

Chronology and Interrelations between Harappa and Central Asia

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This lecture will highlight the most recent excavations of the Ravi and Kot Diji levels at Harappa that illustrate the emergence of complex crafts and trade, with a special emphasis on interaction with Central Asia. It will also present the excavations and experimental studies on the production of faience and steatite tablets. The discovery of distinctive objects with links to Central Asia will also be discussed along with a critical analysis of the chronologies of the two regions.

Most traditional archaeological publications on the early history of South Asia use a Culture Historical model to categorize and discuss the continuities and change in human adaptive strategies. In the past decade numerous scholars have tried to break out of this linear and at times constrictive model. While theoretical model building allows for the use of complex, dynamic, fluid, multifaceted, and contested approaches, they are not practical when it comes to dealing with actual sites and artifacts. Consequently, most archaeologists who are digging and analyzing artifacts find it easier to continue using a relative simple chronological framework with the understanding that it is nothing more than a tool to assist in the eventual construction of more complex models. Once enough data have been collected and organized it is possible to develop more precise frameworks for interpreting cultural processes. In this lecture I presented the most current discussions of the Indus and Bactro-Margiana region using the overarching concept of a "Cultural Tradition" is used to encompass long-term cultural developments in a specific geographical region. When possible, more precisely defined chronological periods and a more precise terminology will be used. This more specific terminology reflects a comprehensive theoretical and chronological framework that is both meaningful and at the same time flexible enough to accommodate the ever changing archaeological and historical database.

Cultural Tradition refers to "persistent configurations of basic technologies and cultural systems within the context of temporal and geographical continuity" (Shaffer, 1991, p. 442 after Willey and Phillips, 1958, p. 37). A cultural Tradition is defined by stylistic groupings, but does not require precise knowledge of cultural relationships between these groupings. During the Palaeolithic period, several

distinct Traditions can be identified in different regions of the subcontinent, such as the Deccan Lower Palaeolithic, Northwest Middle Palaeolithic, Western Upper Palaeolithic, Gangetic Mesolithic, etc. Most of these traditions are not relevant to the specific focus of this volume, but they will be referred to in specific contexts relating to subsistence and technology.

Three major cultural Traditions relating to the initial emergence of urbanism can be identified for the northwestern subcontinent: the **Indus, Baluchistan, and Helmand Traditions**. The **Bactro-Margiana Tradition** falls at the northwestern edge of South Asia and is linked in different ways to processes of cultural and political developments in the subcontinent, beginning as early as the Palaeolithic and continuing through the Early Historic period. Each of these traditions can be subdivided into Eras and Phases as outlined below. Developments in other regions of peninsular South Asia have generally been discussed in terms of single sites or small regional cultures based on limited surveys and excavations. In order to integrate these oftentimes confusing sets of data into the framework proposed used in the northwestern regions, it is possible to identify three major cultural traditions, the Ganga-Vindhya Tradition, the Malwa Tradition and the Deccan Tradition. Each of these traditions is represented by various Eras and Phases, and all of them are linked during their respective Integration Eras to the overarching Indo-Gangetic Tradition. This final Tradition has been defined for the northern subcontinent during the second major phase of urbanization and is basically synonymous with the Early Historic Period.

Each Tradition can be subdivided into Eras and Phases that allow archaeologists to organize and compare materials from different chronological periods and geographical regions. Eras do not have fixed boundaries in time or space and more than one Era may co-exist within a Tradition. These are not simple evolutionary developmental phases and not all are found in every tradition.

Foraging Era refers to the subsistence focus on wild plants and animals. This era includes mobile and sedentary foragers, including communities involved in hunting and fishing. Early Food Producing Era has an economy based on food production but lacking ceramics. In the Regionalization Era, distinct artifact styles (e.g. ceramics) cluster in time and space (without fixed boundaries) and are connected by regional interaction networks. The Integration Era shows pronounced widespread homogeneity in material culture, reflecting intense interaction between social groups.

The Localization Era has general similarity in artifact styles (comparable to the

Regionalization Era), indicating a continued, but altered, presence of interaction networks (Shaffer, 1991, p. 442).

