

# Harappa Excavations 1986-1990

A Multidisciplinary Approach to  
Third Millennium Urbanism

Edited by Richard H. Meadow

Monographs in World Archaeology No. 3



PREHISTORY PRESS

Madison Wisconsin

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Prehistory Press  
7530 Westward Way  
Madison, Wisconsin 53717-2009

James A. Knight, Publisher  
Carol J. Bracewell, Managing Editor

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ISBN 0-9629110-1-1  
ISSN 1055-2316

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Harappa excavations 1986-1990 : a multidisciplinary approach to third millennium urbanism /  
edited by Richard H. Meadow.

p. cm. -- (Monographs in world archaeology, ISSN 1055-2316 : no. 3)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-9629110-1-1 : \$33.00

1. Harappa Site (Pakistan) 2. Excavations (Archaeology) --  
-- Pakistan. I. Meadow, Richard H. II. Series.

DS392.2 H3H37 1991

934 -- dc20

91-39504  
CIP

Cover art: Bowl on Stand H88-1002/192-17 associated with Burial 194a  
in Harappan Phase Cemetery (see Figure 13.18).

# Project Director's Introduction

George F. Dales  
*University of California-Berkeley*

**T**he urban site of Harappa (District Sahiwal, Punjab, Pakistan—Figure 1.1) has a special place in Old World archaeology. From there, in the mid-19th century, first came artifacts of an unknown ancient culture that were to attract the attention of western scholars. Square stone stamp seals inscribed with a still enigmatic script provided the first evidence for the existence of what we know today to be South Asia's earliest urban society, sometimes called the "Harappan Civilization" after the site itself.

Not until the early 1920s, however, were large-scale excavations at Harappa initiated by the Archaeological Survey of India. (See Chapter 2 in this volume by Gregory Possehl for an outline of the history of excavations at Harappa.) Concurrently, excavations were begun some 400 miles to the southwest at Mohenjo-daro. Similarities in artifacts, inscriptions, and architecture immediately made it clear that both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were major centers of an unexpectedly early urban culture centered in the Indus Valley. Extensive excavations through the 1920s and into 1930s at both sites, together with subsequent discoveries and excavations at smaller sites in what are now Pakistan, western India, and even Afghanistan, have revealed a vast and unique South Asian counterpart to the better known ancient cultures of the Near East and Egypt.

Since 1986, the University of California at Berkeley has been participating with Pakistan's Department of Archaeology in a multi-disciplinary research project at

Harappa. In this volume we present an overview of some of the directions in which our research is taking us together with some of the most significant results of the first five years of the project. I wish to thank those of our team who were able to present papers at the Society for American Archaeology symposium in New Orleans (April 27, 1991) and to revise them for inclusion here. Also, I want to thank Gregory Possehl and Jim G. Shaffer for acting as discussants in the New Orleans session that was titled "The Archaeology of Urbanism at Harappa, Pakistan." We all extend thanks to Richard Meadow who served as organizer of the symposium and editor of this volume.

The long range objectives of the Harappa project focus on developing a better understanding of the cultural, economic, and social history of Harappa as a discrete urban phenomenon as well as elucidating its role in the development and life of the Indus Civilization as a whole. The physical nature of Harappa provides unusual opportunities to investigate these questions, opportunities that are not available, for example, at Mohenjo-daro where the present water table is too high to allow excavations in the lowest and earliest levels. An even more important feature of Harappa is that the site comprises three successive cultural phases: a "pre-Indus" or "Early Harappan" phase having affinities with Kot Diji, Jalilpur, and other late fourth and early third millennium sites in northern Pakistan; the "mature Indus" or "urban Indus" or "Harappan" phase as first

