

# HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION

A Contemporary Perspective

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ARIS & PHILLIPS LTD – WARMINSTER – ENGLAND

In cooperation with  
American Institute of Indian Studies

1902

xvii, 440

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## 9. Allahdino: An Excavation of a Small Harappan Site

### SITES IN THE KARACHI AREA

THE Harappan site of Allahdino is one of five now known in the former Federal District of Karachi (Fig. 9.1). Two of these are found on the east bank of the perennial Hab River which marks the boundary between Karachi and the District of Las Bela. Pir Shah Jurio is a small site located on the western tip of a crescent-shaped ridge standing some 15 meters above the Hab River approximately five kilometers from the Arabian Sea. Hab Chauki, about 23 kilometers north of Pir Shah Jurio, is situated on a spur of the Lyari border range overlooking the Hab. It is a low-lying small mound surrounded by alluvial soils. The remaining three sites are found to the east of Karachi some 35 kilometers away and are situated in the basin of the semiperennial Malir River. This river system drains an area in the Kohistan of considerable magnitude and in consequence the catch basin is responsible for an extraordinary quantity of underground water. So great is this amount that up to Partition the Malir system was able to provide Karachi with almost two-thirds of its water supply. Pumping of this water provides irrigation water for the Damlotti and Malir agricultural developments—the most prosperous ones locally. The water table is found in the Malir area at about 15 meters, rising in wells to about six meters below the surface in a good year. The Malir River in flood season is a formidable stream and capable of regularly filling local reservoirs.

The site of Amiliano was discovered by Majumdar in 1934. It is located in a pocket of soil found in the

broken country which lies along the western borders of the main Malir drainage. Considerably higher than that drainage it receives water naturally only during a rainfall period. It is a flat-lying pebbled site suggesting a short, single occupation. No structures, except a small pile of sandstone slabs, are indicated for this site.

Hasan Wali is about 15 kilometers to the southwest of Amiliano just south of the old Thanu Bulla Khan Road. It is located on a sandstone outcrop overlooking a narrow belt of alluvial soil which widens as it trends toward the west. This terminates at the eastern bank of the Bazaar Nadi, a small usually dry tributary of the Malir. Near the site, and lying across the alluvium, are a series of superimposed stone and mud dams, the earlier of which are of considerable antiquity. Associated with the earlier dam (gabarbund?) are the clay bicones familiar at Harappan sites, evidencing the possibility that the earlier dam might very well be Harappan, as indeed the position of this site also suggests. Hasan Wali is a moderately large settlement which fans out from a high point with a central stone structure that immediately overlooks the alluvium. Stone walls run in a number of directions showing that buildings with stone foundations were characteristic of the site. Considerable deflation has taken place owing to the site's exposed position; but all the evidence suggests that ancient occupation was short and for one period only. Plans have been drawn of the exposed structures and will be included in the overall Allahdino report.

Relationship of Four Harappan Sites of the Karachi Region  
to Cultivable Soils and Water

