
UNIT 7 NATURE OF CONTACTS

Structure

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7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain why the Harappans tried to establish links with the faraway lands,
- know about the nature of contact among the Harappan towns and the surrounding areas,
- learn about the trade and exchange activities of the Harappans with the contemporary West Asian Civilizations, and
- know about our sources of information on this nature of contact and exchange network.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Harappan civilization was characterized by the presence of a large number of small and large towns. Apart from cities like Harappa and Mohenjodaro, even very small settlement like Allahdino (near Karachi) have yielded material characteristics of an urban economy. An urban economy is characterised by a vast network of relationships which transcend its physical space. You will see in this unit how the people of Harappa were in active interaction with other cities and towns which were located at a distance of hundreds of miles from Harappa.

This Unit goes on to explain the reasons why did the cities establish trading network and also the forms of the inter-regional trade. It also takes into account the sources of the raw materials and the extent of contact with the contemporary West Asian Civilization. Of course all this knowledge about the Harappan civilization is gained through various historical sources and they have been mentioned in the Unit.

7.2 ESTABLISHMENT OF TRADING NETWORKS

It is believed that active interaction among far flung areas did not exist in the pre-urban society. One might ask why did townsmen establish contacts with faraway lands and how do we know that they had contacts? In urban centres an important part of the population is engaged in non-food producing activities. These people perform the administrative, religious, trading and manufacturing functions. At the

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same time if they are not producing their own food some one else has to do it for them. That is why towns are dependent on the surrounding countryside for food supplies.

What is important for us is the fact that the relationship between the city and the village was unequal. By developing as centres of administration or religion the cities attracted the wealth of the entire country. This wealth was siphoned off from the hinterland in the form of taxes, tributes, gifts or purchases of goods. In the Harappan society this wealth was controlled by the most powerful section of the urban society. At the same time the rich and well off sections in the city led a luxurious life. Their social superiority was reflected in the buildings constructed by them and the acquisition of luxury items which were not locally available. This indicates that a major reason for cities establishing contacts with faraway lands was to cater to the needs of the rich and powerful. This may be one of the factors behind the Harappans attempt to establish links with the faraway lands.

The area formed by Harappa, Bahawalpur and Mohenjodaro seems to have been the core region of the Harappan civilization. However, settlements showing overwhelming Harappan influence have been found in an area of approximately 1.8 million square km.

A pertinent question to ask here is that how some Harappan out-posts are found in such far flung areas as Shortughai in Afghanistan and Bhagatruv in Gujarat? The plausible answer seems to be economic inter-dependence and trade network between different regions. Differential access to basic resources was crucial in linking various regions of Indus Valley. These resources included agricultural products, minerals, timber, etc. and this could be achieved by establishing trade routes. Emerging in the fertile Indus-Hakra plains, the rich Harappans wanted possession of more and more luxury items. In quest of this they strengthened the ties that already existed with central Asia and Afghanistan. They also established settlements in places like Gujarat and the Gangetic Valley.

7.3 INTRA-REGIONAL CONTACTS

In the following sections we shall try to assess the nature of contact among the Harappan towns themselves and with other cities and societies of that period. Our information on such contact is based on the reports of objects found during the excavations of Harappan towns. Some of this information is substantiated by references found in the literary sources of the contemporary Mesopotamian civilization.

7.3.1 Cities

We could begin with the evidence of the existence of granaries in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. These large structures were meant for storing grains. As pointed out earlier urban centres depend on the villages for their foods. The presence of granaries indicates the attempt of the rulers to possess an assured source of food supply. Presumably food grains were brought from the surrounding villages and stored here. This in turn would be redistributed to the townsmen. Grains are a bulk commodity which are consumed every day. Vast quantities of grains would have to be collected and transported in bullock carts and boats. It would be difficult to haul up large quantities of food over a great distance. That is why it has been found that towns were usually located in the most fertile areas that were available in the region, and probably the grains were collected from the surrounding villages.

For example, Mohenjodaro was located in the Larkana district of Sind. Even in modern times this is the most fertile area of Sind. However, some other settlements sprang up on important trade routes or industrial sites. In such cases the location was determined not so much by the presence of fertile agricultural tracts as by possibilities of trade and exchange.

That is why, when scholars analyse the causes for the location of large cities they look for:

- the potentialities of the place for food-production, and
- its proximity to trade routes and mineral sources.

