Hidden Agendas: Hoarding within the Indus Valley Tradition

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Introduction

At its largest extent, the Indus Valley Tradition, as defined by Shaffer (1992a; 1992b) incorporated a variety of regional cultural traditions throughout modern day Pakistan and parts of eastern Afghanistan and western India. These regional cultures, although distinct archaeologically, all interacted in a manner to fashion an integrated archaeological community covering up to one million square kilometres, and lasting for several hundred years (c.4600 to ~3900 BP), before evolving into a number of localised archaeological traditions. The exact nature of this 'Integration Era' of the Indus Valley Tradition (Shaffer 1992a) - often referred to as the Indus Valley, Indus-Sarasvati or Harappan Civilisation - has been the subject of intensive scholarly debate.

The lack of traditional indicators of state-level society - depictions of warfare, temples, public architecture and clearly defined internal stratification - has led to intense scholarly debate as to the internal social and political organisation of the Integration Era. The earliest excavators, despite the lack of monumental architecture and royal burials, inevitably drew inferences with Sumerian and other Near Eastern civilisations. Marshall (1931), Piggott (1950), Childe (1954) and Wheeler (1953; 1959) all envisaged an autocratic Priest-King who wielded absolute power over the citizens of the twin capitals of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. Integral to their argument was the assumption that complexity within the Indus Valley had its origin in the Near East, either through direct colonisation or through trade and exchange. This, however, has been refuted by the discovery of an incipient urban phase within north-western South Asia (Jarrige 1990; Shaffer 1992a). The recognition of internal stimuli in the development of the Indus Valley Tradition has lead to the reinterpretation of its key aspects independent of Near Eastern analogies. Rather than a single unified state or empire, it has been suggested that there were in fact a series of independent, but co-dependent, city-states or domains managed by groups of landowners, merchants and ritual specialists (Kenoyer 1994; 2000; Possehl 1993; 1998). Fairservis has gone as far as to suggest that the Indus Valley was organised along the lines of a developed chiefdom, and that wealth was measured in terms of numbers of cattle, and that the elite were located outside of the urban centres (1986). An intensification of surveys within the Indus Valley has also led to the identification of inter-site hierarchies within key regions (Flam 1976; Chitalwala 1979; Joshi et al 1984; Bhan 1986; 1989; Mughal et al 1996; Mughal 1997), and within the Integration Era itself (Coningham 2005). Intra-site hierarchies, however, are heavily influenced by nationalist goals of identifying early Vedic or Aryan occupations at key Indus Valley sites – e.g. Lal (1993) at Kalibangan and Bisht at Dholavira (Guha 2005). Ongoing excavations at Harappa, Rakhigarhi and sites in Gujarat may provide more comprehensible information regarding this in the future. In terms of warfare, Cork (2005) has demonstrated that communities within the Indus Valley were more than capable of engaging in prolonged periods of war, but that the standing armies and glorification of war found throughout contemporary Near Eastern societies were absent within the Indus.

This suggests that the Mesopotamian-influenced concept of social coercion through military force was either absent within the Indus Valley, or was not a prominent feature of elite authority. Whilst Cork (2005: 411) may disagree, the explanation of social coercion through ideology remains a valid concept, and a number of archaeologists have attempted to model the Indus Valley Tradition within the context of power manipulation and misrepresentation (Shaffer 1982; Miller 1985; Rissman 1988). This paper aims to test whether, as Shaffer has suggested 'it could be that the Indus Valley, a technologically advanced, urban, literate culture was achieved without the usually associated social organisation based upon hereditary elites, centralised political government (states, empires) and warfare' (1982: 49).

