticated drainage systems; a common script, weights, ceramics; and other diagnostic artifact styles. The unique feature of the city plan is seen most clearly in the nested pattern of walled sectors instead of separate mounds enclosed by walls. Another important pattern is the small number of large buildings, all of them within the area of the acropolis. The influence of indigenous styles and the preference for local raw materials is considerably more prominent at Dholavira. This may reflect weaker cultural or ideological integration, since Dholavira is situated at the southeastern periphery of the greater Indus Valley.

Models for Defining Political Organization

Models of the political and socioeconomic aspects of Harappan-phase cities have been reconstructed almost exclusively from archaeological evidence and through comparisons with contemporaneous urban civilizations in West Asia (Kenoyer 1991a; Possehl 1990; Wheeler 1968). Additional sources of comparative information that have not been fully utilized are textual and archaeological data from subsequent historical developments in the South Asian subcontinent itself. Much of this latter information was ignored in previous discussions because of a misperception that there was a hiatus or Dark Age between the end of the Harappan phase (at about 1900 B.C.) and the subsequent Early Historic period (600 B.C.–A.D. 300; Fig. 4.5).

Through the concerted efforts of archaeologists, linguists, and historians (Kenoyer 1995; Shaffer 1993), it is now possible to identify significant technological and cultural continuities between the Harappan phase of the Indus Valley Tradition (2600–1900 B.C.) and the later Indo-Gangetic Tradition, where we see a new phase of urbanism and city-states emerging during the Early Historic period (600–300 B.C.). The continuities and derived developments in craft technologies, subsistence strategies, economic structures, weight systems, and settlement patterns between these two major urban phases indicate that the second phase of urbanism was influenced to some degree

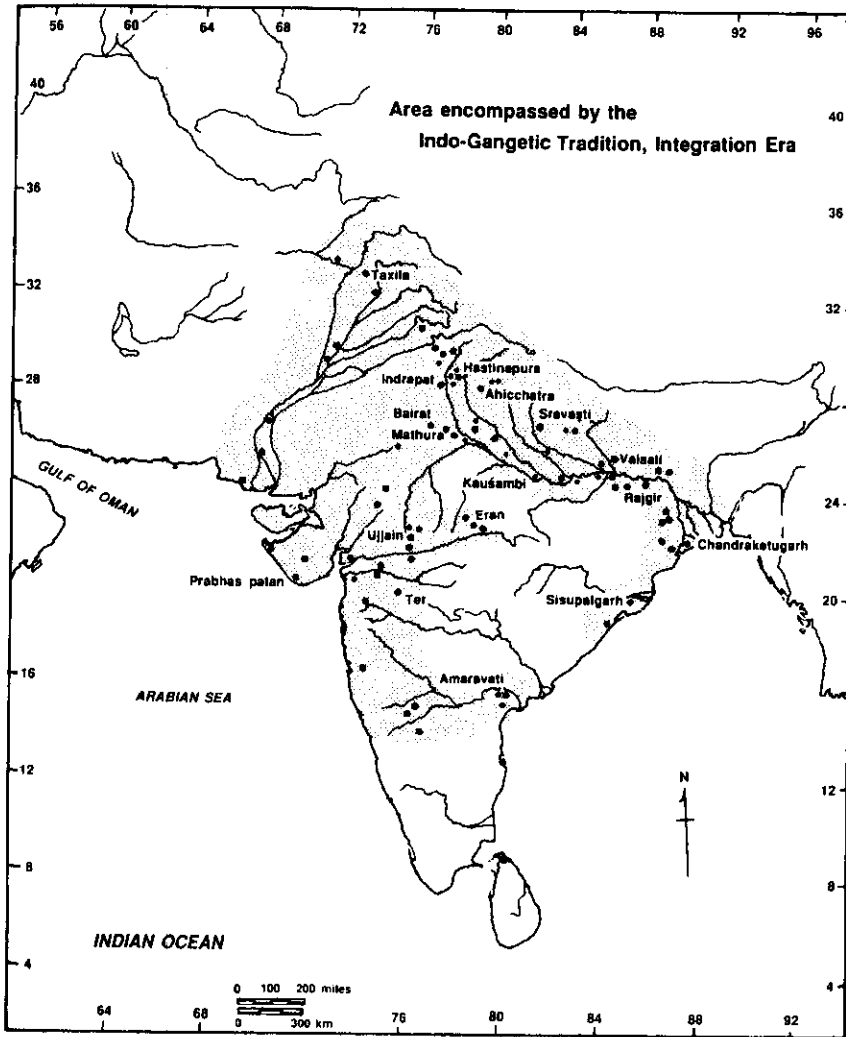


Figure 4.5. Area encompassed by the Indo-Gangetic Tradition, Integration Era.

