

CRAFTING CULTURE: TERRACOTTA ART OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Terracotta figures from the Indus Valley Civilization (3300-1300BCE) offer a fascinating glimpse into the lives of ancient south Asians. These intricately crafted figurines, often depicting humans and animals, showcase the artistic prowess and cultural richness of this enigmatic civilization. Indus terracotta figures narrate stories of a bygone era, frozen in time. These small, yet expressive, figurines reveals the daily lives, rituals, and myths of the Indus people. Each figure, a tangible connection to the past, invites us to decipher the secrets of this ancient culture. The terracotta figures of the Indus Valley civilization demonstrate exceptional artistic skill and attention to detail. With their simplified forms, expressive faces, and intricate adornments, these figurines exemplify the aesthetic sensibilities of the Indus people, highlighting their unique contribution to the evolution of ancient art.

KEY WORDS

Toys, Whistles, Clay, Rattles, Dice, Wheels, Balls, Marbles.

INTRODUCTION

The word Terracotta stands for figurines of clay usually baked or burnt clay. It is one of the most ancient forms of plastic art clay, the medium of Terracotta is one of the easily obtainable and beautiful gift of nature to mankind. It is very handy and cheap. So man at the very thresh hold of civilization began to make ceramics dolls and deities in clay. This art became famous in the ancient worlds. The history of terracotta figurines in India extend over a period of 3000 years. At Harappa, Mohenjadar and other chalcolithic sites, terracotta have been found in large number. Among the most original products of the Indus Civilization are the lively and exuberant terracotta statuettes. The subjects most often represented, on seals of steatite in particular, include animals such as tigers, buffalo, and oxen, which are shown either alone or yoked to small carts. A continuous stream of terracotta figurines are witnessed through all the different ages is seen in India. They have their peculiar local characteristics. They were made entirely with the help of hands and moulds. Paint was applied in most of the terracotta figurines, generally of red, pink, light yellow or black colour.

MATERIAL AND MANUFACTURING TECHNIQUES

Terracotta figurines from the Indus Valley Civilization were crafted using specific clay compositions and techniques. The clay typically contained sand, shell fragments, mica particles, and vegetable material. These inclusions likely enhanced the clay's workability and durability.

In terms of manufacturing techniques, the figurines were predominantly hand-modeled using methods such as pinching to create facial features, applique to attach clay shapes like eyes and jewellery, and incision to carve designs into wet clay. Notably, the figurines were often made by joining two vertically split halves, possibly reflecting symbolic meanings related to dualism or self-integration.

TYPES OF TERRACOTTA FIGURES

HUMAN FIGURES

Human figurines are produced using a standard procedure. Figurines are not made in moulds, a technique known from other crafts. They are hand-built and either solid or hollow. Human figurines are made from two pieces joined together or vertically rolled pieces of clay that make up the head, upper and lower body, and legs. It is not certain whether the figure should be classed as a toy, but the once movable arms certainly suggest it. On the other hand, the figure is represented as pregnant and the extreme exaggeration of the buttocks suggests steatopygy. It is hardly likely, therefore, that the figure was the work of a child. The height of the figure is 3.8 inches, and a hole in the soles of the feet suggests that it was carried on a thin stick. This model is of well-burnt clay of a light-red colour and uncoated with a slip.

ANIMAL FIGURES

The most common terracotta figurines represent domesticated animals, especially zebu (bulls), water buffalo, and caprids (sheep and goat). Other representations include dogs, deer, rhinoceros, elephants, large felines, rabbits, turtles, bears, monkeys, gharials (a fish-eating alligator), and birds, which are less frequent. Animal figurines consist of quadruped and bipedal forms (the legs are joined in the back and front) with few details. The pottery animal is of a composite nature. It has the head and horns of a ram, and the body and tail of a bird. It measures 4.5 inches in length, is hollow, and made of a light-red ware liberally coated with a deep red wash. There are two opposite holes in the animal's sides, through which a stick was probably once passed, either to swing the animal upon, or, as seems more likely, to accommodate a pair of wheels. A smaller hole through the neck was probably intended to take a cord by which this bird-chariot could be pulled along. The figure, which is entirely

hand-made, is too good to have been the work of a child, though in all probability it was made for one.

