Chapter 2

Previous Research on Diversity of Harappan Civilization and Harappan seals
Chapter 2 - Previous Research on Diversity of Harappan Civilization 
and Harappan seals

Chapter introduction

Chapter 2 summarises previous research on the diversity of Harappan Civilization and Harappan seals in order to justify the selection of the Ph.D. aims, and the identification of Harappan seals as the primary subject of study- among the various categories of Harappan artifacts- in the course of this work.

1. History of research on the diversity of Harappan Civilization

Scholars have pointed out that the Harappan Civilization was not homogenous through space and time, based on data from recent excavations and explorations.

The representative theories of the diversity of Harappan Civilization are ‘Sorath-Harappan’ culture (Possehl and Herman 1990) and ‘domain’ theory (Possehl 1999, 2002) by G.L. Possehl. The first scholar to point out this distinction within the Harappan Civilization was J.P. Joshi (Joshi 1984). However, Possehl has identified more than 7 domains (i.e. Harappan Domain, Eastern Domain, Cholistan Domain, Sindhi Domain, Kulli Domain, Sorath Domain, Northwestern Borderlands and Anarta Chalcolithic) on account of geography, settlement pattern data and cultural material (Possehl 2002, 2003). The excavations at Rojdi by Possehl and Raval (Possehl and Raval 1989) were important from the point of view of identifying the regional variations of the Harappan Civilization in Saurashtra. It was noticed that the material culture associated with the Harappan culture at Rojdi showed some differences when compared to material found in the Sindh-Baluchistan region, termed by Possehl as the ‘Sindhi Harappan’ Domain. This was found to be true for the entire Saurashtra region. This difference was treated
as a regional variation of the Harappan culture in Saurashtra and termed as ‘Sorath Harappan’ (Possehl and Herman 1990). Similar regional differences in the material culture are visible, particularly in the ceramic assemblages of the Harappan sites in the Saraswati basin while the sites located in the Sindh-Baluchistan region have classical Harappan elements and thereby form one distinct region within the Harappan empire. Although it is impossible to identify the existence of regional societies or cultures such as Sorath Harappan culture in other regions under present condition because of a lack of sufficient data of excavation and exploration, it is important to note – as Possehl points out- the possibility of the existence of diversity within the Harappan Civilization and regional cultural traditions of each region.

There are some studies about diversity of Harappan Civilization that precede Possehl’s study. Y.D. Sharma evaluated that the Bala culture of eastern Punjab continued from the Pre-/Early Harappan period to the Post Harappan period (Sharma 1982). Sharma’s study suggests that the diversity of Harappan Civilization resulted from the regional cultural traditions in the Pre-/Early Harappan period.

Although the relationship of regional cultures and the Harappan Civilization have not been discussed sufficiently, these studies indicate that the earlier belief of the Harappan Civilization being homogenous throughout space and time was incorrect.

Recent advances in Harappan archaeology, (based on the studies of ceramic assemblages), have revealed the presence of a number of cultural manifestations that reflect regional variations of cultural tradition within the whole Harappan region.

For example, in the Ghaggar Basin, regional differences can be observed in the material culture - particularly in the ceramic assemblages of the Harappan sites like Farmana etc., which show a continuity of the Sothi-Siswal ceramic tradition even in the Harappan phase, along with the typical Harappan pottery (Shinde et al. 2011 etc.), while the sites located in the Sindh-Balochistan region yield classical Harappan elements forming one cultural region (such as the substitution of Pre-/Early Harappan elements at
Chapter 2

Figure 2.1: Regional variations of the ceramic assemblages in Harappan Civilization
The same situation is observed in the Gomal and Gujarat regions. In the Gomal region the Kot Diji ceramic tradition continued even in the Harappan phase along with the Harappan pottery (Dani 1970-71; Konasukawa 2008c), and in the Gujarat region the Anarta ceramic tradition continued into the Harappan phase along with the Harappan and Sorath-Harappan pottery (Ajithprasad 2002; Kharakwal et al. 2012; Shinde 1992, 1998; Sonawane and Ajithprasad 1994, etc.) (Figure 2.1). Furthermore, in the southern Balochistan region, the Kulli ceramic tradition - which could have originated from the Balochistan ceramic tradition (i.e. Quetta style pottery etc.) with noticeable differences from Harappan pottery - had been used during the Mature Harappan period (Casal 1966; Jarrige et al. 2011; Kondo et al. 2007; Possehl 1986; Quivron 2008; Shudai 2009-2010, Shudai et al. 2009, 2013) (Figure 2.1).

Based on this evidence, it seems likely that the regional cultures before the Mature Harappan phase contributed to the development of the Harappan elements in each of these regions, since a number of regional Pre-/Early Harappan cultures flourished in various parts of the Harappan region. In due course, the relationship between these regional cultures and the Harappan culture that succeeded them generated the regional variations or diversity in the Harappan Civilization.

2. Research history on Harappan seals

The Harappan seals have been studied from various viewpoints and approaches since the beginning of archaeological studies on Harappan Civilization.

Noguchi 2003; Parpola 1986, 2011a, 2011b; Parpola and Janhunen 2011; Rissman 1988, 1989, etc), as well as attempts to decipher the Indus script (Farmer et al. 2004; Mahadevan 1977; Parpola 1994b; Possehl 1996; Rao 1982; Zide and Zvelebil 1976, etc.)

There are three volumes of the corpus of Harappan seal and inscriptions, namely the Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions (Joshi and Parpola 1987; Parpola et al. 2010; Shah and Parpola 1991).

In recent studies, although it is still in the formative period of research, some scholars have discussed manufacture techniques of Harappan seals through SEM and 3D analyses (Green 2011; Konasukawa 2012a, 2012c; Kenoyer and Meadow 2011, etc), based on the early studies by E.J.H. Mackay (Mackay 1931).

In the connection with the studies of Harappan seals, it can be said that the studies of Dilmun seals (Al-Sindi 1999; Bruswing et al. 1983, Kjaerum 1983, 1994 etc.), Persian Gulf seals (Hallo and Buchanan 1965; Mitchell 1986, etc.) and the seals of BMAC (Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex) (Hiebert 1994; Parpola 2005; Salvatori 2000; Shinde et al. 2005; Winckelmann 2000, 2005, etc.) are also very important. For this reason, future work by the author will consider the relationships of Harappan seals with those seal types following the completion of this Ph. D. study.

3. Chapter conclusion

Studies of the various ceramic assemblages within the Harappan Culture have shown a number of cultural manifestations which reflect regional variations of cultural tradition (Figure 2.1). Likewise, there are many previous studies on Harappan seals conducted from various view points.

However, no studies on Harappan seals till date have considered the possibility of regional variations and diversity in Harappan Culture being reflected in the seals found from different regional zones. For this reason, the present study focuses on
variations in Harappan seals and their connection to regional diversity in the greater complex of the Harappan culture.
Chapter 2

Note

1) The Study of Harappan seals is very important for understanding the structure of the urbanized society of Harappan Civilization, especially the trade and exchange activities. The roles of the trade and exchange activities in the Greater Indus region or between the Greater Indus region and neighboring zones during the 3rd millennium BC have been discussed in great detail by many archaeologists (Kenoyer 1995; Kohl 1978, 1979, 1987; Lamberg-Karlovsky and Tosi 1973; Law 2008; Mery and Blackman 2005; Olijdam and Spoor 2008; Tosi 1979, etc.).