by the legacy of the earlier urban culture. Because of these linkages, the extensive literature (Vedic and Epic texts, as well as later treatises) on the political and socioritual organization of the Early Historic city-states and empires can now be used to develop more appropriate working hypotheses and interpretive models for the political organization of the earlier cities of the Indus Valley Tradition.

Some of these South Asian models show general analogies with those being proposed for other early city-states, but I must emphasize the preliminary nature of the research and the need for further testing through archaeological studies of both the known city-states of the Early Historic period and the earlier Harappan-phase cities. In the following section, I outline some of the basic aspects of states and city-states, as reflected in the literary evidence from South Asia, and suggest how some of these patterns can be correlated to the archaeological evidence from Indus cities.

Early Historic States and City-States

Although most Western scholars derive the concept of the city-state from the Greek *polis*, I introduce here models of the state from ancient Indian literature. Most of the available texts remain untranslated from Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Pali, but fortunately, the few translated texts we have provide a fairly detailed account of the various categories of city-states found in the northern and northwestern subcontinent from the seventh to the fourth centuries B.C. The most important available texts include the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, the *Astadhyayi* of Panini, and various Buddhist and Jaina texts (Ramachandran 1989).

The *Arthashastra* is a treatise on state organization attributed to Kautilya, a minister of Chandragupta Maurya who established the Mauryan Empire sometime between 326 and 313 B.C. The *Astadhyayi* is a grammatical treatise that includes lists of the early