Rissman and the Ascetic Model

Whilst not specifically a model of social organisation, a paradigm of Indus Valley archaeology emerged in the 1980s that attempted to interpret the archaeological contradictions present in the material record (see Coningham and Manuel 2009 for more detailed discussion of models of willing and coerced subordination within the Indus). Shaffer was interested in the nature and distribution of 'wealth' objects within the Indus Valley. He inferred that a broad segment of society had access to them, but they were almost entirely absent from burial contexts. He suggests this indicated that either: '(1) such wealth objects were not hereditary; (2) they were not considered particularly important indicators of social status; (3) the objects were redistributed at the time of death; (4) there was an absence of well-defined social stratification; (5) some other cultural rule at present unknown was at work designating their presence or absence in burials' (Shaffer 1982: 49). Developing this final point, Miller went one step further and assumed that 'the prehistoric record can be interpreted not as a mere passive reflection of a past society, but as a process of representation which acted to constitute as well as to reflect social relations' (1985: 34). The critique of ideology that Miller invokes suggests that as well as their utilitarian uses, all artefacts are also forms through which a society creates representations of itself (*ibid*: 35). Consequently, groups of artefactual forms may represent the interests of the dominant group, whilst simultaneously masking those of subordinated elements within the society (Miller 1985: 50-56; Coningham and Manuel 2009). Such an interpretation is supported by Rissman in his examination of hoards and burials. Assuming burials relate to public displays of wealth, he noted that they contained items of 'low secular value', in distinct contrast to the relative wealth of private deposits (1988: 217). As such, Rissman inferred that there was certainly a degree of social and economic inequality present within the Integration Era, though concludes that '*if* the secular domain was characterised by some degree of inequality in value distribution, and by some degree of rigidity in status distinctions, these qualities were *concealed* in the public domain by the ideology of value'(*ibid*: 219).This mirrors Miller suggestion that, 'the people of the Harappan who may be said to have power may not have enjoyed privileged wealth or conspicuous consumption, and indeed are more likely to have been conspicuous through asceticism' (*ibid*: 61), and forms the basis of the Ascetic model of Indus social organisation in which elites willingly subordinated themselves in order to gain political and/or social power (Coningham and Manuel 2009).

Rissman's work was influenced by a growing awareness of the duality of the archaeological record as both the material representations of human culture as well as symbolic indicators of

human consciousness (Shanks and Tilley 1982; Parker Pearson 1984). Following Bourdieu (1979) and Giddens (1979), he assumes that grave goods and other public displays of wealth represent deliberate attempts to misrepresent social relationships in the past (e.g. Shanks and Tilley 1982), and therefore are not objective indicators of value distributions. In contrast to public displays of wealth, Rissman sees hoarding as a private and secular activity, and directly opposed to public displays of wealth, and as such, he considers hoarding a more objective indicator of status distributions (1988: 209) (Fig. 1). However, Rissman's primary distinction between private hoards and public offerings is the intent to recover. Although this is a fundamental distinction between offerings and deposits (Bradley 1990), it does not take into consideration the fact that hoards can be either ritual or secular in nature. Bradley identifies a number of criteria for differentiating between ritual and non-ritual hoards (Fig. 2), and between the opposing concepts of 'offerings' and 'sacrifices' (1990: 37). Sacrifice changes the nature of the victim, and makes it sacred, although this requires a living victim. Conversely, artefacts are inert, and their nature cannot change and as such, they can only be offerings (*ibid.*). The 'votive' versus 'treasure hoard' dichotomy has remained strong in archaeological research, though Randsborg demonstrates numerous alternative processes to account for archaeological hoards, such as the removal of ritually 'dangerous' items or the competitive destruction of artefacts by elites (2002: 417). In addition, Randsborg suggests such equifinality should not only be applied to general definitions of hoards, but

Grave Goods / Public Displays	Hoards / Offerings
Public	Private
Ritual	Secular
Ideological	Personal
Permanent	Temporary
Subjective	Objective

Fig. 1: Dichotomy between grave goods and hoards; after Rissman 1988

	'Ritual' or 'Votive' hoards	'Non-ritual' or 'Treasure' hoards
Locations	Specialised: bogs, springs, wells	Unspecialised: dry land, often with marker stone
Range of items	Restricted; high proportion of weapons; ornaments; ceremonial objects; animal bones; food remains	Less restricted; high proportion of tools; simpler personal ornaments; simpler forms of weapons
Condition of artefacts	Mainly whole objects; formal arrangements	Often damaged and/or broken; metal-working residues; freshly made objects

