The Harappan "Twin Capitals" And Reality

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The two major and largest cities of the Indus Civilisation at Harappa and Mohenjodaro at a distance of 570 km from each other, have been generally interpreted as "twin capitals" of the Harappan "state", "empire" or 'kingdom" (Piggott 1950: 136; Wheeler 1968; 5: Rao 1972:3). To support this concept, analogous situations have been cited from the historical period such as the duality of government under the Kushan rulers at Peshawar in the north and Mathura in the south during the second century A.D.It has been further emphasised that two capitals were also established by the Arabs at Multan and Mansura during the ninth century A.D. Thus, for more than fifty years, the idea of "twin capitals' of the Indus Civilization has been frequently expressed in the archaeological literature as no other settlement matched the size of Harappa or Mohenjodaro in the Core Area of the Greater Indus Valley. This notion of "twin capitals" was generally

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accepted by most scholars even though it has been pointed out that there was "no positive evidence that the (Harappan) cities were "capitals", either of separate "states" or of unified "empire" (Allchin 1982: 169).

In the middle of 1970's, the discovery of Ganweriwala (71^0 09'E and 28^0 35' N) on the (now dry) Hakra River in Cholistan (Mughal 1980, 1982, 1984, 1989 and 1990), at once seriously questioned the basis and validity of 'twin capitals" paradigm. Ganweriwala spreads over a total area of 81.5 hectares which is almost equal in size to that of Mohenjodaro (83 ha) and a little larger than Harappa (76 ha)[1]. The surface materials from Ganweriwala belong to the Mature Harappan Period which seem to have commenced in the Core Area about 2500 B.C. In general lay out, it consists of two distinct parts, a small mound on the west and an extensive area on its east, resembling the configurations of the two known cities.

Ganweriwala is located almost at equal distance from Harappa and Mohenjodaro (Fig. 1) Its equidistant location has now brought into focus two other large Mature Harappan settlements reported some time ago in eastern Punjab (now Haryana) and northern Kutch in India. One of the large sites is Rakhigarhi, (76^0 07' E and 29^0 17' N) also known as Rakhi Shahpur in Hissar district (Bhan 1975 : 95-101). It consists of two mounds, a small low one on the west (Rakhi Shahpur 1) and a large and high mound on the east (Rakhi Shahpur 2). Both the mounds together cover an area of 80 hectares. Although the surface materials show Mature Harappan occupation, limited digging on the small (western) mound revealed about 3 m. thick deposit containing pottery of the Early Harappan Period, comparable with that from Siswal A and Kalibangan 1 or Sothi. Rakhigarhi stands on an old bed of the Drishadvati River, a tributary of the Ghaggar – Hakra River.

Another large settlement is Kotada near the village of Dholavira (70^0 06 'E and 23^0 17' N) in Kutch but very close to the southern border of Sindh. This site is also reported as Kotado, Kotadi and Kotada Bhadli (Rao 1973: 198; Joshi *el. al.* 1984: 528 and Pandya 1982)[2]. It sits on Khadir, one of the islands in the Great Rann of

Kutch. Kotada is a strongly fortified city spreading over a total area of more than 40 hectares. The site consists of an inner acropolis or citadel integral with a "middle town" and surrounded by "double ramparts", lined on both sides with stones. Access to the acropolis and "middle town" is provided through gateways, each with flights of stone steps. Outside the citadel, the "lower town" occupies areas on three sides of the citadel. The remains still show 'chess board" planning of stone built houses and streets, all enclosed by another fortification wall which also has gateways and bastions. Kotada is ideally located on the tri-junction of water routes from Sindh, Rajasthan and Kutch. Geomorphological evidence of fossil coral reefs, swash marks and raised beaches coupled with sedimentological studies show that the sea level in ancient times was 2 to 6 metres higher than at present (Gupta 1977; Roy and Merh 1977). It seems that during the Harappan times, the Ranns, being arms of the sea, were navigable. It is postulated that several tectonic movements like those of 1819 and 1839, raised the land mass above the effects of sea water (Roy and Merh 1977: 199). As a consequence, access to the sea must have been severely restricted. It is pointed out that similar geomorphological changes occurred all along the Arabian sea coast on which contemporary Mature Harappan settlements, Bala Kot (Dales 1979), Sotka-koh (Dales 1962) and Sutkagendor (Stein 1931: 60-71; Dales 1962) are located.