If we go by these considerations Harappa is very well located. The entire geographical space to its north-west has not yielded evidence of any other Harappan settlement. Even in the 19th century this area was largely inhabited by pastoral nomads. Some scholars are of the opinion that Harappa was located at a point which separated the zone of agricultural settlements to its south and a zone of pastoral nomads to its north-west. This way Harappa could exploit the resources of both the neighbouring communities. It has also been suggested that although Harappa did not have any advantage in terms of food production it grew into a large city because of its strategic location as a trading settlement. If we place Harappa in the centre and draw a circle around it covering an area of about 300 km. we can see that Harappa had a very advantageous location:

- i) Harappans would have access to the Hindukush and North-West Frontier. This meant that within a distance covered by about ten days of travelling Harappans had access to such precious stones as Turquoise and lapis lazuli which were brought through these routes.
 - ii) They could get mineral salt from the salt range.
 - iii) Tin and Copper were accessible to them from Rajasthan.
 - iv) Probably, they could also exploit the sources of amethyst and gold in Kashmir.
 - v) This three hundred km. circle would give them access to the point where all the five rivers of Punjab joined into a single stream. This means that the Harappans could control the river transport of all the five rivers of Punjab. River transportation was far easier in those times when concrete roads did not exist.
 - vi) This could provide them access to timber from the mountains zones of Kashmir.
- That is why it has been found that Harappa is located in a place which is crossed by many trade routes from West and East even in modern times.

The settlements at Mohenjodaro and Lothal also had their own logic in terms of location. Some scholars believe that the apparently religious nature of large structures in Mohenjodaro might indicate that it was a ritual centre. Whether it was a ritual centre or not, the rich people here were using gold, silver and all kinds of precious articles which were not locally available. Mohenjodaro was closer to the sea compared to Harappa. This would give them easier access to the Persian gulf and Mesopotamia which were probably the chief suppliers of silver. Similarly, Lothal was drawing resources from Southern Rajasthan and Deccan. They probably helped the Harappans procure gold from Karnataka, where contemporary neolithic sites have been discovered near the gold mines.

7.3.2 Villages

The villages supplied the essential food grains and other raw materials to the towns but what were the Harappan towns giving to the villages in return? We have few clues for an answer. One answer is that the rulers of the towns used force to collect grains—calling it tax which was to be given in return for administration. However, one important ingredient of this rural-urban relationship was the ability of the urban centres to collect a whole range of items that were not available locally and supply them to the rural hinterland.

One item of interest was the stone tools. People in almost all the Harappan towns and villages were using parallel-sided stone blades. These blades were made out of very good quality stone not found everywhere. It has been found that such stone was brought from sites like Sukkur in Sind. This hypothesis is proved by the fact that in sites like Rangapur in Gujarat people were using stone tools brought from distant areas during the urban phase of Harappa. Once the Harappan Civilization declined, the people in these areas started using tools made of local stones. Other such items would be copper and bronze. Copper is available only in certain pockets. However, almost all the Harappan sites have yielded copper-bronze tools. These tools also show a uniformity in design and execution in almost all the Harappan sites. This indicates that their production and distribution must have been handled by centralized decision making bodies. They could be the merchants or the administrators residing in the towns.

Apart from these items which were strategically important in terms of the economic activities, the Harappan settlements—big and small—have yielded objects of gold,

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silver and very many precious and semi-precious stones. These metals and stones were procured by the merchants and rulers of the cities. With the inception of urbanism the volume of trade within the Harappan civilization increased in scale and variety to an unprecedented scale. Sites like Mohenjodaro reveal evidence of extensive bead-making. These products filtered down to the rich and powerful in the small villages and towns.

What emerges from the preceding discussion is:

- that the location of villages could be primarily determined by the availability of fertile soil and irrigation facilities.
- The location of towns will be determined by such additional factors as their proximity to mining districts or trade routes.
- Sometimes the factor of trade became so important that towns were established in inhospitable plains where agricultural yields were very poor. For example, Sutkagen-Dor on the Makran Coast was one such site. It is located in an inhospitable area and its prime activity was a trading post between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians.

