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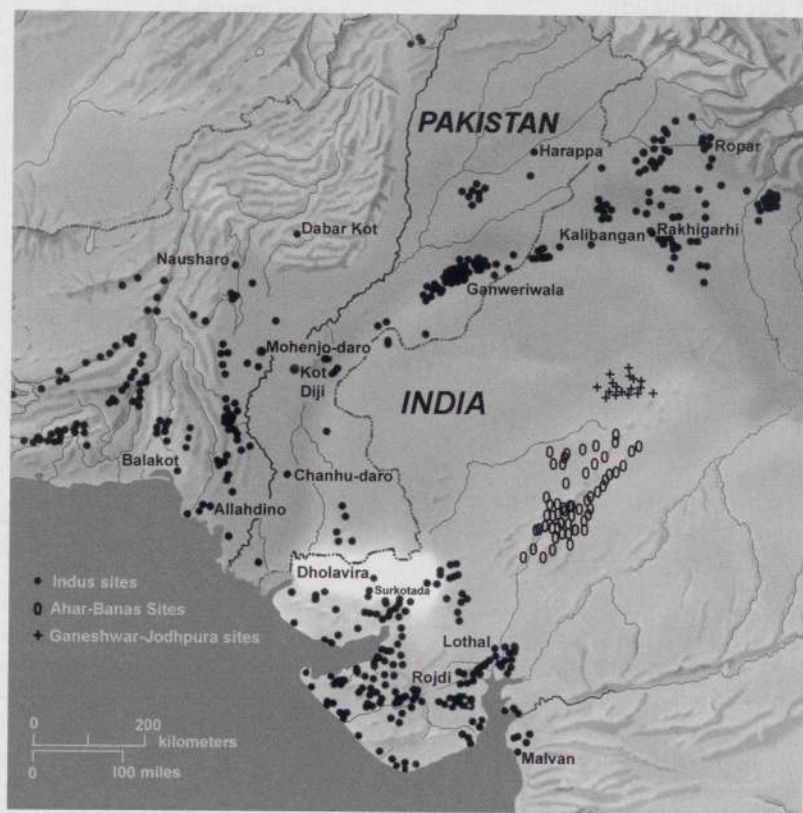
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Excavations at Gilund 2001–2003: The Seal Impressions and Other Finds

Fig. 1. The Ahar-Banas Complex, the Ganeshwar-Jodhpura Complex and the Indus Civilization.



INTRODUCTION

Excavations at Gilund continued in 2001–2003 under the joint direction of Vasant Shinde of Deccan College, Pune and Gregory L. Possehl of the University of Pennsylvania. Gilund is a part of the so-called “Ahar-Banas Complex” of southern Rajasthan and can be dated to approximately 3000–1500 BC (figs. 1–3).

The site is located 1.5 km northeast of Gilund village. It was first reported as “Bhagwanpura” in 1957–58 by K. N. Puri of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI. IAR 1957–58, 45); however, this name is not recognized today. Gilund was then

excavated by B. B. Lal of the ASI in 1959–60 (IAR 1959–60, 41–46). He called the site “Gilund” and this set the precedent we follow.

Gilund is a village of about 8000 people in Rajsamand District of Rajasthan. It is roughly 100 km northeast of Udaipur City, at the southern end of the so-called “Khetri Copper Belt”. The village and site are in an area of slightly sandy, but fertile, arable land, and it is clear that the ancient village was situated to take advantage of a superior agro-pastoral environment. Today the Banas River flows about 1 km north of Gilund, but it may have been nearer in the 2nd and 3rd millennia BC. On the northern side of the river,

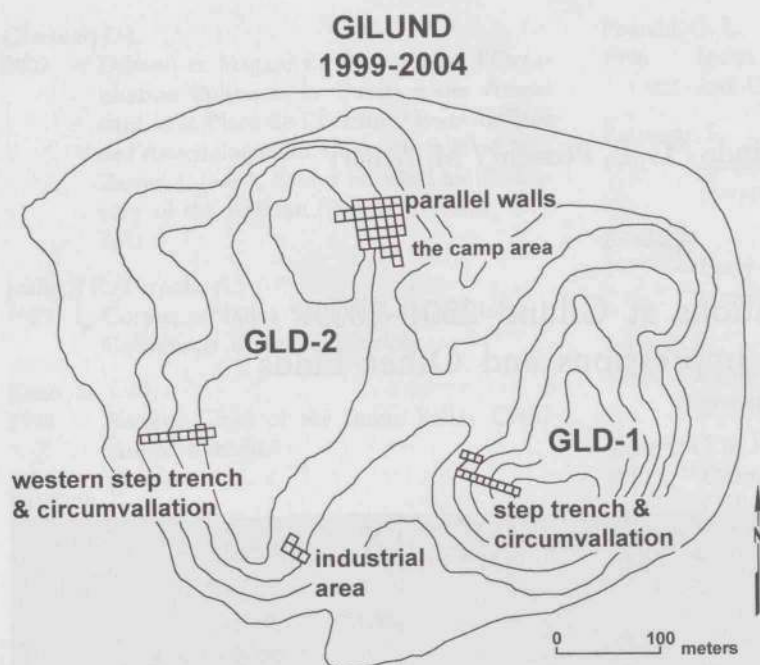


Fig. 2. Plan of Gilund.