Fig. 2: Differences between 'ritual' and 'non-ritual' deposits; after Bradley 1990

that single hoards can have numerous interpretations for their deposition (*ibid*: 417). The ritual nature of hoarding, as evidenced by the potlatch ceremonies of the Pacific Northwest or Big Man feasts of Melanesia (Bradley 1987: 380), was completely overlooked by Rissman. He suggested that religious offerings, such as the interment of grave furniture, are public messages, and thus the artefacts in these events 'are... transformed into components of ritual communication, bearing in part upon social strategies of power and prestige' (1988: 209). In contrast, he viewed hoarding as a private and secular act, as there is no purpose in attempting to hide or destroy wealth where no audience is present: 'in this sense, hoarding is the pure opposite of display: there is nothing ideological about' (*ibid*: 209).

Indus Hoards

Rissman identified twenty-nine potential hoards within Indus sites (Rissman 1988: Appendices 5 and 6), all of which will be considered within this paper, along with an additional hoard from Kuntasi (Dhavalikar et al 1996). Figures 3 and 4 demonstrate the diversity of both materials and objects that are encountered within the Indus hoards. A number of trends are apparent from the two figures regarding the presence and absence of objects and materials within Indus hoards. Firstly, there is a wide variety of both materials and objects found within hoards, though many of the materials are in the form of beads. The most commonly occurring material is copper, which is found in 24 of the 30 hoards, whilst