Similarly we can look at the functions performed in other cities of the Harappan civilization:

- Balakot on the coast of Baluchistan and Chanhudaro in Sind were centres for shell-working and bangle making.
- Lothal and Chanhudaro were producing beads of carnelian, agate etc.
- Some unfinished beads of lapis lazuli in Chanhudaro might indicate that the Harappans imported precious stones from faraway places and then worked them before selling them.
- Mohenjodaro has yielded evidence for the presence of a large number of craft specialists like, stone workers, potters, copper and bronze workers, brick-makers, seal-cutters and bead-makers, etc.

7.4 SOURCE OF RAW MATERIALS

Excavations at different Harappan sites provide us with a large number of bangles, beads, potteries, various copper, bronze and stone objects. The range of objects discovered from the Harappan settlements indicates that they were using many kinds of metals and precious stones which would not be uniformly available in every region. The interesting thing is that even in very small Harappan sites precious stones and metal tools have been found. This indicates an intensive exchange network among the Harappans catering to the needs of the rich. What were the sources of the minerals and metals used by the Harappans?

- They acquired copper from the Khetri-mines of Rajasthan.
- The settlements of Jodhpura, Bagor and Ganeshwar in Central Rajasthan which are generally considered contemporary with the Harappans might have supplied copper ore to them.
- In Ganeshwar over 400 copper arrowheads, 50 fish-hooks and 58 copper axes were found.

At the same time the people in these settlements were subsisting with a combination of pastoral nomadism and hunting-gathering. They do not indicate influences from the Harappan civilization. This adds complexity to our problem of trade linkages. Archaeologists believe that the Harappans were importing copper tools from an area where people were still pastoralists and hunters. However, we do not know the mechanism through which these two groups, one representing an advanced urban civilization and the other representing a pastoral tribe, inter-acted. Probably the contacts were indirect.

The Harappans might have met some of their needs of copper from sources in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Provinces also. Gold was most probably obtained from Kolar gold fields of Karnataka and Kashmir. Some neolithic sites have been located in this region that were contemporary with the Harappans. Gold washing

is reported from Jaipur and Sirohi in Rajasthan, Hazara, Kangra and Jhang in Punjab and along Kabul and Indus rivers.

Silver vessels are frequently found in the Harappan sites. However, there are no known sources for silver in this area. Silver might have been imported from Afghanistan and Iran. Probably, the Indus merchants also exchanged their goods with the Mesopotamians for silver. Lead may have come from Kashmir or Rajasthan. Some minor sources were located from Punjab and Baluchistan also.

The precious stone lapis-lazuli was available only in Badakshan in North-East Afghanistan. That the Harappans exploited this source is confirmed by the discovery of Harappan sites like Shortughai and Altyn-Depe in this area. Turquoise and Jade could have been obtained from central Asia alone. Agate, chalcedony and carnelian were from Saurashtra and Western India. Sea-shells, so very popular with the Harappans, must have come from the sea-coast of Gujarat and western India. Manda in Jammu is located at a point where the river Chenab becomes navigable. Probably good quality timber was acquired from the regions further up and sent to Central Indus Valley down the rivers. At Shortughai large quantity of lapis lazuli was discovered in association with the Harappan remains. This indicates that the Harappans were colonising far flung areas for the exploitation of mineral resources. This also indicates that trading and procurement of exotic materials was an important concern of the Harappans.

Trading seems to have been more an administrative activity than an exchange activity between traders, since establishing a colony at a distance of around 500 km would not be possible for a trader. It were the administrators of Harappa who were trying to bring under direct control resources of distant areas.

7.5 EXCHANGE SYSTEM

The Harappans had established an extensive network of inter-regional trade inside and outside the Indian sub-continent. However we do not know what were the actual mechanisms of exchange between the Harappans and the non-Harappans. Such a large area of interaction would inevitably involve communities having divergent life styles. In those times large areas of the country were inhabited by hunter-gatherers. Some other areas were occupied by pastoral nomads. Still others were just beginning cultivation. Compared to them Harappans represented an advanced stage of civilization. If the Harappans had to exploit some mineral sources from the regions inhabited by the hunter-gatherers or some other communities, how would they go about it? In some cases the Harappans established their settlements in those areas. But this would not be feasible in every case. Probably these non-Harappan communities would be given items which they considered valuable. In such cases the exchange might not have been a regular affair. Rather it would be determined by seasonal migrations and gatherings of these communities. The Harappans would send their merchants to the spots where such seasonal gatherings took place. The pastoral nomads too could have brought goods from distant regions, in course of their migrations. These kinds of exchange activities are known from modern examples in India. However, we know very little about the Harappan exchange system.

