

The Master of Animals **in Old World Iconography**

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Master of Animals and Animal Masters in the Iconography of the Indus Tradition

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The Harappan phase of the Indus Tradition is well known for its planned cities, extensive trade networks, specialized technologies, inscribed seals and pottery, and a wide array of artistic depictions including abstract symbols, plants, humans, and animals (KENOYER 2008; POSSEHL 2002a). Although the Indus script has been found on a wide range of objects, the lack of any convincing decipherment (PARPOLA 1994; POSSEHL 1996) has left scholars without any textual reference to aid in the interpretation of these archaeological remains. While it is possible to make meaningful interpretations about the development of urbanism, technology, and trade based solely on the archaeological record, it is more difficult to gain insight into the meanings of Indus art and graphic expressions without deciphered texts. This lack of a decipherment is particularly significant because the Indus script is often found in association with various animal and human depictions, suggesting that the Indus people used the texts to identify and define specific rituals or ideologies associated with the images and motifs. Many motifs on seals or molded tablets appear to be narratives, depicting humans interacting with animals or other humans (KENOYER 1998, 2006). Without being able to read the writing, it is only possible to make broad generalizations about the meaning of these scenes, and the names of individuals or possible deities remain unknown. Fortunately, some scenes and motifs are similar to those seen in the art of adjacent regions in West Asia or Central Asia (PARPOLA 1994), and although this allows a certain degree of insight into the complexity of Indus iconography, the specific meanings of images in the two regions may have been quite different. Another source of information comes from later iconography in South Asia itself, but once again the specific ideological meanings of the iconography are difficult to confirm.

This paper presents a brief introduction to the Indus Tradition and then focuses on the range of images relating to human and animal interactions that were used in the greater Indus region. During the Early Harappan phase (*ca.* 3300–2800 BC) conflict scenes with humans and animals, as well as depictions of horned anthropomorphic images that may have been shamans or deities, are found at many sites throughout the Indus Valley. These early motifs continued to be used in the subsequent Harappan phase (*ca.* 2600–1900 BC) when Indus cities established vast economic and ideological networks. Because the earliest phases of the Indus cities are deeply buried, very few examples of early art have been recovered; but by *ca.* 2200–2000 BC, the horned anthropomorphic figures were depicted in many different forms and contexts. One of the most important motifs that emerged during the later phase was a powerful human figure, the Master or Mistress of Animals, who is depicted controlling, competing with, or in some cases killing various animals. Other images portray animal-headed humans or human-headed animals that may represent complementary or contrasting imagery of what might be anthropomorphic animal deities or an Animal Master or Mistress. In many of the depictions, plants are associated with the figure, either in a headdress or as part of the natural context in which the image appears. Together these depictions provide a glimpse into a highly complex ideology that was increasingly important during the later urban phase, and may have been a major factor in the integration of the diverse communities living in the Indus cities and surrounding hinterland (KENOYER 2006).

Background and Chronology

The greater Indus Valley includes the regions adjacent to the Indus River and its tributaries, as well as the Ghaggar-Hakra-Saraswati River that flowed to the east (Fig. 1) (MUGHAL 1989). After the discovery and excavation of Harappa (VATS 1940) and Mohenjo-daro in the 1920–1930s (MACKAY 1938; MARSHALL 1931), the term “Indus Civilization” became widely used for the urban phase of this distinctive culture, and “Harappa Culture” has been coined for the unifying cultural features found at many different types of sites (KENOYER 1998; POSSEHL 2002a). Today these terms continue to be used, but the more inclusive

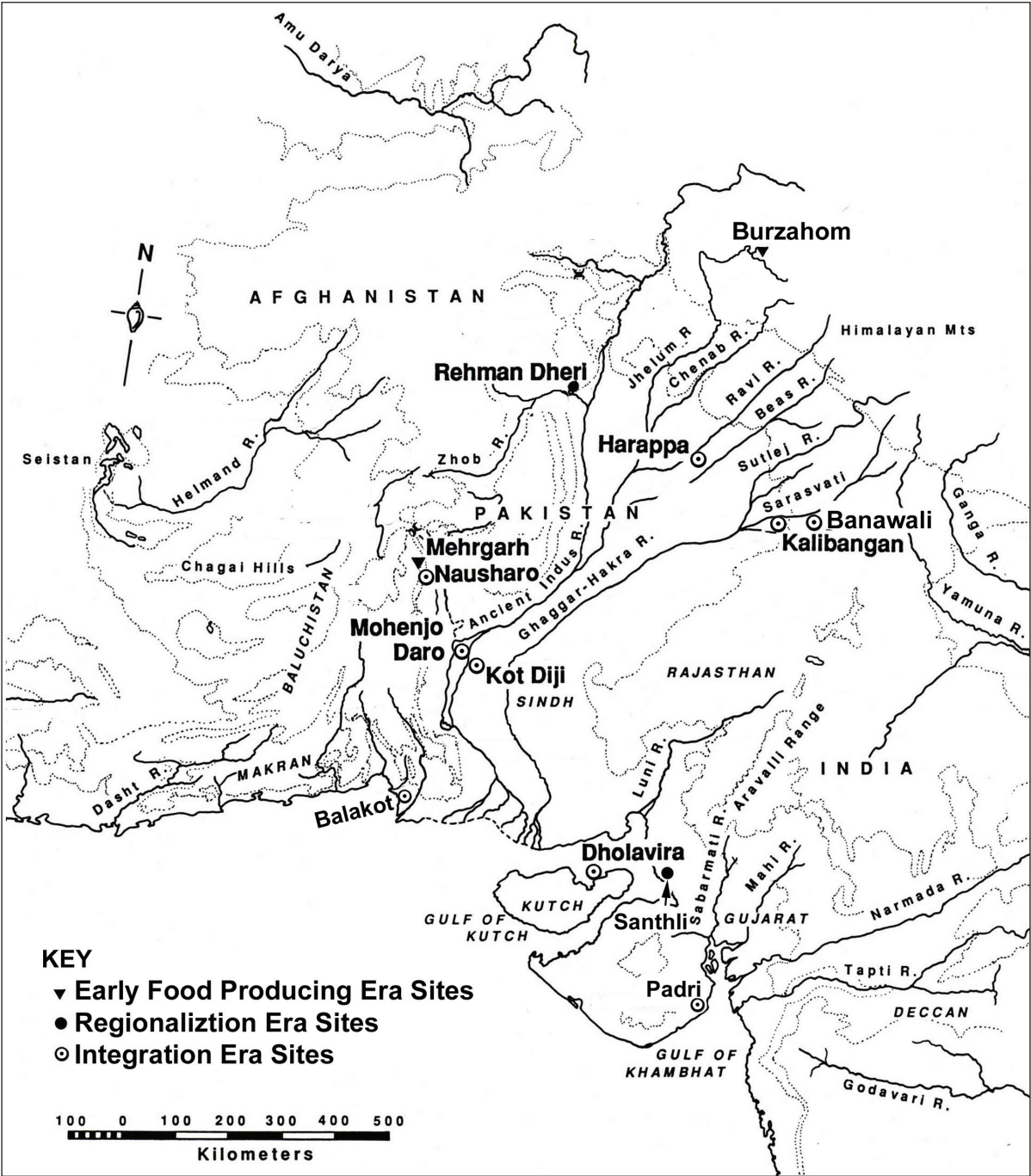


Fig. 1. Map of Indus Tradition sites referred to in text (J. M. Kenoyer).

“Indus Tradition” now refers to the totality of long-term cultural developments that culminated in the first cities in what is now Pakistan and western India (KENOYER 1991, 2008; SHAFFER 1992).

Iconographic depictions of humans and animals, as well as interactions between the two, are common in the art and graphic expression of South Asia, beginning as early as the late Upper Palaeolithic (*ca.* 12,000 YA) and Mesolithic periods (10,000 YA) (KENOYER 1992). While the earliest petroglyphs and rock paintings generally depict humans hunting animals, there are some anthropomorphic figures with horned headdresses that could also represent animal masks for hunting or for ritual purposes. Similar images are found in many other regions of the world and probably reflect common human responses to the natural environment. There is no way to determine if these early images are in fact ancestral to later motifs, but such continuity should not be discounted given that hunting-gathering communities overlapped with the emergence of settled agro-pastoral communities (POSSEHL 2002b).