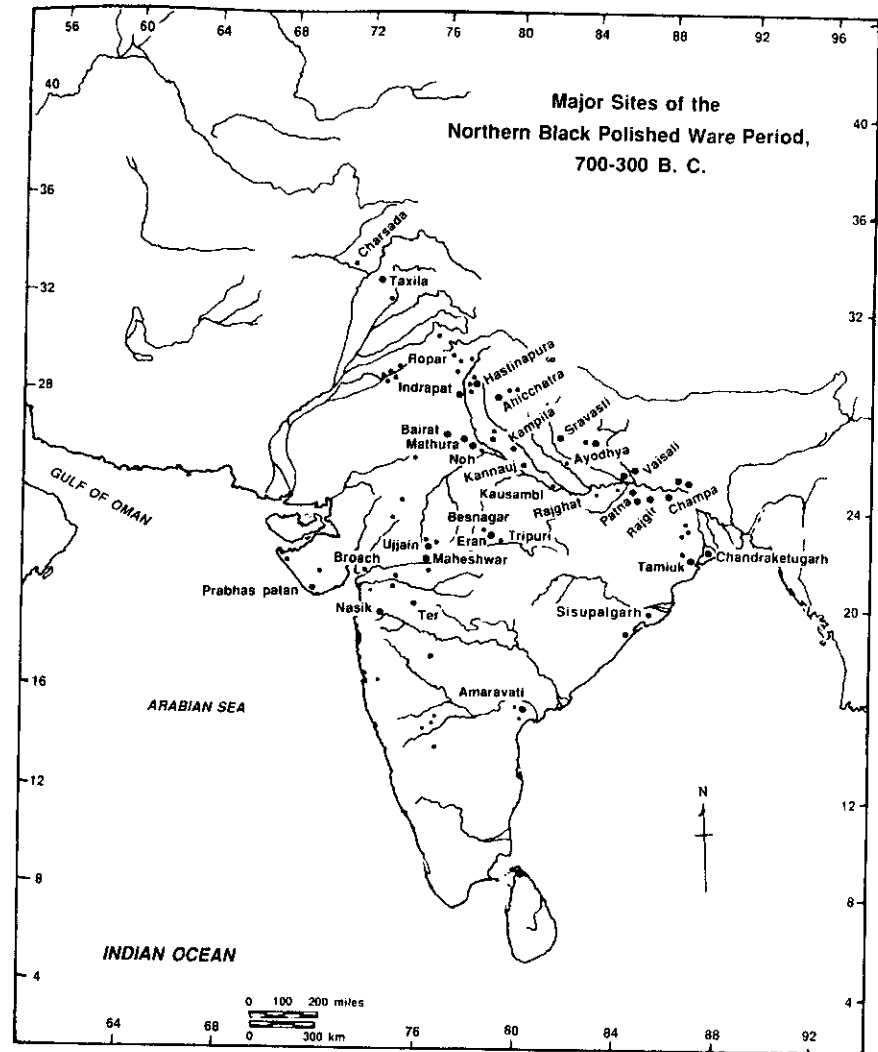


Figure 4.6. Major polities of the Indo-Gangetic Tradition, Integration Era ca. 500 B.C.

city-states. These texts, which were compiled from the fifth to the fourth centuries B.C., speak of the existence of as many as sixteen polities called *mahajanapada*, or great provinces, each dominated by a capital city and ruled by a centralized government (Fig. 4.6). Capital cities that have been identified and surveyed range from 50 to 200 hectares in size (Erdosy 1988), and with the rise of the Mauryan Empire they became even larger.

The size of each *mahajanapada* varied according to the geographical area and can only be approximated, but they appear to range from 80 square kilometers to an area "almost equal in size to the largest Greek polis of Sparta, which occupied an area of 3,360 square miles [168,000 km²]" (Sharma 1968:103). Together, these city-states encompassed the northern and northwestern portions of the subcontinent, from Bengal in the east to Afghanistan in the west and including the modern regions of Gujarat, Sindh, Punjab, and parts of Baluchistan.

The political organization of these city-states included both *raja dhina*, a country ruled by a king/monarch, and *gana dhina*, a country ruled by the *gana* council—that is, a nonmonarchical republic (Bongard-Levin 1986). Nonmonarchical states (*gana*, *sangha*, *vairajya*, *virat*) are contrasted with monarchical states ruled by young princes, single kings, two kings, two fighting kings, and kingdoms without a ruler that have fallen into anarchy (Altekar 1984; Bongard-Levin 1986). Smaller cities or towns were sometimes organized as oligarchies or tribes with hereditary leaders. It is clear that there is no distinct line dividing the various types of political organizations, and they represent a continuum from tyrannical rule to more democratic forms of government.

Many scholars feel that it is not useful to apply a narrowly defined Western concept of "state" to the political phenomena of the subcontinent (Basham 1964; Scharfe 1989). For example, the monarchical state, according to Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, is com-

posed of seven components: king, officers, provinces, towns, treasury, army, allies. Scharfe suggests that “the Indian concept of state is wider than the one common in the West, because the ally (*mitra*) was regarded by Indian theorists as one of the seven constituents or factors of a state” (Scharfe 1989:2). However, as is evident in many chapters in this volume, although a city-state may aspire to independence, it is inextricably connected to other city-states through trade or political alliances at one time or another. A city-state does not evolve in isolation but is part of a larger landscape dotted with small and large settlements, some of which may be competing city-states.

According to several ancient texts, the Indian state was also responsible for the promotion of *dharma* (right action; fostering a feeling of piety and religiousness; encouraging virtue and morality), *artha* (wealth, through the encouragement of trade, industry, and agriculture; developing natural resources; bringing new land under cultivation; building dams; working of mines; etc.), *kama* (worldly pleasures; to be able to enjoy the good life and aesthetic culture through peace and order), and *moksha* (release from the cycle of rebirth through proper action, which includes pursuit of the previous three objectives; Altekar 1984; Ragaranjan 1992; Scharfe 1989). By encouraging these four principles, the state was able to grow strong and remain stable. These dynamic ideological and spiritual aspects of state rule are not unique to the Indian subcontinent and can be identified in many states throughout the world, both past and present.

