

INDIAN ART

FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Art in Indus Valley



G Chandrasekaran
S Swaminathan



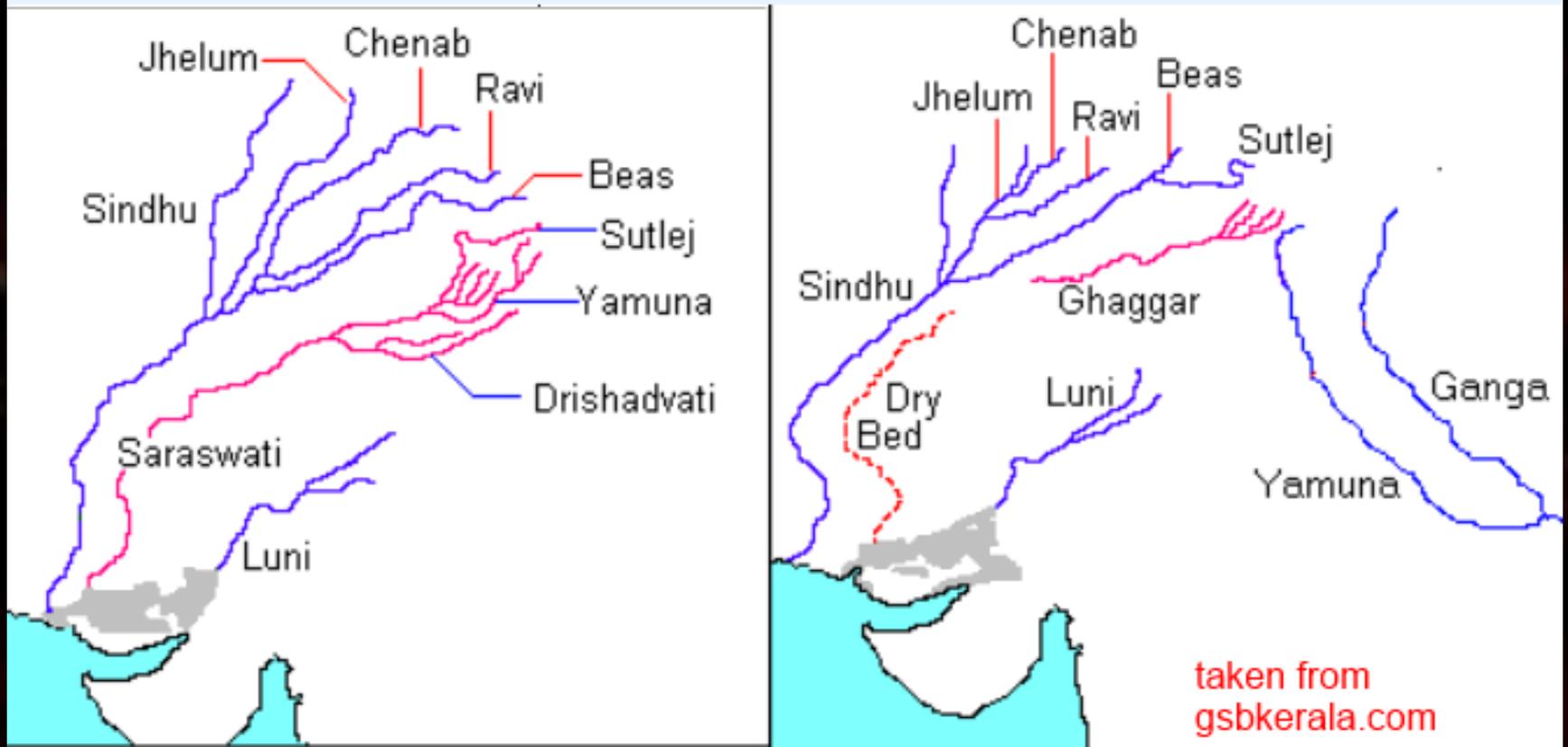
INDUS CIVILISATION
AN INTRODUCTION



Indus valley civilisation is one among the four ancient civilisations, the others being Egypt, Mesopotamia and China.

Its period was 2600-1300 BCE

The Mystery of Saraswati River



Vedic Saraswati

The river courses today. 2000 AD

There was once a large river which ran parallel and east of Indus 5000-6000 years ago, now identified with the River Saraswati mentioned in the Rig Veda.

The Indus Valley Civilisation was discovered
in early 19th century
by Charles Masson and
later by Alexander Burness,
formally by Alexander Cunningham,
explored first by
Dayaram Sahni and RD Banerji
in early 20th century

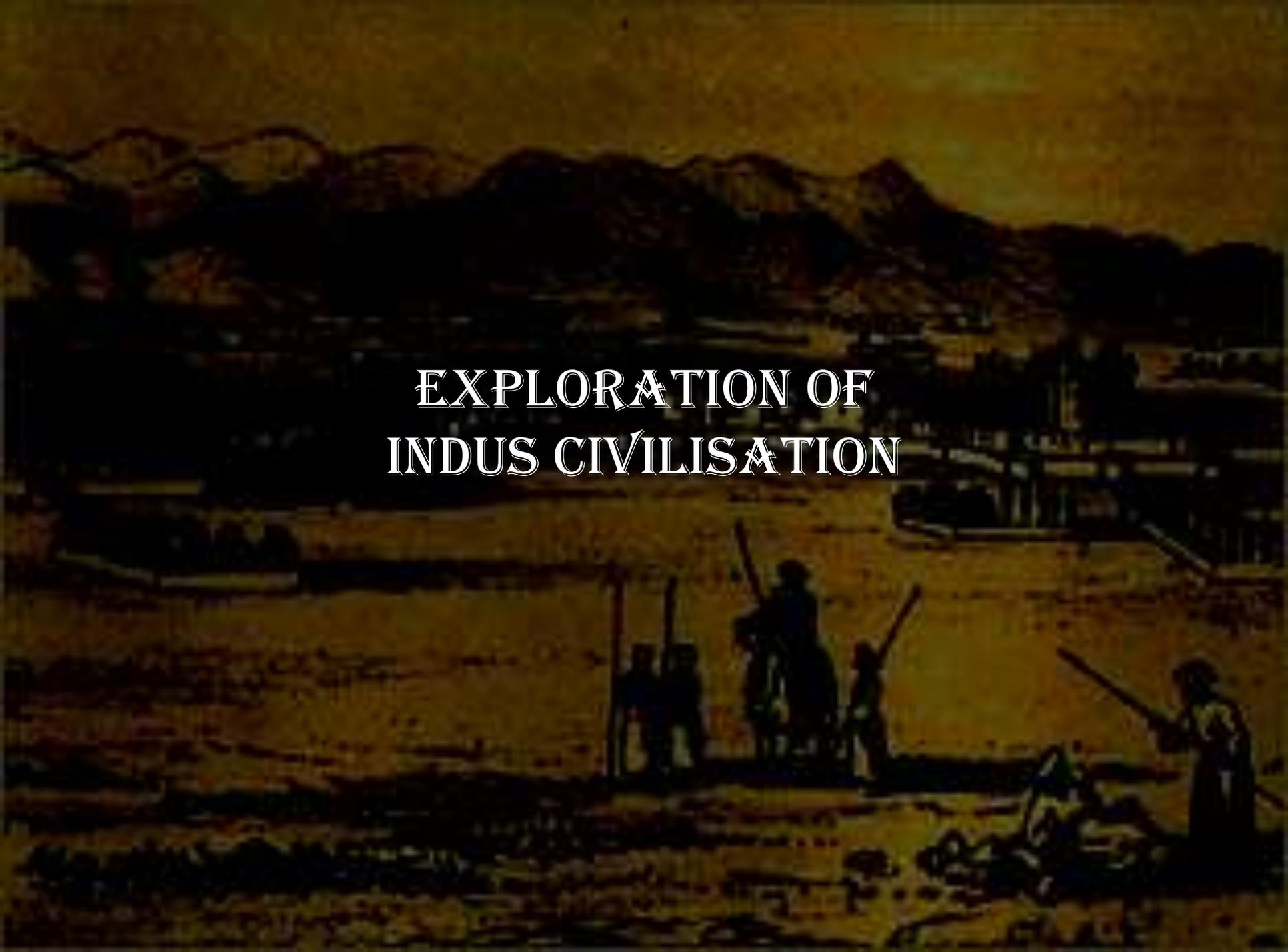
Though the script is not deciphered,
there are a number of 'left-overs' at the sites:

Remains of many well-planned cities
with wide streets,
basement of buildings,
public and private wells and baths, drains,
terracotta figurines, seals and
a host of artefacts.

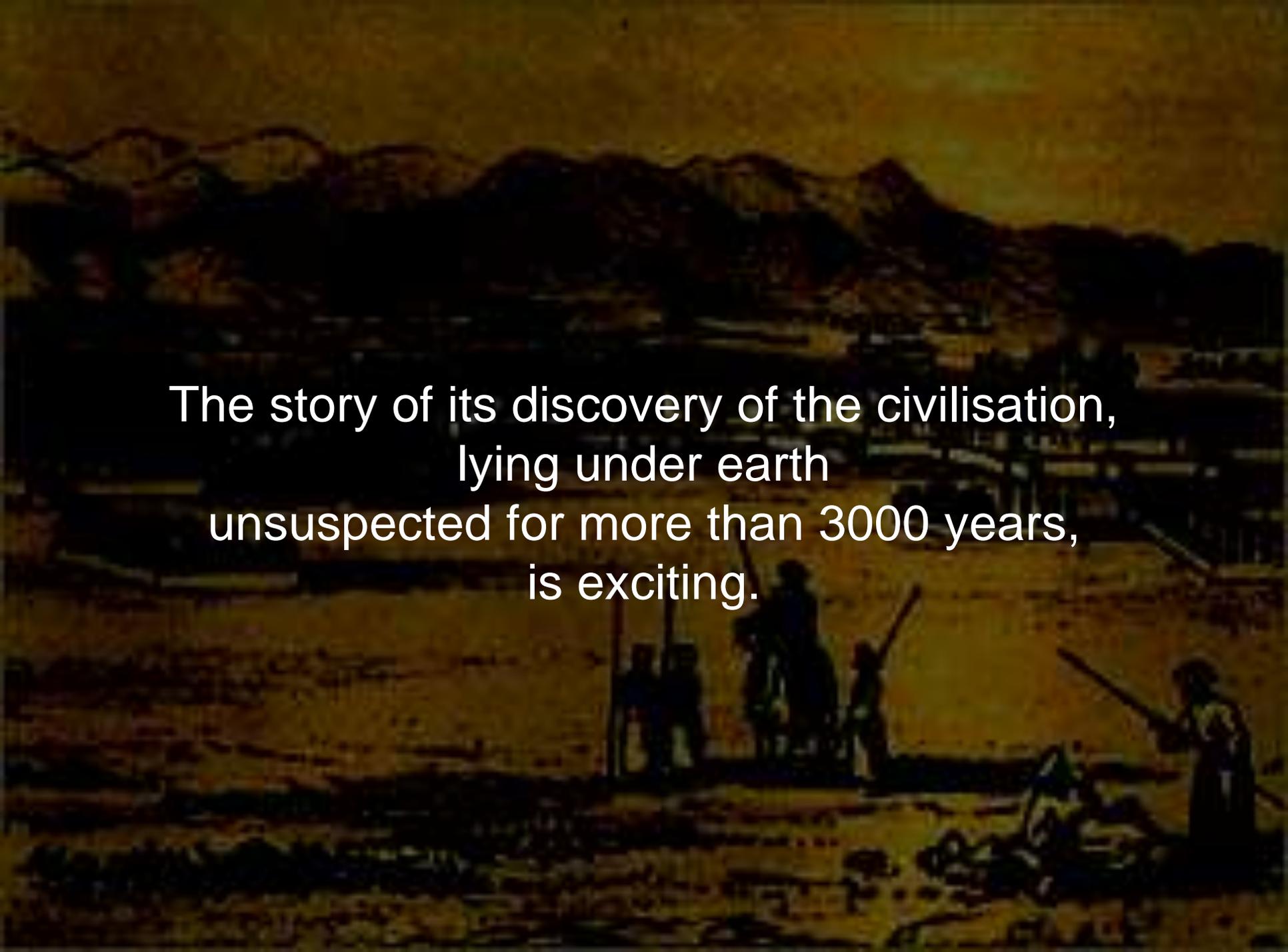
Archaeologists have developed
very sophisticated methods towards
understanding of this civilisation:

Data collection, simulation,
interpretive models and analysis.

These have resulted
in unravelling social, economic and political
organisations and also technological skills.

A sepia-toned illustration of an ancient Indus Valley city. The background shows a range of mountains. The middle ground features a city with a grid-like street pattern and several buildings. In the foreground, a river flows from left to right. Several figures are depicted in the foreground: one person is riding a horse, another is standing with a long staff or pole, and a third person is kneeling on the ground. The overall scene depicts a bustling ancient civilization.

EXPLORATION OF INDUS CIVILISATION



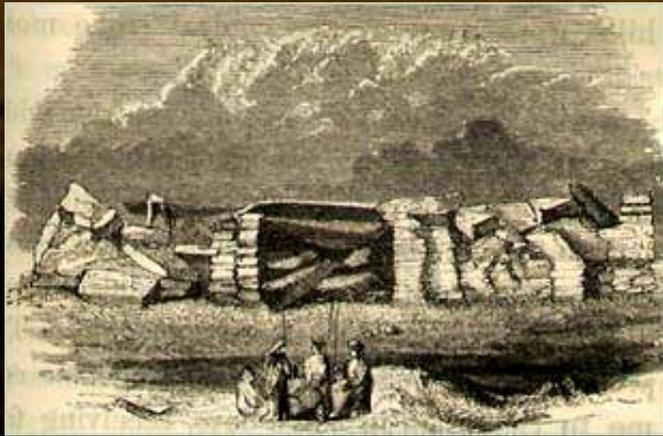
The story of its discovery of the civilisation,
lying under earth
 unsuspected for more than 3000 years,
 is exciting.

It was a deserter of the army of East India Company who stumbled on the ruins in 1820s. Charles Masson, a colourful person, thought it was Sangala, the capital of Porus who stopped the Alexander invasion.

‘Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afganistan and the Panjab’ (1842) by him with a few illustrations by his own hands is the earliest literature on the subject.

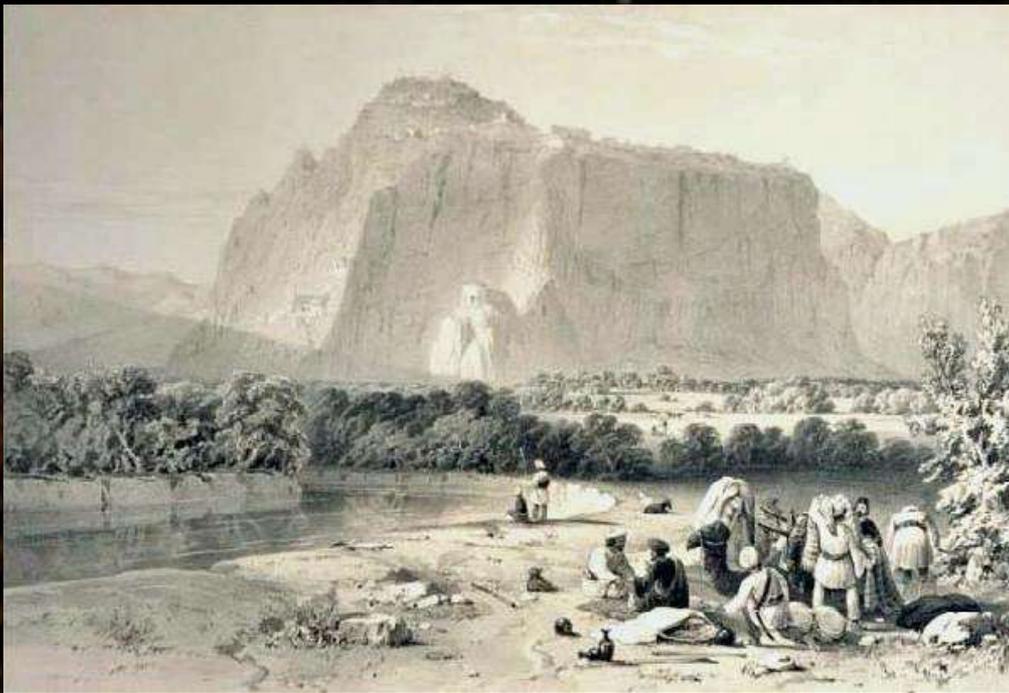


Town of Mastung in the Panjab



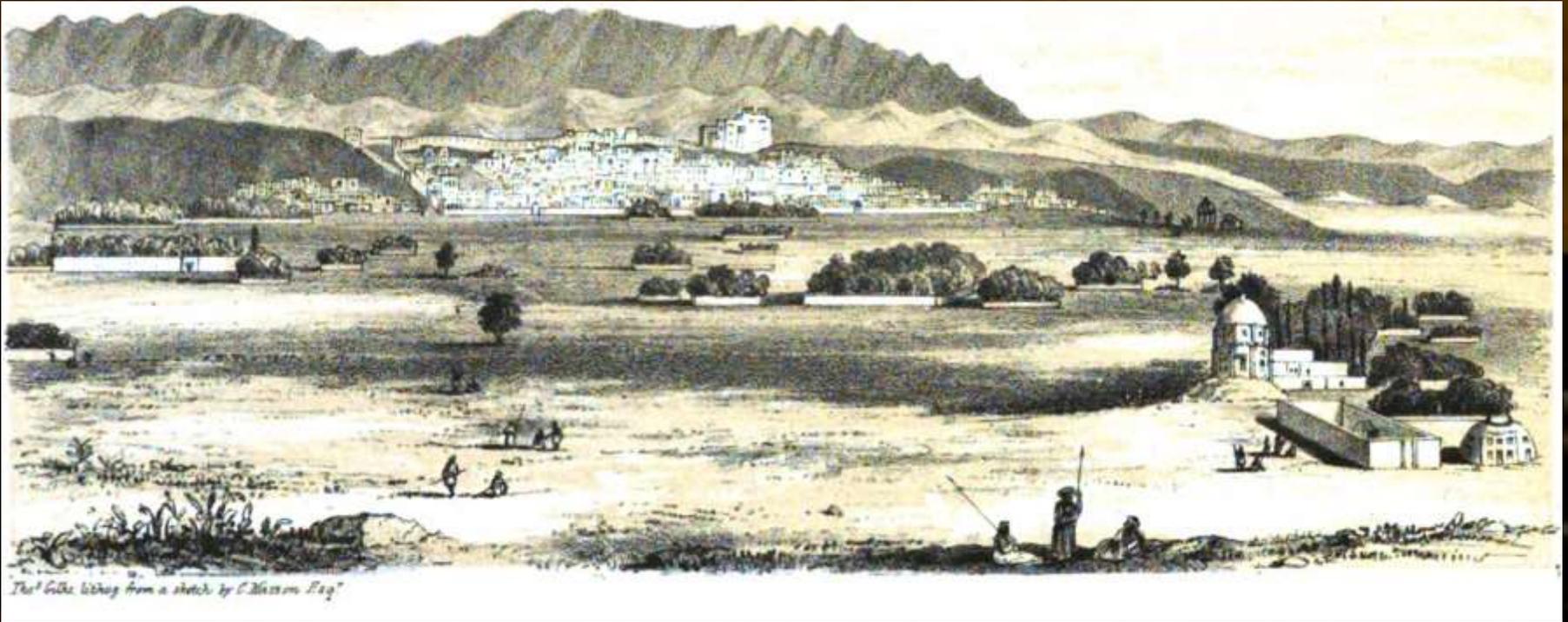
Gohar Basta, Balochistan

Bamiyan



Jelalbad, Afganiistan

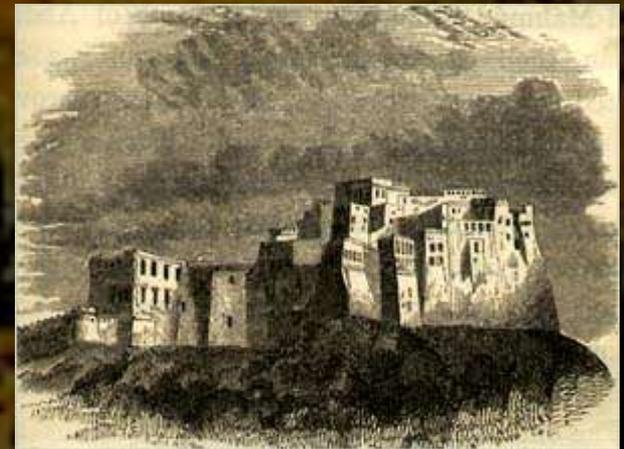
Some sketches by
Charles Masson in 1840s



Kalat, Capital of Balochistan

Kalat, home of the Brahui people,
whose folktales Masson retells in his book.

Brahui is a Dravidian dialect



Citadel of Kalat



Burnes in Bokharra
traditional dress

Alexander Burnes,
is another colourful personality
associated with the Indus lore.

Learnt Persian and Hindi while serving
East India Company army,
took serious interest
in the history and geography of
north-western India and
the adjacent countries.



