Minor antiquities of India and their role in the life pattern of ancient civilization – an interpretation

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Abstract

Minor antiquities are small but not small in importance. These are the objects of utilitarian purposes like objects of daily use, children's toy, ornaments, gems and intaglios, seals and sealing, ritualistic things, etc. However, little emphasis was given upon the study of minor antiquities but these are also conveyors of culture. Perhaps it may seem that minor antiquities are too insignificant to reveal the actual culture of a community and perhaps for this reason these are 'minor' or 'inferior in importance'. However, they are called minor simply because of their small dimensions. Therefore, people must know the unexplored message within the tiny pieces of objects. The article aims to discuss how minor antiquities were used in their own world, i.e. in ancient cultures, and to judge our modern culture in comparison to ancient ones.

Keywords: *Minor antiquities, ancient culture*

Introduction

'Minor antiquities' are small objects, which had been used in the past for various utilitarian purposes like worship, plaything, popular religious and magical purposes, progeny, interior decoration, etc. Some scholars thought that the term 'minor' meant 'less important' and those were of lesser significance to record the culture of the folk, in comparison to architecture, sculptures, inscriptions, coins, etc. However, less emphasis was given to the study of such items in detail. Gradually, these minor antiquities invited the attention of scholars.

Throughout India, the archaeological sites have unearthed abundant number of minor antiquities. We may categorize those in the following headings: (1) playthings (2) utilitarian objects, (3) objects used for personal beautification (4) ornaments, (5) votive things, (6) beads, and (7) seals.

We may have a glimpse of various types of minor antiquities now.

Playthings

Like modern children, the children of ancient times used to play with toys. Toys are simple miniature forms and models. A variety of such things have been unearthed, like cart with or without wheel, wheeled objects, animals or birds without wheels or cart frame, rattle, knucklebone, miniature vessel, and so on.

Among toys, rattles were favorite type that produced sound when shaken. The common varieties were animals (rams and tortoise) and birds (cocks and parrots), grotesque figures, etc. Small pellets had been put inside these hollow objects for jingling. The other types include fruit (pomegranates) and human figures. Rattles have been found at many early historical sites. During the early historical period, the most common metal rattles were in the shape of bird.

Besides, carts, frames and wheels have been found together or separately from the Chalcolithic to the late historical period. Cart models and frames had also been made of copper and bronze along with terracotta. Copper and bronze toy carts are reported from the third century BC. They bear a cross perforation for the axle below the frame and another perforation for the front shaft. The wheels contain thick and conspicuous axis and felly. Harappa has yielded attractive, small copper model of an *ekka* like cart. This is only two inches in height except the missing wheels. Back and front of it are open, with driver's seat; sides are closed and have a gable roof. Two other copper carts have been found at Chanhudaro, one of which has its solid wheels, of a simpler type without cover. The bronze cart models from Rairh show a yoke, open at the rear and they have high slanted and voluted sides; one has no yoke, but has a distinct shelf like a 'mud guard' at the rear for sitting of the passenger. No coverings are noticed. An open cart with two wheels, hubs and spokes was a characteristic type of the Ganga valley. It is outwardly designed with floral motifs in three series. Brahmapuri has yielded superb bronze examples of Satavahana times. There are provisions for tying single or a couple of bullocks or horses. One example from Taxila is a two-wheeled vehicle identified as competition chariot. Another is a plain dog toy-cart made to fit with two holes in the front for shafts and two ground projections underneath for the wheeled axle.

Covered wagons and chariots to be drawn by two horses, bulls, rams, birds, etc. have also been found. These are datable from third century BC to third-fourth century AD.

Ram with prominent curved horns appears to be a favourite subject for the terracotta toy cart. These were either pushed by a stick inserted through a hole at the back made for the purpose, or drawn by a cord. Mukherjee notes (Mukherjee, 1972), "the toy animals mostly come from the Śunga and the Kushāna periods with a greater number belonging to the later period".

The toy carts representing scenes of rural life form a distinct type during the Śunga period. Amongst them, mention should be made of a bullock cart showing a group of people travelling in it. The party consists of six male and female figures, carrying food, drink and musical instruments with them as if for a pleasure trip. Two important specimens found from Kauśāmbi deserve special mention. One depicts a picnic party travelling in a cart carrying food staff. This is a rare toy cart that is ascribed to the first-second century AD. Similar toy cart almost parallel to this has been discovered from Bhita.

A fragmentary terracotta chariot drawn by two headless creatures (equine animals?) with ornamented frontal part is a notable discovery at Chandraketugarh (sixth-third century BC). Another cart displays a human figure, presumably *Indra* riding on an elephant. An example is a '*Rākshas'* cart; this exhibits a pot bellied demon with malicious face, hooplike eyeballs, flattish nose and strong teeth, consuming with enjoyment a large snake as long as holding an elephant just like to be eaten up as after. Another specimen depicts *Ganeśa* with spouse, on a cart (first-second century AD). The female divinity is embellished with turban and earrings. By her right hand, she holds *lāddu* in front of the trunk of her god and her left hand adheres to a tusk. The crowned head of *Ganesa* towers above the arrangement.

Other toy carts represent elephant, horse, humped bull, and bird (owl, parrot, dove, peacock, woodpecker, and crane). A toy cart dragged by a ram (c. first century AD) comes from Tamluk. Cart models and frames of the early historical period indicate a range of vehicles prepared in a realistic miniature form.

Not only cart models, mention may be made of model boats in terracotta found from Lothal. A refined model of a boat contains a sharp bottom, tapered forepart and flat stern and has three hidden holes, two of which are for attaching flagpole and fastening ropes of the boat and the third for maintaining an oar. One dismembered model was without mast. It clearly

stands for a native workmanship used in local waterways and rivers. The first type was intended for the ocean.