The Exchange System Among the Harappan Towns

The Harappans had made distinct attempts at regulating trade and exchange amongst themselves. Even the far flung Harappan sites have yielded uniform systems of weights and measures. The weights followed a binary system in the lower denominations: 1, 2, 4, 8, to 64, then going to 160 and then in decimal multiples of 16, 320, 640, 1600, 3200 etc. Made of chert, limestone, steatite, etc. they are generally cubical in shape. The measures of length were based upon a unit of foot of 37.6 cm and a unit of cubit of about 51.8 to 53.6 cms. Such uniform system of weights and measures indicates an attempt by the central authorities to regulate exchange among the Harappans themselves and possibly with the non-Harappans too.

Seals and sealings have been discovered in large numbers in the Harappan settlements. Seals and sealings are marks of ownership meant to guarantee the quality of the product being sent to faraway lands. That they were used for trade is confirmed

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by the fact that many of the sealings bear impressions of cords and matting behind them. This indicates that the sealings bearing these impressions were originally stuck to bales of merchandise. At Lothal many sealings were discovered lying among the ashes in the ventilation shafts of warehouses. They must have been discarded and thrown away after the imported goods had been unpacked. The seals carried intaglio designs of various animals and a writing which has not been deciphered as yet. However, their use in long distance exchange seems certain.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 State whether the following statements are true or false.
 - a) The Harappan towns were self-sufficient.
 - b) The motive behind the colonisation of far flung areas by the Harappans was basically economic.
 - c) The location of large cities was decided only by the potentialities of food production.
 - d) River transportation was the cheaper and easier means of communication.
 - e) The tools found in different Harappan sites do not show any uniformity in design.
 - f) The Indus merchants exchanged their goods with the Mesopotamians for silver.
- 2 Fill in the blanks.
 - a) The Harappans obtained gold from.....(Kashmir/Rajasthan).
 - b) (Iron/Tin).....was not known to the Harappans.
 - c) Lapis Lazuli was discovered in large quantity at.....(Kalibangan/Shortughai).
 - d) Copper was obtained from.....(Rajasthan/Gujarat).
 - e) (Suktagen-Dor/Kalibangan).....was important as a trading port between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians.
- 3 Discuss about the exchange system among the Harappan towns. Answer in ten lines.

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7.6 TRADE WITH THE PERSIAN GULF AND MESOPOTAMIA

So far we have talked about the inter-regional exchange activities of the Harappans. In these activities Harappans were the dominant partners. Now we shall discuss the trade and exchange activities of Harappans with the contemporary West Asian civilizations. Mesopotamia was located thousands of miles away from the Harappan heartland. Yet these two civilizations had some kind of a trade linkage.

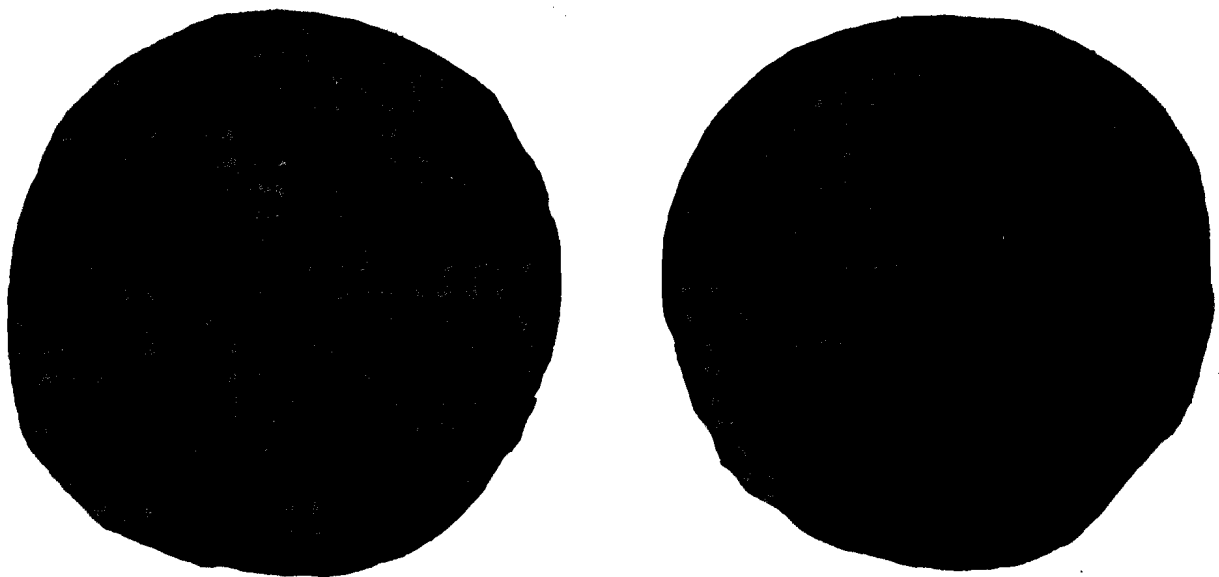
7.6.1 Archaeological Evidence for Contacts