Beginning *ca.* 7000 BC, during the Early Food Producing Era, settled agro-pastoral communities were established at sites such as Mehrgarh in Baluchistan, Pakistan (see *Fig. 1*) (JARRIGE 2000; JARRIGE – MEADOW 1980). The major domestic animal species were sheep, goat, and humped zebu (*Bos indicus*) (MEADOW 1998), and the major grains were wheat and barley, supplemented by lentils and pulses (COSTANTINI 1984). Wild animals in the region included elephant, water buffalo, rhinoceros, deer, gazelle, antelope, wild sheep and goat, ibex, and carnivores such as tiger and leopard (MEADOW 1998). Although it is possible that the lion was found in the plateaus of Baluchistan and eastern Iran, and Asiatic lions still exist in certain areas of Gujarat (DIVYABHANUSINH 2005), there are no conclusive depictions of lions in the art or figurines of the Indus region (KENOYER 1998; and see CLARK 2005:273).

By *ca.* 5500–4000 BC regional village cultures defined by distinctive pottery styles and other artifacts were present throughout the greater Indus region, and specific chronological phases of cultural development can be identified. Some of these regional cultures show clear links with the later Harappan cultural phenomenon and are referred to as Early Harappan (KENOYER 1998; MUGHAL 1970). The Kot Diji phase of the Early Harappan dates to *ca.* 2800–2600 BC at Harappa (KENOYER 2008) and corresponds with the rise of incipient urban centers in the central and northern Indus-Saraswati region. A study of settlement plans and other artifact assemblages indicates that many of the key elements of later Harappan urbanism are first seen in these Early Harappan towns and settlements. Among the key features are decorative motifs on pottery that are shared over a vast territory and may reflect common ideologies. About 2600 BC Harappan urban centers were built on top of the earlier Kot Diji towns in the core regions, and over the next 700 years (until *ca.* 1900 BC) this distinctive urban culture expanded throughout the greater Indus region, as well as along the Gujarat coast (KENOYER 2008). Indus urban centers represent the integration of diverse communities in an equally diverse geographical and cultural landscape.

Table 1. Harappa Chronology.

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Period 1 | Ravi Phase (Early Harappa) | > 3700– <i>ca.</i> 2800 BC |
| Period 2 | Kot Diji Phase (Early Harappa) | <i>ca.</i> 2800–2600 BC |
| Period 3A | Harappa Phase A | <i>ca.</i> 2600–2450 BC |
| Period 3B | Harappa Phase B | <i>ca.</i> 2450–2200 BC |
| Period 3C | Harappa Phase C | <i>ca.</i> 2200–1900 BC |
| Period 4 | Harappa/Late Harappa Transitional | <i>ca.</i> 1900–1800 BC(?) |
| Period 5 | Late Harappa Phase | <i>ca.</i> 1800 (?)–< 1300 BC |

On the basis of excavations at Harappa, the Harappan phase can be divided into three subperiods (*Table 1*) (MEADOW – KENOYER 2005), based on stylistic changes in pottery, architectural features, and various types of artifacts, particularly carved seals and narrative motifs. Although the urban Harappan

phase of the Indus Tradition is commonly referred to as the Indus Civilization or Harappa Culture, with the discovery of many sites along the now dry bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra-Saraswati River, some scholars call it the Indus-Saraswati Civilization (GUPTA 1996).

Indus Symbols and Their Contexts

Although symbols of hunters with horned headdresses and other abstract ideological symbols have been used since the Palaeolithic period, this paper focuses on those that emerged primarily on painted pottery and on carved seals in settled agro-pastoral communities and eventually urban societies. Symbolic designs and motifs represent ideologies that were widely understood by the communities that produced them and the regional cultures in which they interacted. Symbols such as these were probably used to reinforce and legitimize the social order and the ideology of the community (ANDERSON 1989; HODDER 1982), and they were undoubtedly used in various contexts, publicly or privately, depending on the intended audience (KENOYER 2000; and see WELLS, this volume). Many symbols may have been used in multiple contexts, but given the secondary nature of many archaeological deposits, it is not always possible to define the intended context of a symbol or an artifact.

Painted pottery would have been produced in relatively open workshops, easily viewed by the general public in the course of its marketing and use. However, some pottery may have been made specifically for domestic or private use in the home or for private rituals, but we cannot determine this from the pattern of discarded pottery that is found at Indus sites. Carved seals, on the other hand, represent the elite communities of the Indus cities, landowners, merchants, and ritual specialists (KENOYER 1991, 2000). Seals were made in closely controlled workshops, and their motifs and symbols would have been relatively less public. The actual seals were owned and used by a single individual or community, and the sealings from specific seals may have been openly visible to a select group of elites or to traders in the case of sealed trade goods. The symbols on the sealings can be considered a form of either private or public communication, depending on how they were used, which provides important clues about ideology in general and its visual reinforcement within specific contexts.

One aspect of the symbols that needs to be addressed is their longevity. Some motifs, such as the unicorn (KENOYER 1998), appear for only a short period of time and either disappear or are replaced by more complex narratives or ideologies. Other themes, such as the horned animal and horned anthropomorphic figures, have a long history beginning in the Upper Palaeolithic, continuing through the Indus Tradition, up to the present. The meaning of different animals and horned creatures certainly changed over time, and it is highly likely that specific animal motifs found on objects from the same time period may have had different meanings. For example, the wild or domestic water buffalo painted on pottery may have meant something different from figurines of these animals or motifs carved on seals.

Large horns could represent the power, strength, and virility of the animal; by analogy whoever wore a headdress with the horns would possess similar attributes (for animal headdresses, see COUNTS, this volume). The anthropomorphic figures with these headdresses may depict powerful hunters or shamans, or even some form of water buffalo or cattle deity (KENOYER 1998; PARPOLA 1994). In Mesopotamia, beginning *ca.* the mid-third millennium BC, deities came to be distinguished from mortals by the presence of a horned headdress or crown (POTTS 1997:187). The horns depicted in Mesopotamian crowns are probably those of the powerful and dangerous West Asian wild cattle (*Bos primigenius*), and often multiple layers of horns were shown, possibly to accentuate the power of a deity.

Since we cannot read the Indus script, it is not possible to confirm that anthropomorphic figures with horned headdresses are deities or mortals. However, a brief look at later South Asian iconography suggests that horned figures do represent some form of supernatural being, either beneficent or malevolent. For

example, in the later iconography of South Asia, horned images are usually associated with the Asura (demons) who were the enemies of the Deva (gods). Devas were worshipped by Vedic Indo-Aryan-speaking communities, and their enemies, the Dasas, worshipped Asuras (PARPOLA 1994:151). The Indus people have often been associated with the Dasa described in the Vedic texts (HOCK 1999; THAPAR 2000), but this issue is extremely complex and it is not possible to demonstrate the links between the deities of the Indus people, the Vedic Asura, and horned images in later iconography.

Regardless of how the Indus iconography relates to either Mesopotamian or later South Asian patterns, we can assume that horned anthropomorphic figures represent some form of supernatural power. Furthermore, even though we cannot determine the precise meaning of the horned images of the Indus, the fact that they are found at many different sites suggests they represent an ideology shared by many communities throughout the Indus region during the period of incipient urbanism. This ideology continued to develop during the subsequent urban phase, when we see some continuities as well as the appearance of new forms.