Burenes in Bokhara
traditional dress

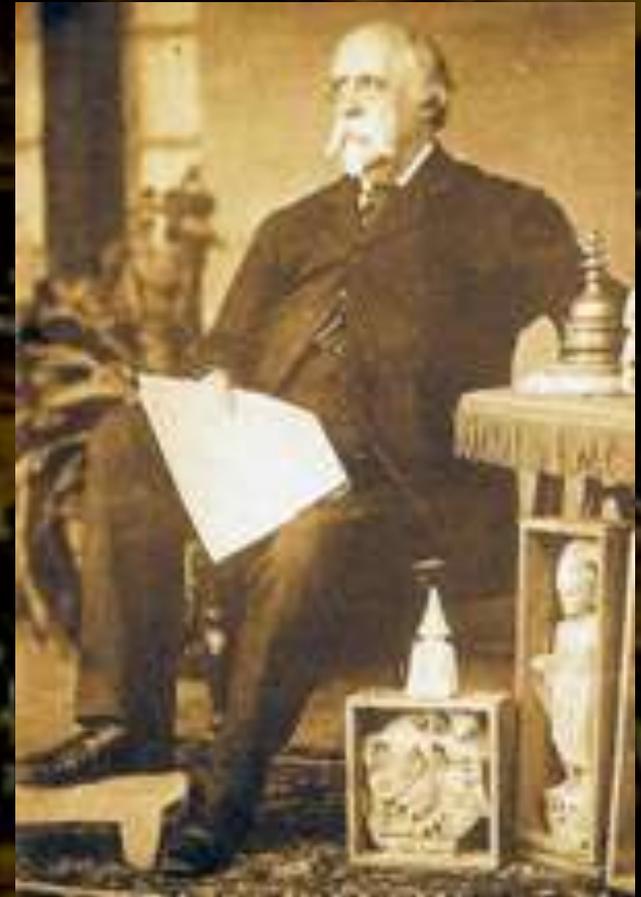
He travelled up the Indus,
then went through
Afganisatan and to Bokharra, the present
Uzbekistan.

He wrote a narrative,
*Travels into Bokhara. Being an account of a
Journey from India to Cabool, Tartary and
Persia (1834). Also, narrative of a Voyage on
the Indus from the Sea to Lahore.*

He active life and his murder
made him characters in
a number of historical fiction.

The 'rediscovered' again only
in the 1870
by Alexander Cunningham,
whose contribution
to Indian archaeology
Indians can not adequately thank.

This led to the first excavations
in early 20th century by
Dayaram Sahni and RD Banerji,
who explored Mohenjo-daro.
The work continues even today.



An aerial photograph of an ancient city, likely Mohenjo-daro, showing a well-planned grid system of streets and buildings. The scene is captured at dusk or dawn, with a dark sky and the city's structures illuminated by a low sun, creating long shadows and a warm, golden glow. The grid pattern is clearly visible, with a prominent main road running diagonally across the frame.

CHRONOLOGY OF INDUS CIVILISATION

Archaeologists identify four eras

Early Food Producing Era (ca. 7000-5500 BC)
when domestic plants and animals are
first exploited in the Indus Valley.

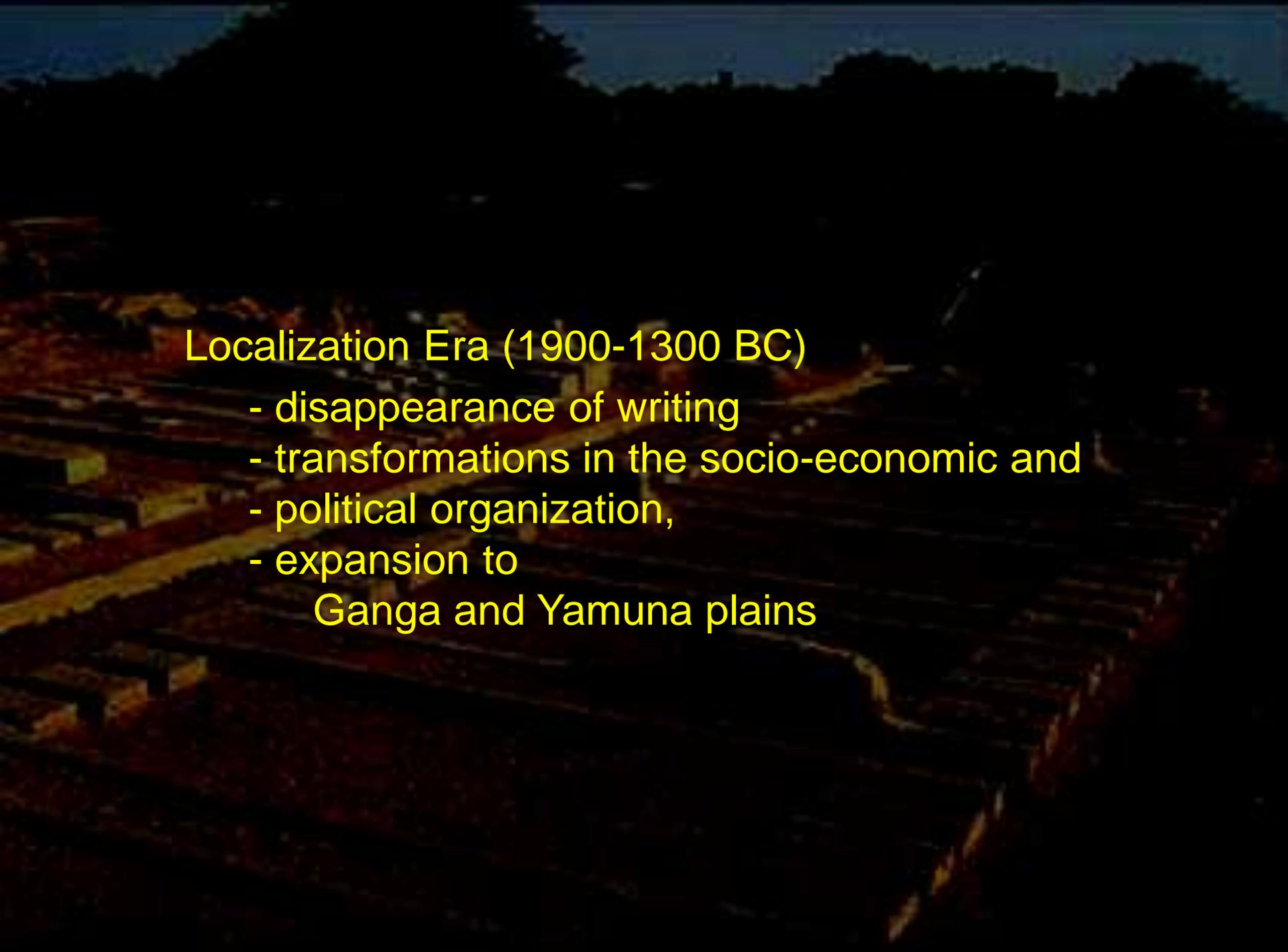
Regionalization Era, (5500-2600 BC)
a period regional cultural development.

An aerial photograph of a river valley. A large dam is visible on the right side of the river. The city below is densely packed with buildings. The river flows through the center of the valley. The background shows a range of hills or mountains under a clear sky.

Integration Era (2600-1900 BC)

'Indus Valley civilization phase':

- emergence of numerous cities and towns
- political and ideological integration of major settlements
- standardisation of weights and measures,
- use of similar styles of pottery vessels and a wide range of other objects.

An aerial photograph of a river valley, likely the Ganges or Yamuna, showing a dense grid of agricultural fields. The river flows through the center of the valley, and the surrounding landscape is a mix of green and brown, indicating different types of crops or land use. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

Localization Era (1900-1300 BC)

- disappearance of writing
- transformations in the socio-economic and
- political organization,
- expansion to
Ganga and Yamuna plains



FINDINGS ON INDUS CIVILISATION

More than 1000 towns have been excavated

The artefacts found include
figurines in terracotta,
seals, pottery, gold jewellery,
bronze and steatite shell works,
ceramics, agate, glazed steatite bead making,
special kind of combs, toys, games and
stringed musical instruments

A number of symbols found, which could be writing

As many as 400 distinct Indus symbols
have been found
on seals, ceramic pots etc.

Indus inscriptions are short,
four or five characters in length,
the longest inscription having 26 characters.

Some conclusions on the Civilisation

The cities were well-planned with protective walls, good sewerage and drainage, granaries and dockyard.

Uniform weights and measures, standard size of bricks used.

Copper, bronze, lead and tin were used.

Cubical weights



The smallest weight in this series is about a gram, and the most common weight is 16 times.

These may have been used for controlling trade and possibly for collecting taxes.