Another important aspect of the Early Historic state is the contrasting role of aliens or foreigners within the state. On the one hand, there are references to noncitizens or foreigners holding important positions within the state administrative system. Altekar (1984:67) suggests that “the non-recognition of the aliens as a separate class was due partly to the catholic spirit of Hinduism and partly to its confidence of completely absorbing the foreigners in its body politic by means of its superior culture.” On the other hand, Kautilya warns his king that strangers, whether foreigners or simply persons from outside the city, should be carefully monitored when they come into a city to insure the security of the city and protect the trade that sustained it (Ramachandran 1989:41). There were special rest houses set aside for travelers passing through the city, not only to facilitate their travels and attract their trade but presumably also so that they could be monitored more easily.

Geographical Context of Early Historic City-States

The geographical context of the Early Historic city-states in the subcontinent is also important to consider, not necessarily as a deterministic factor but as one that inhibited the formation of a strong centralized military or political authority over more than one region, thereby encouraging the development of regional political autonomy. Sharma goes so far as to suggest that states which evolved republican forms of government were situated in geographical locations with harsh climatic conditions—for example, hilly regions, marshy lands, deep forests—that inspired a martial zeal and democratic spirit in contrast to the docile subjects of monarchies (1968:241). While this takes environmental determinism to an extreme, his argument has some validity in that the nature of roads, transport, and communication systems made it difficult for a single monarch to subdue and maintain control over vast regions with inhospitable terrain. It was not until the Mauryan Empire, when roads and rest stops were built along major trade routes, that many of these areas were effectively united, with the support of a very large military organization that used the horse and elephant for transport and battle and had an impressive repertoire of iron weapons.

The vast plains of the Indus and the Ghaggar-Hakra river systems, as well as those of the Ganga-Yamuna rivers, provided an optimal setting for the development of large cities surrounded by a hinterland of smaller towns. The major cities appear to have been relatively self-sufficient in terms of basic subsistence needs but required strong intraregional trade networks to supply exotic raw materials and finished goods for defining and maintaining socioeconomic stratification and for ritual purposes. The most important settlements and the capitals of each *mahajanapada* were situated strategically along trade routes or controlled important resource areas (Fig. 4.2; Erdosy 1988; Lal 1986).

Early Historic Republics

The republican form of government is first revealed in the early Vedic period, which is generally dated from 1500–1000 or 800 B.C., and it is well documented in subsequent periods (600 B.C. and later), when each republic is clearly associated with an urban capital and numerous smaller cities and towns in the surrounding hinterland (Sharma 1968).

The population of these city-states was divided into

four *varna* or classes. The hierarchical relationships of the *varna* are defined in the literature, but the *jati* or occupational caste hierarchy is not well defined until hundreds of years later. In the republics, the highest ranking goes to the *kshatriya* (warrior aristocracy), followed by the *brahmana* (ritual specialists), the *vai-sya* (merchant classes), and *shudra* (laborers). The *brahmana* held lower status in the *gana* than in monarchical states. Citizenship was available not only to the free inhabitants of the city but also to those in the areas annexed to the city.

Cities had differing numbers of assembly members. It is not possible to note all the variations here, but the main point is that there was a hierarchical organization of administration that involved a few elected leaders. They represented a larger body of free citizens who retained a critical role in governing the city-state.

City Organization

The capital city was a walled settlement with a rectangular or square plan, and some cities had a series of three concentric walls. A gate was located at the midpoint of each wall, and the walls were surrounded by moats. In a monarchical state, the capital contained, in addition to a palace for the king and his family, a council hall; the royal storehouse; public buildings for music, theater, and sports; merchant quarters and market areas; residences for various categories of inhabitants; and special rest houses for foreigners and travelers (Ramachandran 1989:41). Special meeting halls were constructed inside the city, where the assembly met on a daily basis. Large reservoirs or tanks for water storage and bathing were also constructed within or at the edge of the cities. These tanks were often used exclusively by elite classes, as is reported for Vaisali, where only the leading *kshatriya* families were allowed to bathe in a specific tank (Sharma 1968:105). Additional tanks or wells were constructed for the remainder of the population.

Cities were inhabited by classes defined by social status and material wealth. The ideal city, as defined by Kautilya, was divided into sixteen major sectors by three parallel streets running north-south and three running east-west. These major streets were approximately 8 meters wide, which would have allowed two-way traffic with ox carts and space for stalls along the edge of the streets. In Vaisali, there were three major sectors: high, middle, and low. In the high section were 7,000 houses topped with gold towers, while the

middle and low sections had, respectively, 14,000 and 21,000 houses topped with silver and copper towers. Inhabitants in the low section included both free and slave laborers. Both private and state-owned slaves were used in agriculture and irrigation, but they also worked as laborers in the administrative center of the city.