Our information about the exchange comes from the finds of typical Harappan seals in Mesopotamia. About two dozen seals, either Harappan or made in imitation of

Harappan seals, have been found in the Mesopotamian cities like Susa, Ur, etc. Recently some of the Persian Gulf ancient sites like Failaka and Behrain have also yielded Harappan seals. In the Mesopotamian city of Nippur a seal has been found with Harappan script and a unicorn shown on it. Similarly, two square Indus seals with unicorn and Indus script were reported from the Mesopotamian city of Kish. In another city called Umma was found a sealing from the Indus Valley meaning that some goods had been received here from the Indus Valley.

In the settlement of Tell Asmar were found certain Harappan ceramics, etched Carmelian beads and kidney shaped bone inlay. All of these indicate trade linkage between Mesopotamia and the Harappans. A distinctive type of terracotta figurines generally found in the Indus Valley has been found in Nippur in Mesopotamia. These figurines depicting a male nude with obese stomach, animal like faces, stubby tails and shoulder holes for the attachment of movable arms are common at the Harappan sites. The finds of three similar figurines in Nippur are indicative of some Harappan influence. Again it has been found that the Indus dice types (1/2, 3/6, 4/5) were found in the Mesopotamian cities of Ur, Nippur and Tell Asmar. Apart from these beads having distinctive designs have been found in Mesopotamia and they seem to have been brought from the Indus Valley. Beads from Chanhudaro with single, double or triple circular designs closely resemble some beads discovered in Kish in Mesopotamia. Harappan weights have been found in Persian Gulf and Mesopotamian sites.

From the Harappan civilization the finds of objects of Mesopotamian origin are almost non-existent. In Mohenjodaro three cylinder seals of the Mesopotamian type have been found. However, they too, seem to have been made in some centre of Harappan Civilization. Some metal objects might have been derived from Mesopotamia. In the settlement of Lothal was found a circular button seal. This seal has been found in large numbers in the excavations at the port at Behrain. These seals seem to have originated in the Persian Gulf ports. Also bun shaped copper ingots have been found in Lothal. These are similar to the ones found in the Persian Gulf islands and Susa. Given the scarcity of material objects which could show contacts between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians, some scholars have questioned the notion of direct trade exchange between these civilizations. It is believed that the Harappans might have taken their wares to the settlements in the Persian Gulf. Some of these were further transported to Mesopotamian towns by the merchants of Persian Gulf ports like Behrain.



12. Seal of Persian Gulf Type : Lothal

7.6.2 Literary Evidence for Exchange

In Mesopotamia some ancient writings have been discovered which give us an idea of their trade linkages with the Harappan Civilization. The famous king Sargon of Akkad (c. 2350 B.C.) in Mesopotamia boasts that the ships of Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha were moored at his capital. Scholars have generally identified Meluhha with the coastal towns of the Harappans or the region of the river Indus. Some scholars

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have suggested that Magan referred to the Makran coast. Some other documents used by the merchants of the city of Ur have also come down to us. They indicate that the merchants of Ur imported copper, carnelian, ivory, shell, lapis lazuli, pearls and ebony from Meluhha. All these objects seem to have been available in plenty in the Harappan sites.

In some cases, like copper, we are not aware of any major sources of supply to the Harappans. However, we should remember that the Harappans were exploiting a very large geographical zone extending upto Central Asia. They might have captured the trading networks that had existed in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the 'Early Harappan' period. The early Mesopotamian literature also refers to a community of merchants from Meluhha living in Mesopotamia. In another instance written documents from Mesopotamia refer to an official interpreter of the Meluhhan language. All these examples indicate that the links between the Harappans and the Mesopotamians were not indirect. Given the distance between these societies we cannot expect regular interaction. However, the relations were fairly close for the Mesopotamian kings to boast about the ships from Meluhha coming to their ports.