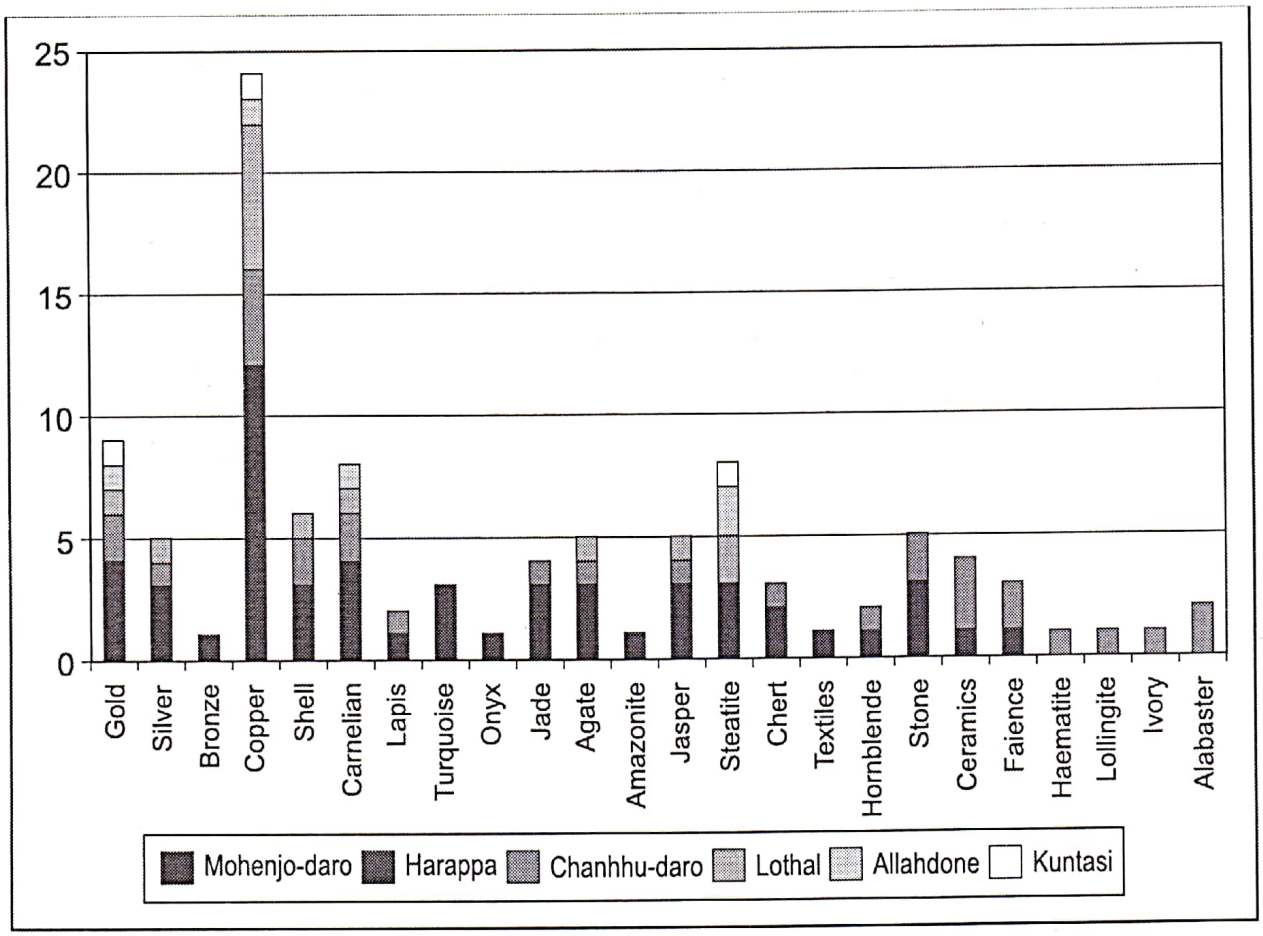

Fig. 3: Materials within the Indus hoards

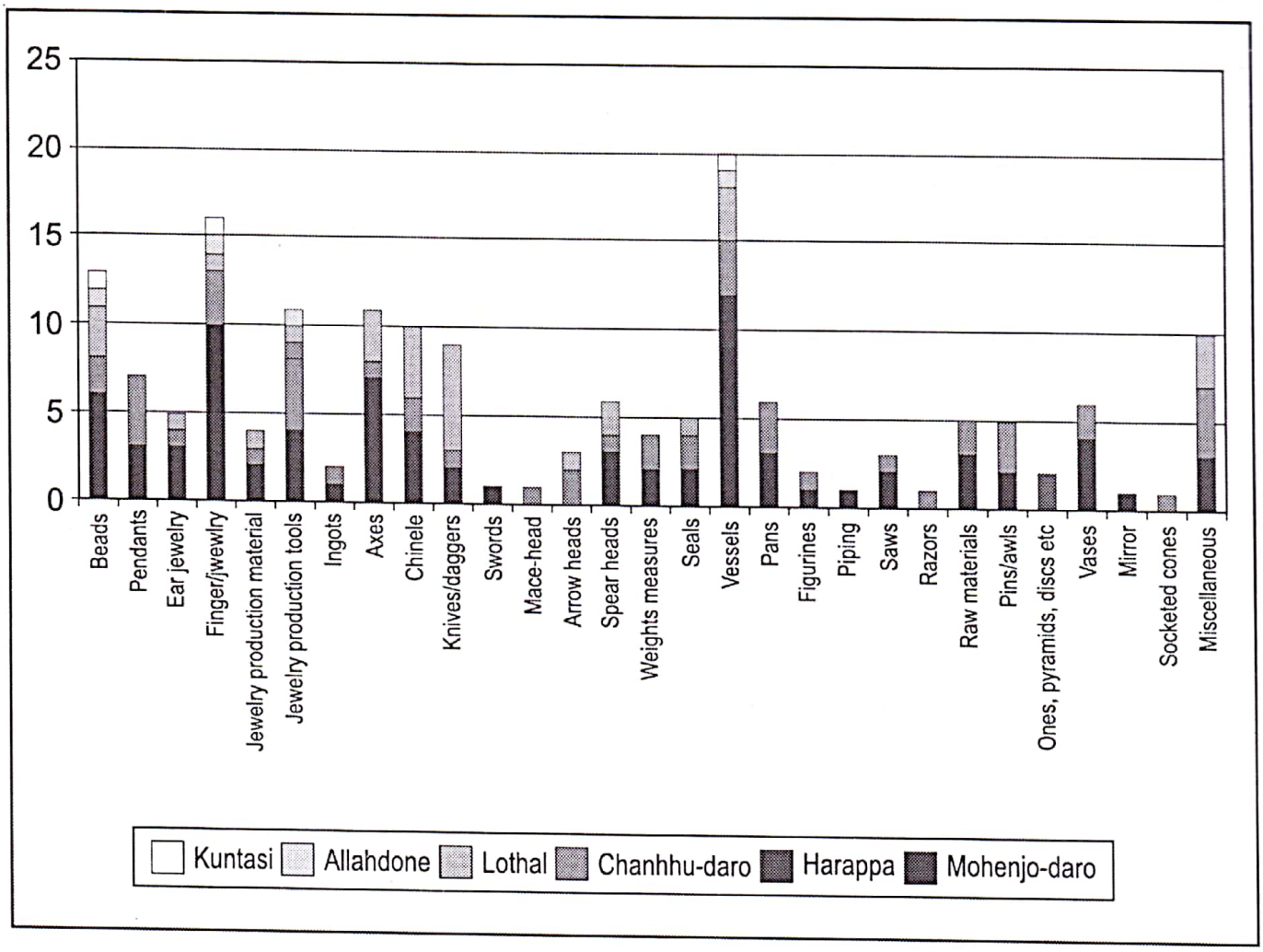

Fig. 4: Objects within the Indus hoards

ceramic objects are found in only four of the hoards. Other commonly occurring materials are gold, silver, carnelian, shell and steatite – all materials that are often termed as 'luxury'.

Regarding objects, the most commonly occurring objects in the hoards are vessels/vases/jars (a total of 41; occurring in 20 of the 30 hoards), within which many of the other objects are placed. Of these vessels, 31 are copper, 2 are ceramic, 1 each of silver and bronze, whilst 5 are of an undefined or unmentioned material. Beads, finger/arm jewellery, jewellery production tools, axes and chisels are all present in ten or more (i.e. a third) of the hoards, and represent both personalised items and objects that are more 'utilitarian'. In addition, some of the Indus hoards contain either raw or unworked material as well as gold, silver or copper personal ornaments (e.g. Mohenjo-daro 1 and 6; Harappa 2 and 7). These deposits would appear to transgress the traditional division of hoards into either ritual or non-ritual (Levy 1982; Bradley 1990) suggesting that such divisions are either not applicable to the Indus due to some influencing factor, or that such a division is only viable in the European Bronze Age. Another striking contrast between European Bronze Age hoards and the Indus hoards is the presence or absence of weaponry. Within European contexts weaponry, particularly swords, are found within nearly all hoards and are the most frequently deposited items (Levy 1982; Bradley 1990; Randsborg 1995; 2002; York 2002). In the Indus hoards, however, weaponry is found infrequently -

1 in 10 hoards contained arrowheads, whilst 1 in 5 contained spearheads, and only 1 hoard contained a sword.