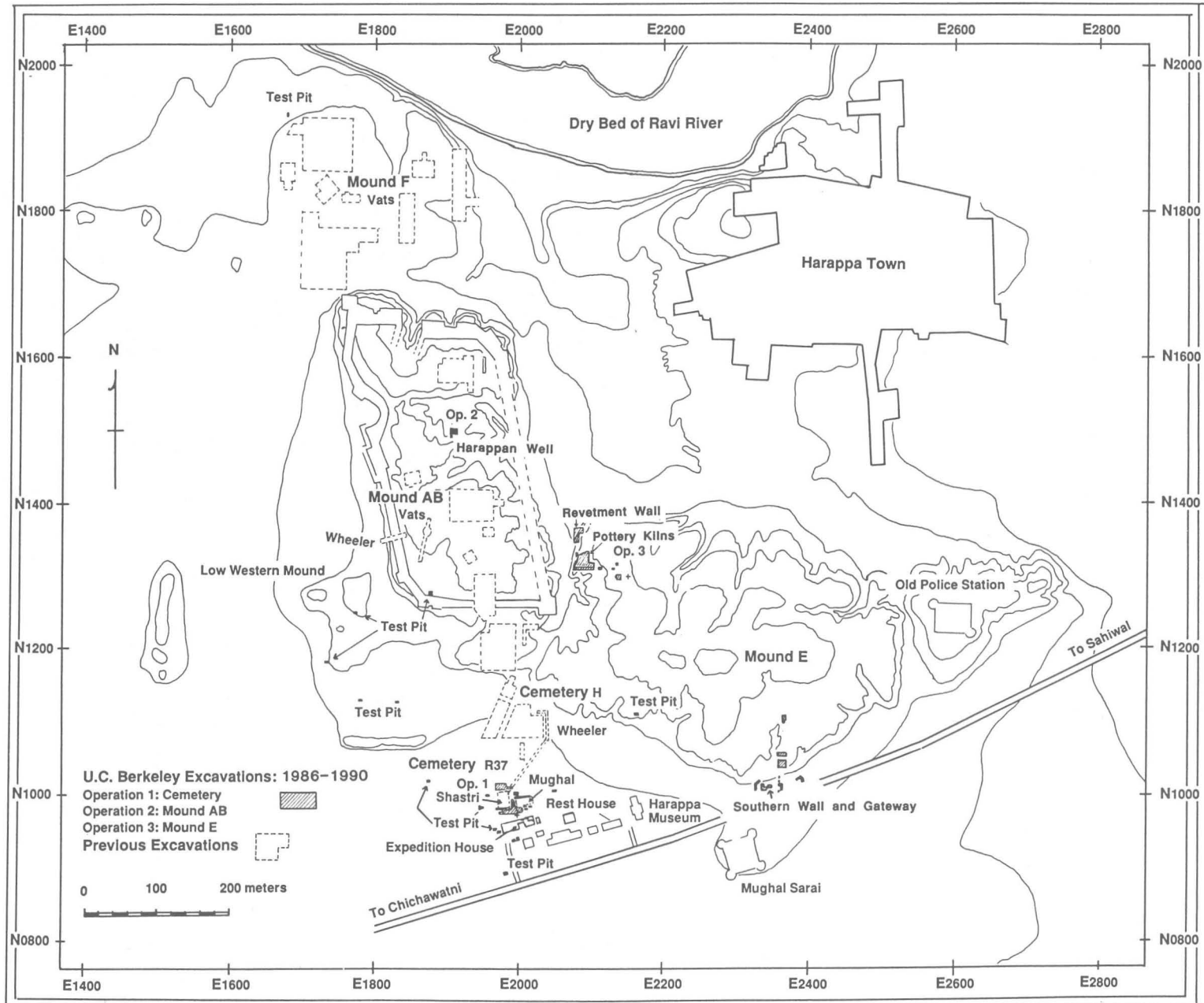


Figure 1.1: Harappa 1990 site plan showing extent of excavations.

defined by the early excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro; and a "post-Indus" or "Late Harappan" phase defined by the distinctive pottery found first in Cemetery H at Harappa.

Our excavations have demonstrated the research potentials as well as some of the preservation problems offered by Harappa. We have discovered at least one main focus of occupation of the Early phase, and although it was founded on natural sediment, there is no ground water problem. Intact architectural remains of Early Harappan (our Period 1) have been exposed followed by remains of what appears to be a transitional phase (Period 2) leading into the urban Harappan phase (Period 3). The potentials for investigating the origins and early development of this major urban settlement and its role within the Indus Civilization are boundless, requiring only imaginative field strategies and adequate funding.

At the later end of the time scale, however, Harappa does present some problems. During the mid-19th century, Harappa (along with other ancient sites) was used as a source of fired bricks for ballast for the construction of the railway bed between Multan and Lahore. The uppermost brick architecture was dismantled and the edges of the mounds were perforated with tunnels that followed the lines of fired brick walls. The result is that there are virtually no structures of the Late Harappan phase (Period 5), and little architecture of the latest Harappan phase (Period 4) remains intact. The subsequent collapse of the tunnels, the burrowing of animals, and erosion from the annual rains make the prospects slim for discovering significant information relating to the end of the Harappan phase and to the relationships between the Harappan and Late Harappan (Cemetery H) occupations.