Another type of toy was animal figurines. The earliest example in terracotta had been found in the Chalcolithic period, in Kulli, Zhob and Quetta areas where agricultural communities were prevalent. These mostly include hand-made bulls with a conspicuous hump, big horns and squat legs, and the second one with a low hump, little horns and broad neck. Supposedly, these were used as votive offerings. The terracotta quadruped animal with two holes at the neck for having a movable head is a very interesting toy. Such objects have been found in Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The head was attached to the body of a quadruped perhaps by means of bristle or stiff hair. The head could be moved back and forth by means of a cord passing through the upper hole. The Harappan culture produced a wide variety of animal figurines, such as ram, bull, sheep, elephant, tiger, lion (couple-headed stylized figure), dog, bear, rhinoceros, unicorn, cow, pig, monkey, cat, squirrel, etc. Interestingly, horse figurine is absent except one from Mohenjodaro and another from Lothal. The definite purpose of the animal figurines is obscure. However, those having provisions for wheels and detachable neck suggest that these had been used as playthings. Several ram and bull figurines presumably have been used as votive offerings or ritualistic things.

In the NBPW levels, animal figurines as elephant, bull, ram, dog, horse, monkey, *nāgi*, etc. spread in many townships in the Ganga valley area. Elephants from Buxar bear vertical stripes treated with colour. A shiny grace is noticed on the animal figurines of Prahladpur, Mathura, etc. like that on the Northern Black Polished Ware. At Mathura, some of the wheel turned elephant-figurines are hollow and have 'applied tail and trunk'. The animal figurines are thoroughly embellished as perhaps they were used for ritualistic purpose. Strips, punch-marks and carved foliage motif were used to decorate the figurines. Some elephant and horse figurines have riders on them, which were fashioned out of double mould. These are datable between c. AD 500 to 650. These were rarely hollow. Afterward AD 650, we find less number of animal figurines and those are overly crude.

The Harappan civilization had produced the earliest examples of wheel. Mainly solid wheels have been excavated from Harappan sites. Those are of three types like, plain i.e. without hub (it is probably the earliest example), the second one with a hub on one side, the third one with hubs on both sides. Spoked wheels has not been reported from Harappan culture, but were

not unknown to that people, which is evident from the spokes on toy cartwheels treated with colour. In some cases, the wheels indicate signs of wear in the axle hole.

Besides, whistles have been reported from the Chalcolithic time. In Taxila, all are made of clay in the shape of sling bullets, barrel beads or miniature vases.

Dolls have also been found in ancient culture. In the Indus civilization, male figurines had been produced though female figurines were more in number. The male figurines from the Indus civilization are seen seated with hands encircling knees. These resemble the 'sorrowful god' discovered at Marija Gimbutas in Old Europe, datable to c. 4500 BC, probably have been denoting the male spouse of goddess, who was offered at the time of seasonal ceremonies (Ghosh, 1989). From Mohenjodaro and Kalibangan, Sumerian type of male figurines, and from Lothal, a miniature mummy with small mould-made masks with spikes and oblique eyes, have been unearthed. Female figurines have probably been used as cult objects. Pregnant woman, mother with baby (in some cases, 'bear/monkey mask') have been unearthed at Mohenjodaro. Some female figurines such as a woman kneading flour dough have also been found. Notably, human figurines were rare in the OCW and PGW cultures in northern India. The largest number of terracotta human figurines is found between c. 600 BC and AD 650. They are crude, handmade and decorated by pinching technique. From c. 300 BC, we find fine specimens, which are partially mould made and handmade (i.e. the face is mould made and body is handmade). Male and female figurines used as toys or dolls continued from the protohistorical period. They bear perforations; different parts have been made and joined together. Human figures are pierced at neck, shoulders and knees for attachment as movable toys. Many crude handmade figures with pinched nose, round eyes and outstretched arms belong to the third century BC – third century AD.

Some interesting playthings were dices, which are long, square in cross section bearing one to six incised dots on the sides. All Harappan sites have yielded dices made of bone and ivory. In the early historical period, dices of bone and ivory have been found at Ganga Valley region. From the early first millennium BC to the early centuries of the Christian era, dices were made of stone, shells and terracotta. It is noted that the four sides of the dice contain 4, 3, 2 or 1 incised or written on them. The common shapes are flat, rectangular or oblong with four sides incised with one to four dots running serially. Each dot is surrounded by one or more circle and bordered with straight lines. Cubic dices are rare; some examples made of terracotta have been reported from the Kushāna period. They bear one to six points arranged

in such a way that the sum of the points of each pair of the opposite faces is seven, similar to those found from the Harappan sites.

Another form of plaything was the gamesmen of simple shapes such as disc, flat at the bottom and on the upper side with a raised boss surrounded by concentric circles the center, or are solid cylinders, square or hexagonal tablet. Some have perforations on top for threading. A few are with symbols. Gamesmen of bone and ivory have also been excavated at Lothal and from the Ganga valley region. The gamesmen are also made of stone, conch-shell etc.

Hopscotches are flat circular gaming pieces. Probably these were used as children's game of hopping on one foot and kicking the object over scotches (lines) marked on the ground. Edges of potsherds were rubbed to make it round shaped. Hopscotches of stone, bone and ivory have been found at many sites.

Knucklebones are gaming pieces with four flat sides and two round sides. The four flat sides bear number markings one opposite six and three opposite four.

Small sized stools, chests, boards; etc. made of ivory of early Christian era has been found. Toy furniture of bone and ivory like handles, terminals, trinkets, tables, bedsteads, etc. have been yielded from Taxila belonging to third century BC and third century AD levels.

Discs were evidently used as gaming counters. They are simple with the edges decorated. Discs of various kinds have been found; such as: discs with star-shaped decoration round the edge made by notching, with floral design on one side and *swastikā* incised on the other side, with double perforations made of a potsherd, with rows of pinholes round the edge, bearing a figure of tortoise on one side and so on.

Utilitarian objects

We may mention a variety of objects used for utilitarian purposes. One of those is lamp. These were made of terracotta, stone, copper and iron. Various types of lamps have been reported like small shallow bowl with or without beaked edge; small shallow bowl with a handle with or without water container; with a beak having a single or multiple channel, spouted lamp, plain and decorated with human or animal head, tortoise shaped, lamps with

lugs and nozzle; a human figure holding lamp in hand; rectangular lamp having an ornamented spout.