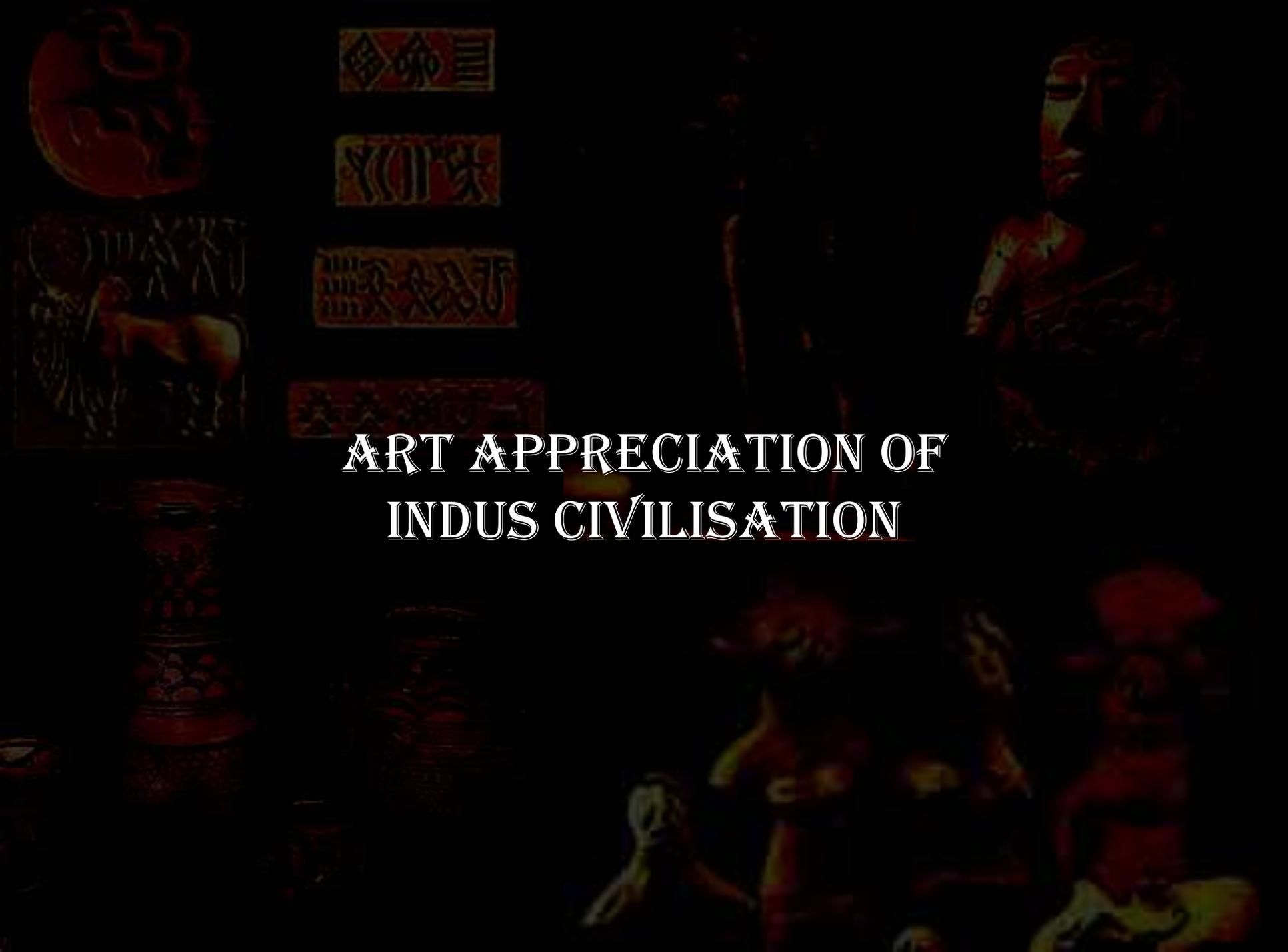
Indus life

Barley was major cultivated cereal crop,
but not much information
on the farmers and their agricultural methods.

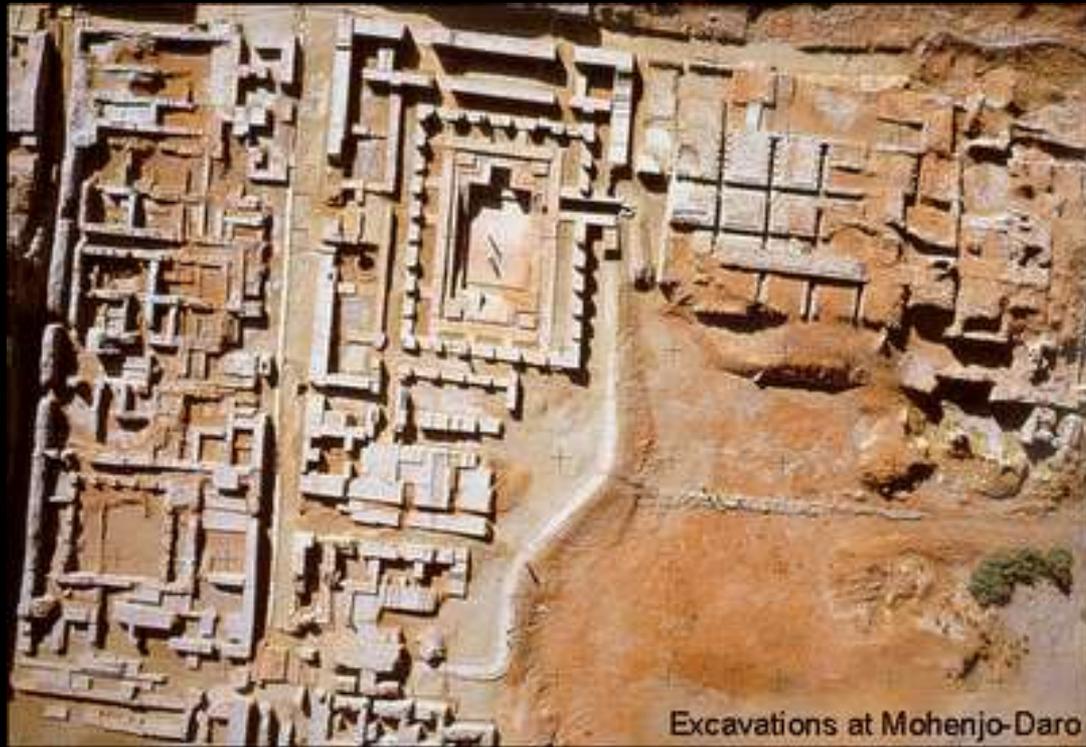
Main forms of transport bullock carts and boats.

People worshipped Mother Goddess,
who symbolized fertility.

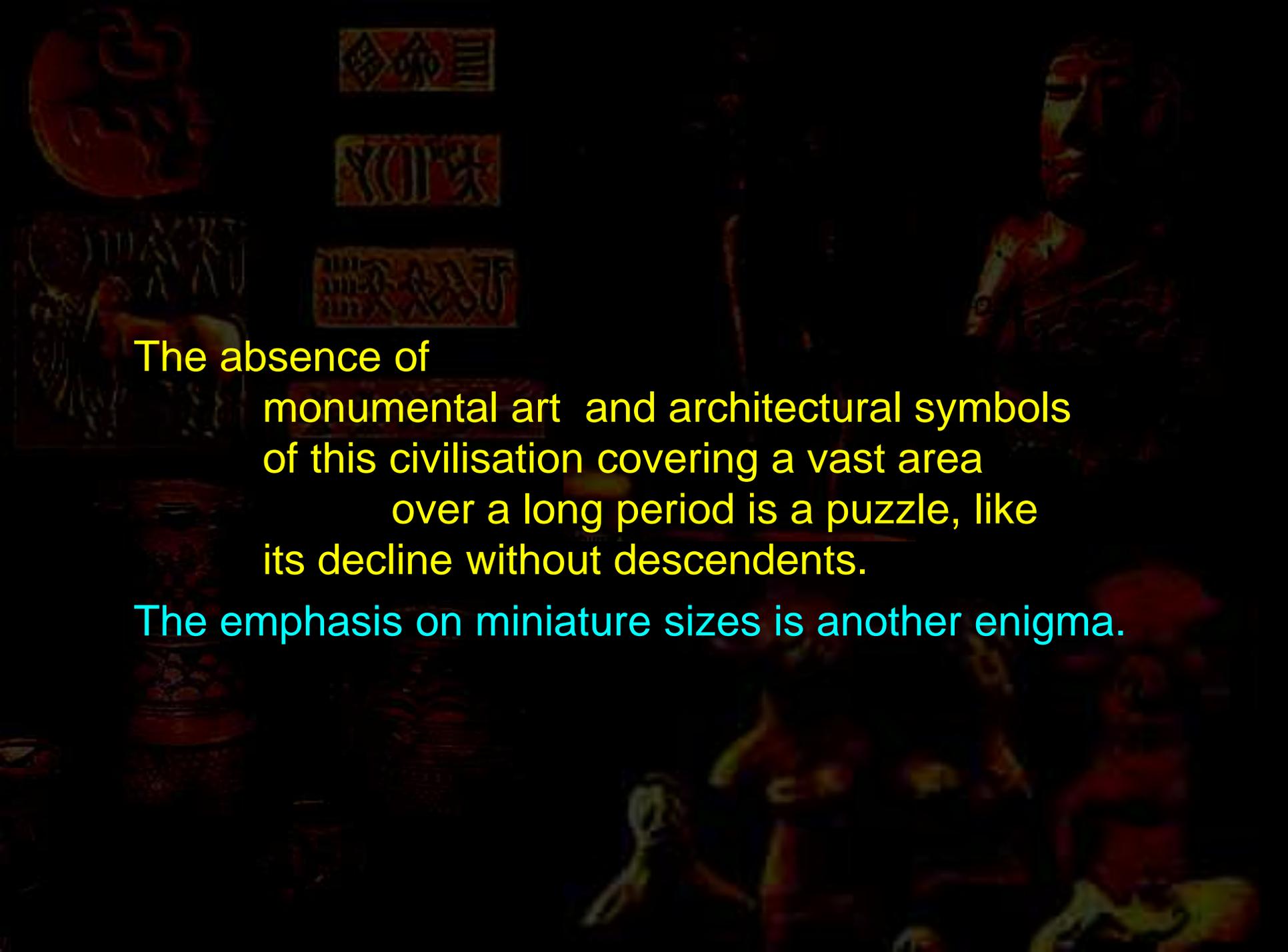
Most of the inhabitants were traders or artisans.



ART APPRECIATION OF
INDUS CIVILISATION



Planned cities are the most remarkable achievement of this civilisation, but the artefacts found here throw more light on the art and craft of this culture.

The background of the slide is a dark collage of ancient Egyptian art. At the top center, there are three horizontal bands of hieroglyphs. To the left, there is a circular emblem with a sphinx-like face. Below it, a seated figure is visible. To the right, there is a profile of a human face. The overall theme is ancient Egyptian civilization.

The absence of monumental art and architectural symbols of this civilisation covering a vast area over a long period is a puzzle, like its decline without descendents.