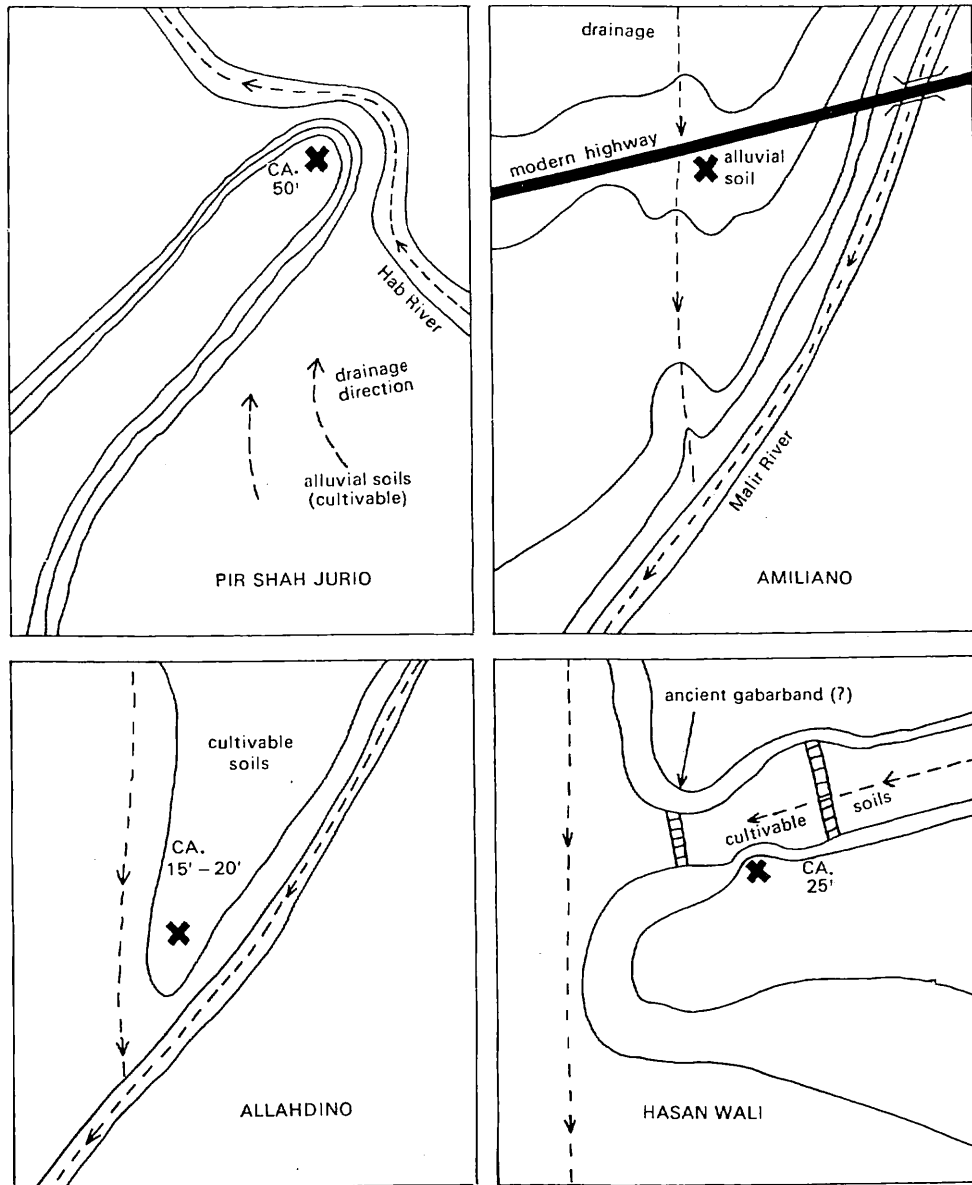


Fig. 9.1. Sites and drainage patterns in the Karachi region.

### ALLAHDINO

Allahdino is a low silt mound rising about two meters above the modern alluvium. The site extends no more than 100 meters in any direction. Its position is in the midst of modern cultivation, three to five meters above the present flood plain of the Malir River and that of its tributary the Bazaar Nadi. Allahdino is

close to the junction of the present beds of these streams and is about 15 kilometers south of Amiliano. Of the five Harappan sites of the Karachi region, Allahdino offers the most promise of excavation return. It is in a relatively protected situation and its size promotes the possibility that a reasonable sample can be taken. It is also important in that its position within the modern alluvium is in striking contrast to the

other sites. Pir Shah Jurio and Hasan Wali are above and outside the cultivable alluvium. Hab Chauki and Amiliano are in the midst of very small pockets of cultivable alluvium but are to a degree isolated from the more important tracts of cultivable land in the region. Only Allahdino's location indicates the man/land relationship emphasized at Mohenjodaro, Harappa, and other riverine-oriented sites.