Although there is no discussion of drainage or sanitation systems, excavations at many early cities have revealed drains and sump pits made with discarded storage jars or specially designed ceramic rings. These ceramic rings were also used to line wells. Large habitation units were made up of rooms surrounding a courtyard, with sheds for working and domestic activities and latrines/bathing areas (Ramachandran 1989:41).

The city had a heterogeneous population of many classes and ethnic groups, from rulers and administrators to merchants, laborers, and foreigners. In contrast, the villages in the hinterland were relatively homogeneous, consisting of agricultural settlements or settlements of specialized artisans—potters, mat-makers, salt-makers, and so on (Ramachandran 1989).

More than sixty different industries were present within the cities, and they have been grouped by into eleven basic categories:

(1) textiles, (2) carpentry and woodwork, (3) metalwork, including smiths and jewelers, (4) stonework, (5) glass industry, (6) bone and ivory work, (7) perfumery, (8) liquor and oil manufacture, (9) leather industry, (10) clay work, including pottery, terra-cotta figurine-making, modeling, and brick making, and (11) miscellaneous industries, such as making garlands, combs, baskets, musical instruments, and painting. (Ramachandran 1989:41–42)

The estimated total population for the entire Licchavi *janapada* is 200,000–300,000 (Sharma 1968), but not all would have been “Licchavi,” and many of the occupational castes were probably ethnic minorities. The three related polities of the Licchavi, Naya, and Videha encompassed a long strip of land of greater than 168,000 square kilometers (Sharma 1968).

Agricultural land, grazing land, forests, and water resources were owned both privately and collectively by the *gana*-state. The army was made up of free men of various classes and directed by *kshatriya* leaders, who were elected to their positions by peers.

Trade and commerce were important for the well-

being of the city and were controlled by the *kshatriya* (landed military aristocracy) and the *vaisya* (merchants). However, most of the important specialized crafts and occupations were organized as *nigama*, organizations of merchants, and *sreni*, groups of artisans. The term *sreni* has often been interpreted as a "guild," but it should be seen as a different form of organization because of the close association with hereditary occupational specialists, referred to as *jati* or caste.

It is thought that the *nigama* and *sreni* may have paid taxes directly to the state. Other taxes were collected from travelers bringing goods into the cities, and taxes were levied on agriculturalists. Each *gana* had its own coinage, with a specific symbol or set of symbols stamped onto the silver or copper coins. This type of monied economy is basically incompatible with simple clan or tribal organization (Bongard-Levin 1986).

Summary of Early Historic City-States

The leader of a *gana* republic (as well as a monarchy) was invariably a *kshatriya* who was appointed or elected by the *gana* and took the title of *raja* (king), *senapati* (general/leader of the troops), or *pramukh* (leader). There were no hereditary leaders, and they were servants of the *gana*. No royal marriages, alliances, or surrenders could be made without the approval and consensus of the *gana*. The *gana* assembly was open to all free inhabitants of the city, meaning the *kshatriya*, *brahmana*, and *vaisya*. There were regular meetings on a daily basis or sometimes even three times a day. The *gana* had explicit laws and legal codes for jurisdiction and punishment. They were not necessarily the same as those of monarchies. The *gana* had the power to kill, punish, banish, levy taxes and fines, control marriages and alliances, and it sent emissaries to monarchs. There was much rivalry within the *kshatriya* aristocracy and competition to acquire land, wealth, and power. In some cases, rivalries and alliances between small groups of *kshatriyas* led to the creation of oligarchies or even monarchies.

Within the *gana* we see the continued importance of *gotra* or clan affiliations, but they became less important over time and were eventually replaced or superseded by the *kula* or family ties. This is seen primarily in the leading political role of specific *kshatriya kula* (warrior families). There was continuous tension between the various *varna* and threat of revolt by slaves. *Kshatriya* leaders were repeatedly threat-

ened by *brahmana* or *vaisya* who gained power through control of land and commerce. *Shudra* (laborer class) and slaves were often exploited and abused to the point of revolt.