TOYS

WHISTLES

Toys of this kind are common at Mohenjadaró and are invariably in the form of a bird, hollow within and with a small hole in the back near the tail, which when blown into produces a shrill whistle. It is not easy to recognize the species of bird, but it is likely that a dove is intended. The pedestal – like bases with which the birds are provided permit of their standing easily on a flat surface, and make them convenient to hold. It is possible that various modulations could be produced from such whistles and especially the call of a dove.

RATTLES

Round pottery rattles with small pellets of clay inside are well known at Mohenjadaró. It is 2.55 inches in diameter and light-red ware decorated with parallel circles in red paint. The rattles found vary in size from 1.5 inches to 2.6 inches in diameter, and are all made of light-red ware. Some are plain and others decorated with thick lines, always of red and arranged either laterally or vertically. These rattles were probably made by wrapping the clay round a combustible core, in the centre of which the roughly made baked clay pellets were placed to produce the sound. In every case they are hand- made, not moulded, and they are invariably well finished, but without a slip.

BALLS AND MARBLES

A number of small balls, averaging 0.48 inch in diameter, were made of agate, slate, veined onyx, and some kind of red and white breccia. The ball made of this last material is not perfectly round, and is also only semi-polished. These marbles, were all found together at level of 2 feet below the surface. There is only one way of making stone marbles of this kind, and that is by continually rolling them in a pan in water mixed with an abrasive. Together with a stone marbles were two measuring 0.4 inch in diameter made of white paste and faience respectively. On the latter an equator was painted in manganese. Marbles are known from many ancient sites, but they were uncommon in early summer, possibly for the reason that knuckle-bones took their place.

CHILDREN'S TOYS

The remains of sun dried or baked mud bricks imply on a monotonous architectural style. Buildings perhaps included elaborated wood carvings or decoration with other materials as preserved evidence. Insight into Indus Valley Civilization arts and culture provide only various sculptures, pottery, jewellery, and terra-cotta, gold and stone figures.

This is amongst the oldest and most widespread form of handicrafts. Historical records of prehistoric era have been found in the remains of pottery. It is believed to have existed since 7000 BC in the Neolithic period. Apart from the popular terracotta or fired clay products, other products are the stoneware which are fired at over 1150 degree Celsius. The translucent form, also known as porcelain is also very popular. The raw material for this craft is ordinary clay, derived from the beds of water bodies like river, lakes and ponds. The clay is cleaned, mixed and then shaped either by hand, wheel or moulded into desired object. The items are dried, fired and glazed as per the requirements. The clay or terracotta products are graded according to their colour, strength and water absorption capacity.

ICONOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLISM

ARTISTIC FEATURES AND AESTHETICS

A study of the Harappan terracotta's by Alexandra Ardeleanu-Jansen (2002) has undetailed the great variety in the form of female figurines. The type which is frequently interpreted as having a religious significance is a slim female figure with a distinctive fan-shaped headdress, wearing a short skirt. She is heavily ornamented with necklaces, armlets, bangles, anklets, and earrings. Some of the figurines have cup-like attachments and flowers on either side of the head. In certain cases, the cup-like attachments have traces of black residue, suggesting that they were used to burn oil or some sort of essence. Such figurines may have been religious images worshipped in households, votive offerings made to a deity, or part of the paraphernalia of domestic rituals. It is interesting to note that such figures do not appear on Harappan seals and tablets or in stone or metal sculptures.