Within each Era, Phases can be defined on the basis of tool technologies, pottery and other types of artifacts, writing and architectural styles. A Phase is the smallest analytical unit, limited to a locality or a region and to a relatively short interval of time. All of the Traditions and Phases are linked directly or indirectly through avenues of communication and trade. These Interaction Systems are reflected by broad distributions of cultural traits within a brief period. Traditions and Phases are not totally distinct phenomena because of their interconnections through economic, social and ritual interaction systems.

Major Cultural Traditions

Indus Tradition

Foraging Era 10,000 to 2000 BCE

Mesolithic and Microlithic

Early Food Producing Era 7000 to 5500 BCE

Mehrgarh Phase

Regionalization Era 5500 to 2600 BCE

Early Harappan Phases

Ravi, Hakra, Sheri Khan Tarakai,

Balakot, Amri, Kot Diji, Sothi,

Integration Era

Harappan Phase 2600 to 1900 BCE

Localization Era

Late Harappan Phases 1900 to 1300 BCE

Punjab, Jhukar, Rangpur

Indus Tradition :

The Indus Tradition refers to the total phenomenon of human adaptations that resulted in the integration of diverse communities throughout the greater Indus Valley and adjacent regions. This Tradition has been called the Indus Valley Tradition, as well as the Indus-Saraswati Tradition, both of which usually begin with the period of initial domestication and settled village communities. In this book the

time frame for this Tradition has been pushed back to include the earlier Foraging Era.

Foraging Era: A relatively long period of time and diffuse geographical area during which mobile and semi-sedentary foraging and hunting communities began focusing on intensive exploitation of specific plants and animals. In specific areas of Afghanistan and the edges of the Indus valley these adaptive strategies eventually led to the domestication of certain species. The general date of 10,000 BCE corresponds to a period at the end of the Pleistocene when this type of transition is known to have been occurring in a broad region stretching from northern Egypt and the Fertile Crescent area of West Asia, to Afghanistan and the Indus Valley. Sites that represent these transitional communities are defined by the presence of microlithic tools and other evidence of human occupation, such as accumulations of marine shell, grinding stones and stone alignments. Sites from this Era have been found along the Baluchistan piedmont zone, in the Rohri hills and adjacent deserts, as well as throughout the coastal regions, from the Makran to Gujarat.

Early Food-producing Era: This Era is represented primarily at the site of Mehrgarh (7000 - 5500 BCE), where there is conclusive evidence for the use of domestic wheat and barley and domestic cattle, sheep and goats. At present only one cultural phase (Mehrgarh Phase) has been identified for this Era, but future excavations in other regions may result in the identification of additional phases. At Mehrgarh, small rectangular mud-brick houses were subdivided into rooms and cubicles that could have been used for storage of grain and other necessities. Baskets coated with bitumen have been discovered in the houses and graves. No elaborate ceramic technology had been developed at this time, but the first basket impressed, low-fired ceramics begin to appear at the very end of this phase. Numerous ornaments made from marine shells and exotic colored stones were buried with the dead along with polished stone axes and chert blades. Additional sites that may belong to this Era have been discovered along the edges of the Indus valley, but have not yet been excavated.

Regionalization Era: From 5500 to 2600 BCE numerous regional cultures emerged throughout the greater Indus region. This relatively long time period has been subdivided into many distinct Phases on the basis of distinctive pottery, artifacts and chronological occurrence. Most sites reveal the presence of more than one phase. Specialized crafts including ceramics, metallurgy, lapidary arts, glazed faience and fired steatite were developed in each major region. Many crafts using organic

materials such as textiles, basketry and woodworking have also been documented. Distinct artifact and ornament styles represented by beads, bangles and decorated figurines evolved in specific regions. Geometric seals were made from terracotta, bone and ivory. The use of pre-firing potter's marks and post-firing graffiti on pottery set the foundations for the later emergence of writing. Extensive trade networks were established along the major river routes and across mountain passes to connect settlements to each other and facilitate the movement of goods and raw materials. Trade networks were maintained by emerging elites as well as by mobile traders. Communities specialized in pastoralism, fishing, foraging and hunting continued to exist alongside the more settled agricultural societies. The later part of the Regionalization Era, often referred to as the Early Harappan Period, represents a phase of formative urbanism. The building of walled settlements, the use of specific types of painted pottery and ornaments, the appearance of seals and rudimentary writing and the expanded trade networks represent the emergence of complex chiefdoms and incipient urbanism.