The earliest evidence of lamps comes from the Chalcolithic sites and were in use in the early historical times (sixth century BC to sixth century AD) and gradually varieties increased during later periods. Lamps have also been found in copper and iron.

Bells made of iron, copper, bronze and silver have been found. Bells are hollow and domical in shape having a ring at the top. However, bells with a rectangular base and a suspension loop have also been reported from Hunur. Pyramidal shaped bells with a loop at the top have been reported as well from some sites, one is from Brahmagiri.

Chisels of copper or bronze in various shapes have been excavated at Harappan sites. One end is slanting to sharp edge and the other is left blunt for striking it with a hammer. Chisels from Pandu Rajar Dhibi have a rectangular cross section. Chisels reported from Deccan Chalcolithic sites are handle-less but with a thick body and convex cutting edge. Iron chisels excavated from the megalithic levels are with a rectangular bar body, pointed end and incipient shoulders. Some chisels are bevelled on both faces, and had probably been used as pointed end for wooden ploughs. In the early historical period, iron chisels are found having a circular top section, bevelled end and flattened to a straight sharp edge. Some have a heavy circular body and pointed end.

From the Harappan and other Chalcolithic cultures of Central India and Deccan, various metallic fishhooks have been yielded. Both barbed and non-barbed types from Mohenjodaro are the earliest known examples. Copper was replaced by iron in the Megalithic and the early historical cultures, but the non-barbed fishhook with tapering body and slightly carved threading end remained to be the popular type. The use of fishhook had not been popular in late historical times, perhaps because of the extensive use of other fishing devices like many kinds of nets and traps.

For fishing, net sinkers were used. Those are heavy perforated objects made of metal, stone or terracotta. In eastern parts of India and Bangladesh, an area with rivers and pools the fish had continually been a staple cuisine of the people. People of this region used net sinkers for catching fish by nets.

Balls of terracotta, shell, faience or stone have been used as pebbles or pellets for sling or sling-ball. Those are solid and rounded. Terracotta balls are red in colour, but owing to ill firing, some become black. Slip has not been applied to any ball. The diameters of these balls vary from 1.50 inch to 0.35 inch. Balls have been found at the Harappan sites.

Spindle whorls were used in ancient times as flying wheel in a spindle (*takli*) to spin fabrics. These objects, either disc shaped or plano convex in section with single or multiple central hole(s) were made of terracotta, shell, stone, faience, metal, bone, wood etc. It is suggested that some light-weighed whorls bearing one small hole at the centre, probably with a simple metal/wooden spindle inserted in it were used to spin fine fabric, like cotton. Some heavy specimens show more than one hole at the centre, probably fixed to a split wooden spindle and used to spin a jute-like coarse fabric.

Cones and pointed tops were made for utilitarian purposes. Cones may have a phallic significance. These could be ear pendants, or may have been used as pointed darts from sling bows as noted that points of most of these cones are broken. Being mostly handmade and hard baked the colour of cones ranges from light red to dark brown. Some cones were made of special clay of very compact nature and fired in the kiln in such a way that they shine. One variety of these cones has flat base that can readily stand up.

Cloth dyer's stamps are hollow stamps with designs in relief on them. The exact purpose of these stamps cannot be determined. They are highly baked and seem to have been used as potter's or cloth dyer's stamp (Mukherjee, 1972). The motifs and designs in various stamps deserve minute study and these might reflect light on possible cultural contact. Some of the cloth dyer's stamps bear net design, star-shaped design in the centre and band of other motifs running in the concentric circles. Some are semi-circular in shape, some have pedestal shaped handle etc.

Inkpot was another thing used for keeping ink in it. From archaeological evidence, we come to know that the Greeks introduced metal inkpots; the Śakas imitated those in clay. Few types from Ahicchatra carry indications of ink while a few examples from Vaisali contain black carbon stain on the rim or within these. Usually refined to average quality clay was used to make those. These have a wash or slip and a narrow edge, remarkably broad mid portion and a bulky, plane or spherical base. They are reported from the first and sixth century. A vase-shaped inkpot of bronze set on a stand has been revealed from Nalanda.

Ascribed to the eighth – tenth century, it is decorated with Buddhist motifs on the crest of the edge.

Some terracotta objects, varying from 4-10 cm and triangular, oval, round or blunt cylindrical in shape have been found in different sites. Their exact usage is not known; may be these were used as ritualistic objects as found in 'post-cremation urn burials' at Harappa. These might be used to construct floors and roads since some specimens have been found in 'fire places' at Lothal and Kalibangan. These were of clay, mixed with husk and grit. Triangular shaped ones bear 'self-slip' and these were more frequent in early times.

Copper or bronze knives, the earliest ones from the Harappan culture are simple with a thin tanged blade and pointed top, the cutting edge on the curved side is slightly thick. Some specimens bear revert holes for attaching to wooden handles. Most of the knives are made of sheet metal but not cast. During the Megalithic culture, iron replaced copper. Knives of this period have blades, a short tang and are circular in section. In the early historical period, mainly two types were prevalent, namely, one with concave back and the other with straight back and tapering edge. Iron knives were widely used in the first century BC - second / third century AD.

Nails of copper have been reported from the Chalcolithic levels of Navdatoli. These have a long body, round or rhomboid and have a convex outspread or square head. Iron nails occurred at megalithic sites. Those from the early historical period are long and tapering. These have heads variously shaped – circular, hooked, knobbed, oblong, bulbous and beaked. In the same level, copper nails have also been reported. These are sharp, pointed with a round or flat body and rectangular or square in section with flat, circular or knobbed head. Iron nails of the shapes mentioned above were in use till late historical times.