There is also a matronly, pot-bellied type of female figurine who may represent either a pregnant woman or a prosperous woman. She is naked and sometimes wear some jewellery and a turban or headdress. Both the 'matronly type' and the 'slim type' of female figurines may hold a baby in their arms. The 'matronly type' can stand without support, while the youthful, 'slim type' needs support. It is interesting to note that female figurines including those with possible religious significance are found in large numbers at sites such as Mohenjodaro, Harappa, and Banawali, but not at sites such as Kalibangan, Lothal, Surkotada or Mitathal.

REPRESENTATION OF DAILY LIFE

DICE

Dicing was a common game at Mohenjodaro and it is proved by the number of pieces that have been found. In all cases they are made of pottery and are usually cubical, ranging in size from 1.2 by 1.2 by 1.2 inches to 1.5 by 1.5 by 1.5 inches. One die, however, is

rectangular, measuring 1.6 by 1.4 by 1.1 inches. The dice of Mohenjadaró are not marked in the same way as to-day, i.e., so that the sum of the points on any two opposite sides amounts to seven. Instead of that, 1 is opposite 2, 3 opposite 4, and 5 opposite 6. These dice must have been thrown on a soft surface, such as a piece of cloth, or on dusty ground, for their edges show little evidence of wear. Dice have been found at levels ranging from 1 foot to 15 feet below the surface of the ground, and must, therefore, have been used in the Late and Intermediate Periods at least, if not in the Early Period as well. It is quite possible that dice were used in conjunction with board-games.

WHEELS

A considerable number of pottery wheels have been found in various parts of Mohenjadaró. At first sight they might be mistaken for spindle-whorls, but that they are the wheels of carts and other toys seems beyond a doubt. Some pottery chariot wheels found at Kish are very like those found at Mohenjadaró, the only difference being that the Sumerians wheels have a raised hub on both sides of the wheels instead of a hub on one side only, as was the rule in ancient Sind. The wheels of Sumerians vehicles were build up from more than one piece of wood, and very much the same form of construction must be imagined for the wheels of the vehicles used by the Indus Valley Civilization, especially as the wheels of the modern Sind cart closely resemble those of Sumer, and like them were fixed to an axle that revolved with them.

GAMESMEN AND AMULETS

Some form of game or games played with pieces was common at Mohenjadaró is proved by the great number of gamesmen that have been found. The materials of which these pieces are made are comparatively few. In order of popularity they are faience, pottery, shell, marbles, agate, slate, and steatite. The poorer people used gamesmen made of pieces of potsherd roughly rubbed into a suitable shape. The board on which these pieces were used was probably roughly marked on the ground, either in the form of squares or small holes scooped out in the dust. With such a board and pieces a game could be played almost anywhere, as the materials for it were always to hand. As, however, not more than three gamesmen of identical form and material have as yet been found together, there is reason to think that comparatively used, unless, like chessmen, the pieces differed slightly to show their rank. Gamesmen of this kind are found at all levels, except those of tetrahedral shape which are of very early date. The evidence at present is insufficient to conclude that certain shapes were confined to certain periods.

RITUALISTIC SIGNIFICANCE

CLAY BAKING PANS

The two clay dishes were evidently made by children. The first is 2.7 inches long and appears to represent a pan with a saddle-quern in its middle, on which rests a muller. Something has evidently been broken off the end of the pan possibly the figure of a woman engaged in grinding corn. Despite the very rough workmanship of these pottery objects, it is possible that they were intended to be placed in graves, just as similar figures of women kneading bread were placed in some of the earlier tombs of Egypt.

CONCLUSION

Most of the terracotta figures were found broken and discarded in secondary locations. None were found in a context that could be interpreted as a temple. This was one of the reasons why Marshall suggest that they were votive offerings rather than cult images. The fact that so many of them were broken suggests that they may have been part of a ritual cycle and were made for short-term use for certain specific occasions. The relationship between the female figurines and the male and animal figurines with which they are associated needs to be explored.

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IMAGES



HUAMN FIGURES



ANIMAL FIGURES



CHILDREN'S TOYS



WHEEL



DICE