The materials from the surface of Kotada are mostly Mature Harappan, consisting of black-on-red pottery, Indus script, terracotta wheels, chert blades and cores, beads, shell bangles, manufacturing waste of shell and copper pins. In size, Kotada is 40 ha. and therefore, smaller than other four contemporary Mature Harappan cities but it fits into the definition of cities (Mughal 1990). Thus, it is clear that in the vast terriroty of the Greater Indus valley there were more than two cities of the Indus civilisation, regardless of their location in different ecological regions.

Another remarkable feature is almost equidistant location of the major cities of the Indus Civilisation (Fig. 1). The present evidence strongly suggests that a definite grid of settlement location was maintained at least during the Mature Harappan Period.

This is yet another outstanding and unique feature of the Indus Civilization. There is some variation in the distances among the Harappan cities when calculated in a direct line on the map because ancient routes are not known precisely. Keeping this factor in view, the distance from Harappa to Rakhigrahi on its east is 350 km and southwest to Ganweriwala is 280 km. From Ganweriwal, the distance to Mohenjodaro is 308 km. Between Ganweriwala and Kotada, there is long distance of 522 km as no major city has yet been discovered somewhere in the middle. Only two small sites, Chanhudaro and Nuhato (Gharo Bhiro) are known in eastern Sindh. This long gap is like the one which existed between Harappa and Mohenjodaro (570 km) prior to the discovery of Ganweriwala in Cholistan. Further explorations in eastern Sindh might reveal yet another major city north of Kotada. Such a discovery would fit in the equidistant pattern of major Harappan cities.

The same locational pattern of the major cities may be extended to some other towns or small Harappan settlements. For example, from Mohenjodaro, the distance to Nausharo in northwestern Sindh is 270 km while Bala Kot on the sea coast is 266 km (in direct line across the Indus Kohistan hills). From Harappa, the distance to Hisam Dheri and Karam Shah in the Gomal Valley is 260 km. The distance between the Gomal Valley and Shortugai in north Afghanistan should measure twice the length maintained between any two sites in the Indus Valley. In a very general sense, an average distance between the major Harappan cities comes to 290 km. Between a city and town or village, it is even less, about 265 km.

The available information as reviewed above demonstrates that just like a high degree of standardization maintained in most other forms and expressions of the Harappan culture, the cities of 40 ha. size and above also followed a standard system of equidistant location throughout the Greater Indus Valley. Such a pattern of cities calls for explanations more convincing than the hypotheses of trade or exchange net-work, centres of procurement, production and re-distribution, or of the capture of economic resources of a region. Likewise, the major cities can not be regarded

as administrative "capitals" of the Indus "Empire". Among five major cities so far known, four are in the Core Area of the Indus Valley which measure between 76 and 83 ha. and only one in Kutch, is 40 ha. in size. The fortified cities or towns along the sea coast – Kotada, Bala Kot, Sotka-koh and Sutkagen-dor – had certainly different functions than those in the plains of Punjab and Sindh. Whatever explanatory models are given, the emergent picture of the Harappan cities has rejected the old argument of "Twin capitals". The location of major cities at almost equal distance from one another is yet another unique feature of the Indus Civilization which is unparalleled in the settlement history of oriental civilizations.

NOTES

1. The measurements of Harappa and Mohenjodaro as re-calculated by Fentress (1976) are considered to be accurate.

2. The site was originally reported as Kotadi in *Indian Archaeology 1967-68: A Review*: 14-16. Joshi et. al. 1984:528 listed it as Kotada Bhadli, (No. 3) and reported other sites under the name Kotada (Nos. 4 & 20), the latter in Jamnagar district. These sites were originally listed by S.R. Rao (1973: 198). Kotada in the present discussion is mentioned as Dholavira in *Indian Archaeology 1984-85: A Review*: 14-17.