Locks and keys are very rare finds from excavations. Sirkap and Taxila have yielded keys. Both locks and keys have been reported from Sanchi (fourth-fifth century AD) and Nalanda (later time). Locks have a 'spring and push type device', with a very simple system; four elastic springs at the end of the bolts were made to pass through a small hole inside the lock case which has a hole in the opposite end to let the key to be inserted for operation of the lock. From Sirpur some locks and keys have been found which are circular and rectangular in cross section.

Needles, used for sewing, are round and oblong with pointed tips, and of various sizes with an eye and no head. The first evidence of the needles in India had come from the Neolithic levels at Burzahom (Kashmir), Chirand (Bihar) and Bagor. Needles have also been reported from Harappa. From the post-Harappan age down to the end of the Mauryan period, needles are noticeably absent.

Razors of copper and bronze have been excavated exclusively from the Harappan culture. Various forms include double-bladed, simple-bladed, L-shaped, U-shaped or crescent shaped, hook-shaped. Double-bladed razors have been found from all levels of the Harappan culture. It has oval tang with uneven edges and is very thin. The cutting edge of a simple bladed razor is at the square end with a rounded corner. It has also the other convex side with rough end. L-shaped razors have two arms, one of that is longer and broader than the other one. Hook shaped razor is a curved one. Its outer curve is ended to the handle joint; the inner curve is blunt with bird-headed handle. The straight end has a sharp cutting edge.

Weights of various sizes in series of degrees, measures and their supplementary parts have been found in metal. During the early historical period, circular weights made of copper have been unearthed. Some weights bear small holes on their surface. Perhaps to increase the weight the holes were therefore filled up with lead. Some cavities with lead fillings have also been reported. From Taxila, scale-pans of copper and iron datable between 300 BC and AD 500 have been excavated. They are saucer-shaped and two metal-loops are attached to it for hanging.

Personal adornment objects

Antimony rods of terracotta, copper, bronze, ivory, shell, lead, stone, and of various shapes and forms, also known as kohl-sticks or collyrium-sticks have been reported from all the subsequent periods almost all over the entire subcontinent. They are generally long and cylindrical, plain, with both ends rounded, clubbed or bulbous. Some have one end rounded, clubbed or bulbous; and the other end unfinished, plain, pointed, cut-off square, tapering, scooped or with a pin, toothpick, ear-cleaner, or some decorative cleaners.

Antimony rods of shell, bone and ivory have been revealed from the Harappan as well as historical sites.

Apart from this, not all such rods might have been used as antimony rods and are identified as stylus or objects of indeterminate use.

The use of skin rubbers has a long tradition in India. The earliest dated specimen comes from the Harappan culture. During this period, Indian skin rubbers were generally barrel-shaped or rounded with smaller incisions on the body. For scrubbing the skin, these were either pecked or incised with oblique lines, rectangular or semicircular notches, triangular V-shaped notches, checks, zigzags, chevrons. Terracotta slabs having a prick file-like face and smooth rounded back are called as skin rubbers. These are of various shapes and patterns – mostly rectangular, square or circular and rarely plano-convex, oval, barrel-shaped or trapezoid.

The barrel-shaped rubbers are wheel-turned while others are handmade. The clay was mixed with lime and sufficient quantity of sand to obtain rough surface. Often quartz pieces were added to roughen the exterior. Skin rubbers, excavated at Ahicchatra and Rajghat bear animal figures including elephant, crocodile, griffin, etc., which testify the decorative function of the animals.

For cleaning and doing the hair, for keeping it in position after dressing and as an ornament for the head ancient people used combs. These are toothed toilet objects, being variously made of bone, horn and ivory and decorated. The earliest combs were reported from the Harappan sites, from the Neolithic site of Burzahom (Kashmir). Early historical sites have yielded combs of ivory, horn and bone.

Metal mirrors, circular or oval, polished on the obverse and plain or with a design or decoration on the reverse have been reported from many sites but are limited in number. From Harappan sites, metal mirrors have been reported so far. The decorated bone or ivory handles, in which the tangs of the mirror were inserted, have been found from many Harappan sites and from first century BC to first century AD levels of Sirkap and Vaisali.

Containers used for keeping toilet items like perfume, ointment, antimony and kohl are known as toilet caskets. The earliest example of toilet casket is fluted kohl or cosmetic pot made of cast bronze, found from Chanhudaro. It has a narrow mouth and a long neck, which seems to be used to keep a fine powder such as kohl. Bronze and silver caskets have been found at Mohenjodaro and Harappa, which had possibly been used to keep cosmetics in it as

traces are found of inside these collyrium, cerussite, kohl etc. Caskets of gold, silver, copper have also been excavated in Taxila.

In ancient times, both men and women used to wear ornaments to adorn various parts of body. We find references to various types of head ornaments in literature. Terracotta pendants may have been worn on the forehead. Ivory combs may also have been used as head ornaments. Men and women used hairpins to deck their coiffure and to keep the hair in place. Hairpins of bronze, ivory, steatite, shell, bone with their heads decorated with spirals and animal figures were in use. Fillets were worn on the forehead. A broken gold pin has been found from Pāndu Rājār Dhibi (West Bengal).

Ear ornaments like rings and tops unearthed at various sites and similar ornaments noticed on terracotta figurines prove that those were widely used. Ear ornaments can be broadly categorized into five groups: ear-tops (have knob at the back), ear-studs (look like nail with large head), eardrops (consist of a hole at the top and its centre is raised which forms a convex disc), earrings and ear-pendants (have grooves near the top to hold the wire and perhaps they used to be hung to the ear lobes). Earrings made of copper, bronze and silver have been unearthed as stray finds. Ear lobes of terracotta, cylindrical or round in shape come from Manjhi, Chirand, Vaiśali and Pataliputra (Bihar). These are of various shapes and are wheel made, dull red coloured, showing concentric circles on both ends with projection in the front side and depression in the back. At Champa, terracotta ear ornaments have been collected from period III attributed to the Gupta age. At Buxar, ear studs have been discovered from Period I. In West Bengal, Chandraketugarh and Nanoor (Birbhum) have yielded ear studs. The one obtained from Chandraketugarh in decorated with lotus motif. Sisupalgarh excavation has yielded 148 number of terracotta ear ornaments.