The changes in how symbols are created and used provide an important perspective on their role in social and ideological legitimation. The horned water buffalo figure and the horned anthropomorph, for example, are first seen on pottery or inscribed onto terracotta cakes but eventually are incorporated into complex narratives carved on stone seals and molded on terracotta tablets. As pottery motifs found at numerous contemporaneous sites throughout the vast Indus region, they probably represent shared ideologies spread horizontally across the vast areas. However, when these same horned-animal motifs are combined with anthropomorphic figures, or used in narratives in the context of a hierarchically stratified urban society, they probably had a very different function. When narrative scenes appear on Indus seals, they seem to be an attempt to codify and advertise specific ideologies. Molded tablets made from a single master seal or mold were produced in multiple copies distributed throughout sites such as Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. Their role may have been to promote or popularize specific mythological narratives to legitimize the authority of the ruling elites, and at the same time vertically integrate various social strata into a unifying ideology (KENOYER 2000).

Horned-Animal Motifs: Early Harappan and Harappan

During the Early Harappan, Kot Diji Phase (2800–2600 BC), horned-animal motifs appear for the first time on button seals, as well as painted on pottery. The fact that these motifs are found throughout the greater Indus region is not surprising because the animals depicted were also present at all the sites. Based on the wide spreading shape of the horns, the most common animal represented is probably the swamp variety of wild Asian water buffalo (*Bubalis arnee*), but some examples of curly horn, riverine water buffalo are also found. Both male and female water buffalo have large horns, and they were clearly among the most powerful animals found in the marshes along the rivers of the region. Wild buffalo have been found at the Early Harappan site of Santhli in north Gujarat, and possible domestic forms have been recovered from Dholavira, Kutch, Gujarat, as well as Balakot, Baluchistan (see *Fig. 1*) (PATEL – MEADOW 1998). Domestic water buffalo generally show a decrease in overall bone and horn size, due in part to selective breeding.

Examples of this motif are seen painted on Kot Dijian-style pottery from Early Harappan sites such as Rehman Dheri (DURRANI 1988; SHAH – PARPOLA 1991), Kot Diji (*Fig. 2a, c*) (KHAN 1965), and Harappa (KENOYER 2008). Kot Dijian pottery with this motif was produced throughout the greater Indus region and was even traded to surrounding Neolithic communities in remote regions such as Burzahom in Kashmir (*Fig. 2b*) (GOSH 1989). There is some regional variation in how the buffalo is

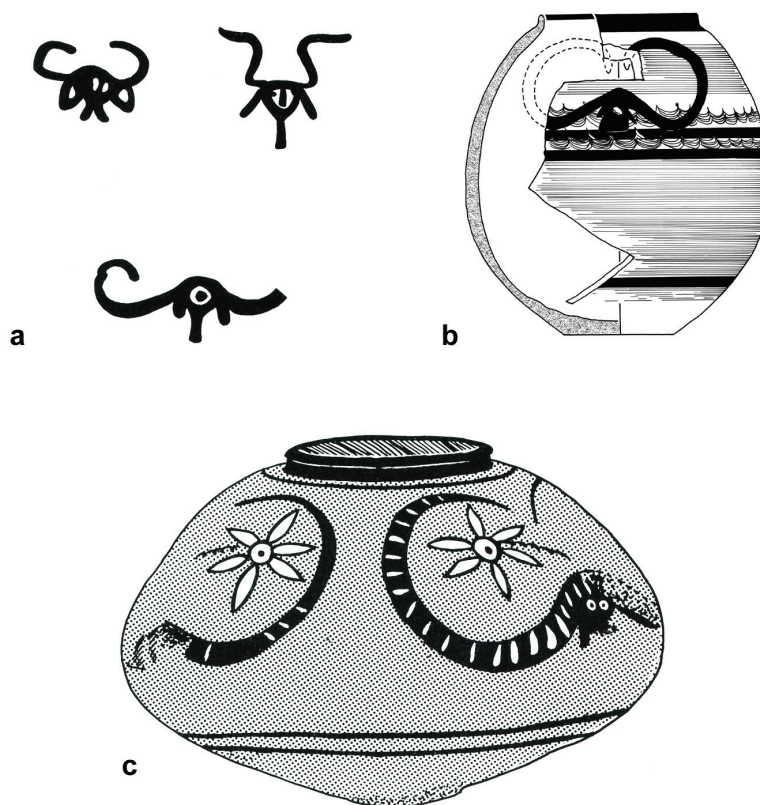


Fig. 2. Early Harappan, horned-animal motif: a. buffalo-horned deity painted on Kot Dijian jars from Rehman Dheri, ca. 2800–2600 BC (after SHAH – PARPOLA 1991:color photographs 13, 14; see also DURRANI 1988:Fig. 56.); b. buffalo-horned deity painted on Kot Dijian jar, Burzahom; c. buffalo-horned deity, polychrome, painted on a jar from Kot Diji, 2800–2600 BC (after KHAN 1965:Pl. 17b).

represented, but the widespread horns suggest the wild animal continued to be depicted, even though domestic animals with smaller and more curly horns may have been used by people living at the sites.

During the subsequent Harappan Phase, horned motifs are not depicted on the typical Harappan black-on-red painted pottery, but are found on regional pottery forms in both the southern and northern areas of the greater Indus Valley. The site of Padri is located along the southern coast of Saurashtra, Gujarat, and has both local and Harappan-style pottery. A large storage jar of local form has a painted design incorporating water buffalo horn motifs and an anthropomorphic figure wearing a water buffalo horned headdress (*Fig. 3a*) (SHINDE 2004). Transverse ridges common on water buffalo horns appear to be included in the horn designs on the Padri pottery. Another example is found farther north, at the regional site of Banawali, located on one of the northern tributaries of the Ghaggar-Hakra-Saraswati River (see *Fig. 1*). A small vessel found in the Harappan levels but made in an Early Harappan shape has the head of a water buffalo with curly horns depicted in relief on the globular body (*Fig. 3b*) (UMESAO 2000:145, cat. no. 558; BISHT, personal communication, 2009). The Banawali pot vessel may depict a riverine variety of the water buffalo, given the curly horns.

These two examples suggest that regional cultures continued to depict horned motifs on pottery using their local artistic traditions, even though Harappan artistic and ritual tradition began to depict this motif in new and more complex ways. The Harappan forms include both male and female horned anthropomorphic figures or deities and a wide variety of narrative scenes that may represent myths and rituals.

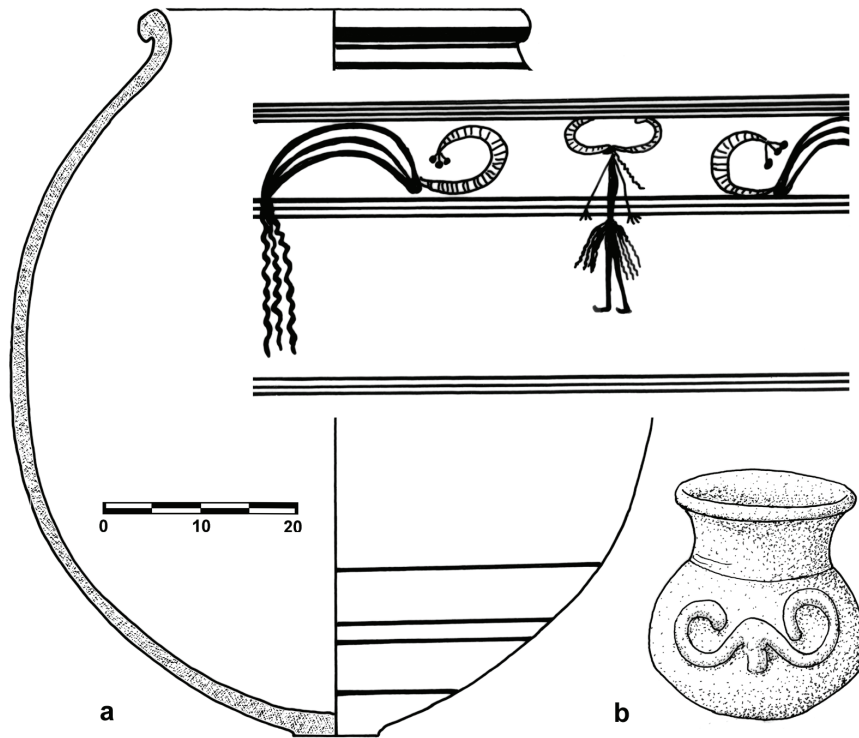


Fig. 3. Harappan horned-animal motif: a. Padri, vessel with horn motifs and anthropomorphic images with horned headdress (after SHINDE 2004); b. Banawali, small globular vessel with buffalo-head motif in relief (after UMESAO 2000:145, cat. no. 558).

