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Q1(c)

Harappan seals

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Harappan seals
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Harappan seals are mostly square steatite with script and an animal.

Harappa, **Mohenjo-daro**, and **Dholavira** are key findspots.

They likely marked goods and office in a trade system.

The Indus script on them is still unread.

Seals are not a full social census of the civilisation.

Introduction

Harappan seals are small inscribed stones and faience pieces from Indus cities. They are the main public sign of Indus writing, trade, and animal imagery.

Body**Form and findspots**

- Typical seals are square steatite, carved in intaglio, with a boss at the back and a short inscription above an animal.
- **Harappa** and **Mohenjo-daro** yielded the densest hoards. **Dholavira** added a large signboard and seals in a gated city of Gujarat.
- Unicorn, bull, elephant, and composite beasts are common. The so-called unicorn is the modal motif, not a zoo census.

Function and script

- Seals likely marked goods, offices, and identity in a trade web that reached Mesopotamia, where Indus-style seals appear.
- The script is still unread. Direction is generally right to left. Sign lists are finite, so it is writing, not mere decoration.
- **Asko Parpola** and others argue a Dravidian hypothesis. That remains a hypothesis until a bilingual appears.

Limit

- Seals are elite or mercantile objects. They do not narrate the whole Indus farm hinterland.

Flow diagram

Harappan seals -> Harappa Mohenjo-daro

Harappan seals -> Dholavira

Harappan seals -> Trade identity script

Conclusion

Harappan seals are the portable archive of Indus script and animal emblem. They prove administration and long-distance trade; they do not yet yield a readable history.

Facts & figures

Steatite seal

The standard Harappan square seal, carved in intaglio with a back boss.

Mohenjo-daro

Largest published seal corpus of the Indus cities, with unicorn and other motifs.

Dholavira

Gujarat city with seals and a unique large signboard of Indus signs.

Unicorn motif

The most frequent animal device on seals, an emblem rather than a zoological record.

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