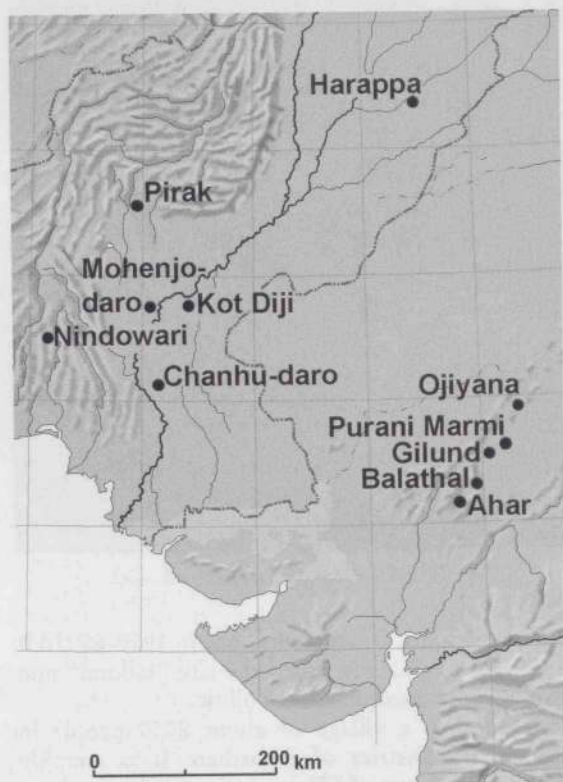


Fig. 3. Sites mentioned in the text.

at a distance of 4 km, is a range of hillocks, which is the main source of pasture for the modern settlement.

Gilund may be the largest site of the Ahar-Banas sites. The exact size of the ancient settlement is difficult to determine, but we consider the place to be approximately 25 hectares, noting that during some periods it was probably larger. There is another Ahar-Banas Complex site 18 km northeast of Gilund in the village of Marmi that is also very large.

There are approximately 100 Ahar-Banas Complex settlements known to archaeologists today. They tend to cluster in the five hectare range. Most of them are located in the valleys of the rivers Banas, Berach, Kothari, Gambhiri, Khari and their tributaries.

Five of the Ahar-Banas Complex sites have been excavated. Ahar itself in the outskirts of Udaipur¹, Balathal, 30 km south of Gilund², Ojiyana (a.k.a. Ojena) located in Bhilwara District and excavated by the ASI in 1999–2000 and 2000–2001³, Purani Marmi, c. 18 km up the Banas River (northeast) from Gilund⁴, and Gilund, now excavated for four seasons by the joint team offering this report (Shinde/Possehl, in press).

The site of Gilund is composed of two prominent mounds. The higher, eastern side is called

¹ Sankalia/Deo/Ansari 1969.

² Misra et al. 1995; Misra 1997.

³ IAR 1984–85, 68; Meena 1987; Tripathi 2000, 6–16; Meena/Tripathi 2000, 2001, 2001–2002.

⁴ IAR 1957–58, 45; Mohanty et al. 2000.

GLD-1. It is c. 15 m above the surrounding plain. The larger, rolling mound on the west (GLD-2) rises to a height of c. 8 m above the surrounding area. As will be noted later, these two parts of the site (a high eastern mound and a lower western one) may be a part of the settlement design for ancient Gilund.

AIMS OF THE EXCAVATION

The general aims of the Gilund project are to understand the social life and history of the peoples and others of the Ahar-Banas Complex in the Mewar region of Rajasthan. The excavation team is also interested in the history of Indian agriculture and they want to further understand the date and nature of the beginnings of food production in this region, and the effect had by the introduction of African millets (sorghum and pearl millet) in the late 3rd – early 2nd millennium BC. Gilund is located in one of India's principal copper belts and they want to know how the people there made use of this resource (and others), both internally and as a commodity for trade and exchange.