Mohenjo-daro revealed the greatest number of hoards, and the greatest variation within hoards. Of the twelve hoards identified in Mohenjo-daro, not one is located within the 'citadel mound' (see Fig. 5.3), and they are evenly distributed throughout the excavated areas. Regarding the materials and objects found in the Mohenjo-daro hoards, there, again, does not appear to be any identifiable patterns. Nine of the hoards are contained within vessels, and after those vessels the most frequently occurring item are axes (within seven of the twelve hoards), which were not weaponry but served a more utilitarian function. As for materials, all twelve hoards contain copper items, although the next most frequently occurring materials are gold and carnelian, both of which are associated with wealthy and luxury items (Rissman 1988). The most varied hoards in Mohenjo-daro also show little patterning. Hoard numbers 1 and 2 contain wide variety of both materials and objects (sixteen materials and ten objects, and twelve materials and twelve objects respectively). Hoard number 4, however, contains a low variety of materials (copper and stone), but a large variety of objects (eleven) including the only sword recovered from a hoard. Conversely, hoard number 6 contains nine different materials that are used in only six types of objects, mostly decorative jewellery. The impression from Mohenjo-daro is that hoarding was not restricted to any particular area of the city, nor was there any particular object or material that was consistently deposited. The hoards do not, however, appear to be merely temporary depositions of valuable items. On average, the Mohenjo-daro hoards are located 1.96 metres below floor level, indeed hoard number 5 was nearly 7.5 metres below floor level, suggesting that they were of a more permanent nature.