Amongst the neck ornaments, the most common was beaded necklace. Innumerable beads have been found at all archaeological sites. Complete necklaces of beads are rare. Necklaces of semiprecious stones, gold, copper, steatite, shell have been found. Pendants of different materials and of different forms have been in a large number. Terracotta bulla was probably worn as neck ornaments. Chains of copper, bronze, cabled strips of gold, torque of solid wire, torque of beaten sheet of gold on a core of lac, gold necklace set with jewels etc. have been revealed. A fragmentary gold necklace was recovered from Vaisali. Sirkap has yielded a gold necklace of first century AD. It has two small fish with tail.

When necklace of beads with several rows were manufactured, spacers were used. It has more than one perforation. Two broad types of spacers have been found – (1) flat and (2) crescent shaped. In both cases, their purpose was the same, that is, to keep the strings separate. The first type of spacers contains three, four or six holes while the second type has only two parallel holes. Bead spacers with only one hole have also been found which are described as middle ribbed beads.

Terminals have several holes at one end, which all terminate in one large hole at the other end. Perhaps they were made in two sections and then joined together. Combined terminals are also found being generally semicircular in shape.

The arm and wrist ornaments in the ancient times were mainly made of metal, faience, shell, terracotta, glass, ivory, bone etc.

Finger rings have been found practically at all levels of archaeological sites. Plain rings of copper and terracotta were wide spread in ancient times. Other materials used are gold, silver, ivory, shell and during historical time, glass. Gold finger rings have been found only in Taxila, often inlaid with crystal, garnet, malachite and have filigree and granular beading work (Graeco-Roman period). Copper and soapstone specimens have been reported from third century BC. A soapstone specimen from Tripuri shows mother goddess and Garuda figure holding serpents in the hoop. Hastinapura and Rajghat specimens show broad bezels (first century BC - second century AD).

In ancient times, girdles were used for decorative purposes and to keep the loincloth in position. A gold girdle was discovered at Taxila (first century AD). It has 116 lily-pattern pieces, hollow inside and having two transverse holes for strings.

Foot ornaments include lead anklets, an example of it have been unearthed at Bulandibagh probably of pre Mauryan date.

Votive/magical objects

Mother goddess was the most common votive thing throughout the ages. The earliest mother goddess is dated between 2300 BC - 1700 BC. Terracotta mother goddess was prepared for popular religious and magical practices and progeny purposes. They were definitely associated with fertility cult.

The mother goddess has bird or animal like face, extended arms, prominent breasts, broad hip, and thin waist, triple rosetted headdress, collar, necklace and conspicuous waist girdles. In some examples, cup is attached to either side of her head, which probably contained incense. The legs of the most of the figurines are straight having no feet. She wears short skirts held up by a single or double belt. Some figurines have no jewelry. Some figurines have double horn-like projections on their headdress.

Some male or female figurines called *Yakshas* or *Yakshīs* may be identified as secondary deities due to their symbols, vehicles and association with particular animals or birds. They form a distinct type of the Maurya-Śunga period. These figurines were probably worshipped in shrines or placed under big leafy trees. The female figurines are larger in number than the male ones. *Yakshas* or *Yakshīs* seated on mount are rarely reported.

The most common *Yakshī* figurines show round face, elaborate headdress, draperies, ornaments and five hairpins (*āyudhas*). These five magical hairpins include sword, trident, battle-axe, arrow and *ankuśa*. Stella Kramrisch identified them as '*Apsarā Pañchachūdā'* (Kramrisch, 1939).

From ancient times, worship of *nāgī* or snake was prevalent. The *nāgī* figurines, which also occur in the pre-NBP levels at certain sites of Bihar and Utter Pradesh are stylized and have snake hood and human female body. They are handmade, bearing punched and etching marks to indicate the navel, girdle, etc. The common form of stylized snake hoods shows a long neck and tapering hood with two circular eyes. Between the head and neck, there are bands. Mid portion of the body is broad and decorated with stamped circlets. It has two stumpy legs. Another form shows a standing female figure with a halo of snake hood, beneath a merloned roof. These figurines seem to be the representations of mother goddess.

From the earliest time beads have been worn by men and women as ornament as for their magical properties. For this reason, great variation is noticed in their shapes and materials.

A special and common type of bead is the 'eye bead' resembling the eye. There are four main varieties of eye beads: (a) spot eye beads, (b) beads with small circlets, (c) stratified eye beads, (d) inserted cane eye beads.

Amulets are a kind of charm believed to have magical power to safeguard the wearer. Various plants and animals' teeth were also worn as amulet. Amulets and pendants have a wide range of shapes and motifs. They are also executed in a wide range of materials. Pendants were used as decorative objects, while amulets were believed to have magical and curative power, which had also been referred to in literature.

Talismans are the beads believed to be enriched with magical properties and thus able to change fate into fortune and to orient human actions and feelings in a special way. The power of a talisman may be originated from a connection with physical forces from religious affiliations, or from being made in a ritual manner of special material. The basic difference between a talisman and an amulet is that a talisman can change events whereas the function of amulet is fundamentally protective.

Seals

Ancient seals were of three types - 'stamp seal', 'cylinder seal' and ‘seal ring’. A 'stamp seal' consists of a cut surface on the end of a block or cone or other shape, with or without a handle on the back. A 'cylinder seal' consists of a cylinder with carved figures. The former gives it impression on the medium by simple downward pressure; the latter is rolled over the medium.

Sealings have been found more profusely than seals. Generally, sealings have been discovered at centers of trade and commerce, administration and religion where letters, parcels, and votive tablets were exchanged. Paucity of seals may be owing to the reason that a single seal could make many seal-impressions. Though baked and intact, the die was usually destroyed after its owner's death to avoid its misuse. A few seals are found intact because they might be lost or not destroyed due to their sentimental, artistic or intrinsic value.