Human-Animal Deities or Spirits: Harappan

The use of motifs depicting beings that combine both human and animal features becomes common during the Harappan period (2600–1900 BC). They presumably represent deities or powerful nature spirits, and male or female humans combined with one or more animals, such as the water buffalo, bull, tiger, or Markhor (wild sheep). The motifs are found on various types of objects, including incised clay tablets, carved seals, and molded tablets and three-dimensional terracotta figurines, but almost never on pottery. It is not possible to determine if the animal or the human component is more important, but the prevalence of both suggests they were important symbols and the line between human and animal was quite fluid in terms of ideological representation.

The most common motif is a bearded male with a horned headdress, depicting the widespread horns of a water buffalo, the shorter horns of the zebu bull, or occasionally the twisted horns of the Markhor sheep. Terracotta figurines of this image are common at both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa (Fig. 4a), but the horns are usually missing due to the fragile nature of low-fired terracotta. When carved on seals, a plant motif is often added as part of the headdress. It is not clear if the plant is a separate addition or just difficult to depict on clay figurines and therefore excluded.

There are also rare examples of terracotta figurines with animal bodies and human faces. At Harappa a tiger with a humanlike face has been found (Fig. 4b). Another variation is seen on two figurines from Harappa that have a human female head wearing an elaborate decorated headdress attached to a seated catlike lower body (Fig. 4c). These clay figurines are invariably broken and were probably discarded after being used in household or community rituals (CLARK 2005; KENOYER 1998).

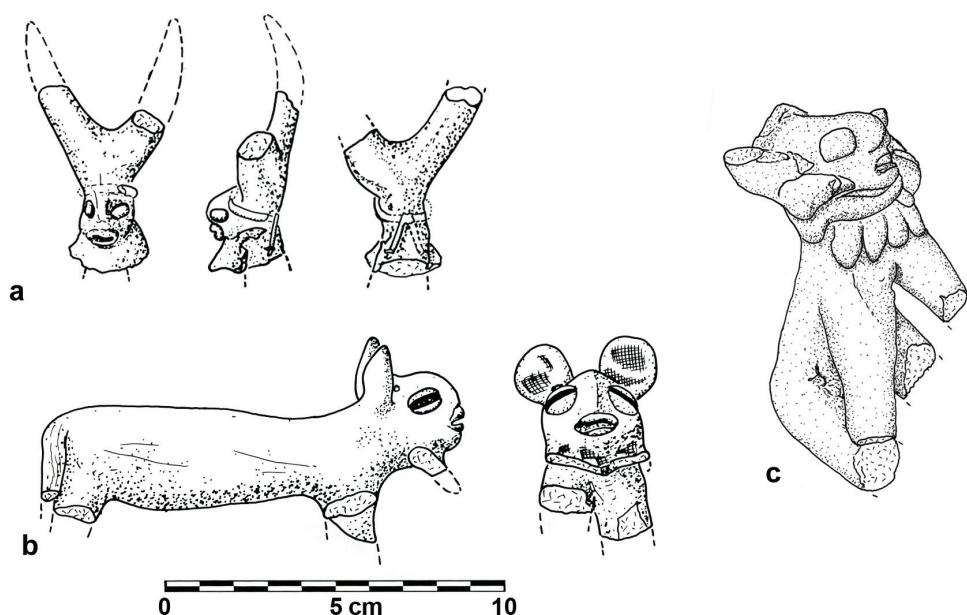


Fig. 4. Harappan horned figurines (J. M. Kenoyer): a. male figurine with horned headdress, Harappa (H94-2265/3952-01); b. tiger with human face, Harappa (H94-2311/5063-01); c. female head on a catlike body, Harappa (HM 2082).

Combined animal and human faces are also found on tiny terracotta pendants that have holes on both edges. This type of object was probably worn as an ornament or possibly used as a finger puppet (KENOYER 1998). An example from Mohenjo-daro has a human bearded face with short bull's horns. The beard lies flat against the chin and the face has a peaceful countenance (Fig. 5a). A comparable object from Harappa shows a human face with bull's horns, but the wide mouth is fanged like a tiger and the beard is spread out like the fur around a tiger's chin (Fig. 5b). These peaceful and ferocious depictions of a horned figure may reflect various aspects of the same deity or regional interpretations of a horned human-tiger being.

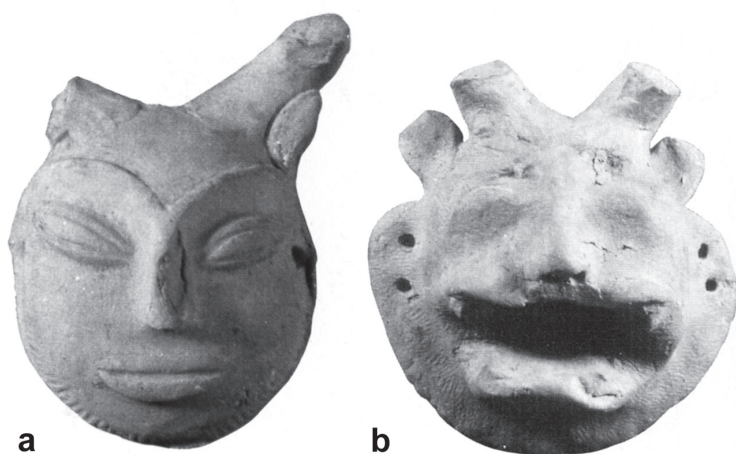


Fig. 5. Terracotta horned tiger man: a. horned (tiger) man with peaceful face, Mohenjo-daro (MD 980) (Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan); b. horned tiger man with ferocious face, Harappa (H93-2093) (Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan).

A comparable image found in later Hindu iconography is referred to as *kritimukha*, or Face of Glory (KRAMRISCH 1996:322). The image represents a demon created by Shiva to destroy another demon, which eventually consumed its own body, leaving only the ferocious head behind. Today, this fierce

tiger/lion/bull/human face is placed above doorways, atop temples, and at the back of many sacred images to ward off evil. The Harappan image may reflect a similar ferocious spirit, but it is not clear if the spirit was benevolent or malevolent.

Although we cannot reconstruct the physical and social context in which these combined human and animal motifs were used, their depiction as figurines and rarely on pottery at sites throughout the greater Indus Valley suggests the images were occasionally worshipped in domestic contexts or less formal settings. In contrast, the same horned images are also carved onto seals or narrative scenes that indicate a more elite context for their use.

Horned Deity and Narrative Motifs

During the Harappan period the use of carved steatite seals with animal motifs and script became widespread in the cities and towns of the Indus Civilization. Seals were used to impress clay lumps that sealed containers, doors, and storerooms, or possibly to verify documents (FRENEZ – TOSI 2005; KENOYER 2001). At Harappa, seals dating to the earliest part of the Harappa phase, Period 3A (2600–2450 BC), were carved with a single animal motif and Indus script. The earliest examples of molded tablets with narrative scenes are found during Period 3B (2450–2200 BC), and most seals and molded tablets with more elaborate narrative scenes date to Period 3C (2200–1900 BC) (KENOYER 2006; MEADOW – KENOYER 1997).

Many of the narrative seals are in fact heavily worn and were clearly used to make sealings, but due to differential preservation of unfired clay, sealings of any kind are very rare at Indus sites. One example with a narrative motif has been discovered from the site of Banawali (Fig. 6) (JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:B-23). It depicts a man standing with arm raised in front of a unicorn and a Markhor sheep, with some script in the background. The male figure has hair tied in a bun behind the head, as is common on other male figures, but there is no indication of a horned headdress. This image could represent a form of Master of Animals without the common horned headdress.



Fig. 6. Master of Animals sealing, Banawali
(after JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:341, B-23).