The hoards from Harappa mirror those of Mohenjo-daro in some criteria, although prove contradictory in others. Firstly, concerning their distribution, two of the seven hoards are located within the 'citadel mound' (compared to none at Mohenjo-daro), whilst the remaining five hoards are all found close to the citadel (Mound AB) (see Fig. 5.4). Interestingly, four of the hoards are located within Mound F, the area Piggott (1950) and Wheeler (1959) attributed as 'workmen's quarters' housing servile workers and which Miller (1985) ascribes to willingly subordinated communities (Coningham and Manuel 2009). Their presence, along with Mohenjo-daro hoard number 12 (which was also found within a traditionally assumed subordinated area) suggest that the inhabitants of these regions had equal, if not greater, access to resources as the remainder of the community. As for the variety of materials and objects within the hoards at Harappa, a similar pattern to Mohenjo-daro is evident. Hoard number 1 has five objects made from ten different materials, whilst hoard number 2 contains 14 object types made from only two materials (copper and lollingite). Fewer of the hoards are contained within vessels, and three of the hoards (almost half) do not contain copper objects. The most frequent object types are finger/arm jewellery (five of the seven), followed by jewellery production tools and pendants (both found within four hoards). Again, copper is the most frequently occurring material within hoards (four of the seven), though the next most frequent material is ceramics, which is found within three of the hoards, despite it occurring in only one other hoard outside of Harappa. The hoards from Harappa also contain haematite, lollingite, ivory and alabaster that are not found within any hoards elsewhere. Like Mohenjo-daro, there are no eminently visible trends or patterns to the hoards within Harappa, although unlike Mohenjo-daro hoards are present upon the

'citadel mound'. Both materials and objects are varied, and the average depth of hoards is 2.13 metres, slightly deeper than the hoards at Mohenjo-daro.

The most striking feature of the six Chanhu-daro hoards is that copper is the only material present, despite the fact that the hoards contain anywhere between three and eight object types. Knives/ daggers are the most frequently occurring object, being present in all six hoards, followed by chisels, which are present in four of the hoards; vessels are present in three hoards. Secondly, the hoards at Chanhu-daro are clustered together towards the eastern edge of Mound II (see Fig. 5.5). The original excavator, Mackay, interpreted two of the hoards (numbers 2 and 3) as the property of a metalworker (1943: 40-43), and another two hoards (numbers 5 and 6) as part of a 'bead factory' (*ibid*: 43). Possehl suggests that Chanhu-daro was a regional craft centre, engaged in the manufacture of beads, seals, ceramics, using chalcedony, carnelian, faience and shell (2002: 74). Interestingly, though, none of these materials or objects is found within Chanhu-daro's hoards, despite the fact that beads are one of the most frequently occurring objects within the other hoards. The range of hoarded materials is minimal, although the objects are still varied. In addition, the hoards are clustered within the area identified as a 'bead factory', which is on the opposite side of the site to the 'citadel mound'. Similarly, Possehl (2002: 81-82) interprets Lothal as both a trading entrepot and manufacturing centre similar to Chanhu-daro, primarily engaged in the manufacture of beads. However, whilst the hoards at Chanhu-daro did not contain any of the manufactured items, but rather the manufacturing tools, Lothal is in fact almost the opposite. All of the hoards contain beads of a variety of materials, whilst there are single occurrences of seals, rings and jewellery production tools. As for the location of the hoards, one is located in the 'Acropolis' close to the bathing platforms, another is within the lower town, and the third hoard is of an unknown location!

The two smaller sites of Kuntasi and Allahdino both yielded a single hoard each; though provide valuable information as to the nature and distribution of hoarding. The hoard from Kuntasi, which is generally considered an 'industrial complex and port' (Dhavalikar et al 1996: 60) similar to Lothal, bears many resemblances to the hoards from Lothal. The hoard contained beads of steatite, paste and gold, as well as copper rings and bangles – again the products of manufacture, rather than the production tools themselves, as at Chanhu-daro. Allahdino, on the other hand, is a relatively small Integration Era site, which the excavator interprets as a small agricultural settlement (Fairservis 1993: 112) although with the potential for craft specialisation (Atre 1989: 50).

