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Q1

Discuss the salient features of the Harappan architecture.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · GS I · 10 marks · Indian Heritage and Culture

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Core demand of the question

- **Name the main kinds of Harappan building:** citadel, lower town, dock, warehouse, drainage
- Describe materials, planning and water works with site examples
- Place the sites on the Indus-Saraswati map, not as a list of names only

Revision summary

Harappan cities combined a western citadel with an eastern lower town and a grid of streets.

Burnt brick in a set ratio, covered drains, wells and bathing floors were the civic kit.

Mohenjo-daro is known for the Great Bath, **Lothal** for a dock-like basin, and **Dholavira** for rock-cut reservoirs.

Sites spread from Harappa and Rakhigarhi to Kalibangan and the Gujarat coast.

The architecture is public infrastructure more than a royal temple style.

Introduction

Harappan architecture is the first large, planned building tradition on the Indian subcontinent. It is not a palace culture of one king. It is a **city culture**: baked brick, a grid of streets, and water managed as a public good. The same grammar appears from the **Punjab plains** to Kutch, which is why a map matters as much as a ground plan.

Body**Planned cities, not random mounds**

A typical mature Harappan town had a raised **citadel** on the west and a **lower town** to the east. Streets ran in a rough **grid**, with main roads wide enough for carts and lanes that served houses. Houses opened inward onto a courtyard. Many had a bathing platform and a drain that joined a covered street drain. That drainage is the signature of the civilisation: waste was not left to soak the street.

The brick was **standardised**. A common ratio was **1:2: 4**. Builders used **mud brick for cores and burnt brick** where water would attack the wall. Timber and gypsum plaster appear in special buildings. There is little monumental sculpture on the walls. Beauty sat in **proportion and civic order**, not in a carved temple tower.

Water, work and worship in stone and brick

• **Mohenjo-daro**, on the Indus in Sindh, holds the **Great Bath**: a watertight tank with bitumen, side rooms, and a drain. It looks like a public ritual of cleanliness. Nearby stand a large **granary or warehouse** and a dense lower town. **Harappa**, on the Ravi in Pakistani Punjab, has circular working platforms and granary blocks beside the citadel. **Dholavira, in the Rann of Kutch, is the most dramatic water city: rock-cut reservoirs, storm-water channels, and a giant stone signboard.** **Lothal**, on the Gulf of Khambhat, has a baked-brick basin usually read as a **dock** or water tank linked to trade. **Kalibangan** in Rajasthan shows ploughed fields and fire altars. **Rakhigarhi** in Haryana is among the largest settlements on the Ghaggar-Hakra (often identified with the Saraswati) belt. **Banawali** and **Bhirrana** extend that eastern map.

Fortification walls at **Dholavira** and Harappa, and the absence of palaces stuffed with royal art, suggest a civic elite more than a god-king. Architecture here is **infrastructure**: drain, well, warehouse, dock.

The map runs from the Himalayan piedmont to the Makran coast and down to Gujarat. Architecture followed **rivers and the sea**, not a single capital.

Flow diagram

Punjab and Haryana
 Harappa on Ravi
 Rakhigarhi on Ghaggar-Hakra
 Banawali / Bhirrana
 Sindh
 Mohenjo-daro on Indus
 Rajasthan
 Kalibangan
 Gujarat and Kutch
 Dholavira reservoirs
 Lothal dock / basin
 Harappa on Ravi -- Mohenjo-daro on Indus
 Rakhigarhi on Ghaggar-Hakra -- Kalibangan
 Kalibangan -- Dholavira reservoirs
 Dholavira reservoirs -- Lothal dock / basin

Conclusion

Harappan architecture is planned brick cities with citadel and lower town, public baths, drains, warehouses and, at **Lothal** and **Dholavira**, ambitious water works. The same language is spoken across a wide Indus-Saraswati and Gujarat map.

Facts & figures

Brick ratio

A widely noted Harappan brick proportion is 1:2:4, which made walls modular across distant sites.

Dholavira

A UNESCO site in Kutch whose reservoirs and storm channels show architecture as water engineering.

Lothal

A Gujarat settlement whose baked-brick basin is read as a dock or tank linked to Gulf of Khambhat trade.

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