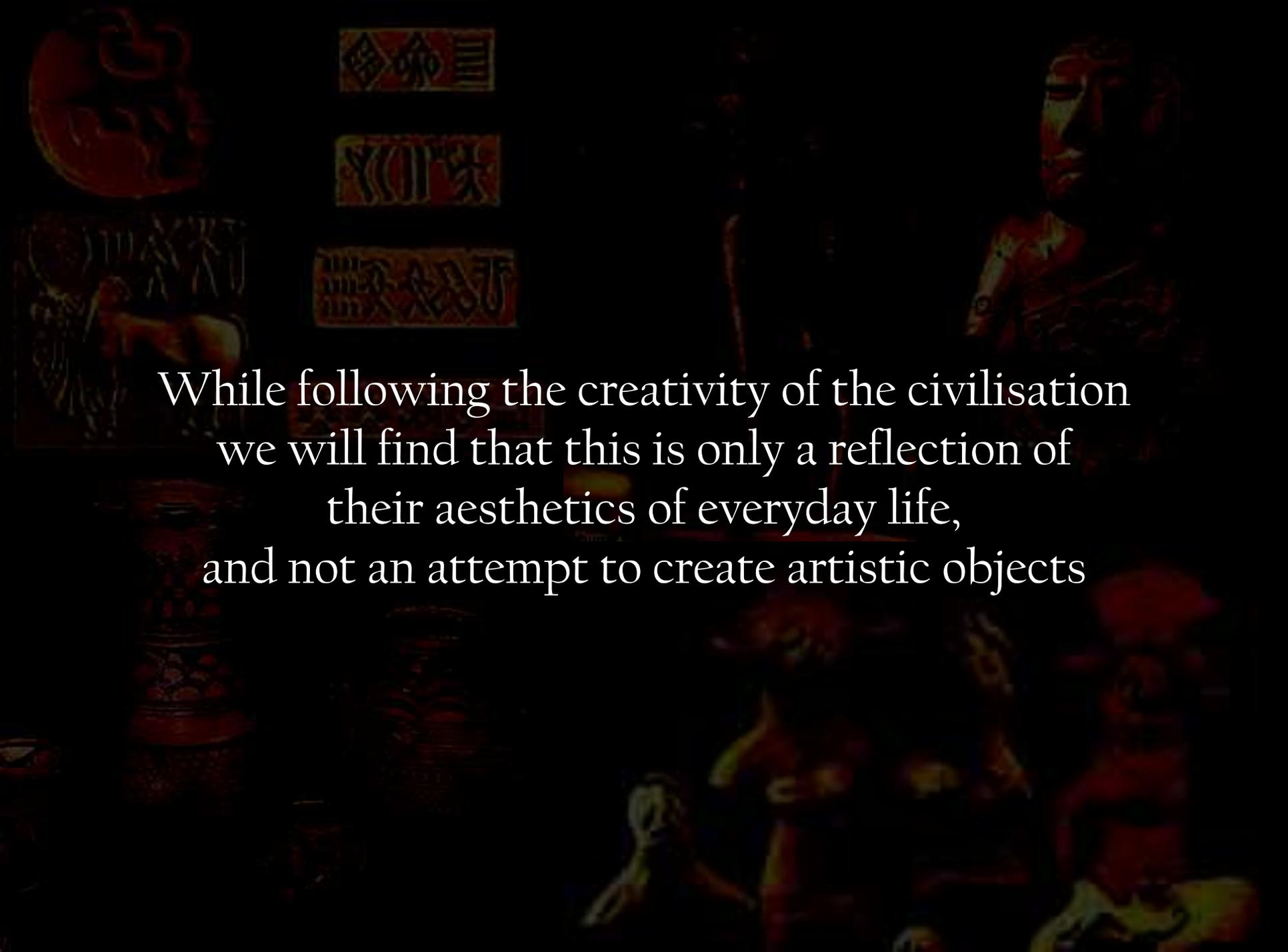
The emphasis on miniature sizes is another enigma.

The background of the slide features a collage of ancient Egyptian artifacts. At the top center, there are three horizontal rectangular panels containing hieroglyphs. To the left, a circular object, possibly a pectoral or a mirror, is visible. Below it, a large, dark, textured object, likely a statue or a piece of pottery, is partially shown. On the right side, a large, stylized head of a statue or a mask is visible. The overall background is dark and textured, suggesting an archaeological excavation site or a museum display.

There is a variety of small-size artefacts found,
whose sizes ranging from
an inch to a foot, but in large quantity.

These are objects crafted in
faience, terracotta and a few in stone and bronze.

But elegant art and sophisticated craft technology
are evident.

The background is a dark collage of ancient Egyptian art. At the top center are three horizontal bands of hieroglyphs. To the left is a large, reddish-brown circular object, possibly a papyrus basket or a decorative element. Below it is a sphinx. In the center, a seated figure is visible. To the right is a large, stylized face or head. At the bottom, there are more figures and a lotus flower.

While following the creativity of the civilisation
we will find that this is only a reflection of
their aesthetics of everyday life,
and not an attempt to create artistic objects



FIGURINES



Highly stylised female terracotta figure, possibly, Mother Goddess.

It is heavily ornamented with prominent head-dress, substantial necklaces and girdle, shows high quality work.

Mother Goddess

Stylised terracotta figure
in an unusual posture,
may represent
the goddess fertility .
It shows innovative
autonomous tendencies.





Female figurine
holding a round object.

Tiered hair-style and
ornaments, like
-necklace and bangles,
textile designs painted
are novel features



Female figurine with
a fan-shaped headdress,
short skirt held
by a belt.



Torso of a female figurine with short skirt held by a belt.

Female figurine holding
holding the infant's head
to her breast
with her arms
encircling the infant.



Two seated male figurines with knees bent and arms at the sides of the legs and around the knees.

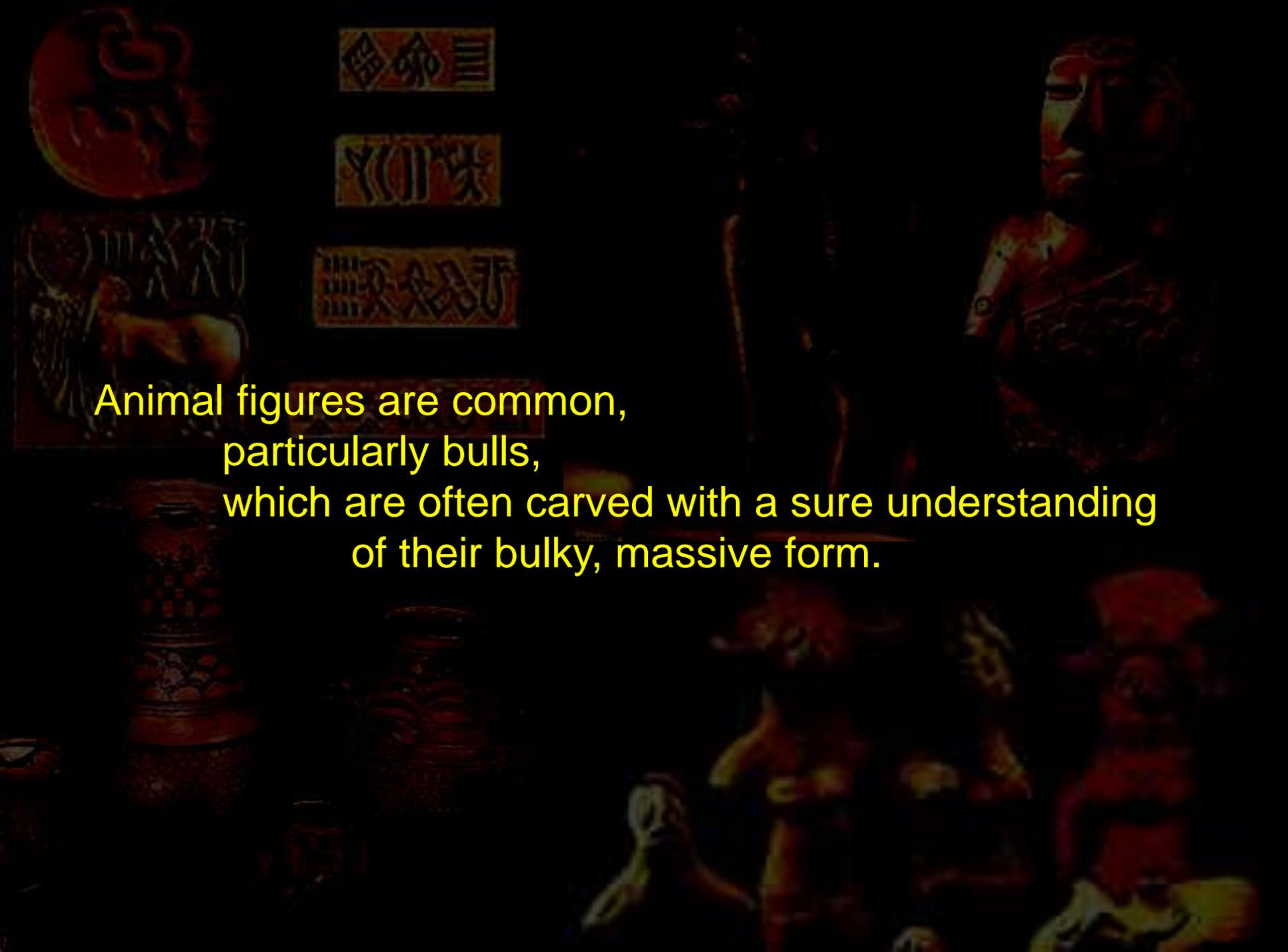


Another seated male
with his knees drawn up
tightly to their chests and
featureless face and
with no ornamentation.





ANIMALS

The background image shows a collection of ancient Egyptian artifacts. On the right, a large, seated statue of a man with a beard and a headdress is visible. To the left, there is a smaller, bull-headed figure. In the center, there are several rectangular objects, possibly amulets or small statues, with hieroglyphs and symbols. The overall scene is dimly lit, highlighting the textures and colors of the artifacts.

Animal figures are common,
particularly bulls,
which are often carved with a sure understanding
of their bulky, massive form.



An ox decorated with black stripes.
Very often some features like eyes
were also rendered in pigment.

Water buffalo with large incised backswept horns.





Ram with large curled horns



Two rhinoceros with distinctive "horned" snouts.
Rhinoceros are no longer found in this region,
their bones have been found