The Indus seals dominated at the contemporary period. These were made of steatite. The standard Indus seals were square, measuring from 2-3 cm. On the obverse an animal was engraved above which was a brief legend (?). The reverse has commonly a pierced boss for hanging. The animals portrayed are unicorn, elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo, etc. and the Brahmanical bull with its hump and pendulant dewlap. There are rectangular or round seals, and several are cylindrical. Some seals bear only a legend but no animals. There are other seals that have only an animal, bird or a symbol but without any legend.

Role of minor antiquities in the life pattern of ancient civilization

In the history of civilization, minor antiquities have a conspicuous place. The study of plastic art without the study of minor antiquities remains incomplete. These were probably spontaneous artistic expression of man throughout the ages. These have survived from early times and are the significant materials of a civilization with a character of its own, bubbling with life and colour.

India has been a cultural center from a very ancient time. In the early literature, we find insufficient description about this country. However, archaeological evidences are opulent to depict the existence of a prosperous culture. Minor antiquities not only serve as an art piece but also portray the activity and transformation in the customs and manners of man in different periods for which we have found no other evidences.

Minor antiquities had a significant role in the economic condition of the then people. These provide firm evidence of urbanization. By opening and developing new trade centers and markets, a society tries to be urbanized. This is not possible in a self-sufficient rural agricultural society where industries do not grow promptly. In this context, mention may be made of the terracottas of Pataliputra and Buxar, which help infer that a new socio-economic structure gradually flourished during the early historical period. Again, a number of terracotta figurines present peculiar types bearing foreign influence. The motifs and designs were migrated from the West and Central Asia and subsequently mixed together with the existing motifs and designs of indigenous terracotta types. Introduction of fine, translucent, light blue glass in manufacturing bangles, evident from some sites, suggests that there might have been a Roman influence. Evidently, the people of Gujarat, Konkan, the Malabar Coast, Tamil Nadu, Vengi, Andhra, Kalinga and Vanga were all carrying on trade with South East Asia. Various Indian miniature models of boats found in that country support this fact. The carved gems are found in large numbers all over the entire northwestern region and are confirmed by the bearing of legends in early Brahmi or Kharosthi, along with in Greek figures, to be the work of local artisans. They have been prevalent in India in the first and second centuries AD and indicate that an effective swell of influence – possibly owing to Roman extension – came from Asia Minor.

Much important were the weights and measures (scales), cowries and balance. They unquestionably discovered a scientific standard for manufacturing and selling the products.

These weights and measures are standard and equally measured, ranging from large pieces to small examples. "Their smallness indicates that they might have been jewellers' weight" (Ghosh, 1989).

In trade, seals prevented tampering. These might have been used for various commercial purposes like official authority seals, identity token, fixation tablets, sealing of letters or packets, etc. The invention of script, application of seals, production of weights and measures – all suggest about flourishing trade and commerce. Lothal was the main trade centre. The Indus people were capable to make the economic relations with West Asian and Central Asian countries that supported the Indus economy. For example, a typical Persian Gulf seal was found at the port-site of Lothal, which denotes to the presence of a Gulf trader from Gujarat. A large number of seals of the Indus character excavated at Ur, Lagash, Susa, Tell Asmar, Umma, etc. suggest that the Indian traders went to Mesopotamia. A Sealing was reported from Umma, found along with a bundle of cloth, which obviously was taken abroad from India. Like cloth, probably the Indus people have also sold abroad spices, ivory, etc. Some tradesmen of Afghanistan brought in return to the Indian subcontinent semiprecious stone and lapis lazuli, highly in demand, from Badakhshan.

The abundance of shell bangles and waste materials found from various sites, indicate that manufacture of shell bangles was a flourishing cottage industry at that time. Besides, many minor antiquities made of different materials including a few 'unfinished ones also indicate presence of local industry.

Beads were used as the medium of exchange, standard units of value in barter and market systems. The ornaments also represent the economic condition of society and the trade relations with other countries. In the early Vedic Age, introduction of currency may be noticed in the form of '*Niska'* as gifts; the '*Niska'* most likely was an ornament in the form of a necklace of gold or silver. Afterward it was replaced by gold coins. From these, it is evident that the people of ancient times were carrying on profitable trade with various countries, in which minor antiquities were of great importance.

The spiritual life of ancient people was full of rites and rituals. In the rituals related to fertility, people may have worshipped the mother goddess. Female figurines were believed to bear some religious significance whose physical features played a distinct role. Mother goddess was considered the tutelary goddess of agriculture, for the prosperity of the crops

and entire animal world. These figurines of mother goddess are perhaps the most ancient cult works of art.

The *yogī* figure from Mohenjodaro seal suggests that people of that time had a thought on 'Higher Reality'. A three-faced deity on some Harappan seals, seen in a feather-and-horn headdress and surrounded by a number of wild and tamed animals, was worshipped as Paśupati, lord of animals that indicating the primitive form of Śiva

Common serpent figurines of terracotta were plentifully found in the early historical period, which claim to a primitive *nāga* cult, especially predominant in Bihar, since this day.

Beads were also supposed to have some miraculous powers. In ancient times, beads were dispersed like seeds during architectural construction in hope of a good crop. It has been believed that beads had been of symbolic repositories of sacred knowledge, having curative power, serving as the 'fee for passing' to the afterlife. The 'eye bead' resembling an eye was believed to have protective power against malevolent eye. They were the 'eyes that could see in all directions' and afforded protection against evil. Seals were used as pilgrimage token, as amulets and charms as well as votive offerings.

Amulets were the charms worn or placed in a house and believed to have a protective effect. Talisman was believed to have magical properties and thus able to change fate into fortune. It is interesting to note that the designs on the amulets and symbols on the beads had their meaning. We get them in form of teeth which probably worn to protect one from the mad dog's bite. Heart shaped pendant was possibly worn to avoid heart disease. Fish shaped amulets was possibly worn for fecundity. The animal amulets were perhaps fashioned with the belief that the pet animal would confront the first attack of the enemy and thus defend the wearer from physical harm.

