

TOPIC: FOREIGN TRADE AND COMMERCE OF HARAPPA CIVILIZATION

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Abstract: *The present paper deals the foreign trade of Harappa civilization. In this paper, the focus has been made on the import and export of commodities. The means of transport which were used at that time were also include in this paper. In this paper, we have Mesopotamian documents which inform about trade and commerce during Harappa period but we are mainly dependent on the archaeological evidences which throw light on the foreign trade of Harappa civilization with the foreign civilizations.*

Key Words: Civilization, import, export, commodities and archaeological evidences

Trade can be understood reciprocal traffic of materials or goods directed by human agency from one place or individual to another.

¹ Harappa civilization had trade relations with the foreign countries. It had trade relations with the cities of Mesopotamia which were proved by the archaeological evidences.² It is said the merchants from the Indus valley were residing in Mesopotamian cities but the presence of Indus musicians and serving ladies can be possible.³

The period around 2500 BC-2000 BC saw the emergence of the urban phase of Harappa culture and during this period Harappa trade with the west reached at zenith.⁴ We have many archaeological evidences and documents of Mesopotamia which throw light on the Harappan trade with the west. It was from Qalat-al-Bahrain where chert cubic weights have been reported and Mesopotamian barrel shaped haematite weights have also been reported from Dilmun.⁵ The Persian Gulf seals and cylindrical seals of Mesopotamia have been identified in Indus valley. It was from Lothal where Persian Gulf seals were

¹. C.C.Lamberg-Karlovsky, Trade Mechanisms in Indus Mesopotamian interrelations, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.92, No.02, April-June, p.222.

².D. N. Jha, *Ancient India; In Historical Outline*, Manohar; New-Delhi, 2011, p.37.

³. Jonathan M.Kenoyer, Trade and Technology of the Indus valley: New insights from Harappa Pakistan, *World Archaeology*, Vol.29, No.02, p.274.

⁴. LajwantiShahani, Ethno-archaeology of Harappa Sea trade—A Preliminary study, *Man and Environment*, Vol.XXII, No.01, 1997, p16.

⁵. Serge Cleuzion, The Oman Peninsula and the Indus civilization: A Reassessment, *Man and Environment*, Vol.XVII, No.02, jan-june 1992, p.93.

reported.⁶ The Arab *dhous* have been found in many parts of Kachh of Gujarat to procure staple food supplies in exchange they brought wet and dry dates.⁷ A coffin burial of Harappa which resembled with the Sumerian burial according to the great archaeologist Mortimer Wheeler which indicates that there was close connection between Indus valley and Sumerian civilization.⁸ From Lothal where two Egyptian terracotta mummies were found. It was also from Mohenjo-Daro where Egyptian mummy was reported.⁹ The people of Indus valley civilization imported many items from outside. They imported copper from Afghanistan, lapis lazuli from Iraq, Jade and turquoise from Pamir in Central Asia and Khorasan in Persia.¹⁰ In spite of, a large number of archaeological findings have been reported from outside the Indus valley which indicates that there was a trade relation between Harappa civilization and the west. It was from Umm as-Sujur where statuettes of rams were found and these were also reported from Mohenjo-Daro.¹¹ A group of red ware jars with black painted bands found in the early city-II of Qala at al-Bahrain. It was from Oman where the elongated humped bull on a black-on-red hemispherical jar from Cairn V was found which is dated second quarter of the 3rd millennium BC.¹² It was at Wadi Suq where a cubic stone weight of Indus origin was founded. From Mayasar, cord-impressions, thumb-nail impression, Harappan-like signs engraved on rims of jars and a prismatic seal of possible Indus tradition. It is dated 3rd millennium BC.¹³ From Hili North where ceramics resembled with Indus-like painted decoration. The ivory comb based on Indus models found at Ra's al-Junayz which was also reported from Mohenjodaro and Chanhudaro.¹⁴ It is said that Harappan glyptics, stone-weights, beads, ceramics, metal-objects and soft-stone vessels were found all over the Gulf. Harappan seals made of copper

⁶. Lajwanti Shahani, Ethno-archaeology of Harappa sea trade—A Preliminary study, *Man and Environment*, Vol.XXII, No.01, 1997, pp.11 and 13.

⁷. *Ibid*, p.15.

⁸. K.A.Chowdhury and S.S.Ghosh, Plants remains from Harappa 1946, *Ancient India*, No.07, 1951, pp.13 and 14.

⁹. M.K.Dhavalikar, *Cultural Imperialism (Indus Civilization in Western India)*, New-Delhi, 1995, p.128.

¹⁰. B.B.Lal, Proto-Historic Investigation, *Ancient India*, No.09, 1953, p.85.

¹¹. Serge Cleuzion, The Oman Peninsula and the Indus civilization: A Reassessment, *Man and Environment*, Vol.XVII, No.02, jan-june 1992, pp-93-97.