The study of these Karachi District sites is important for several reasons. First, it will reveal much about the Harappan Civilization's internal character. Also, the sites stand at an intermediate position between Baluchistan and Sind and are close to the traditional sea and overland trade routes which converge on the Karachi area. It is hardly likely that if extensive commerce moved along these routes in the Harappan times that the sites of the Karachi region would not reflect its influence in some way or another.

The excavation strategy at Allahdino was to clear one level as completely as possible. It is known of course that non-Harappan, or Early Harappan, sites of Amrian type occur in the region (Orangi, Hasan Wali II, and sites along the Hab River for example) and it would not be unexpected given the situation elsewhere to find Amrian material in the lower levels at Allahdino. Though in actual fact one did not, this possibility seemed far less important than an effort to reveal the character of Harappan occupation at one level; something surely needed in the study of the Indus Civilization. Allahdino's size also makes possible the excavation of the entire site, thus ensuring the recovery of a "complete" sample. It has been growing clearer and clearer that excavations on parts of sites of a given period do not, as a rule, produce sufficient evidence by which to truly assess cultural character. However statistically valid a random sampling might be, it is suspect when one has to deal with most human activities as the history of sociology evidences. In order to handle this problem a quantitative method was adopted which required that all excavated earth be screened and that a rigorous control over fragmentary material be exercised. Even thumbnail-size copper stains *in situ* were recorded as if they were actual objects. After three-and-a-half seasons of work the amount of recovered material is impressive: more than 300,000 potsherds, 24,000 bicones, 2,600 terracotta triangles, 1,500 bangles, 196 pieces of copper or bronze, etc. The same technique was of course maintained for faunal material, slag, exotic unused stone and the like. Flotation and soil analysis were

carried out as well. All material was recorded in the same way, *in situ* or in fill. This helps create a distributional picture where, for example, the density of artifact or non-artifactual material may serve as an indicator of specific functional locations. It also gives an opportunity to test the validity of random sampling in the archaeology of the borderlands, wherever it occurs. At least one more full season at Allahdino is planned, however, before this can be done.

## ARCHITECTURE

At the central, highest part of the site, an open court measuring approximately 20 meters by eight meters was uncovered. The most distinctive feature of this court is a stone-built well (Well A) in the middle of the southern wall. The well has a small opening (ca. 60 by 90 centimeters) and a Harappan intersecting circle "bath tub" was attached to its southern side. This well stood at least 1.25 meters higher than a surrounding pavement which at one phase of the site's existence probably covered the entire court. The well, however, appears to have been a part of rectangular Building IV. South of Building IV is a complex of small rooms which is temporarily called Building VII. This is apparently joined to Building IV by another and similar well (Well B). Building VII has a broad brick platform with two square pits and a third rectangular in plan. There are also stone walls and rooms along its southern margin. In one of these rooms a small pot was found *in situ* which contained a jewelry cache of five necklaces and eleven copper finger rings of coiled wire. The necklaces had silver beads (both barrelform and disc) as well as carnelian, agate, jasper and copper beads and spacers. A tiny gold earring was also found in this cache.

Access to the central court was made possible through open passageways left between the surrounding buildings. Of these, Buildings I and II are the most impressive. Building I, the largest on the site, is still not completely excavated and in its latest phase may have been modified from an earlier, still poorly defined building. It appears to have been characterized by two east-west running wings joined by a platform and drain complex on the east and by a stone wall complex on the west. The latter is only partially excavated. The whole centered around an inner court in which there may have been some subsidiary (or earlier) structures. The northern wing was made up of compartments, the western half of which contained

storage vessels, including a fine classic Harappan black on red vessel similar to the one shown in the famous frontispiece of Mackey's publication on Chanhudaro. There is some suggestion that access to these compartments was via some stone steps.

Building II contained a stone-lined bathroom complete with covered drains, and outlets to the north. Between Buildings I and II there are remnants of a paving which is presumed to have been joined to the paving of the central court at a late phase of the site's existence. Most striking is the presence of a drain system represented by two stone-lined channels which join to the south at the head of the alley between Buildings I and II. A large stone slab, still in place, was apparently used to direct water from one channel to the other.