Some narrative seals and specially made molds with two or more narrative scenes were used to create multiple impressions in terracotta or faience that were fired and used as tokens for economic or ritual purposes (KENOYER 1998, 2006). These distinctive tablets have been found at most large Indus sites, but Harappa and Mohenjo-daro have the largest number of narrative tablets. The formal representation of narratives on high-status administrative objects suggests the ideology being represented was critical to the legitimation of elites and people who used seals as a mechanism for control (KENOYER 2000, 2006). The increased use of narratives in the later urban period could indicate a need to promote ritual events or ideologies that would integrate the city's many diverse communities.

Two distinct horned deities are found in narrative scenes carved onto seals. One figure has relatively short horns emerging from the top of the head like those depicted on the humped zebu; the other has wide, curved horns spreading to the side, characteristic of the water buffalo. Both often have distinctive broad beards and shaggy or long hair. On some of the smaller carvings, details of the faces and the difference between the two types of horns are difficult to distinguish, but the wide, curving horns tend to occur with a central component made from a pipal tree branch (*Ficus religiosa*), which usually has three highly stylized leaves reduced to three projecting lines. The horned figures are shown in many different roles that range from images of adoration, worship, or passive observation to active worship or aggressive attack. These images may actually be distinct forms of the same deity or totally separate gods, but the details cannot be determined without decipherment of the script often found with the narratives. In all these roles, the human (male or female) figure is defined primarily by the fact that it is wearing a horned headdress, but occasionally the human figure is depicted with animal legs, hooves, claws, or a tail; the deity combining human and animal features could be either a Master of Animals or an Animal Master.

In one seal from Mohenjo-daro, the horned image is standing amid a sacred fig or pipal tree, and a second horned image is kneeling in front of the tree, presenting an offering of a human head on a short



Fig. 7. Narrative seal with worship of a deity in a tree, Mohenjo-daro (DK6847, NMP 50.295)
(Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan).

stool (Fig. 7). The standing figure is probably a deity while the kneeling figure could be a shaman or devotee. In other narratives the image is depicted seated in the yogic position, usually on a wide throne or bed (Fig. 8a). Some seated figures with horned headdresses appear to have additional faces carved on the side of the head, suggesting that this deity had at least three aspects (Figs 8a, b and c). Only one terracotta figurine from Mohenjo-daro has a double face, on front and back of the head (MACKAY 1938:Pl. LXXVI, 8), but no figurine with three or four faces has been found.

The short-horned figure is sometimes depicted with the tail of a bull, and on copper tablets from Mohenjo-daro this type of figure is shown carrying a bow and arrows. Two lines projecting from the



a



b



c

Fig. 8. Horned deity seals, Mohenjo-daro: a. horned deity with pipal-leaf headdress, Mohenjo-daro (DK12050, NMP 50.296) (Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan); b. horned deity with star motifs, Mohenjo-daro (M-305) (PARPOLA 1994:Fig. 10.9); reproduced with permission of the author and courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India; c. horned deity surrounded by animals, Mohenjo-daro (JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:M-304); reproduced with permission of the authors and courtesy of the Archaeological Survey of India.

lower face could indicate a beard or simply accentuated lips and nose (*Fig. 9a*) (MACKAY 1938:Pl. CXIII,14; MARSHALL 1931:Pl. CXVII,16). While most horned figures are bearded and presumably male, others are beardless and have a prominent breast representing a female deity. One unique seal from Mohenjo-daro shows a bull-horned female deity with clawlike hands attacking a horned tiger (*Fig. 9b*) (MARSHALL 1931:Pl. CXI, 357). This being has the hindquarters and tail of a bull, but the torso is human female, with a breast in profile. The deity's female form indicates that the horned beings had both male and female aspects.

A third category of animal seen in combination with the human form is the wild ram or Markhor. A complex narrative on a cylinder seal from the site of Kalibangan, India, shows two men pointing

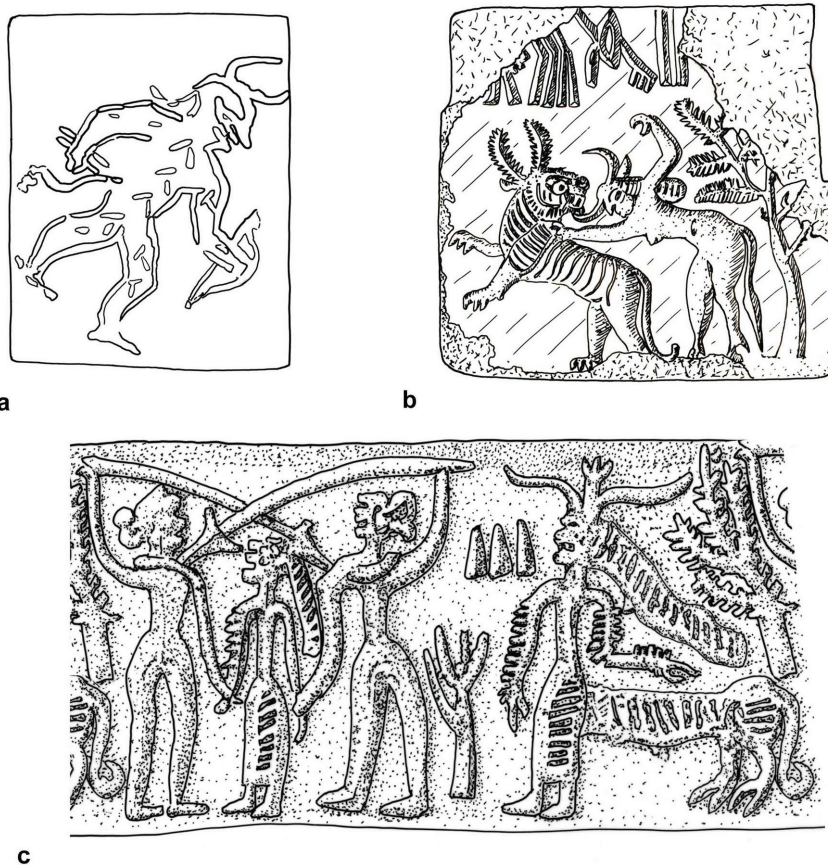


Fig. 9. Horned hunters and deities: a. hunter copper tablet, Mohenjo-daro (after SHAH – PARPOLA 1991:428, M-1540); b. horned deity attacking horned tiger, Mohenjo-daro (after JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987); c. narrative with horned female with bull-tiger body, cylinder seal, Kalibangan (after JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:KB-65).

spears at each other and holding onto a figure that is standing between them (*Fig. 9c*) (JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:K-65). The middle figure is smaller and probably represents a female with long hair, bangles on each arm, and dressed in a long skirt. Looking over the scene is perhaps a female deity with the body of a tiger and the horns of a Markhor. The deity has long streaming hair, and both arms are covered with numerous bangles. In front of the deity is a tree without leaves; behind is a tree covered with leaves. A single sign of three strokes appears in front of the deity's face. The motif of the female human-tiger-Markhor deity is also depicted on a square seal from Kalibangan (JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:K-50) and on a seal from the site of Nausharo (JARRIGE 1989:Pl. XIV, 9), but no example has been discovered at the larger urban centers.

Not all narrative motifs were depicted on seals or molded tablets; one unique example of a horned image was found incised on a common triangular terracotta cake at Kalibangan. The broken terracotta cake shows an anthropomorphic horned figure with feathers or branches emerging from the top of the head (*Fig. 10*). The lower portion of the image is missing, so it is not possible to determine if it was standing or sitting. The opposite side of the same terracotta cake shows a human figure holding a rope tied to an object that some scholars have interpreted as an animal being led to sacrifice (BALA 2004; LAL 1979). Triangular terracotta cakes are normally used for thermal heat retention in ovens and hearths or as baffles on furnaces. The use of a terracotta cake to inscribe what appears to be a sacred image may indicate that occasionally it was used for special rituals. Because Kalibangan, a small regional town, has produced the only example, this was clearly not a common Indus feature.