The pattern of hoarding from the six sites does not suggest any conspicuous approach or rules concerning hoarding. The locations of hoards appear to be arbitrary, and in fact, appear to contradict many of the normative suggestions of wealth distribution. Not only are there very few hoards found within the citadel areas, but, especially at Harappa, there are more hoards located within the so-called 'coolie-lines'. As for distributions within the lower towns of Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Chanhu-daro, only the latter shows any sign of clustering. The contents of hoards also do not appear to follow any trends. There are numerous similarities and dissimilarities between the six sites, and taken individually appear to contradict the evidence from the others. The only identifiable pattern appears to be the tendency to hoard items within pots, jars, vases and other vessels – a factor that may be more functional than symbolic especially when dealing with thousands of beads.

Discussion

The shift from notion of the Indus as an empire or state with strict social hierarchies has raised numerous questions over the exact nature of its social organisation (Coningham and Manuel 2009). Rissman and Millers' ascetic model challenges our current interpretation of the archaeological record in protohistoric South Asia, arguing that it represents a distorted view of past society. However, Rissman's imposition of western concepts of hoarding onto the Indus Valley Tradition has not been entirely successful. He also avoids notions of wealth distinctions and conspicuous consumption such as potlatch or feasting that are notoriously difficult to identify archaeologically. Furthermore, Rissman identifies, but neglects to comment on, the two distinct methods of burial within the Integration Era: formal cemeteries outside the city, and informal burials within settlements (1988: 211). This geographic, as opposed to artefactual distinction, may reflect wealth distinctions both within and between different urban centres. However, the lack of well excavated and contextualised human remains makes such an approach problematic.

Of the hoarded deposits identified by Rissman (1988: appendices 1-6), it is Bradley's (1990) distinction of faunal remains equalling 'ritual' hoards, as opposed to 'non-ritual' hoards that takes precedent. Although Rissman identifies the need to understand grave goods and offerings within their symbolic context, he does not consider the possibility that different methods of burial may alter the contextual meaning of inclusions, as Peebles and Kus (1977) demonstrate at Moundville. What differentiation there is within grave goods, Rissman attributes to economic inequality, based along dimensions of age and sex (1988: 214), yet within the hoards there is far less variation of objects, materials and approaches.

Further issues arise from Rissman methodology and terminology. The term 'hoards' suggests the deliberate retention of artefacts for future recovery, even though there is nothing to suggest that any of the deposits were buried with the intention for recovery. The use of the term 'buried' or 'hidden' deposits allows for a much wider scope with regards the ultimate purpose of the artefacts, whether they were personal stashes of wealth, objects that were hidden due to Miller's suggested embargo, or sacred deposits to unknown deities. Additionally, Rissman's presumption regarding items that were considered most valuable is also questionable. He stated that 'the evidence of the hoards is consistent with the suggestion that people categorised gold, silver, copper, semi-precious stone and perhaps shell as items of material wealth' (1988: 26). Yet, recent investigations into the deposition of artefacts within the European Bronze Age has revealed that often the symbolic value of possessions far outweighs the intrinsic value of objects in determining their deposition (Kristiansen 2002; Randsborg 2002; York 2002).

In conclusion, Rissman's methodology attempts to examine Indus social organisation in a more objective manner than previously attempted, and along with Miller (1985) provokes a model that avoids the social evolutionary framework of Service (1962), and normative models of Indus social organisation. However, the methodology could be improved through a more vigorous and comprehensive definition of hoarding (e.g. Randsborg 1995; 2002; Bradley 1985; 1990), as well as considering the variety and symbolic context of different burial methods, and their reflections upon Indus social organisation. What has been demonstrated within the Indus is that hoards do not appear to represent any one function taken either as a group or individually. Until recently such equifinality has not been considered within the hoarding literature (Bradley 1998; Kristiansen 2002; Randsborg 2002; York 2002), and as a consequence its role within ancient societies is only now beginning to be understood.

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