Building III, at the western end of the central court, appears to have been used for the manufacture of clay bicones and other baked clay objects. It contained clear evidence for ovens in compartments in both its northwestern and southeastern sections. Building V appears to have been used as a "warehouse" of some kind since large storage vessels were found there. But, it also contained considerable habitation debris. Building VI is still unexcavated but a line of stone wells suggests a separate structure.

Certain features of this complex of buildings at Allahdino can be noted.

1) All the buildings have some portion of their structure in stone.

2) There appears to be no regular pattern of brick laying: header-header, stretcher-stretcher, and header-stretcher bonding all occur, even in the same building.

3) There are functional differences among the structures.

4) There is a formality of plan which integrates the structures. There is a general absence of haphazardness both in the way the buildings were constructed and the way they relate one to another.

5) The thickness of walls in Buildings I, II and probably III, as well as the smallness of many of the "rooms" in these structures, argues for a second story in at least some of these buildings.

6) There was no perimeter, or enclosing wall around the site.

## IRRIGATION

One of the most intriguing problems which Allahdino

raises, and perhaps solves, is the question of the smallness of the openings in the two wells. Well A was traced to a depth of about 4.3 meters or some 1.25 meters into the virgin soil before the stone construction stopped. Clearly the well builders had a special purpose for this kind of construction. What was this?

As outlined earlier, the immense catch basin of the Malir system produces a large underground reservoir. The modern open pump wells, some of which are 30 meters or more across, fluctuate seasonally according to the amount of water in the reservoir. However, as is well known, water in wells rises higher than the surrounding water table because of hydrostatic pressure. The smaller the well diameter the higher the water will rise. Modern wells in the Damlotti area fluctuate in water height as much as 10 meters or more. Even in the larger wells the water surface may reach to within six meters of the modern land surface.

It is suggested then that the Harappan wells were deliberately kept small in diameter so that the water level would not only rise higher but would indeed *overflow* in artesian fashion. The well openings are certainly too small to conveniently lower containers through them. But there is another important factor. The central well is located at the highest part of the site. Any runoff from that well could be channeled wherever one wished because of the slope of the surrounding site. In the case of the divided drain to the north, a regular flow of well water could be moved with precision through the stone channels into the surrounding fields via earth-cut ditches; again *because of the slope of the site itself*. In the modern situation well water is pumped out onto a platform above the surrounding fields and guided into those fields by a channel which slopes down from the platform. The neatness of this idea in the Allahdino case is that it accounts for the narrowness of the well, the strategic location of the well at the top of the site, and the bifurcation of the drains with their movable sluice block. It also makes site location understandable. Since Allahdino is five or more meters above the Malir River, water for the cultivation of the surrounding alluvium must be brought to the fields in some regular fashion. Alternatives to meet this need are not attractive. One could hypothesize an irrigation canal which takes off from a contour above Allahdino; but this would mean a canal at least 20 to 25 kilometers long. One could argue for greater rainfall, which may be valid; but for which the evidence at

Allahdino is at least still uncertain. One could postulate the regular use of some water-raising devices, like the *shaduf* or the Persian Wheel: but there is no evidence for these. On the face of it I believe that the argument as outlined above for well-water irrigation is plausible. An additional observation might be added that immediately north of Allahdino the slope of the land is from east to west, or across the greatest extent of cultivable land.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The stratigraphy of the site leans heavily upon the work of Jim Shaffer who cut a sondage in quadrant J-6. It appears that there was an early phase when Harappan cattle pastoralists settled the site. This was followed by a major construction period during which Buildings I, II, III and probably IV, were created. These were embellished somewhat later by the addition of the more flimsy structures on the south. None of the buildings, however, remained static during its life as all of them have indications of rebuilding and wall modification as one might expect in the life of any structure. The site was abandoned suddenly as the jewelry cache and the basically intact walls of the various buildings suggest. Apparently the collapse of the superstructure did much to preserve the foundations and the contents of many of the rooms. Later visitors to the place left little evidence for their passing except some burned spots which marked their fires and an occasional line of postholes, such as in plan of Building II, quadrant G-5, and Building I, quadrant F-4. The conformity and continuity of artifacts and structures evidences a short time span for Harappan occupation which I suspect was no more than a hundred years at the most.