Integration Era: This Era has only one phase (Harappa Phase) with three subdivisions that dates from approximately 2600 to 1900 B.C. During the Harappa Phase, there is a synthesis of major regional polities into a larger integrated economic, political and ideological system. A relatively uniform range of pottery styles and other types of material culture including ritual symbols has been found throughout the greater Indus valley. Extensive urbanism, characterized by large cities built with fired brick, and satellite settlements made of mud brick begins during this phase. A formalized writing system, the Indus Script, was established. The use of standardized weights and measures indicates the presence of taxation and regulations of trade. Hierarchical social order and stratified society is reflected in architecture and settlement patterns, as well as artifact styles and the organization of technological production. The Harappa Phase represents the first state-level political organization, but no single settlement dominated the region and there is no indication for the emergence of hereditary monarchies or highly centralized territorial states. There is a conspicuous absence of central temples, palaces and elaborate elite burials that are characteristic of other early urban societies in Mesopotamia, Egypt and China. Although massive mud brick walls surrounded most large settlements, there is no evidence for major conflict or warfare as is common in other early civilizations.

Localization Era: A time of cultural transformation connected with changes in local environments, socio-political organization, changing population distributions and

settlement patterns. Some urban centers decrease in size and other regions showing increasing numbers of smaller settlements. The Harappa Phase economic and political structures and associated artifacts such as seals and weights disappear. Beginning around 1900 BCE, this transformation continues until around 1300 BCE and overlaps with the Regionalization Era of the larger Indo-Gangetic Tradition (see below). The major Phases identified for this Era represent the emergence and consolidation of localized states or chiefdoms with smaller scale social and political interaction. As the cultural regions became disconnected, the unifying styles of artifacts of the earlier Indus cities disappeared. Major changes occurred in burial practices, painted pottery styles and ritual objects. During this time period, literary sources indicate that Indo-Aryan languages and Vedic ideology and culture were spreading throughout the northern subcontinent. Vedic religious traditions set the foundation for later Brahmanical Hinduism. The roots of other religious traditions, such as Jainism and Buddhism, were also beginning to form at this time. In contrast to these changes, earlier Indus techniques of farming and herding continued to be used along with many of the technologies, such as ceramics, bead making, shell working and metallurgy. New technologies that emerge at this time include higher temperature kilns and glass bead making.

Bactro-Margiana Tradition

Foraging Era

Upper Palaeolithic - Kuprukian Phase 15,000 - 9000 BCE

Early Food Producing Era

Non-ceramic Neolithic, Gar-I-Mar 8500- 5500 BCE
(Jeitun Culture + 6000 -5000 BCE)

Regionalization Era 5500-2800 BCE

Gar-i-Mar, Gar-i-Asp, Ceramic Neolithic/Chalcolithic 5500 BCE
Anau -Namazga 4500-2800 BCE

Integration Era 2800-1500 BCE

Namazga IV/Geoksyur, 2800-2100 BCE
Namazga V, 2100-1900 BC
Namazga VI/BMAC 1900-1500 BC

Localization Era 1500 - 700 BCE

Tulkhar, Beshkent, Vakhsh cultures

Bactro-Margiana Tradition

Foraging Era : Along the northern foothills of the Hindu Kush there is evidence for Late Upper Palaeolithic and Epi-Palaeolithic communities between 20,000 and 9000 BCE who had begun to focus their hunting on wild sheep and goat as well as cattle, and they may have begun gathering wild grains such as wheat and barley. No evidence Epi Palaeolithic sites have been reported in the Kopet Dagh (S. Turkmenistan) or in the oases regions of Margiana and Bactria, but Mesolithic/Epi Palaeolithic sites have been identified to the east near the Caspian Sea and in the arid deserts to the north of the Hindu Kush in Turkmenistan.