One reason for looking closely at the sociopolitical structure of the *gana* and *sangha* republics is to see what makes them different from monarchies and to determine if the distinction could be identified archaeologically. In most aspects the two forms of state were very similar, though it is possible that the cities of the monarchical states were larger than those of the oligarchies or republics (Erdosy, personal communication). Both had centralized economies using standardized monetary and weight systems, army, taxes, local and international trade, and land ownership by the state. Archaeologically, the most distinctive difference would be the identification of a palace area or royal storehouse. It is possible that these could be distinguished from ordinary *kshatriya* elites, but other aspects of the architecture and layout of the cities would be similar. Both had a multitiered settlement pattern with the largest trade and urban centers being the administrative centers as well. Decentralized aspects of both state systems are seen in the private ownership of land and commerce. Similar languages and (later) writing systems were present throughout the northern subcontinent.

Both forms of state had hereditary classes of elites, retainers, administrators, craftsmen, laborers, slaves. The only major differences between the two appear to be the presence or absence of a hereditary ruler and the order of the *varna* hierarchy. In a monarchy the sequence from high to low is *brahmana*, *kshatriya*, *vaisya*, and *shudra*; while in the *gana* republic it is *kshatriya*, *brahmana*, *vaisya*, and *shudra*. In the monarchy the *brahmana* validated and legitimized the king through confirmation of his hereditary lineage, generally descended from the sun or the moon. In the *gana* republic, the leader was legitimized by the support of the *kshatriya* elites, and there was no need for additional *brahmana* validation.

It is important to note that the leadership in both forms of state was not reinforced by royal edicts or coins with the image of the king or elected leader. Consequently, without the aid of written documents, the differences between these two forms of state would not be visible archaeologically unless a palace area and royal storehouse could be identified.

Except for possible differences in the overall size of cities, there is very little to differentiate the two forms of city-state during the Early Historic period. This

factor, combined with the textual evidence that identifies most of the oligarchies in the northwestern regions (northern Indus Valley), has great import for our investigation of the form of political organization during the Harappan phase. At this stage in our research it is not appropriate to focus on specific aspects of political organization but to devote our attention to the question of centralization and the organization of urban centers. We may never be able to differentiate between a monarchical state or a republican state during the Harappan phase, but it is possible to identify aspects of the Harappan cities that may be correlated to political and socioeconomic organization found in city-states during the subsequent Early Historic period. In identifying these similarities, I am not proposing that they result from identical cultural processes or that they are themselves identical but that they may reflect analogous political structures connected through direct historical/cultural links. These comparisons are necessary for building new research strategies to refine our interpretations of Harappan-phase cities.

Political Organization of Harappan-Phase Cities

All scholars actively involved in research on the Indus Valley Tradition agree that the largest cities were the focus of political and economic power for a period of more than 700 years. The cities were central places within a specific region. They appear to have used a shared script; they had a common material culture; there was a standardization of economic exchange that may reflect a form of taxation; and there is clear evidence for a common ideology (Kenoyer 1991a). We cannot at this time speak of citizenship laws, state policy on self-sufficiency, or independence, but on a general level, the definition of city-state proposed by Griffith and Thomas (1981a) and that used by Charlton and Nichols (this volume) would include the cities of the Indus Valley Tradition as city-states.

Due to the nature of the data, previous discussions on the political organization of the Harappan phase have focused on the distinction between chiefdoms and state-level organization rather than on the specific issue of city-states. Some scholars have argued that the Indus cities do not represent a state-level society of the type found in Egypt or Mesopotamia (Fairservis 1989; Shaffer 1982, 1993), but there is a general consensus that they do reflect some form of centralized chiefdom or state-level organization (for summaries, see Kenoyer 1991a; Possehl 1990). On

the basis of archaeological evidence alone, it would be difficult to differentiate a group of large village-based chiefdoms from a group of small city-states, but the scale of settlement hierarchy in the Indus does not seem compatible with most known chiefdoms.