Horned Deities in Yogic Position

The image of a horned deity seated in the yogic position is quite common at most large Indus sites. It is assumed that it represents a deity because in some narrative tablets a second figure is shown seated below the image in supplication or worship (see *Fig. 13a*). These horned yogic deities come in a wide range of styles, with simple to complex iconography. They are usually associated with Indus script and are seated on a throne or depicted with other symbols, such as stars or various wild animals. On the molded narrative tablets they are usually part of a complex scene containing one or more additional figures or animals and occasionally some Indus script.

A seal from Mohenjo-daro depicts a relatively simple figure seated in the yogic position on a throne with legs carved in the shape of bovine hooves (*Fig. 8a*). Although the frontal face is not very distinct, there appear to be additional faces on each side, possibly representing a three-faced deity. The carving of the body shows well-defined pectoral muscles that have been interpreted by some as breasts, and the lines carved in the groin could be a vagina (ATRE 1998) or stylized male genitalia (KENOYER 1998). The headdress has three pipal leaves branching out of the center and two curving horns on either side.

Another example from Mohenjo-daro shows a nude, pot-bellied figure seated in the standard yogic pose, its face in profile with a massive braid of hair projecting from the back of the head (*Fig. 8b*). A star is carved in the center of each curving horn, and the stylized branch with five leaves curls up from the center of the headdress. Both arms are covered with bangles; no breasts or pectoral muscles are depicted, but a single groove in the groin area has been interpreted as either a vagina or a stylized phallus.

The most famous representation of the horned-deity motif is on a seal from Mohenjo-daro that shows a male deity with three faces seated on a throne in the yogic position with what appears to be an erect phallus (*Fig. 8c*) (KENOYER 1998). This image is heavily adorned with a series of graduated necklaces reaching to his waist and bangles on both arms. The massive headdress is made up of water buffalo horns with deep ridges and a central fan-shaped element that could represent feathers or branches. A rhinoceros, a water buffalo, an elephant, and a tiger, all ferocious animals, surround the figure. The throne has legs in the shape of flaring columns, and two gentle antelope are seen at the front of the dais. A single line of undeciphered Indus script (in reverse) is carved along the top of the seal. The horned figure is clearly the focus of the image, but there are many ways to interpret the iconography (DURING-

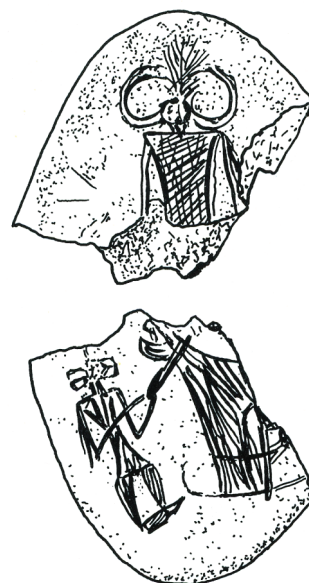


Fig. 10. Horned deity and a figure with a tied animal, incised terracotta cake fragment, Kalibangan, Period I, 2800–2600 BC (after LAL 1979:Pl. 12).

CASPERS 1985; PARPOLA 1994; SRINIVASAN 1984). The yogic posture and erect phallus have tantric overtones, representing the use of meditation and sexual powers to control or maintain balance in nature. Because of these features, many scholars have compared the image on this seal to the later Hindu deity Shiva who is often called *Pasu pati nath*, or Lord of the Beasts. However, such a connection cannot be reliably tested without the decipherment of the text, and there is no way to link the horned figure on any Indus seal with later iconographic images. Even though the images may look similar, the meaning relayed may have been significantly different.

Two molded terracotta tablets from Harappa show the horned deity seated in the yogic position on a throne with a reed house or temple to one side (Fig. 11). These scenes suggest the deity was associated with formal places of worship but was placed in open areas outside the structure during the ritual.



Fig. 11. Horned deity and “temple,” Harappa (H95-2487/4466-01) (Courtesy of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan).

On another narrative tablet, the seated deity is depicted next to a scene in which a human figure is killing a water buffalo (see Fig. 15c). This water buffalo sacrifice may in some way be connected to the worship of the deity or it could just be part of the larger narrative. The horned figure in the yogic position was probably a common deity worshipped at Indus sites; the motif is found on molded terracotta tablets throughout the Indus region.

Bull-Human Attack Motif

There is a separate theme in Indus art depicting conflict between humans and horned animals. The animals are usually the water buffalo, humped zebu, and short-horned bull without a prominent hump. These conflict scenes are depicted on carved terracotta or stone seals dating from the Early Harappan and Harappan periods. Hunting wild cattle or water buffalo must have been dangerous, and it is likely that the scenes on the seals represent either actual or mythological hunting scenes. What is interesting is that the humans seem to be destroyed by the horned animal in the early versions of this motif, while in later motifs the tables are turned and the animal is being destroyed by humans (Fig. 15c) or used for acrobatic leaping rituals (Fig. 12c).

One of the earliest examples of a possible bull-and-human conflict scene is found on a terracotta seal from Mehrgarh (Period VII) dating to the end of the Early Harappan period. It depicts a humped bull or possibly a water buffalo and abstract forms, one of which appears to be a human body, that fill

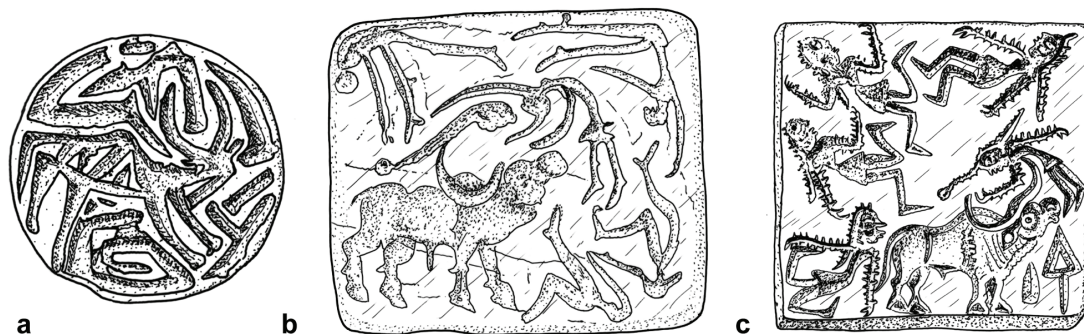


Fig. 12. Buffalo attack scenes: a. bull attack scene, circular button seal, Mehrgarh (after SHAH – PARPOLA 1991:MR-17); b. buffalo attack scene, Mohenjo-daro (after JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987:M-312); c. buffalo attack or bull-leaping scene, Banawali (after UMESAO 2000:88, cat. no. 335).

the space around the bull. The humanlike form looks as if it is being tossed from the horns of the animal (*Fig. 12a*). The motif of a water buffalo attacking and tossing humans is shown in much clearer detail on a steatite seal from Mohenjo-daro, dating to the Harappan period (*Fig. 12b*) (JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987: M-312 DK 8321; MARSHALL 1931). Carved in an abstract but expressive manner, this seal shows a water buffalo bull tossing a human on its horns with four or five additional human bodies lying around the animal; it is unclear if the humans are male or female. The simple style of carving, without much detail, may indicate that the seal belongs to the beginning of the Harappan period or possibly even to the Early Harappan period. The seal is heavily worn with rounded edges indicating that it was used numerous times to impress this motif on clay.

Another seal with a similar motif, discovered at the site of Banawali (BISHT 1982), shows a water buffalo bull with a figure impaled on its horns and four other individuals lying scattered around it (*Fig. 12c*) (UMESAO 2000:No. 335). Some scholars argue that the images are not being impaled but that this is a sequential depiction of a woman acrobat leaping over a water buffalo bull (ASKO PARPOLA, personal communication, 2009). Two Indus script signs are carved beneath the upraised head of the animal. The human figures have what appear to be bangles on both arms and a long braid extending from the back of the head. No breasts are indicated, but the hips have a triangular shape, which suggests that the figures on the Banawali seal may be women rather than men.