CHRONOLOGY

The chronology of Gilund is one of the problems on which the excavation team is still working. Using our excavations, the radiocarbon dates we have so far, and the relatively sound chronology from Balathal, Gilund has been divided into three Ahar-Banas (or Chalcolithic) periods:

Late Ahar-Banas	2000–1700 BC
Middle Ahar-Banas	2500–2000 BC
Early Ahar-Banas	3000–2500 BC

EXCAVATION ON THE WESTERN FACE OF GLD-1

The excavation on the western face of GLD-1 utilized the step trench method. GLD-1 has about 10 m of habitation deposit including Medieval, Early Historic and Ahar-Banas materials. A series of trenches were laid and excavated from the highest part of GLD-1 to its base, with a view of obtaining a complete cultural, ceramic and structural sequence. We found that the top 1.50 m has historic materials that are not well preserved. Directly below them is the Ahar-Banas occupation that can be divided into five structural phases. The lower deposit has evidence of the Early Ahar-Banas similar to that of Balathal. The ceramic corpus includes Reserve Slip Ware, an early ceramic type in the Ahar-Banas Complex.

A kiln was found in the mid-levels of the step trench. The dome of the kiln was supported by circular clay pillars, one of which is intact in the middle of the firing chamber. Within the kiln were

found two roughly oval shaped objects made of terracotta. The sides, bottom and the area around this feature is burnt red indicating its heavy and constant use.

The foundations of what may be a circumvallation were found at the base of GLD-1. Just below the present ground surface there is a hard packed feature of clay "loafs" and brick bats as well as black clay and brown silt. It measures 7.20 m in width and was built on a solid platform made of mud and mud-bricks. At the base of GLD-1 these foundations run in a north-south direction.

Just outside the circumvallation at the base of GLD-1 we found a surface, which looks like a simple, unpaved road. The many striations marking this surface are parallel to one another and appear to be the ruts of ancient carts that passed by this part of the site.

THE WESTERN STEP TRENCH

The western face of GLD-2 was selected for excavation to continue our investigations of the site. A series of eleven trenches were laid in an east-west direction from the top of the mound to its edge. The work in this area had evidence for successive habitation in the form of floors and structural levels. It seems that this area was abandoned during the later periods of occupation (c. 1700 BC).

An interesting domestic structure belonging to the late Middle Ahar-Banas Phase was encountered in the step trench. It seems to be a rectangular structure oriented in a northeast-southwest direction with the northern wall measuring 5.6 m and the western wall being 7.6 m long. The other two extremities have not yet been fully exposed. This building was made of wattle and daub, with a plastered floor. Within the structure we found many pots and storage jars all burnt in situ. One of them contained a large number of jujube seeds.

The possible circumvallation at the base of the GLD-2 cutting is much like the evidence at the base of GLD-1. These foundations are made of clay, clay "loafs" and mud-brick bats rammed very hard. The feature runs in a northwest-southeast direction and is exposed only to a length of 5.5 m. Its width is 7.5 m. On the outer side of the wall is a projection running roughly in northeast-southwest direction, which may be a bastion. Further work in this area is planned.

As we have noted, there is evidence for a circumvallation on the western sides of both GLD-1 and GLD-2. It is still not known if they were connected as a single wall around the entire site, or if the high mound (GLD-1) had a wall separate from the one surrounding the lower mound (GLD-2). If ancient Gilund town was divided into two distinct mounds, then one would expect to find functional differences in the activities that took place in each area,



Fig. 4. The parallel walls.

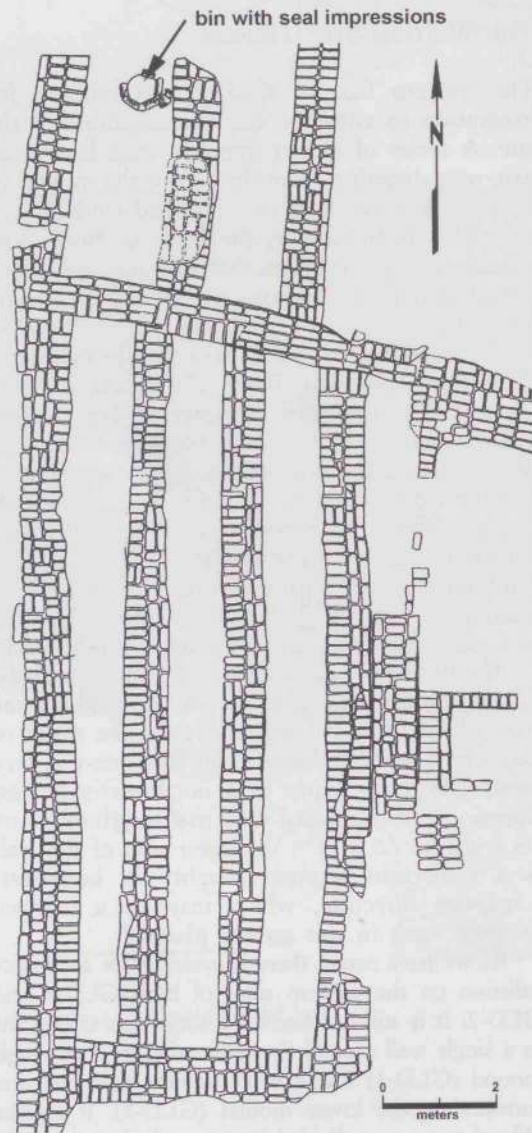


Fig. 5. The parallel walls.