The absence of Mesopotamian goods in Harappa can be explained by the fact that traditionally the Mesopotamians exported items like garments, wool, perfumed oil and leather products. All these items are perishable and as such they have not left any trace. Silver might have been one of the items of export. Silver was not available in any known Harappan source. However, they were using it in large quantities. This could be an import from Mesopotamia.

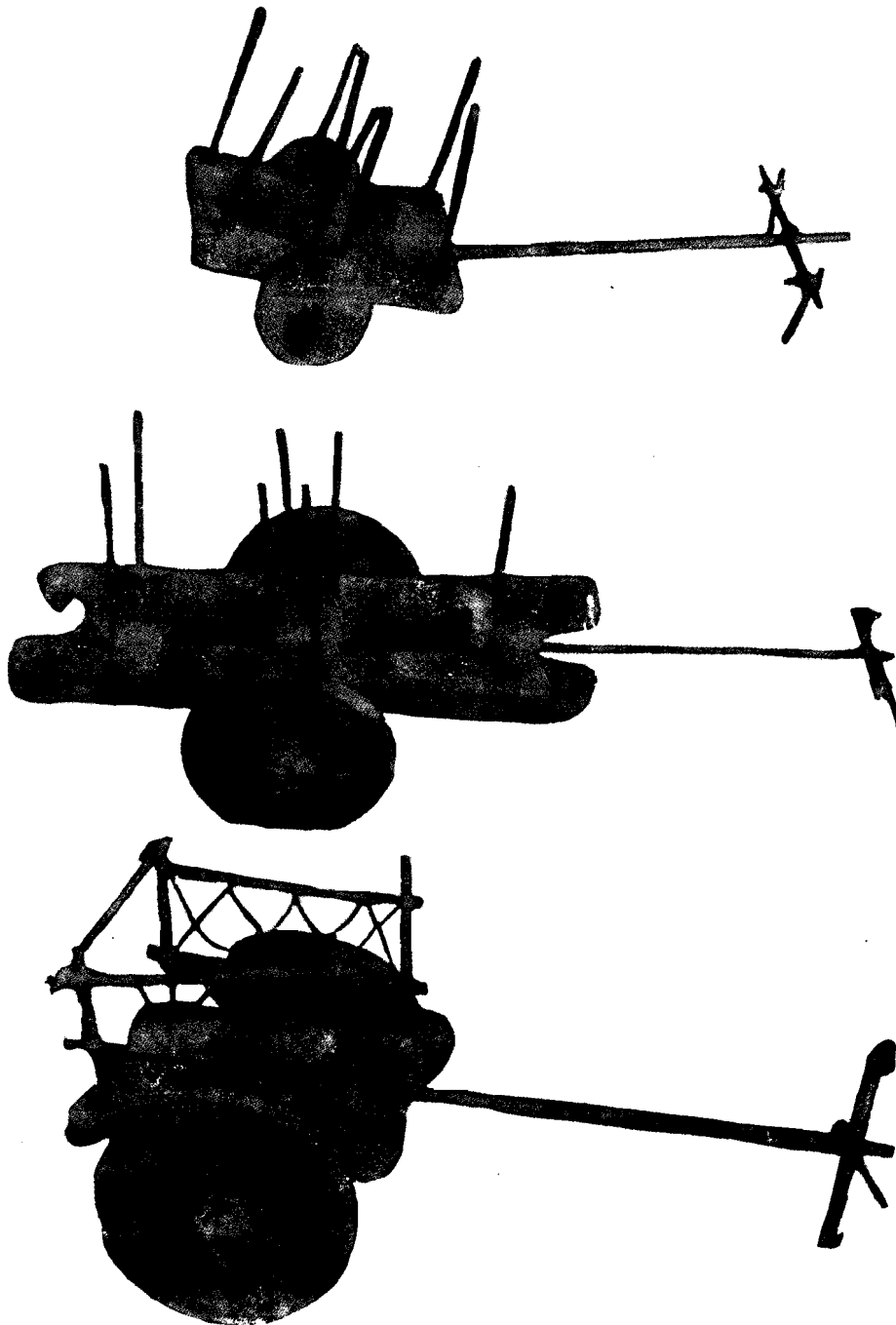
7.7 MODE OF TRANSPORT

The discussion about the nature of contact and exchange brings in the question of transportation. Many representations of ships and boats are found on seals in Harappa and Mohenjodaro. At Lothal was found a terracotta model of a ship with a stick impressed socket for the mast and eyeholes for fixing rigging. At Lothal was also discovered a brick basin 219 by 37 metres in length, with brick walls of 4.5 metres in height. The excavator believed that it was a dockyard. Apart from this site the seashore of the Arabian sea seems to have been dotted with many sea-ports. Places like Rangapur, Somnath and Balakot would have functioned as outlets for the Harappans. Even in the inhospitable Makran coast Harappan sites like Sutkagen-Dor and Sutkakoh have been discovered. The primary reason for their location in those inhospitable tracts was that they were safe from the dangerous monsoon storms and currents hitting the sea-coast in Western India and Sind. In the monsoon months they could function as outlets for the Harappans. Sutkagen-Dor is located on the borders of present day Pakistan and Iran. It is likely that even in the Iranian side there were some Harappan settlements. They have not been explored so far. But this kind of extension along the sea-coast would provide the Harappan ships points of anchorage right upto the Persian Gulf.

The inland transport was done with bullock carts. Many terracotta models of bullock carts have been found in Harappan settlements. In Harappa was found a bronze model of a cart with a seated driver and also models of little carts which are very similar to the modern 'Ikka' used in Punjab. For longer journey through wooded country, caravans of pack-oxen would be the chief means of transport. In historical times a large number of goods were transported by pastoral nomadic communities. Possibly the Harappans also engaged in similar practices. However, in those times river systems would have been the channels of transportation because they were cheaper and safer.



13. Representation of a ship on terracota



14. Toy carts

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 State whether the following statements are true or false.