The estimated hinterland of the largest Harappan-phase cities roughly corresponds to the larger city-states (both republican and monarchical) of the Early Historic period. This correlation probably results in part from the fact that city-states in both periods were located in similar geographical settings. However, it is culturally more significant to note that the technologies for communication, trade, and military coercion were at approximately the same scale and remained so until the advent of the Mauryan Empire, around 300 B.C. During the Early Historic period, the area encompassed by the various city-states included the previous region of the Harappan phase and additional territories in the Gangetic plain and peninsular India. The total area is more than twice that of the Harappan phase (Fig. 4.5), and it was integrated economically and ideologically but not politically.

Political integration of these city-states did not occur until the rise of the Mauryan Empire. It was achieved through military conquest, but it was maintained by the promotion of a new ideology and economic security. Emperor Ashoka, after defeating—and, in many cases, totally annihilating—his enemies, is said to have converted to Buddhism and proclaimed a reign of peace, nonviolence, and right action. Interestingly enough, however, his military force was never disbanded or disarmed.

The role of the Early Historic state in promoting *dharma* (right action), *artha* (wealth and trade), *kama* (the good life through peace and order), and *moksha* (release through the previous three objectives) emphasizes the ideological and economic benefits of integration. Integration of the numerous cities and smaller settlements in the greater Indus Valley could only have been maintained by the promotion of a shared ideology and economic benefits. If there was a period of military coercion, it was not reinforced by continued militarism but appears to have been replaced by ideological and economic coercion—a strategy that was later repeated by Ashoka.

The archaeological evidence for ideological and economic coercion is seen in the spatial organization of cities and the hierarchy in crafts and technology (Kenoyer 1989, 1992). In the Early Historic period these types of archaeologically visible evidence can be correlated to hierarchical political and socioeconomic organization, which in turn corresponds to social

classes or *varna*. Walled sectors in the Early Historic cities served primarily to differentiate classes, provide security, and control economic interaction. Numerous different public or administrative buildings and the presence of separate water sources in the form of wells or tanks can also be seen to reflect hierarchical classes or distinct communities within the cities.

Separate walled mounds with associated suburbs at both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa suggest that these two cities had similar hierarchies of competing political and socioeconomic classes. While it is possible that a single community of elites with strong kin ties controlled both cities, it is highly unlikely that a ruler in one city dominated all the other cities. This type of centralized control does not appear until the time of Chandragupta Maurya, around 300 B.C.

The regional differences in artifact types and city layout suggest that each of the Harappan cities had an independent community of ruling elites. The fact that no single building or group of buildings dominates either site suggests that the political organization was probably not a hereditary monarchy, where one would expect to see palaces and royal storehouses. On the contrary, the presence of numerous large buildings and public spaces in the lower town at Mohenjo-daro and Mound F at Harappa would support the interpretation that there were several distinct elite groups living in each city. The exception to this pattern at Dholavira, with its nested walled areas, suggests that the political organization of this settlement may reflect the dominance of a single class. It is possible that this city was a small kingdom, but it also could represent a colony of one of the core-area cities.

In addition to the layout and organization of the cities, the presence of hierarchical classes in the Harappan-phase cities is supported by many other categories of evidence, such as "ritual" objects, ornaments, seals, and weights (Kenoyer 1991a). These types of objects continued to be used for differentiating classes during the Early Historic period and are the strongest evidence of ideological continuities between the two urban periods.

Earlier generalizations about uniformity in artifacts have stressed the authoritarian nature of Harappan culture, but most of the uniformity can be explained by the presence of a common belief system or conservative ideology that required specific symbols and artifacts for ritual purposes as well as for defining class affiliation (Fairservis 1984; Miller 1985). These symbolic objects also reinforced the hierarchy of the society and helped to legitimize the socioeconomic and political order (Miller 1985). The role of kin-related

learning processes and the diffusion of craft specialists from specific communities to all the major settlements is also an important mechanism for maintaining uniformity in technologies and style.

Unlike the later urban periods, where a rigid caste society was maintained, the Early Historic period was characterized by classes or *varna* whose ranking was flexible, depending on the economic power of a specific community. Supported by numerous craft specialists and service groups that also had the potential for gaining power, there was a continuous struggle for power between ritual specialists, military leaders or landowners, and merchants.