possibly along the lines seen at the city of Mohenjo-daro with its Mound of the Great Bath and Lower Town. This would in turn suggest fairly close interaction between the peoples of Sindh and Mewar in the second half of the 3rd millennium (2500–1900 BC).

THE INDUSTRIAL AREA IN THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF GLD 2 SETTLEMENT

Excavation at the southern end of GLD-2 has produced evidence for what we believe to be an industrial or craft area. The earliest feature in this area is a large rectangular building (Structure 12), oriented north-south and east-west, with plastered walls made of both mud and baked brick. An entrance 1.3 m wide was found along the eastern wall of the structure. The entrance was well plastered on all sides. The wall in which it was situated is 6.0 m long. The partially excavated northern and southern walls have lengths of 2.0 and 4.5 m respectively. The walls are all 50 cm thick.

Stratigraphically above the earliest structure is another large rectangular building (Structure 11) made of mud brick and stone, with a different orientation from that of Structure 12. The inside of Structure 11 has a succession of well plastered floors on top of which we found a large amount of vitrified clay. This appears to have been dumped here as the floor itself is burnt only in patches.

To the west of Structure 11 is what seems to be a large oval shaped kiln. It has mud walls and is 4.2 m in length, 80 cm in width, with north-south orientation. The kiln contained vitrified clay similar to that found dumped within Structure 11. A second kiln was partially excavated to the north of Structure 11. It was found to have been plastered and the walls at the base are 60 and 65 cm in length.

THE CAMP ON THE EASTERN FACE OF GLD-2

During the first season of renewed excavation at Gilund we learned that the Ahar-Banas people had established their habitation on the sandy soil of the area, possibly on a dune. On the eastern face of GLD-2 there is what appears to be a camp site, occupied by people who used microlithic tools and made a crude, red pottery. These people made tools similar to those used at Bagor some 30 km to the north. The vocabulary of South Asian archaeology usually leads archaeologists to call such camps "Mesolithic". The concept of the "Mesolithic" was developed in Europe for peoples who lived in the Holocene and were not food producing. But, this is a gross distortion of the cultural context and complexity of peoples of this sort, who may be partly food producers, and who may have complex exchange relationships with the prehistoric peasant peoples around them. We will therefore not use the term "Mesolithic" in reference to this camp.

Excavation in this part of the site has documented c. 60 cm of habitation, with both ceramic and aceramic levels. The soil is dark brown fine sand with large amounts of debitage and a few tools. Most of the artifacts are of quartzite with some chert. The pottery from the ceramic phase is a crude, coarse, ill fired red ware. The aceramic phase of Gilund has clusters of stone that may be arranged in a roughly rectangular fashion around a hard and compact area. Outside this feature is a fireplace or hearth.

We do not yet have dates from the Gilund camp. But new AMS dates from Bagor confirm occupation there as early as 5500 BC, which may correspond to the occupation at Gilund.

STRUCTURES IN THE NORTHEASTERN PORTION OF GLD-2

Excavations in the northeastern area of GLD-2 yielded a number of residential structures associated with domestic features: structures, floors, hearths, storage pits and storage jars. Structure 8 in this area belongs to the Late Ahar-Banas Phase. It is associated with a storage bin with two structural phases and two circular platforms probably for supporting storage bins. The house is a rectangular, two-roomed affair oriented in a north-west-southeast direction. The southern portion was damaged by erosion. The northern room of the structure is 8.75 m by 5.70 m wide. The western wall of the structure has been exposed to a length of 10 m. The walls of the structure are represented by a series of post-holes with a portion of a wattle and daub wall surviving. Structure 8 shows signs of repairs indicating that the structure was probably in use for a considerable time. A storage bin and two grey ware storage jars were found along the northern wall. A large hearth, or

fire pit was found outside the western wall, indicating that some cooking may have been done out of doors.

THE AREA OF THE PARALLEL WALLS

During the first season of renewed excavation at Gilund we exposed a massive set of mud bricks walls, parallel to one another on the eastern slope of GLD-2 (figs. 4–5).