Dog with a collar

Perhaps this is a domesticated dog



Deer

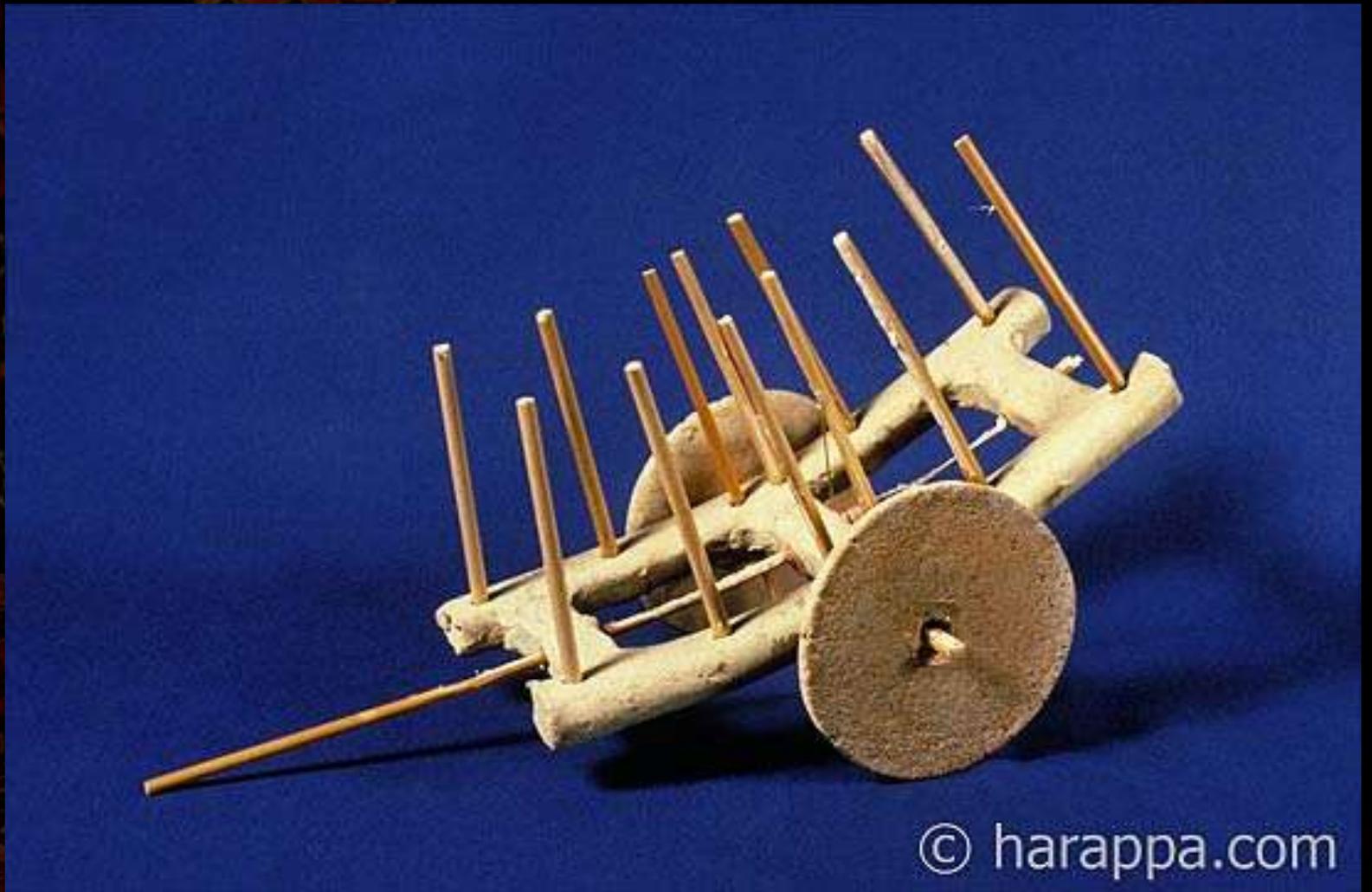




TOYS



Ox- driven cart (assembled)
Many styles of carts were found.
Interestingly, these carts can be seen even today



Toy carts of a different style.

Holes along the length of the frame to hold wooden side bars and also below to hold the axle and a stick are found.

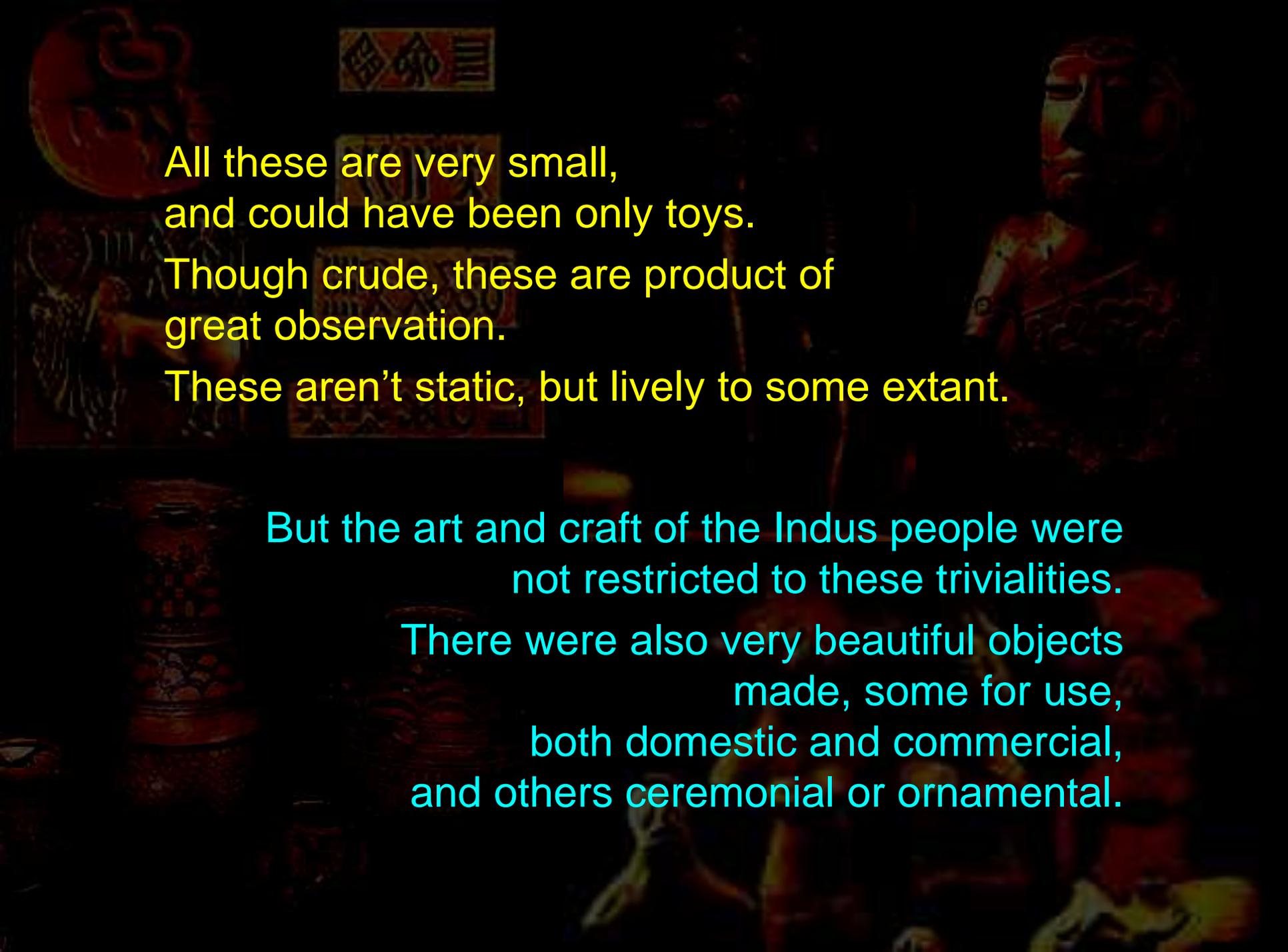
Painted torso of a figurine.

Painting designs on figurines and on pottery was popular.





Miniature moulded mask of bearded horned deity, with open eyes and peaceful visage, short horns and long ears.

The background image shows a collection of ancient artifacts from the Indus Valley civilization. On the left, there are several small, intricately carved figurines, including one that appears to be a seated female figure. In the center, there are several rectangular objects, possibly seals or plaques, with various symbols and designs. On the right, a large, seated figure, possibly a deity or a ruler, is visible, wearing a patterned garment. The overall scene is dimly lit, highlighting the textures and colors of the artifacts.

All these are very small,
and could have been only toys.

Though crude, these are product of
great observation.

These aren't static, but lively to some extent.

But the art and craft of the Indus people were
not restricted to these trivialities.

There were also very beautiful objects
made, some for use,
both domestic and commercial,
and others ceremonial or ornamental.



VESSELS

Terracotta cooking pots and bowl





**Metallic cooking vessel.
Made of two pieces joined by cold hammering.**

Copper plate with vertical sides.



© harappa.com

But there are far more utilities which are even by present standard very elegant, like these jars.



Made on the wheel decorated with geometric designs arranged in panels, the jars had moulded bases.



Vase decorated with bull heads with large curved horns along with six-petaled white flowers forming an ornamental motif



Dish or lid

A black buck
painted with trefoil design
made of combined
circle-and-dot motifs

Large burial urn

The painted panel around the shoulder of the vessel depicts flying peacocks with sun or star motifs and wavy lines that may represent water.



Geometric patterns



Geometric patterns



Some more samples





Animal motifs





The patterns and tints on these painted jars amply illustrate the colour sense of earliest painters of India.



Bulls crossing horns



ORNAMENTS



A number of ornaments are found:
bangles, chokers, long pendant necklaces, rings,
earrings, conical hair ornaments, and broaches.

These were not buried with the dead
but were passed on from one generation to the next.
These ornaments were hidden under the floors in the
homes of wealthy merchants or goldsmiths.

Terra cotta bangles

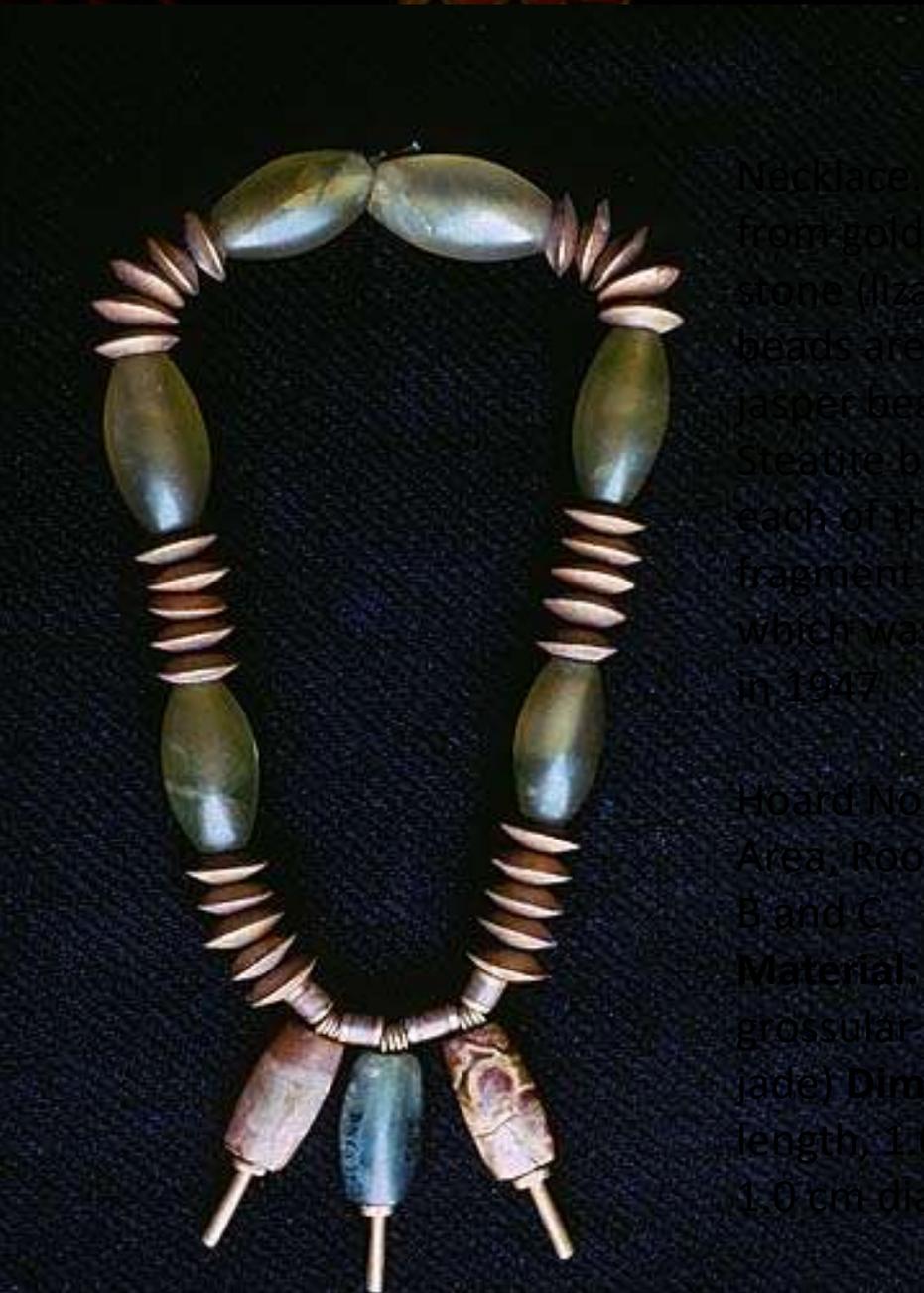
Many of the bangles were originally painted with black or red designs.