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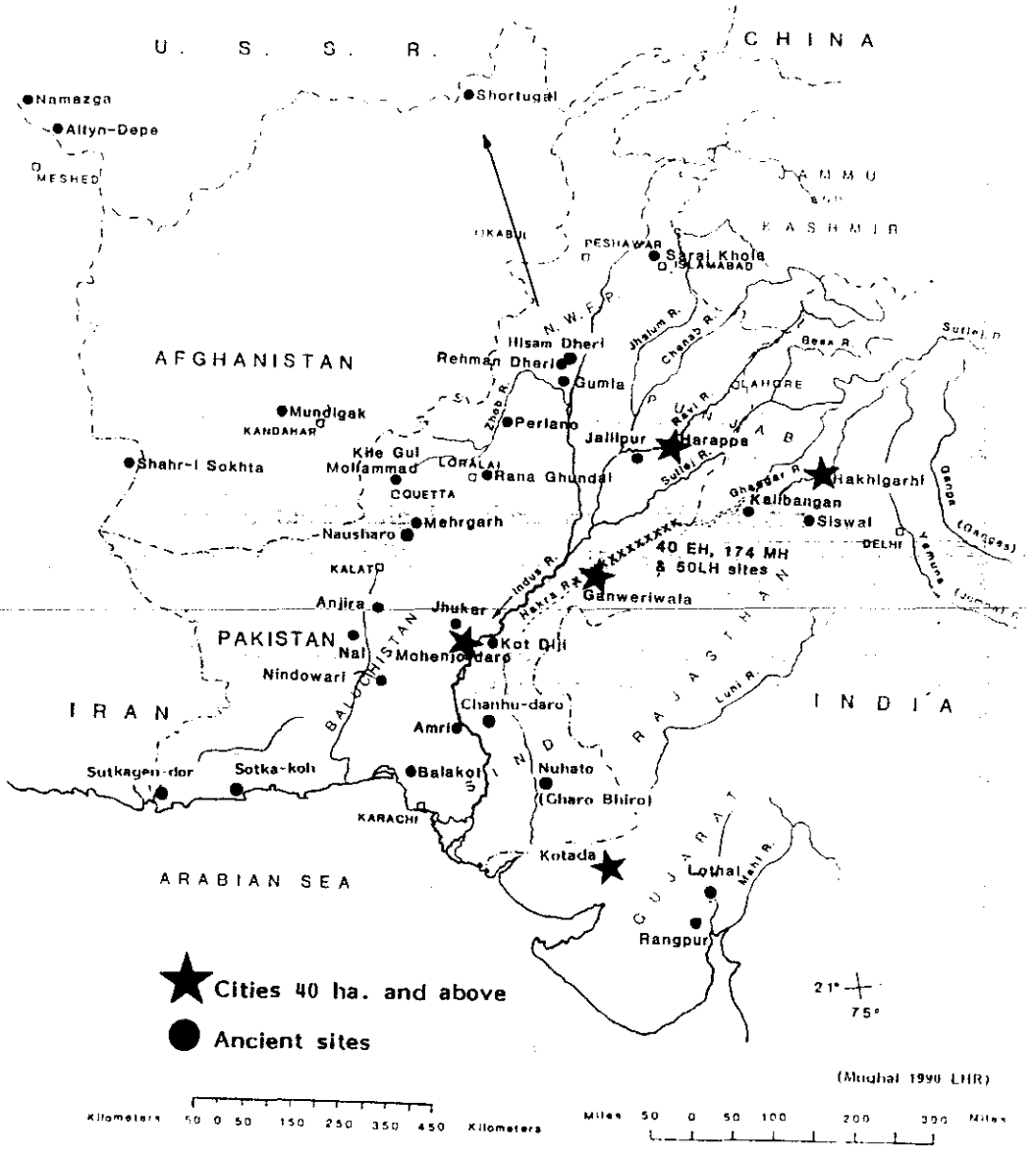

Fig.1: Map showing the location of major Harappan cities in the Greater Indus Valley