¹². *Ibid*.

¹³. *Ibid*.

¹⁴. Lajwanti Shahani, Ethno-archaeology of Harappa sea trade—A Preliminary study, *Man and Environment*, Vol.XXII, No.01, 1997, pp.10 and 13.

and steatite, ivory comb and carnelian beads were found at Oman peninsula.¹⁵ Harappan weights have been found at Ur, Susa, Shimal, Tell-

, Qala'at al Behrain and MaysarI.¹⁶ The Mesopotamian documents or written records inform about the trade with east with three countries such as Dilmun, Makan and Meluhha. Dilmun is to be taken the Persian Gulf region, Makan is present Markan coast in Baluchistan and Meluha is the name of Harappan region.¹⁷ RomilaThapar argues that these were three provinces of Harappa civilization. She proposed Dilmun was Sindh. Makan as well as Meluha was the region of Kutch and Saurashtra.¹⁸ Melhua exported ivory, copper, carnelian, lapis lazuli, birds, monkey and variety of woods to Magan(Oman).¹⁹ All these items were available in India. The other reason was that Meluha was identified with Sindh and Baluchistan due to the existence of a clan named Melahha which belonged to the sea-fearing tribe of the present day Mohans of Sindh who is non-Indo-European group.²⁰ Dilmun was in India because the Summerian myths mention, it was the land which was known for its cleanliness, purity and holiness.²¹ The most important items which were imported into India were silver, ivory, wood, lapis lazuli, carnelian etc.²²

The most important trading station was Shortugai where a large number of lapis lazuli have been reported and for this reason it was made trading outpost.²³ Lothal was also important port of the Harappan people. It was located in Gujrat. A dockyard has been identified at Lothal, although it is controversial. In its vicinity, a warehouse which was considered a hub of exchange and a place where the finished goods of the craft workshop were gathered, stored and transported²⁴ It was from Ur, Tell-Asmar and TepeGawara where a number of Indus cubic dice made of terracotta were reported.²⁵ From Nippur

¹⁵. M.K.Dhavalikar, *Cultural Imperialism (Indus Civilization in Western India)*, pp.119 and 127.

¹⁶. Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, Select book service syndicate, 1993, pp.186 and 187.

¹⁷. M.K.Dhavalikar, *Cultural Imperialism (Indus Civilization in Western India)*, pp.121-127.

¹⁸. *Ibid.*

¹⁹. *Ibid.*

²⁰. *Ibid.*

²¹. *Ibid.*

²². Elisabeth C.L.DuringCaspers, Harappan trade in the Arabian Gulf in the 3rd Millennium BC, *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol.03, 1972-73, London, pp.06 and 07.

²³. Bridget and Raymond Allchin, *Rise of Civilization in India and Pakistan*, pp.186 and 187.

²⁴. RomilaThapar, *Early India from origins to A.D 1300*, (New Delhi, 2002), p. 81.

²⁵. Elisabeth C.L.DuringCaspers, Harappan trade in the Arabian Gulf in the 3rd Millennium BC, *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, Vol.03, 1972-73, London, p.16.

where three nude male figurines made of terracotta have been discovered and these nude male figurines were also found in the Indus cities.²⁶

The numerous representation of ships and boats on Harappan seals and terracotta models of ships indicate the existence of riverine and maritime trade.²⁷ The depiction of Harappan animals on seals, pottery and the presence of terracotta animals indicate that the animals might had been used for transport purposes.²⁸ It is also said that from 2200 BC to 1800 BC, there had developed a trade corridor from central Asia to Oman peninsula with branching off to Baluchistan and Indus-valley which is attested by numerous central Asian objects have been discovered at Baluchistan, Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and vice versa.²⁹ The problems which are linked with the Harappan trade with the west have some shortcomings which have been noticed by some scholars and these scholars are ShreenRatnagar and Chakrabarti. These two scholars argue that there are not sufficient quantitative archaeological evidences for the external trade of Harappan civilization as we have mainly dependent on inorganic evidences.³⁰

Conclusion: At last, it can be said that Harappa civilization had foreign trade with the west, which is supported by Mesopotamian documents and many archaeological evidences, but the problem with the Harappan external trade is that we have mainly dependent on the inorganic materials as we have no organic materials because organic materials are subjected to perish.

²⁶. *Ibid.*

²⁷. D. N. Jha, *Ancient India; In Historical Outline*, p.37.

²⁸. J.Manuel, Harappa environment as one variable in the prepondence of Rhinoceros and paucity of horse, *Puravattava*, No.35, 2004-05, p.22.

²⁹. LajwantiShahani, Ethno-archaeology of Harappa sea trade—A Preliminary study, *Man and Environment*, Vol.XXII, No.01, 1997, p.16.

³⁰. *Ibid*, p.11.