Ornaments

At the top are fillets of hammered gold that would have been worn around the forehead.





**Necklace
made from gold,
agate, jasper,
steatite and green stone
all attached with
thick gold wire.**

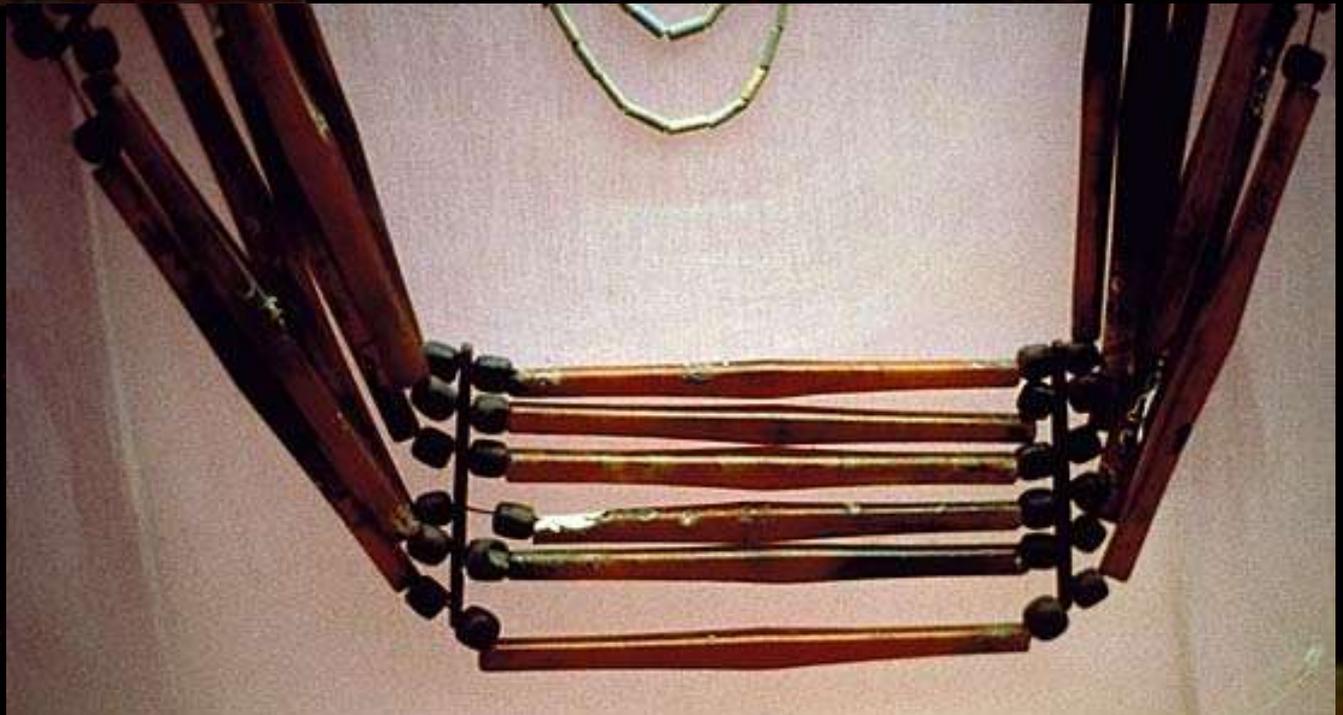
Necklace
from gold
stone (Ilza
beads are
jasper be
Steatite b
each of th
fragment
which was
in 1947

Hoard No
Area, Roo
B and C.
Material:
grossular
net, engl
jade) Dim
length, 1.0
1.0 cm dia

are
on
et). The
gold wire
Palma
Section
B and C.
Material:
grossular
net, engl
jade) Dim
length, 1.0
1.0 cm dia

Necklace or belt

Carnelian and copper/bronze with
42 long bicone carnelian beads,
72 spherical bronze beads,
6 bronze spacer beads,
2 half moon shaped bronze terminals,
2 hollow cylindrical bronze terminals.





SEALS



The seals are the most important artefacts found.

These provide very important information about the society.

The seals are mostly rectangular, but some are circular or cylindrical.



These are made of soapstone, terracotta or copper, were used for stamping on goods or documents.

Most of the seals have a knob at the back through which runs a hole, perhaps worn round the neck or the arm.

The seals betray the high skill of the artisans, real work of art.



These contain a figure or two and some characters, which are believed to be writing.

The figures could be animals, real or mythical, or human beings.



We get to know about the dresses, ornaments, hair-styles of people, and their religious beliefs.

The animal motifs tell us about contemporary fauna and also, again, about their beliefs.

Lastly, the characters, believed to be a script would give more information about the civilisation, if deciphered.



Plastic quality is unmistakable in the humped bulls, and the modelling is refined and sensitive.

A humpless beast, generally called a “unicorn,” is quite stylized.

There are also images of apparent religious significance, often strongly pictographic.



Impression of seal



Rear of seal

He is seated in yogic position on a throne, with heels pressed together under the groin.

His elaborate headdress consists of a single branch with three pipal leaves rises from the middle of the headdress.



Nude male deity with three faces

A composition



A deity depicted standing in a pipal tree and looking down on a kneeling worshiper.

A human head rests on a small stool.

A giant ram and seven figures in long skirts in procession complete the narrative.

A collection of animals and some script symbols, possibly used in rituals narrating the story of some myth.





Moulded double-sided tablet shows
an individual spearing a water buffalo.

A gharial is depicted above the sacrifice scene and
a figure seated in yogic position looks on.

On the reverse
is a female deity
standing above an elephant
and battling two tigers.

A single Indus script depicting
a spoked wheel is above
the head of the deity.

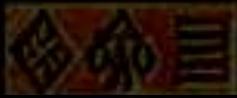




A few more animal motifs



A majestic bull, *Bos indicus*, with its heavy dewlap and wide curving horns, is the most impressive motif



Bull, *Bos gaurus*





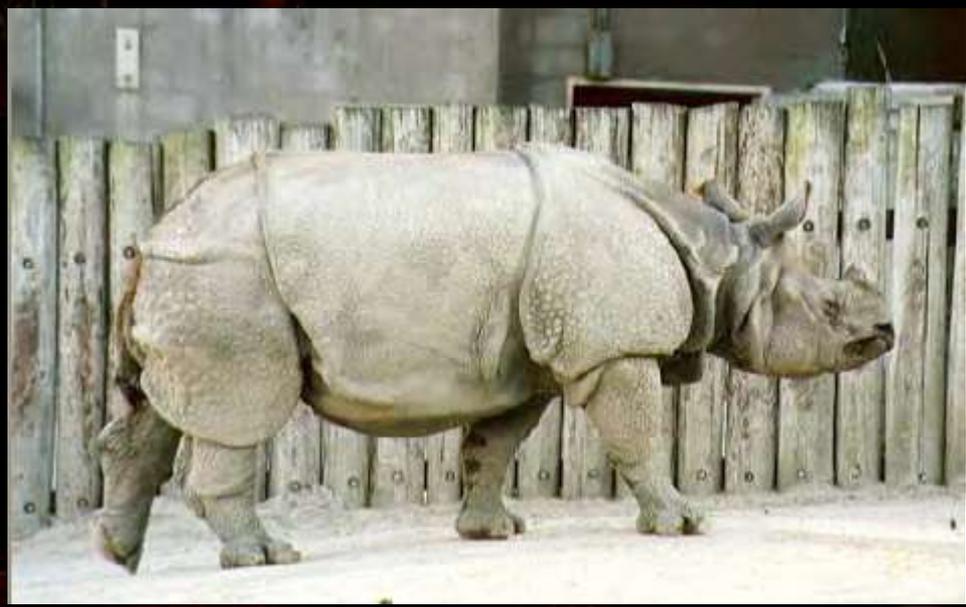
Water buffalo



命 命 命

命 命 命

命 命 命





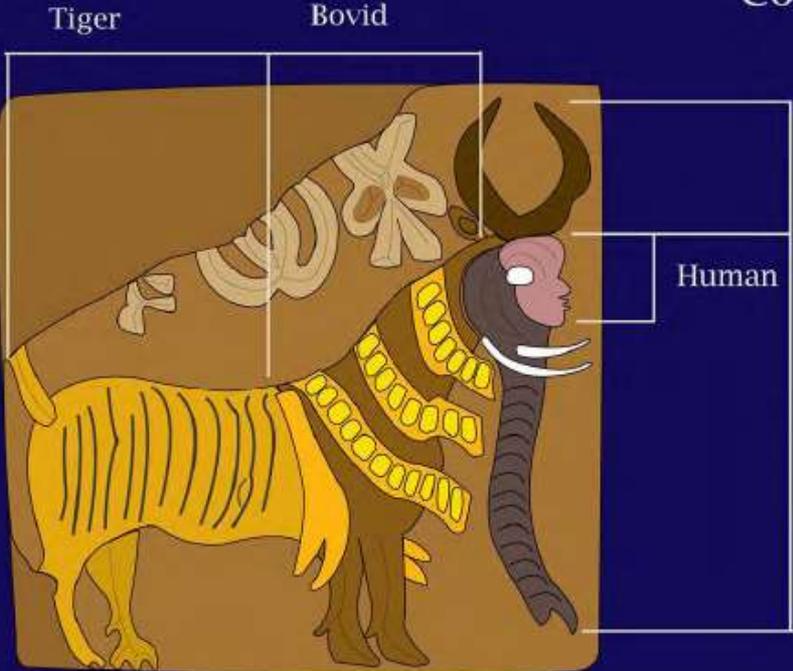
Markhor goat,
Capra falconeri heptneri





Ibex

Composite Bovid





Chinkara





There are a number of seals with figures of mythical animals with multiple heads like this.