All three of these narratives clearly represent the power of the water buffalo or bull, and humans both male and female are either being destroyed or performing a ritual that probably served to illustrate the power of the animal.

Human-Bull Combat Narrative

In combat scenes dating to the later part of the Harappan period, the motif of a human fighting with a short-horned bull suggests that in this new narrative the human was in fact in control and dominating the battle. The scene is most commonly found on molded faience tablets from Harappa, dating to Period 3B, circa 2450–2200 BC. This depiction of combat is actually part of a longer, four-part narrative that is found on two-, three-, and four-sided molded tablets (*Fig. 13*) (KENOYER – MEADOW 1997; MEADOW – KENOYER 1997). In the first scene a human figure, possibly male, grapples with a short-horned bull with its head lowered (*Fig. 13a*). A small, unidentified plant with at least six branches is discernible behind the individual. In the second scene, a deity with long matted hair, possibly wearing a buffalo-horn headdress, sits on a bed or throne in a yogic position (*Fig. 13b*). In most of the tablets the upper part of the headdress is missing, but the matted hair can be seen in some examples. The figure has both arms covered with bangles and sits with arms resting on the knees. A second individual, possibly a supplicant or worshipper, with long hair and wearing bangles, sits on a short stool to the proper left of the individual on the bed or throne. The individual reaches toward the seated deity with the right hand and extends the left arm in the opposite direction. The third scene shows a horned deity standing with both feet planted firmly on the ground and wearing a large water buffalo horn headdress (*Fig. 13d*). Matted hair is seen falling to one side of the head, and a curved shape, possibly representing a jutting beard or necklace, is clearly seen on some of the impressions. A curved branch with three projecting leaves, possibly pipal, emerges from the top of the head, and the arms hanging to the side are covered with bangles. The fourth scene or side of the tablet has six Indus script signs that would have been read from right to left (*Fig. 13d*).

Many examples of this narrative have been found at Harappa, but not all tablets have the full sequence of narratives. Two-sided tablets may have the bullfight scene and script. Three-sided tablets have various combinations of the scenes, either with or without the script. We cannot determine the

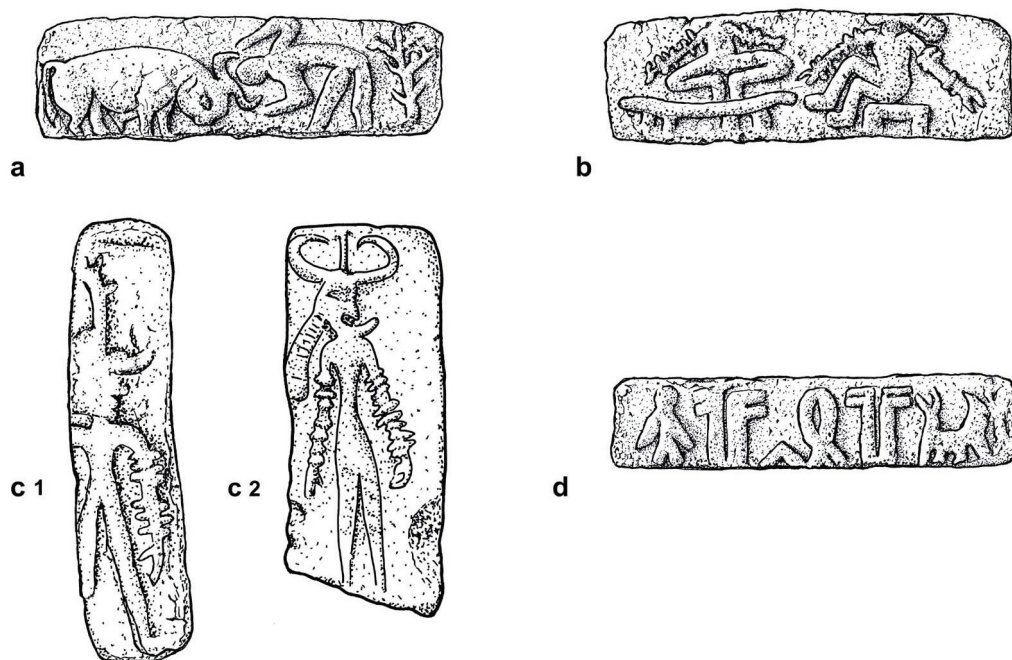


Fig. 13. Molded tablet with four narrative scenes, Harappa (H97-3349/8102-41) (J. M. Kenoyer):
 a. bull and man fight scene; b. deity seated on bed with person seated on stool;
 c. horned deity standing with arms at side, (1) H97-3349, (2) H97-3301; d. Indus script.

reason for producing short or long versions of this narrative, but it may have to do with specific ritual performances or other events that commemorated it. Tablets showing various aspects of the narrative have been found on multiple walled mounds at Harappa, indicating that their use was widespread within the city and not just limited to one part of the settlement (MEADOW – KENOYER 1997). Because of this distribution pattern, we can assume the tablets reflect integrative rituals or events that served to unite the different parts of the ancient city.

Human-Animal Contest Motif

While the struggle between humans and horned animals is clearly the most common theme in Indus iconography, there are other images that depict humans in conflict with tigers and even unicorns. An example of the latter on a fragmentary terracotta tablet shows a stylized human figure with two bangles on each arm standing with arms outstretched between two unicorns (Fig. 14). It is unclear if the image is actually in conflict with the unicorns or if they are paying respect to the figure. The iconographic position, however, is similar to that seen in contest scenes showing a human, usually a male, grabbing two tigers by the throat.

The Indus seals with human-tiger contest scenes have been compared to human-lion or human-bull contest scenes found on cylinder seals from the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic periods in Southern Mesopotamia and Egypt (*ca.* 3000–2900 BC) (PARPOLA 1994:246–248). Although the earliest Mesopotamian and Egyptian examples of contest scenes are dated several hundred years before those of the Indus, there is no indication of trade or exchange with these regions that would result in the diffusion of an isolated ritual motif without some other artifacts as evidence of this interaction. The myth of a hero who could grapple with two ferocious animals is probably a story with deep roots extending to the

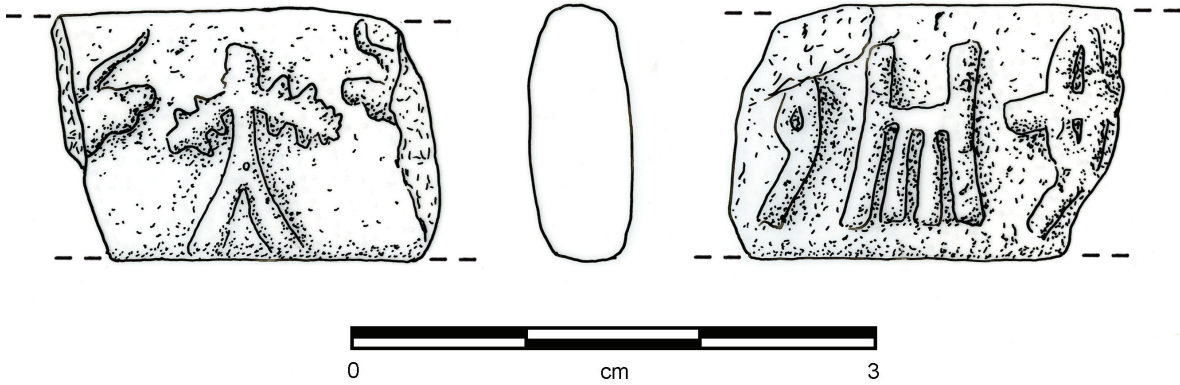


Fig. 14. Hero and unicorn contest scene, Harappa (H97-3416/8022-50) (J. M. Kenoyer).

Palaeolithic and may have been widespread throughout West and South Asia. Each region probably used familiar animals to represent specific concepts of nature and conflict between various spiritual forces.