Excavations at some Harappan sites revealed some containers, mirrors and antimony rods put beside the dead body, under the belief that the deceased person would use those things in afterlife.

Of the recreations of the Indians, the most popular was the chariot meet and the second was dicing. Some sort of betting also appears to have been popular, as suggested by the presence of dice. The recreation of the people included the game of chess of which gamesmen have

been used. Children played hopscotches and marbles, and played with horned masks and some simple toys like bulls with movable heads and monkeys 'going up and down a cord'. Terracotta toys including rattles, carts, whistles, bird chariots, human figurines etc., were popular among the children. The purpose of producing toys was definitely to pacify, entertain and teach children. Sometimes, those were used for interior decoration. The representation of animals as toy carts suggests that those animals were domesticated and probably used in agriculture. The miniature carts used by the children also reflect the prevailing transport of that time. The medium of conveyance was vehicles like carts, wagons and chariots drawn by men or animals while on waterway boats and sailing ships served the end. We come across toy carts with solid wheels as well as with spoked wheels in terracotta. From the Harappan sites we find *Ekkās* in bronze and copper which possibly the children of affluent families used.

Dolls, dices, hopscotches, discs etc., also served as objects of amusement. Some of the dices bear the representation of dancers. Probably they had some significance or may be used for embossing.

The life of luxury led by the people of ancient time can be imagined from the articles of toilet as well as ornaments found from many sites. Among the toilet objects unearthed are mirrors, razors, combs, antimony pots, kohl sticks, skin rubbers, etc. Combs were used for cleaning and arranging the hair, for keeping it in position when dressed, and as an ornament for the head. The great plenty of skin rubbers, especially in drains (in case of Harappan sites) prove their use in toilet. Kohl was applied to eyes with kohl sticks. Antimony pots were used for keeping antimony powder. Bronze mirrors were used to see the image of oneself during personal ornamentation. These reveal how fastidious the women of the ancient times in culture of beauty were.

Ornaments are essential for personal decoration for their aesthetic value. From the excavated human figurines it appears that ornaments were spontaneously worn by all; necklaces, fillets, armlets and finger rings by both men and women; girdles, ear rings and anklets by women exclusively. They evince the good taste of jewelers. In the early historical periods, ornaments were of gold and silver. The poor were fond of ornaments but had to be gratified with terracotta beads and ornaments. Ornaments indicate social status and position of man. Say for instance, a crown shows royalty or divinity. The form and decoration of the ornaments represented the aspirations, fears, jealousies, and the ambitions of people.

Apart from the aesthetic and ritualistic significance, minor antiquities in their varied uses throw considerable light on the history of the people. They show that society was divided into different groups and classes based on existence of weavers, jewellers, potters, blacksmiths, ivory carvers and such other types of artisans. Society was largely divided into two classes namely the rich and poor. We can assume that ornaments for the rich were made of gold, silver, faïence, ivory and the semi precious stones; for the poor they were mainly of shell, bone, copper and terracotta. Beads were also worn to indicate the status. Terracotta was associated more with the masses than with the upper echelon; furnishing a sign to the level of creativity of a community. So, terracotta figurines may be regarded as the 'poor man's sculpture'. Art was not confined to the higher groups of people; it was the best exponent of the popular life and mind of contemporary society on the other.

People's knowledge of technology can be traced from minor antiquities. The knowledge was extended to three 'R's viz., reading, writing and (a) rithmetic. Weights and measures, made by those people, prove this. Weights of chert, limestone, steatite, slate, chalcedony, schist, gneiss, etc. usually cubic in form secured a binary system for the lower category and a decimal one bigger up, the proportions being 1,2, 8/3, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 160, 200, 320, 640, 1600, 3200, etc. up to 12800. Such a series and arrangement was unique. Mention may be made of graded scales, found at Mohenjodaro, Lothal and Kalibangan, albeit these are occasionally unfinished. A bronze bar from Harappa also bears marking at fixed intervals. The evidence implies that the Indus people adopted a 'foot' of about 33 cm to 33.5 cm, together with a 'unit of measurement' measuring about 51.6 cm to 52.8 cm. The art of mixing copper with tin or arsenic to produce bronze must have come to the protohistoric man as a great discovery. The terracotta objects were created both by hand and mould; sometimes both these techniques were employed. Introduction of double mould, presence of air holes, grits and admixture of rice husk, use of pigments etc. indicate a high skill in terracotta making. Glass objects were manufactured following a high technology.

In the pattern of Indian art as a whole, the cumulative evidence from archaeological excavations shows that minor antiquities played an essential part in many ways in the life pattern of ancient world. In the change and development of forms and materials of minor antiquities and their decorations is hidden the study of progress of humanity through the ages. They were possibly influenced by exotic contacts and setting them in their chronological order a notable course was left upon to trace the history of the age-old culture of India. These

find serve as documents of economy, religion, society and culture as well as denote the history of art predominating during ancient times. The vast repertory of minor antiquities may be recognized as the natural growth of early Indian art based on indigenous soil and trends that was the in thing in that time.

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Figures

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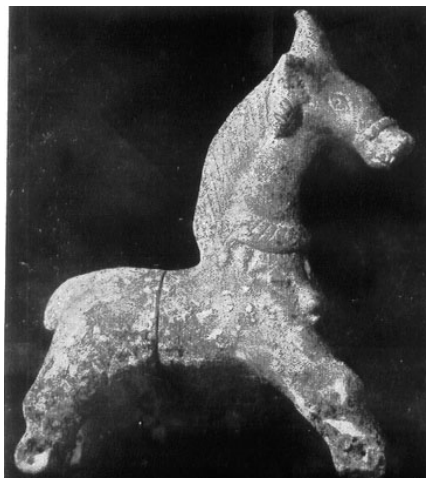
Figure 4. Terracotta model boat from Harappan civilization (Photo courtesy www.wikimedia.com)



