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Q5(e)

Lothal dockyard and international trade relations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · 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

- Describe the Lothal dockyard as archaeology, not as a slogan
- Show the evidence for a basin linked to tide and trade
- Place Lothal in Harappan international trade
- Note doubts and what still stands

Revision summary

S. R. Rao identified a burnt-brick tidal basin at Lothal as a dock beside warehouses and bead workshops.

Gujarat Harappan coastal sites together support craft export to the Gulf and Mesopotamia (**Meluhha**).

Some archaeologists prefer a reservoir reading; geomorphology of the estuary is still discussed.

Even without the word dock, Lothal is a water-edge trade and craft town.

International trade here is Bronze Age Gulf networks, not a modern port trust.

Introduction

Lothal, on the Bhogavo in Gujarat, is the Harappan site where **S. R. Rao** identified a baked-brick basin as a **tidal dock**. The claim made Lothal India's textbook port for **Indus-Mesopotamia** trade. The bricks are real; the word "dockyard" is an interpretation that later archaeologists have both defended and trimmed.

Body**The structure**

A large trapezoidal basin, burnt-brick lined, with a spillway or inlet toward the river, sits beside a warehouse block and a bead factory. Rao argued that ships entered with the tide, that the walls matched a lock-like arrangement, and that Lothal was an **estuarine harbour of the mature Harappan (roughly later third millennium BCE)**. **Nearby: acropolis, lower town, cemetery, weights, seals, and a Persian Gulf** type of circular seal or related finds in the wider Gujarat Harappan.

Trade relations

Harappan trade westward is known from **Meluhha** in Mesopotamian texts, from **Indus seals at Ur and in the Gulf**, from **carnelian beads, ivory, timber, copper**, and from **Dilmun (Bahrain)** as a middle port. Lothal's bead workshops (carnelian, steatite) and weights fit an **export craft town**. **Kuntasi, Dholavira, Khirsara, Padri** show that Gujarat was a coastal Harappan belt, not one dock.

International here means **Gulf and Mesopotamia**, and inland links to **Rajasthan copper** and the **Indus trunk**. It does not mean a modern customs house.

Doubts

Leshnik and others asked whether the basin was a **reservoir or tank for a dry town, not a ship dock: silt, distance to palaeo-coast, and wall design were the issues**. Later **geomorphology** has tried to **reconstruct the palaeo-estuary**. Even if "dock" is too strong, **Lothal remains a craft and warehouse centre on a tidal creek**, which is enough for trade.

ASI conservation and the site museum keep the dock story in public memory. **Teaching should say: engineered water basin plus workshop plus seals**, then "dock" as the strongest reading, not the only possible noun.

Flow diagram

Lothal basin -> Warehouse beads
Warehouse beads -> Gulf Dilmun
Gulf Dilmun -> Mesopotamia Meluhha

Conclusion

Lothal's brick basin, warehouse and bead factory mark a Gujarat Harappan port-craft settlement tied to Gulf and Mesopotamian exchange. Whether every course of brick was a ship lock, the town was built for water and for goods.

Facts & figures

S. R. Rao

Excavator who interpreted Lothal's brick basin as a tidal dock of the mature Harappan.

Meluhha

Mesopotamian name widely identified with the Indus region in Bronze Age trade texts.

Carnelian beads

A Harappan export craft; Lothal's workshops are part of the evidence for long-distance exchange.