But these drawbacks are far offset by the positive features of the site. The papers presented in this volume testify to the fact that after just five seasons of work at this enormous site, we have made significant new discoveries concerning the structural and cultural development of the city, the history of technologies and crafts, the knowledge and exploitation of the natural environment, and the socio-economic and cultural life of the city.

Two important aspects of the project, however, are not directly reflected in this volume. The first is conservation. The expedition house we constructed in 1986 includes a large field conservation laboratory equipped and supplied following the advice of personnel from the Smithsonian's Conservation Analytical Laboratory who have participated in operating the lab during the field seasons. In the laboratory, desalinization, cleaning, and consolidating of excavated items have been given first priority,

although considerable attention has also been devoted to assisting the site curator in matters relating to the conservation of the site and of specific artifacts in the collection of the Harappa Museum. In addition, our conservators have assisted in the training of Pakistani personnel from the Department of Archaeology and from the Lahore Museum.

The second aspect of the project not directly covered by the papers in this volume is the training program we have offered for Pakistani graduate students, junior officers in the Department of Archaeology, and staff from the Lahore Museum. Month-long intensive courses in basic field and laboratory techniques were offered almost every season. In addition to providing the participants with an opportunity to learn something of our way of doing archaeology, the training program has allowed us the pleasure of interacting with a broader spectrum of the Pakistani scholarly and archaeological community than would have been possible only in our own research program.

The principal medium for initial publication of the results of each season's work is *Pakistan Archaeology*, the journal of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan. For the convenience of readers of this volume, however, we have abstracted these preliminary reports and included them here as Chapter 13. Final publication of various aspects of our work is well underway. The first report to go to press (in late 1991 or early 1992) will be that concerned with the excavations in the Harappan phase cemetery (R37); it comprises the reports of the physical anthropologists together with basic grave lot descriptions. This will be followed by a volume describing in detail the artifacts from the cemetery. As work in other areas is completed, additional publications will be compiled.

Acknowledgements are due many persons and institutions in this country, Pakistan, and Europe. We express thanks to Pakistan's Department of Archaeology, to its Director during the initial negotiations for the license—Mohammad Ishtiaq Khan—and to its current director—Dr. Ahmed Nabi Khan. We appreciate the cooperative and supportive spirit that has prevailed since the start of the project in 1986. We are grateful to the officers of the Ministry of Information, Sports and Tourism who approved the initial license and its renewal in 1989; to Dr. Mohammad Rafique Mughal, Director of Archaeology, Northern Circle, who has been directly responsible for overseeing the project; to the curators of the Harappa Museum and to the various Field Officers of the Department of Archaeology who have worked with us in the field (their names are given in Chapter 12); to Dr. Saifur Rahman Dar, Director, Lahore Museum, who deputed three of his officers to

work with us at various times in the field—Mr. Waseem Ahmad, Mr. Shahbaz Khan, and Mr. Tariq Masud; to the many persons in the American Embassy in Islamabad and the Consulate in Karachi—especially those in USIS—who provided support, encouragement and lecture opportunities; to Donna Strahan, then of Smithsonian's Conservation Analytic Laboratory (and now of the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore) who helped plan, equip and operationalize our field lab during the first three seasons; to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for sending Margaret Leveque to work as Assistant Conservator during the 1987 season; and to the Smithsonian's CAL for sending Harriet Beaubien to act as Conservator for the 1989 and 1990 seasons.

The basic funding for the project, in Pakistani rupees, was provided through the Smithsonian Foreign Currency Program. We offer special thanks to Francine Berkowitz through whom those funds were

made available. Supplemental dollar funds have been provided by the National Geographic Society (Grant #4219-89), the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the University Museum (Philadelphia), and the National Science Foundation (PYI award to J.M. Kenoyer for research and travel and research award to R.H. Meadow for faunal analysis). For additional private contributions we thank Mr. and Mrs. Carlo Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Kostman, and other anonymous contributors.

Finally, I want to express my personal thanks to the members of the Harappa staff who have worked so diligently and faithfully to make the project a success. This has been the most cooperative, skilled and companionable team that I have ever worked with in the field—professors, graduate students and specialists alike—and I find it difficult to fully express my appreciation to them all for their support and assistance during some often difficult times.