The scale of the site is modest and the fact that several of the structures are specifically functional rather than generally habitational, as well as the possibility of an irrigational premise as outlined above, gives the impression that the population living on the site was no more than eighty or so. One suspects numerous scattered households were satellite to sites like Allahdino and Hasan Wali. In turn these sites served the extended community by providing collective labor for functions such as milling, irrigation, religious services, administration, storage, etc.

#### ARTIFACTS

An ongoing study of the interior diameter of frag-

ments of clay bangles has indicated so far that the hand breadth of the bangle wearers was about five centimeters. This evidence suggests that the women who are presumed to have worn them were very slender and perhaps under five feet four inches in height.

There is evidence for cattle, goats and sheep, the water buffalo, possibly the donkey, and for grain-eating rodents. There were also gallinaceous fowl, as well as fish and possibly the monitor lizard. Flotation results have not been truly satisfactory. Wheat, and perhaps barley, is attested and a legume of some unidentifiable kind was found; but nothing else has been isolated. One hopes to improve on this by utilizing newer flotation methods in a subsequent season.

The seals and graffiti attest to the fact that not only was the Harappan script well known to the inhabitants of Allahdino, but that the social organization for which the seals are representative was in vogue there. There are "unicorn" bull seals, and both the elephant and the rhinoceros. If, as I have discussed in the first preliminary report for Allahdino (Fairservis 1976), these larger motifs in the seals generally represent sodalities in the society, it is clear that the Allahdino settlement was highly organized under a leadership familiar on a larger scale at Mohenjodaro and elsewhere. In the same context, the repetition of the capped knot sign  $\hat{\kappa}$  on sealing 73-156, and on three unicorn bullseals 73-105, 73-32, and 74-177, which I would read as settlement chief (*urtal*), is not at variance with the sense that the polity of the Harappans revolved around shared and specialized authority as is not uncommon in later manifestations of village India.

#### TRADE

If one draws a series of concentric circles representing 10 kilometer units with Allahdino at their center it can be said that 95 percent of all materials found on the site could have been obtained within 50 kilometers. Flint deposits have been located within seven kilometers of Allahdino. Shell and fish are obtainable both in the Malir Basin and the coast of the Arabian Sea. Copper, agate, jasper and carnelian are found in the Lyari Hills, the Porali Basin, the Kohistan, and the Hab River Valley. On estimate, about 10 kilograms of copper artifacts were found at Allahdino. Only the gold and silver are not locally obtainable among all the materials that have been identified.

However, until qualitative analysis of these materials is completed one cannot exclude the possibility that at least some of the manufactured articles are the consequence of trade. While copper slag is attested at Allahdino it is scattered and sparse and no furnace has yet been found there. However, it is doubtful on the face of the overall evidence that trade was significant either in the location of the site or deeply involved in its functions.

#### SUMMARY

Allahdino, and by allusion the other Malir sites, was a settlement created to serve a community whose population was resident in households scattered over the landscape and presumed to be largely engaged in agriculture and cattle pastoralism. Ancient Allahdino provided various functions including local adminis-

tration, the manufacture of clay artifacts and irrigation water. The households were probably no more than three kilometers from the central site and a constant interplay between Allahdino and the household was maintained. Local natural resources were sufficient for most material needs and specialists living at Allahdino both obtained and converted these materials. Interaction among the Malir, and with other Harappan sites of the region, moved objects and services through a network which is characteristic of Harappan settlement almost everywhere. Ultimately, regional networks connect with one another reinforcing both the conformity of Harappan Culture and its continuity even far from the Indus River Valley itself. This is a model which hopefully one can continue to test as work is finalized at Allahdino.

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