These have been described in some detail in Shinde/Possehl (in press). More work has been done on these walls since that report. The present exposure consists of five parallel walls each about 20 m in length. The northern limit of this feature has not yet been reached. The long axis of the parallel walls runs north-south. They are made of very good mud brick and are preserved to a width of 75 to 125 cm, with about one meter between them. So, it seems that the building was conceived to have walls and spaces of about even dimensions. Shortcomings in the building/measuring process, and wear and tear, have led to the discrepancies. The spaces were probably intended to be about a meter wide, or what ever unit(s) of measure the Gilund peoples had that approximates the modern meter in length.

Two crossing walls, running east-west have been found. They are slightly wider than the north-south walls (1.1 m) but exhibit the same general features of construction. One of the crossing members appears to be at the southern boundary of this building.

The walls were made of very hard, well made reddish mud bricks with yellow mortar. They were laid using a rather haphazard pattern, as seen in fig. 4. The exterior of the walls appears to have been plastered. Habitation debris and surfaces exist between the parallel walls.

The Bin and Seal Impressions in the Building with Parallel Walls

The 2002–2003 excavation team emptied a bin in the northwestern corner of the parallel walls. It was found to contain over 100 seal impressions. The impressions were made from seals both round and rectilinear. None of the seal impressions were made by the widely known Indus Civilization style seals, with a device below a line of script. Moreover, there is nothing on the seal impressions that suggests writing. No Indus script has yet been detected.

The design motifs are generally quite simple and have wide ranging parallels from sites in Sindh and Baluchistan: Chanhu-daro the Jhukar levels⁵, Pirak Periods I and II⁶, Kot Diji (Shah/Parpola

⁵ Mackay 1943, pl. XLIX, nos. 5–6; pl. L, nos. 5, 7, 13.

⁶ Enault 1979 fig. 96, nos. 650–652; fig. 97, nos. 662, 663, 668; fig. 98, nos. 667–668.

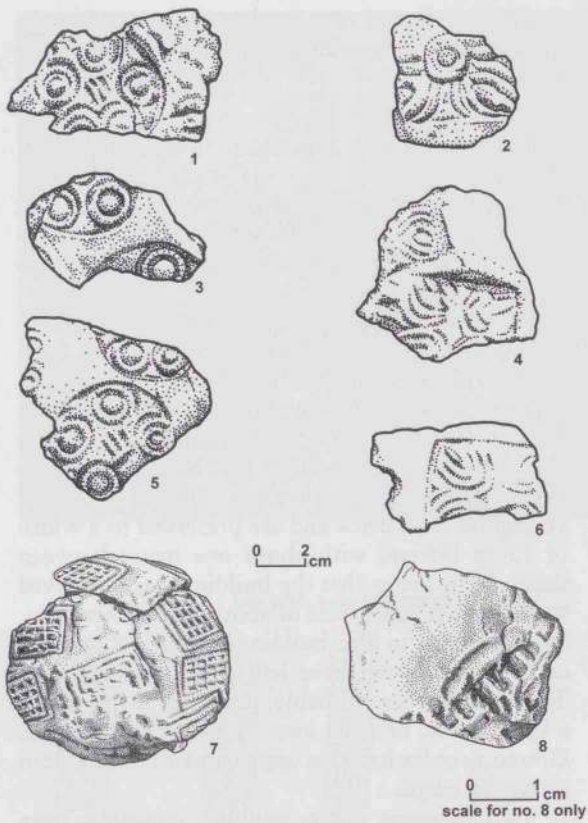


Fig. 6. Seal impressions from Gilund.

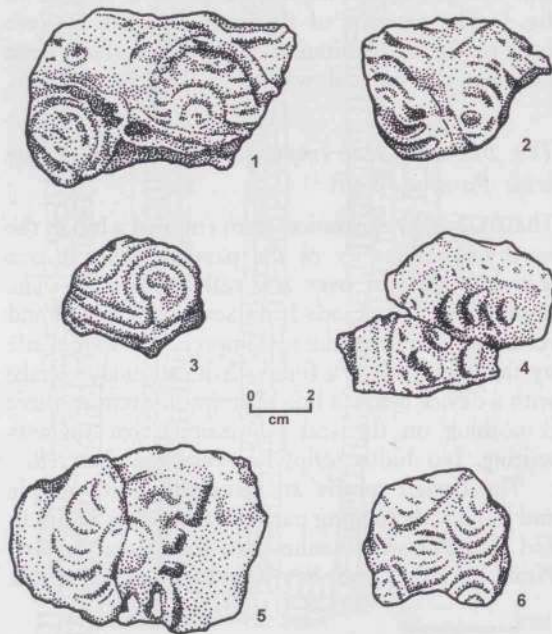


Fig. 7. More seal impressions from Gilund.