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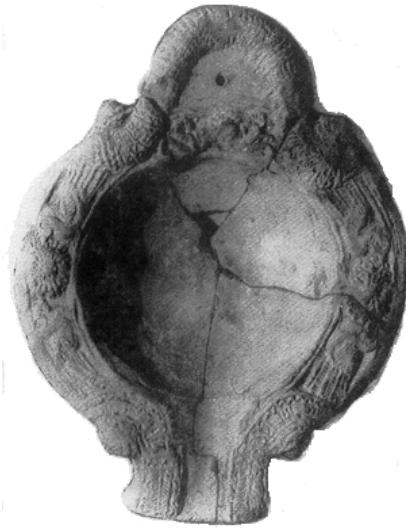

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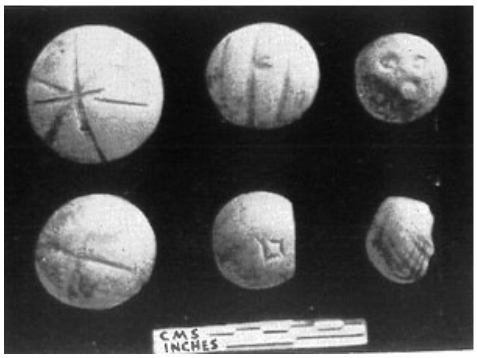
Figure 12. Metal objects including chisel, fishhook, ring, etc. (Photo courtesy: Prof. S.K. Mukherjee)



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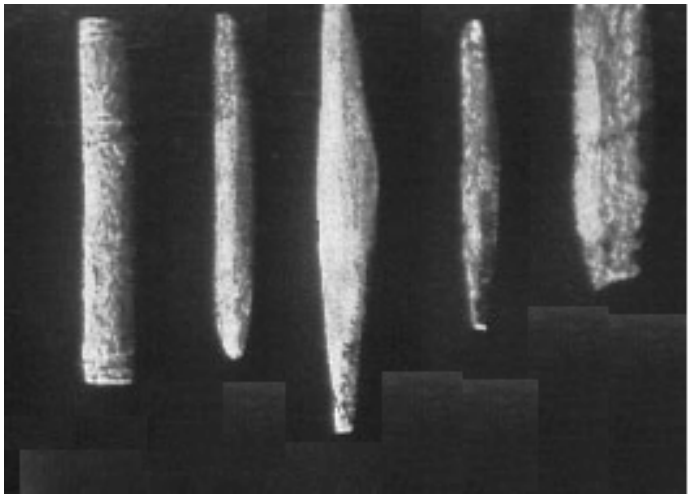
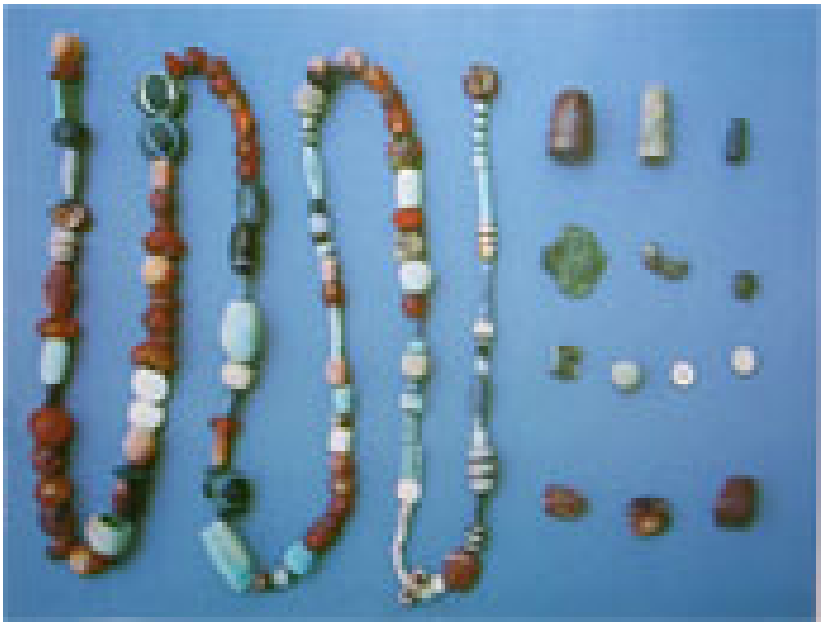


Figure 15. Antimony rods (Photo courtesy: Prof. S.K. Mukherjee)



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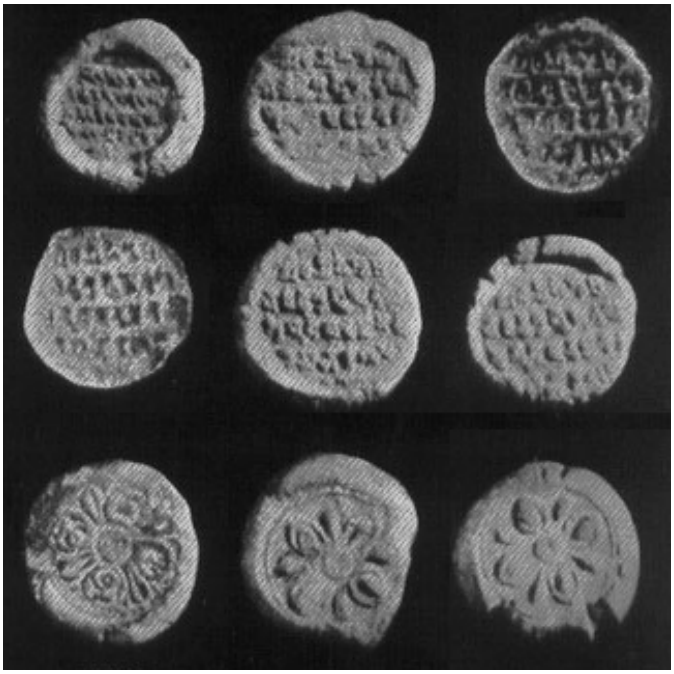

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Figure 22. Harappan sealing showing unicorn (Photo courtesy: www.wikimedia.com)