Early Food-producing Era: Between 9000-8000 BCE the first evidence of domestic sheep/goat and possibly cattle is documented at the cave sites of Gar-i-Mar and Gar-i-Asp, and the open air site of Aq Kupruk in northern Afghanistan. These communities did not produce pottery and were still involved in hunting and probably gathered wild grains, but they provide important evidence that the processes leading to domestication were occurring in this region at about the same time as in the Near East. Neolithic settlements with evidence for sheep, goat, wheat and barley have been found at sites such as Jeitun (Djeitun) in the Kopet Dagh and further to the east in Margiana. While earlier scholars have argued that these settlements represent migrations from eastern Iran, they could also be linked to communities in northern Afghanistan.

Regionalization Era: From around 4500-2700 BCE farming communities along the Kopet Dagh and in the oases regions of Margiana and Bactria began developing distinctive regional styles. For the purposes of this book they are all grouped together as distinct Phases within a single Tradition though some scholars define a separate Tradition for each major area. The agricultural villages in the Western and Central areas of the Kopet Dagh have some cultural similarities with sites to the south on the Iranian Plateau and probably represent a distinct Phase (Anau-Namazga). In the Eastern Kopet Dagh and Margiana, new pottery styles, architecture and distinctive burial traditions indicate the emergence of a different cultural Phase (Geoksyur). The Geoksyur pottery has similarities with earlier Phases found in the Indus and Baluchistan Traditions to the south, but it appears to be an indigenous development linked to the south through long distance interaction systems. Lapis lazuli trade to the south may have been one of the factors linking these regions, but so far there is little evidence for trade items from the south finding their way north.

Integration Era: From 2800 -2100 BCE major changes are seen in the Kopet Dagh

that indicates the emergence of complex chiefdoms or hierarchical state level society. Although not on the same scale as seen in the Helmand or the Indus Traditions, settlements become larger and are fortified. There is a rise in specialized crafts and increased status differentiation in burials. A Harappan settlement was established at Shortughai along the upper Amu Darya in Bactria, but there is no indication of direct interaction between this outpost and the settlements in the Kopet Dagh.

From 2100-1900 BCE the Margiana oases become heavily settled through the implementation of an extensive irrigation system. During this period artifacts from the Indus Tradition, including seals and carved ivory rods are found in Central Asian sites. Some Central Asian type artifacts are also moving to the south, but there is no indication of major cultural impact between the two regions. This same pattern seems to hold for the final phase of Central Asian integration, which has been referred to as the Bactro-Margiana Archaeological Complex -BMAC. From around 1900-1500 BCE this phase sees the emergence of a distinctive settlement style in Margiana and then it spreads to Bactria. This is clearly an indigenous process and does not represent migration or diffusion from outside of Central Asia. Heavily fortified towns with multiple concentric walls and complex multi-roomed structures were constructed using mud brick. Almost identical styles of material culture were being made at all of the major sites and finished objects produced in Central Asia have been found distributed throughout Afghanistan and at major sites in the Indus Valley during the first part of this Phase, from 1900-1750 BC. The actual movement of people from central Asia to Baluchistan and the edges of the Indus Valley during this time period is supported by the discovery of burials with BMAC objects. Some scholars have argued that the BMAC communities represent Indo-Aryan or Indo-Iranian speaking cultures that earlier scholars thought were moving into the Indus Valley at approximately this same time. This interpretation may in fact be correct, but after 1750 there is no evidence for interaction with the Indus Valley. Furthermore, since no BMAC sites or continuities of this tradition have been documented in the Punjab or Ganga-Yamuna regions these communities cannot be connected to the Indo-Aryan speaking communities of the Rg Veda and later Epic traditions.

Localization Era: From 1500 to 700 BCE, Central Asia sees the continuity of regional cultural traditions and a possible redirection of interaction to the steppes in the north. This period sees the breakdown of the previously integrated culture into smaller localized groups that may represent pastoral tribes. Numerous cemeteries have been excavated that indicate links to steppe cultures in the north as well as settled agriculturalists in Bactria and Margiana.