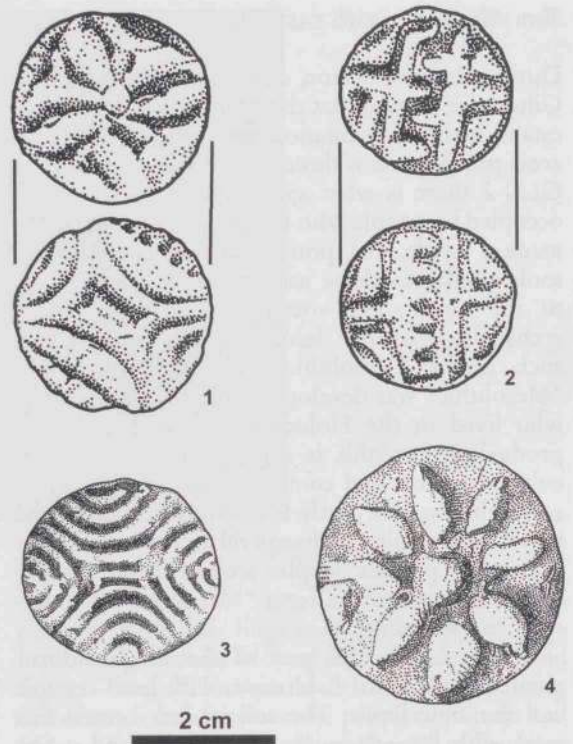


Fig. 8. Seals from Chanhu-daro. No. 1, Mackay 1943, pl. L, 7. 7a; no. 2, Mackay 1943, pl. L, 5. 5a; no. 3, Mackay 1943, pl. XLIX, 2 no. 3?; no. 4, Mackay 1943, pl. L, 13.

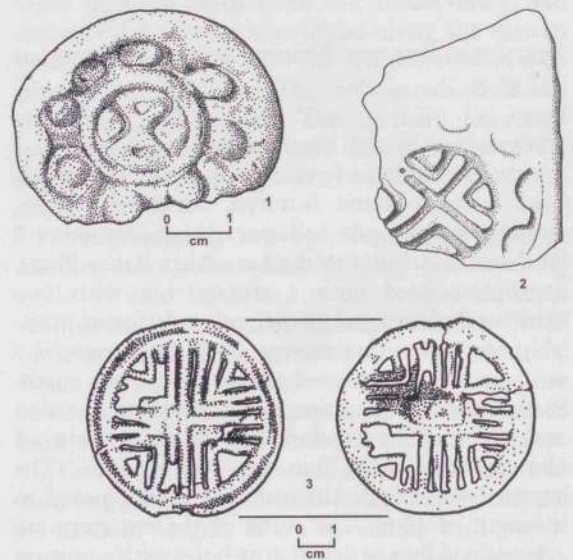


Fig. 9. Seals and seal impressions from Pirak. No. 1, Enault 1979, fig. 97, 662, Period IB; no. 2, Enault 1979, fig. 97, 663, Period IB; no. 3, Enault 1979, pl. XLV, C, Period IIIC.

1991, 397, no. Kd-6) and Nindowari⁷. There are also parallels with seals from the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) of Central Asia and northern Afghanistan (figs. 6–11)⁸. Seals and other artifacts from the BMAC are widely distributed in South Asia, Iran, and the Arabian Gulf (fig. 12).

The seals from Chanhu-daro, Pirak Periods I and II and the BMAC would all date to the late 3rd and early 2nd millennia BC. This is where we have tentatively dated the Gilund sealings. It should be emphasized, however, that the building with parallel walls is probably in our Middle Ahar-Banas Phase, which is not independently dated at Gilund. This needs to be done and is one of the priorities for the program of work proposed there.

The backs of the impressions are often broken earth, not the original “cortex” of the impression. But, some of the backs are preserved and they inform us that the impressions were stuck to surfaces, generally with a double curve as on the shoulder and/or rim of a pottery vessel. There are some signs of string, rope, and fabric on the seal impressions.

There are some other artefacts from Gilund that would seem to have parallels with other parts of the Subcontinent and Central Asia. Perhaps the most interesting of these is a stepped cross in terracotta (fig. 13). Stepped crosses are frequently found as seals in the BMAC (Sarianidi 1998: seal nos. 476, 477, 968, 969). There is even one from the excavations at Harappa (Vats 1940, pl. XCI, no. 255). Stepped crosses are also very common elements on painted pottery in Baluchistan, especially the site of Nal (Hargreaves 1929) and Central Asia, as reviewed in Possehl (1999, 675–680). We have also found a part of a pendant, in terracotta as well, with a suggestion of a bucranium motif (fig. 14).