Chandru Sir looks at this from his point of view

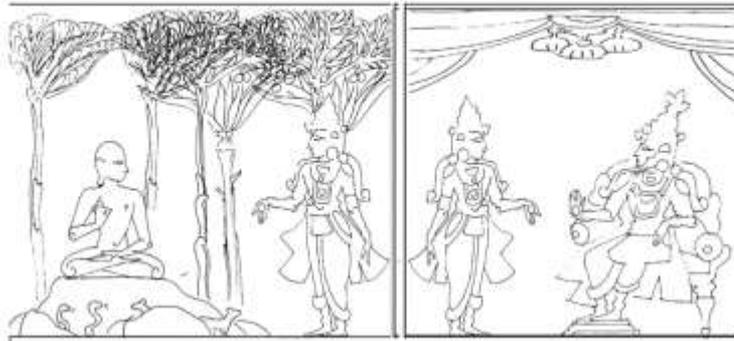




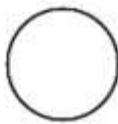
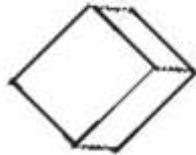
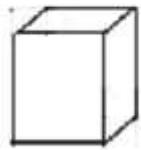
Figura 1. Stojící muž

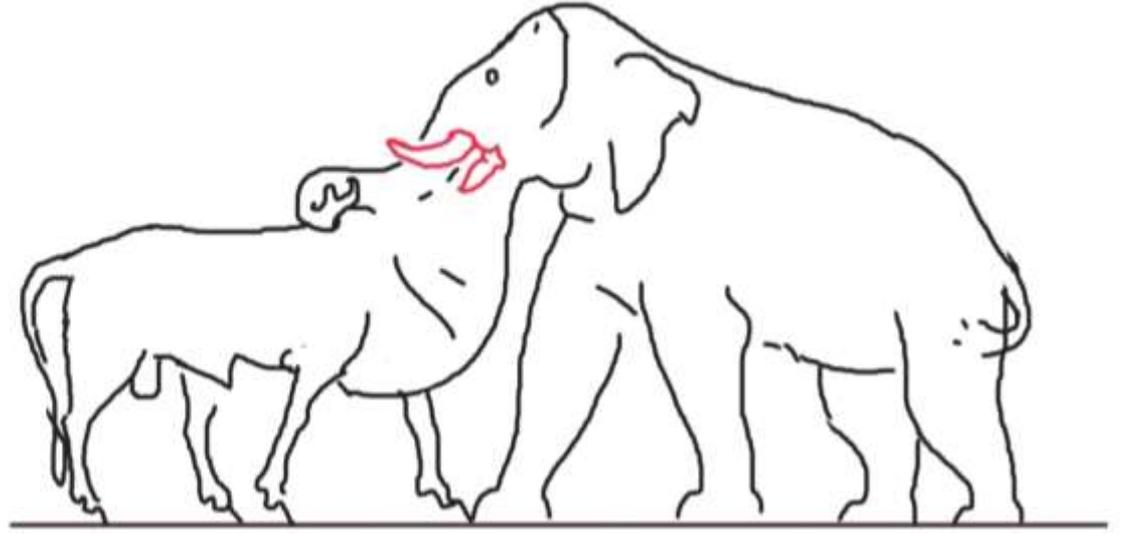


Figura 2. Pohybující muž



Figura 3. Pohybující muž





இவற்றை அலங்காரப் புனைவு வகை என குறிப்பிடலாம்



FIGURINES



A well-proportioned seated male figure with head missing, with cloak draped over the left shoulder, left arm clasping left knee and hand resting on right knee.



A sculpture male head:
finely braided hair
tied into a double bun
on the back of the head,
headband with hanging
ribbons falling down the back,
shaven upper lip,
closely cropped and
combed beard,
stylized almond shaped eyes
framed by long eyebrows,
stylized ears
make this a well-crafted figure

A male bust
about 7-inch high,
with elongated face,
slit eyes,
thick, sensuous lips,
stylised beard,
combed hair with
a fillet around head,
shaved upper lips
wrapped in a cloak
with interesting
trefoil pattern.



King-priest



Lastly we shall look at the most important Indus finding,
the Dancing Girl

A naked woman, 4-inch high, stands in a natural position with one hand on her hip and the other on her thigh.

She wears a necklace and a number of bangles on her unusually long arms.



The statue led to two important discoveries: first, that they knew metal blending, casting and sophisticated methods of working with ore, and secondly, that entertainment, especially dance, was part of the culture.



The artist had full mastery of foreshortening and body torsion.

The attitude of the left arm and shoulder is proof of the uniqueness of Indus art from the conventional art of all other early art in the world.



From the guestbook



John Marshal:

When I first saw them I found it difficult to believe that they were prehistoric; they seemed to completely upset all established ideas about early art, and culture.

Modelling such as this was unknown in the ancient world up to the Hellenistic age of Greece,

Now, in these statuettes, it is just this anatomical truth which is so startling; that makes us wonder whether, in this all-important matter, Greek artistry could possibly have been anticipated by the sculptors of a far-off age on the banks of the Indus.

From the guestbook



Mortimer Wheeler

She's about fifteen years old . .

A girl perfectly, for the moment, perfectly
confident of herself and the world.

There's nothing like her, I think, in the world.

From the guestbook



Archaeologist Gregory Possehl:

We may not be certain that
she was a dancer,
but she was good at
what she did and she knew it

From the guestbook



C Sivaramamurti:

The technical excellence of the metal dancer is only surpassed by the aesthetic sense of the artist who appreciated that the dancer's graceful pose is as striking as the dance itself.



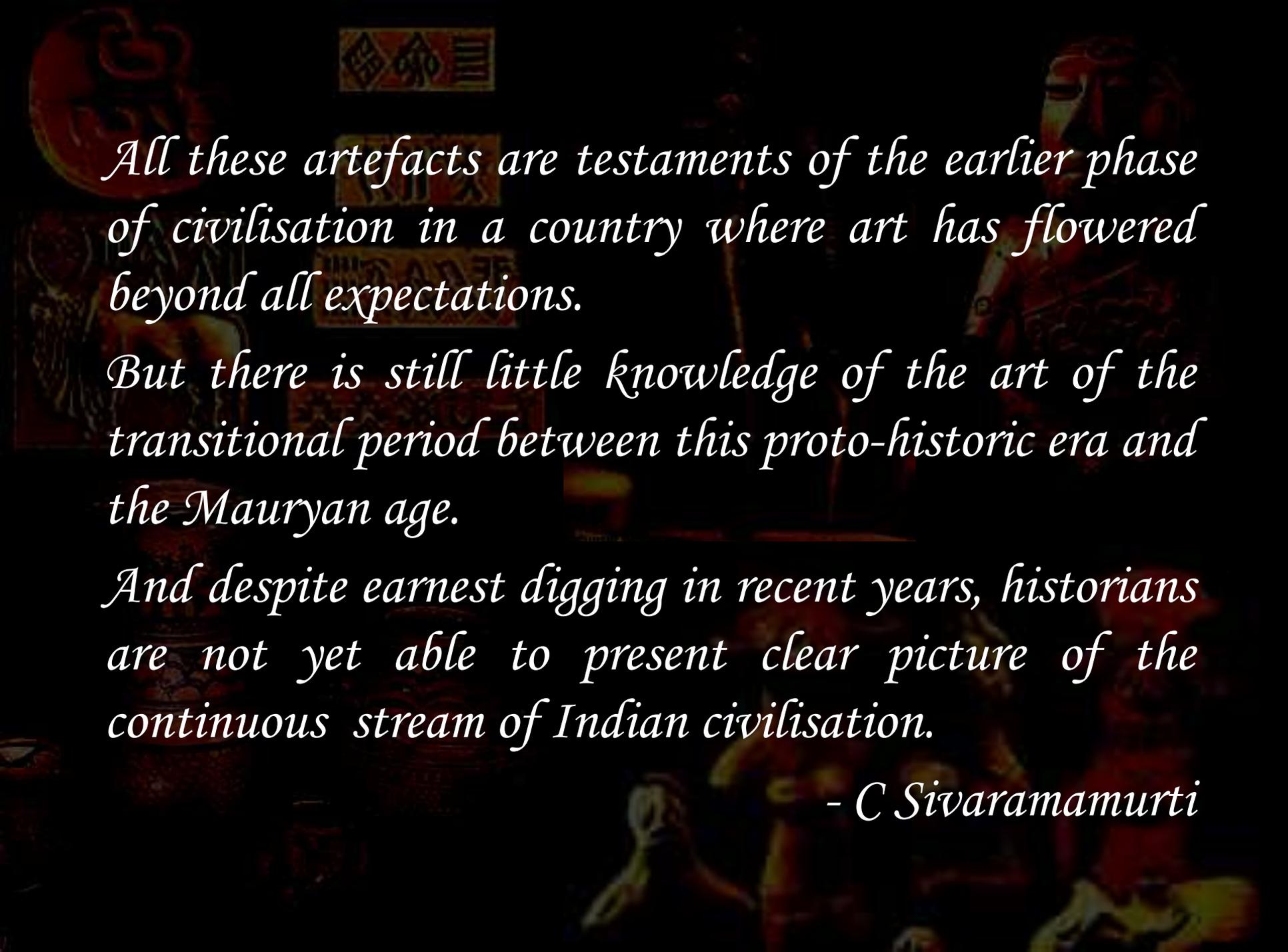
We shall listen to what Chandru Sir has to say about this dancer.







The only other metal image found in the Indus excavations

The background of the slide is a collage of ancient Indian art and artifacts. At the top center, there is a small rectangular panel with a geometric pattern. Below it, another panel features a stylized figure. To the right, a larger, more detailed panel shows a figure in a dynamic pose, possibly a deity or a royal figure. The overall color palette is dark, with reds, browns, and blacks, giving it an antique and scholarly feel.

All these artefacts are testaments of the earlier phase of civilisation in a country where art has flowered beyond all expectations.

But there is still little knowledge of the art of the transitional period between this proto-historic era and the Mauryan age.

And despite earnest digging in recent years, historians are not yet able to present clear picture of the continuous stream of Indian civilisation.

- C Sivaramamurti