The Indus seals usually depict a powerful nude male figure, sometimes explicitly male, grasping two tigers by the throats with bare hands. On one Indus seal, where the figure is carved in greater detail, it is possible to make out six locks of hair (Fig. 15a). It is unknown what these locks represent, but Parpola claims the Indus iconography is identical to the six locks of hair depicted on some Mesopotamian hero figures in similar contest scenes (PARPOLA 1994:247). It is possible that such iconographic details were shared between the two regions since this Indus seal may date to the final Harappa phase (*ca.* 2200–1900 BC), by which time we know there was considerable commerce between Mesopotamia and the Indus. However, it seems unlikely that the Indus artist would have borrowed the six locks of hair motif and not the symbol of lions and short-horned Mesopotamian bulls that are also associated with the Mesopotamian hero. In terms of one region influencing the other, we know that the zebu and water buffalo images from the Indus region do spread to Mesopotamia during the Akkadian period (PARPOLA 1994), but so far there is no evidence of Mesopotamian lion motifs or short-horned bull motifs being used in Indus iconography.

The Indus contest motif is also seen on molded tablets where the figure strangling the two tigers with bare hands may represent either a male with developed pectoral muscles or a female with pronounced

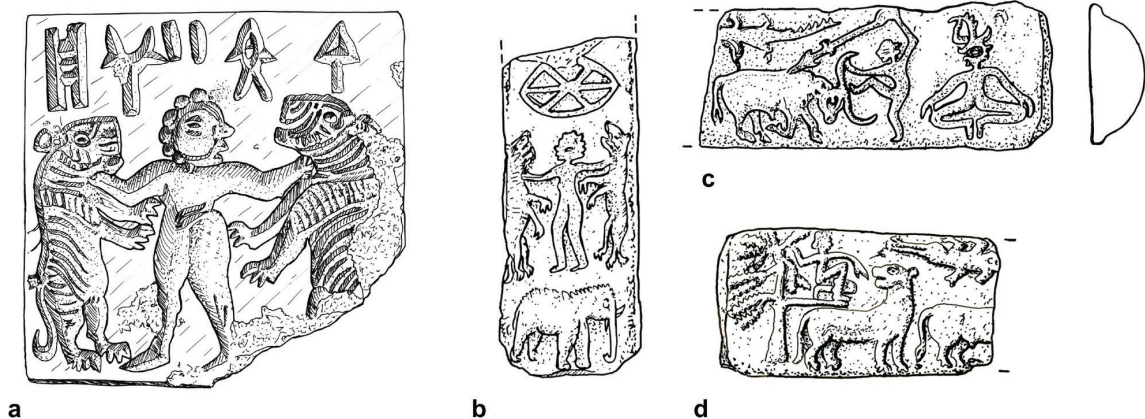


Fig. 15. Tiger contest scenes: a. hero and tigers contest scene, Mohenjo-daro (M308) (after JOSHI – PARPOLA 1987); b. hero or heroine and tigers contest scene, Harappa, obverse (H95-246/4651-10) (J. M. Kenoyer); c. narrative tablet with deity and water buffalo sacrifice, Harappa, reverse (H95-2486/4651-10) (J. M. Kenoyer); d. narrative tablet with man in tree and tiger, Harappa, obverse (H2001-5075/922-01) (J. M. Kenoyer).

breasts seen in profile (*Fig. 15b*). On a terracotta tablet from Harappa, the figure is standing on an elephant, and above the head of the hero/heroine are two Indus script signs (for a discussion of such hierarchical positioning in relation to the Master of Animals motif in the eastern Mediterranean, see COUNTS, this volume). The first sign is a spoked wheel compressed into an almond shape and two single strokes. On the reverse of the same tablet is a narrative scene depicting, from right to left, the following scenes: On the far right is a horned deity seated in the yogic position with bangle-covered arms resting on the knees (*Fig. 15c*). A branch with three leaves is projecting from the top of the head and the arms resting on the knees are covered with bangles. Next is a scene depicting a human figure (presumably male), with hair tied in a bun, at the back of the head, impaling a water buffalo with a trident-like barbed spear. The hunter's foot presses down the water buffalo's head as he thrusts the spear into its shoulder. Above the head of the hunter is a gharial, a small species of crocodile with a narrow snout that was once common in the Ravi and Indus rivers, but is now almost extinct. To the far left is a scene depicting a tiger looking back over its shoulder at a person sitting on the branch of a tree (*Fig. 15d*). This complex narrative has been found on numerous identical molded tablets, and parts of the narrative often occur singly on seals or other two-sided molded tablets (KENOYER 1998).

The scene that is particularly relevant to this paper is the spearing of the water buffalo, which depicts overt mastery of animals by humans. This killing or sacrifice may represent some sort of annual fertility rite or the conquering of a powerful demon. In later Hindu rituals, the water buffalo sacrifice is associated with the worship of the goddess Durga and takes place after the annual fall harvest. The sacrifice also commemorates Durga's destruction of a terrible demon called *Mahishasura*, the Water Buffalo Demon who wreaked havoc throughout the world, upsetting the balance of nature (PARPOLA 1994:254). Iconographically, Durga is depicted using a trident to spear the Water Buffalo Demon. The similarity in the weapons depicted by the Indus and the later Hindu artists can be explained functionally, since this weapon is the only type that can safely kill such a large animal. The center point of the trident delivers the lethal blow, and the two side points keep the impaled animal from pushing up the length of the spear to gore the hunter. The Hindu legend is first noted in the iconography of the Kushana period (*ca.* first–third centuries AD), and the earliest textual reference is dated to *ca.* the fifth century AD (PARPOLA 1994:254), but it may be based on a much earlier oral tradition. While it is not possible to connect directly the Indus motif with later Hindu legends or iconography, it is likely that the shared motifs represent similar stories of struggles between humans and natural powers.

Conclusion

There are several other examples of combined human and animal forms in the Indus culture that indicate even more complex ideologies, but here we focus on those representing specific powerful animals and human mastery of animals, either by male or female figures. It is not possible to accurately quantify how many male vs. female depictions are present, since specific sex indicators are quite rare. Perhaps depicting the sex was not as important to the Indus artists as the other iconographic motifs, presumably since it would have been common knowledge who the image represented. It is also not possible to know when a horned image represents a deity or a ritual specialist. This dichotomy is a purely modern, western construct because in many nonwestern societies, ritual specialists themselves take on the deity when they are dressed as that deity and have undergone proper purification or preparation.

Some motifs depict humans being destroyed by animals, but most show humans or deities dominating wild animals, and other scenes incorporate animal-headed human figures that appear to have supernatural powers. The water buffalo is one of the most enduring images, first appearing in the Early Harappan period and continuing through the Harappan period. The earliest images take the form of simple water

buffalo heads with widespread horns painted on pottery or depictions of water buffalo attacking humans on button seals. These early images continue during the Harappan periods, when they are supplemented by horned anthropomorphic deities standing or seated in the yogic position and eventually by narrative scenes depicting the killing of a water buffalo in the presence of a horned deity seated in the yogic position. Although wearing the horns of the water buffalo probably indicates mastery of this ferocious animal, the use of the headdress may also reflect considerable reverence for the power of the animal.

Conflict between humans and short-horned bulls is also depicted, and some headdresses include shorter varieties of horns that may represent other forms of bovine or the Markhor. Conflict with bovine animals includes grappling as well as spearing; in the case of the tiger, this animal is only depicted being strangled. The other animal that features in some iconographic combinations with humans is the Markhor, but there are no depictions of its being hunted or strangled, and therefore it must reflect a very different ideology.

In most of the images the anthropomorphic figure with horns appears to be dominant over both animals and humans. In some images the horned humans have other animal features such as legs, claws, and tail, which raises the possibility that these are depictions of anthropomorphic animal deities that are themselves masters of other animals or humans. This may explain the rare depictions of tigers with horns (*Fig. 9b*), presumably representing this animal with supernatural powers. It is probable that both interpretations are valid and that horns are symbols of human mastery over animals, Master of Animals, as well as representing a horned animal deity with anthropomorphic form, or Animal Master. Further studies of the iconography and comparisons with later periods may help determine which form is more appropriate in a specific context, but in the end, the undeciphered script really holds the key to understanding the role of these horned deities in the Indus region.

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