Finally, there is one object that would seem to be a stamp seal. It is terracotta with a short handle and a star motif (fig. 15). Star motifs are common within the Greater Indus Region but this stamp seal recalls those of the BMAC in bronze as seen in Sarianidi (1998, seal nos. 641, 642, 643, 721–723).

The Seal Impressions

There is a good literature on the modern study of seal impressions⁹. We have learned much from these studies: about the motifs on the seals and the function of the sealings; what they sealed and how this was done. Prehistoric peoples from the Indus

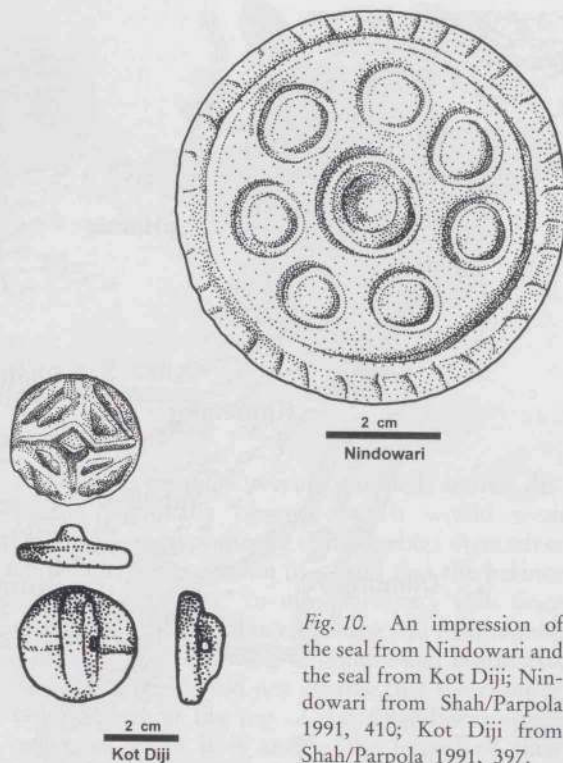


Fig. 10. An impression of the seal from Nindowari and the seal from Kot Diji; Nindowari from Shah/Parpola 1991, 410; Kot Diji from Shah/Parpola 1991, 397.

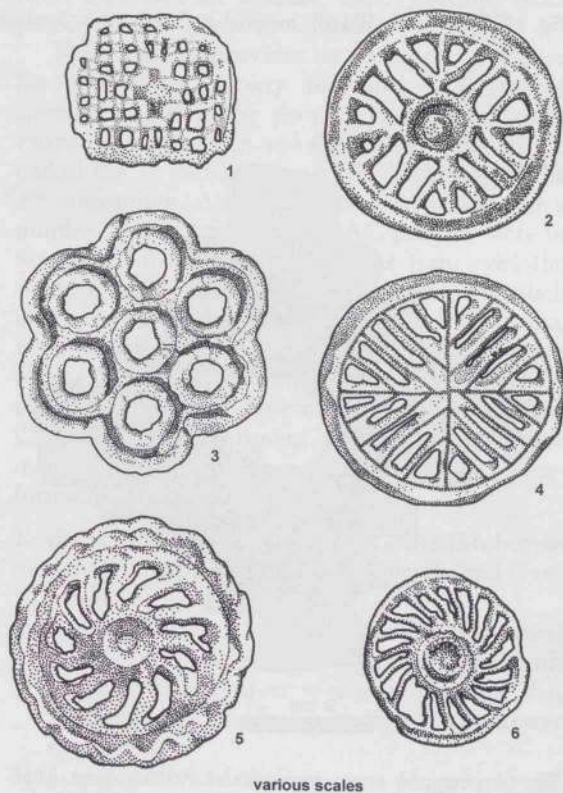


Fig. 11. Seals from the BMAC. No. 1, Sarianidi 1998, seal number 812; no. 2, Amiet 1988, fig. 13, f; no. 3, Sarianidi 1998, seal number 653; no. 4, Sarianidi 1998, seal number 551; no. 5, Sarianidi 1977, fig. 49, 2; no. 6, Amiet 1988, fig. 13, e.

⁷ Shah/Parpola 1991, 410, no. Nd-3.

⁸ Sarianidi 1998, seal nos. 410, 506, 540, 551, 653, 782, 784, 812, 817, 819, 1250, 1650.4–1797.

⁹ Fiandra 1981; Fiandra/Ferioli 1983; Zettler 1987; Szarzynska 1994; Fiandra/Pepe 2000; Tosi 2003, personal communication.



Fig. 12. Sites with BMAC material in South Asia, Iran and the Arabian Gulf.