 - a) The literary sources of the contemporary Mesopotamian civilization do not mention any contact with the Harappan civilization.
 - b) The discovery of Harappan seals in the Mesopotamian cities proves the contact between the Harappan and the Mesopotamian civilizations.
 - c) The discovery of a dockyard at Lothal refers to the maritime trade of the Harappans.
 - d) Bullock cart was not known to the Harappans as means of transport.
- 2 Mark (✓) the right answer.
 - i. What were exported from the Harappan cities to Mesopotamia?
 - a) Garments, Perfumed oil, leather products.
 - b) Silver, gold, bronze
 - c) Copper, ivory, lapis lazuli.

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- ii. Some of the important ports of the Harappan period were:
 - a) Dilmun, Magan, Meluhha
 - b) Kalibangan, Banwali, Lothal
 - c) Ur, Nippur, Chanhudaro
 - iii. Some important Mesopotamian sites where the Harappan seals have been found are:
 - a) Susa, Ur, Kish
 - b) Tell Armar, Behrain, Akkad
 - c) Dilmun, Magan, Meluhha.
- 3 Write in five sentences on the transportation system of the Harappans.

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

We have seen from the above discussion that the Harappan Civilization seems to have carried a brisk internal trade. Internal trade would mean exchange activities carried over an area of 1.3 million square km. This exchange activity is clear from the fact that even very small Harappan sites like Allahdino have yielded seals, sealings, many kinds of beads of semi-precious stones and metal utensils. Most of these objects were imported from outside. The location of Harappan settlement along navigable waterways and traditional land routes also indicates deep involvement of the Harappans in exchange activities. Their linkages with the contemporary West Asian cultures is also well documented now. No wonder we call them a city-centred community.

7.9 KEY WORDS

Bead : A small piece of stone pierced in the middle for stringing.

Hinterland : A region lying inland from a port of centre of influence.

Mesopotamia : Ancient name of Iraq.

Region : An area having specific characteristics of landscape which differentiate it from other areas.

7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 a) False b) True c) False d) True e) False f) True
- 2 a) Kashmir b) Iron c) Shortughai d) Rajasthan e) Sutkagen-Dor
- 3 Your answer should include the uniform systems of weights and measures, binary system of weight, seals and sealings on the products to ensure quality and ownership etc. See Section 7.5.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 a) False b) True c) True d) False
- 2 i) c ii) a iii) a
- 3 Your answer should include archaeological evidence in support of transportation system, river transport, inland transport. See Section 7.7