

STUDIES IN THE DECIPHERMENT OF THE HARAPPAN SCRIPT AND HARAPPAN SEALS

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ARCHAEDOCUMENTATION

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE SO-CALLED 'PROTO-SIVA' SEAL FROM MOHENJODARO¹

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Some of the most important and interesting finds associated with the Harappan civilization are its well-known and enigmatic seals and related artefacts such as sealings and tablets.² These seals contain the earliest examples of writing and of bas-relief sculpture so far discovered in the South Asian subcontinent. The decipherment of the script found on these seals and the interpretation of the sculptural representations are extremely important for a better understanding of one of the world's earliest urban civilizations -- providing the only or vital clues to its language, and its thoughts and beliefs.

Altogether about 3000 seals have been found at the various Harappan sites in the Indus Valley and beyond. As we might expect, the two largest sites, Mohenjodaro and Harappa, have yielded the greatest number, while other large centres such as Lothal, Kalibangan and Chanhudaro have also produced a considerable collection (Rao 1982: Table 1:1).

The best-known and most controversial of these is Seal no. 420 from Mohenjodaro (Mackay 1937: Pl. xciv, Fig. 420. This is the seal bearing Text no. 2420 in Mahadevan 1977.) It was discovered by Ernest Mackay in the DK area at Mohenjodaro around 1928 (Mackay 1938:127), but was first published and interpreted by John Marshall, with Mackay's acquiescence, in his well-known book, Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization (1931:52-56).

According to Marshall the seal depicts:

'A male god ... who is three-faced, is seated on a low Indian throne in a typical attitude of Yoga, with legs bent double beneath him, heel to heel, and toes turned downwards. His arms are out-