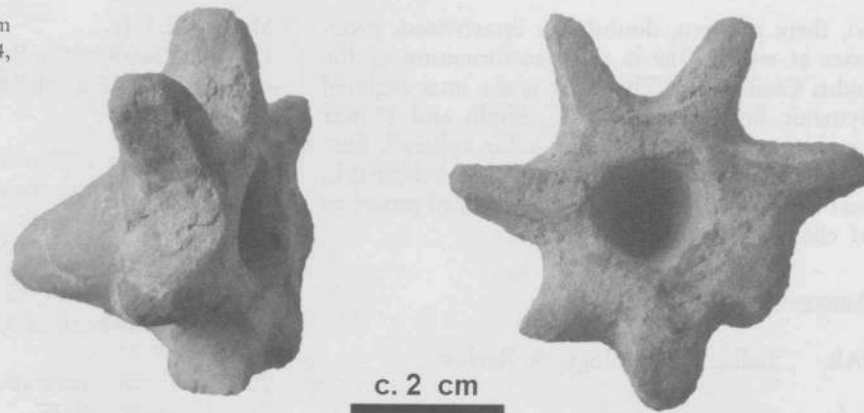


Fig. 13. Stepped cross, terracotta, Lot 1005, Late Ahar-Banas Period.



Fig. 14. Pendant, terracotta, Lot 1035, Late Ahar-Banas Period.

Fig. 15. Stamp seal in the form of a star, terracotta, Lot 1024, Late Ahar-Banas Period.



to the Mediterranean sealed pots, doors, boxes, bundles and bags. There is an interesting common pattern that seems to come through for the evidence on them from Crete to Lothal. In centralized administrations all, or a part of each sealing, was stored as “receipt” or record of the transaction or the open/close procedures. They were kept for a time (a week, a month, a year?); however, even when they had lost their function as a part of record keeping they were rarely discharged with general trash, but were disposed of in controlled, separate areas, within or close to the actual administrative compound. This certainly seems to fit the pattern at Gilund.

The Building with the Parallel Walls was a Magazine Type Warehouse

The size and nature of this building suggests that it was a “public” structure. The presence of the bin within the space between two of the walls, and other signs of occupation, lead us to believe that the long, narrow “rooms” were used for storage, as in a “magazine” style facility, with goods lined up, leaning against the supporting walls.

The warehouse/magazine, the bin and seal impressions seem to indicate that Gilund in the late 3rd – early 2nd millennium had a population of elite citizens who used stamp seals as identification of themselves and their elevated status, to seal and mark commodities that were stored in a special building under their control. These commodities were possibly derived from some sort of “tax” or tribute extracted from the population of the Ahar-Banas peoples at Gilund and/or other places. Booty from warfare, raids, and the like may also have been stored in this warehouse, along with the produce the elites derived from their own efforts as farmers, herders and exploiters of natural resources. The exact nature of the commodities stored in this warehouse is not known, but agropastoral products, especially valuable processed things like ghee, oil and textiles come to mind as good possibilities. Metals and other valuable “natural resources” might have also been stored here.

How these products were consumed, and/or disbursed is equally obscure but it would seem reasonable to hypothesize that the elites themselves consumed some portion of it, and that the balance was used as “gifts” to more ordinary folk since such things are useful in recruiting and maintaining a loyal, useful following at Gilund and elsewhere. Moreover, we should not assume that the elites of Gilund were at the top of the Ahar-Banas social order, although it is among the largest of their sites, possibly the largest. Be that as it may, some of what was amassed at Gilund, may well have been expended in keeping happy people more powerful than those at Gilund.

Thus, Gilund provides us with good evidence for a stratified society that had wide-ranging contacts between the peoples of western India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia just at the end of the 3rd millennium and the beginning of the 2nd millennium. Archaeologists have known for a number of years that the BMAC peoples were in Sindh and Balochistan, as well as Iran, even the Arabian Gulf. But, this is the first time that such evidence has come from so deep within India, which significantly expands the geographic picture of an interesting, even critical, period – interesting in part because this is the very time that the Indus Civilization is undergoing a process of transformation. Ultimately this process of change, transformative in nature, led to:

1. the abandonment of the Indus cities (Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi and Ganweriwala);
2. transformed the Indus people’s sociocultural system from one that was highly stratified with many craft and career specialists into one that was much less stratified with significantly fewer specialists;
3. a termination of their system of writing and weights and measures;
4. a significant compromise of their technological virtuosity;
5. an abandonment of the ideology on which the Indus Civilization rested.

So, there are two, doubtlessly intertwined, processes at work. One is the transformation of the Indus Civilization. The other is the inter-regional dynamic linking the BMAC, Sindh and Mewar into something like an "interaction sphere". Further archaeological work at Gilund is dedicated in part to an investigation of these entwined processes of change and contact.

ABBREVIATION

IAR Indian Archaeology: A Review

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