Harappan cities were undoubtedly composed of similar competing elites whose centers of power would have been within each of the separate walled mounds at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa or in the acropolis at Dholavira. These walled mounds would have reinforced the distinct communities of ruling elites and allowed total economic control of specialized goods being produced by artisans in a specific sector.

The ideal city defined by Kautilya had different sectors located in specific areas of the city. This placement of social and economic classes within a city reflects and reinforces the hierarchical organization of the society as a whole. It is probable that the strong similarities of layout and orientation between the western mounds at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro could represent a similar pattern. For example, the communities that lived in the walled western mound at Harappa may have had strong social or political connections with communities on the western (citadel) mound at Mohenjo-daro. The same could apply to other sectors of the cities. Current excavations at Harappa and proposed new excavations at Mohenjo-daro could begin to test such hypotheses.

Fluctuations in dominance between the communities on each of the mounds probably contributed to the economic development and the rapid buildup of the city as a whole. New suburbs with associated craft areas may have resulted from growing populations within the city and the agglomeration of new populations to the city. Similar patterns of competition between elites within a city-state are well documented in the Early Historic states. The competition between powerful *kshatriya* clans occasionally led to large-scale warfare (e.g., the Mahabharata battle), but more often it resulted in fission and the colonization of new regions such as South India and Sri Lanka (Thapar 1984). These colonial extensions in turn contributed to the spread of technologies, subsistence

strategies, language, and ideology. The widespread distribution of Harappan-phase settlements may reflect a similar process of expansion and colonization through competition and fission among the ruling elites from the core regions of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra valleys. A site like Dholavira, or any of the smaller walled settlements in Gujarat, the Punjab, Baluchistan, or Afghanistan could represent such outposts or colonies. In contrast to the core-area cities, these outpost settlements may have supported only one dominant elite community, along with the necessary support classes of laborers or indigenous peoples.

Conclusion

The geographical setting and internal organization of the Harappan-phase cities, along with specific patterns of artifacts, indicates that these cities were most likely independent polities during much of their existence. As was common during the Early Historic period, we can envision several different types of city-states, with fluctuations from strong centralized control, dominated by single individuals or a small group of elites, to periods during which an entire class of people—for example, merchants, landowners, ritual specialists—were dominant. The nature of integrative control and alliances was probably just as stratified or ranked as was the society as a whole. Elites within each of the mounded areas of a site, or even between sites, may have been competing for power. Even though we cannot identify the specific mechanisms for their political control, the current evidence suggests that these larger cities can be identified as city-states.

The integration of this vast geographical area into a single cultural system was probably the result of economic strategies defined by ideology and social relations rather than overt military coercion. Competition between elites living in two or more of the Harappan-phase cities might have resulted in periods of greater or lesser integration, as one community or another came into power. Alliances between ruling elites living at two or more of the largest sites would have stimulated extensive colonization of resource areas by other communities to compete for power.

The literary evidence from the Early Historical period brings a new perspective to the mute archaeological patterns of the Harappan phase. There is no need to look outside the subcontinent to find analogies when we have such strong cultural and historical continuities in the actual region of study. Similar

approaches have been the norm in Mesoamerica for generations, but only recently has it been possible to begin making the connections in the Indian subcontinent.

By utilizing this important body of data to refine our research strategies, we can collect and analyze the types of data needed to test specific questions about military action, ideology, and socioeconomic organization. The results of these studies will allow further refinement of the hypotheses and models of political organization that have been proposed for the Harappan phase.

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Notes

1. For the three major cities, see Bisht 1990; Dales and Kenoyer 1993; Jansen 1991; Kenoyer 1991b; Meadow 1991b. For the smaller sites see Besenval 1992; Biagi and Cremaschi 1990; Bisht 1982; Dikshit 1984; Durrani 1988; Durrani et al. 1991; Flam 1993; Jarrige 1986, 1990; Joshi 1973; and Joshi and Bala 1982.
2. For architectural analysis, see Jansen and Tosi 1988 and Jansen and Urban 1984, 1987. For craft technologies see Ardeleanu-Jansen 1992; Franke-Vogt 1992; Kenoyer 1992; Kenoyer and Miller in press; Vidale and Kenoyer 1992; and Wright 1989. For subsistence, see Belcher 1993; Costantini 1990; Meadow 1991a, 1993; and Reddy 1991.