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Political Organisation of the Indus Valley Civilization

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Political Organisation of the Indus Valley Civilization

Practice: 5 MCQs



The Priest-King bust from Mohenjodaro. Photo by Mamoon Mengal, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 1.0.

Who ruled the Indus cities? Nobody knows for sure. The great cities of Egypt and Mesopotamia carry kings' names, but the Indus cities do not. So scholars weigh clues instead: there is no palace or tomb, but the bricks and weights point to shared planning.

- **Palace:** only a **label**.
- **Priest-King:** a name from **Mesopotamian** parallels.
- **Bricks:** ratio **4 : 2 : 1** everywhere.
- **Views:** one state, several rulers, or none.

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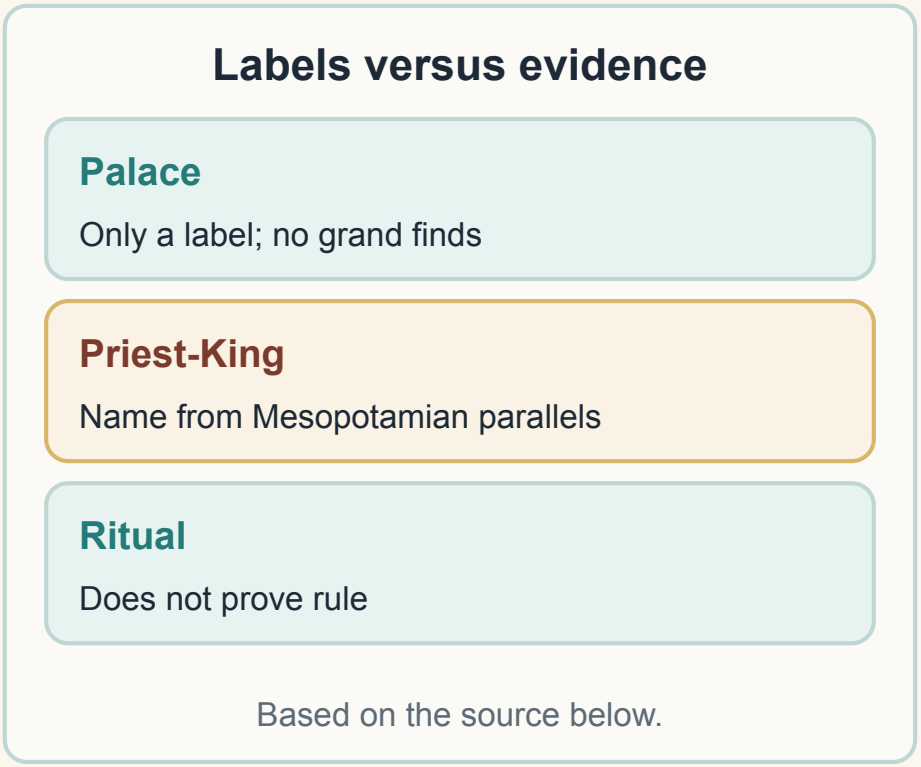
1. No palace, no tomb, no name

Egypt and Mesopotamia left kings’ names and monuments. The Indus cities did not leave obvious ones. This lesson sorts what the evidence shows from what scholars guess.



Three labels that need care. Original explanatory diagram.

1.1 Was there a palace?

A large building at **Mohenjodaro** was labelled a **palace** by archaeologists. No spectacular finds were linked with it. So the label is a guess.

1.2 Why is a statue called the “Priest-King”?

A stone statue is still known as the **“Priest-King”**. Archaeologists knew Mesopotamian history, with its priest-kings. They found parallels in the Indus region. The name comes from that comparison.

1.3 Does ritual prove rule?

Harappan ritual is not well understood. We also cannot tell whether those who performed rituals held political power. A priest need not be a king.

1.4 What did the citadels hold?

Harappa, **Mohenjodaro** and **Kalibangan** each had a **citadel** on a high mud-brick platform. INFLIBNET says it was possibly meant for members of the ruling class. At Mohenjodaro the citadel held the **Great Bath**, the **Great Granary** and a pillared hall that scholars call the **Assembly Hall**.

Sources:

- NCERT, Themes in Indian History I, Chapter 1
- INFLIBNET, Indus Civilization

Archaeologists proved the large Mohenjodaro building was a palace.
Think it through: does a Priest-King statue prove a priest ruled?
No. The name came from comparing the Indus region with Mesopotamia. Ritual role and rule are two different things.

2. Signs of shared planning

2.1 What was alike across the cities?

Harappan artefacts were strikingly uniform. This is true of pottery, seals, weights and bricks. A Cambridge abstract adds a common script and planned towns to the list.

2.2 How uniform were the bricks?

Bricks were made in a **standard ratio**. Sun-dried or baked, the length and breadth were **four** and **two** times the height. Bricks were not made in one centre. Yet the ratio held from **Jammu** to **Gujarat**.

2.3 How were weights arranged?

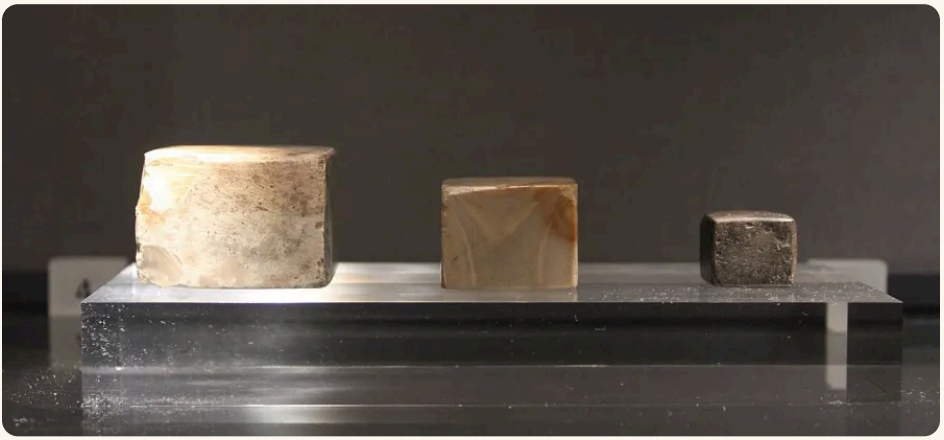
The lower weights were **binary**: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32. The higher ones followed the **decimal** system: 160, 200, 320, 640. Metal scale-pans have also been found. Harappa and Mohenjodaro shared a common system of weights and measures.

2.4 Who organised the work?

Labour was mobilised to make bricks and to build massive walls and platforms. At Mohenjodaro the settlement seems to have been planned first and then built. The open question is who organised all this.

2.5 How exact was the street plan?

Roads and streets in the Lower Town followed an approximate **grid** pattern. They met at right angles. The grid was approximate, not perfect.



Cubical chert weights from Mohenjodaro. Photo by Zunkir, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Sources:

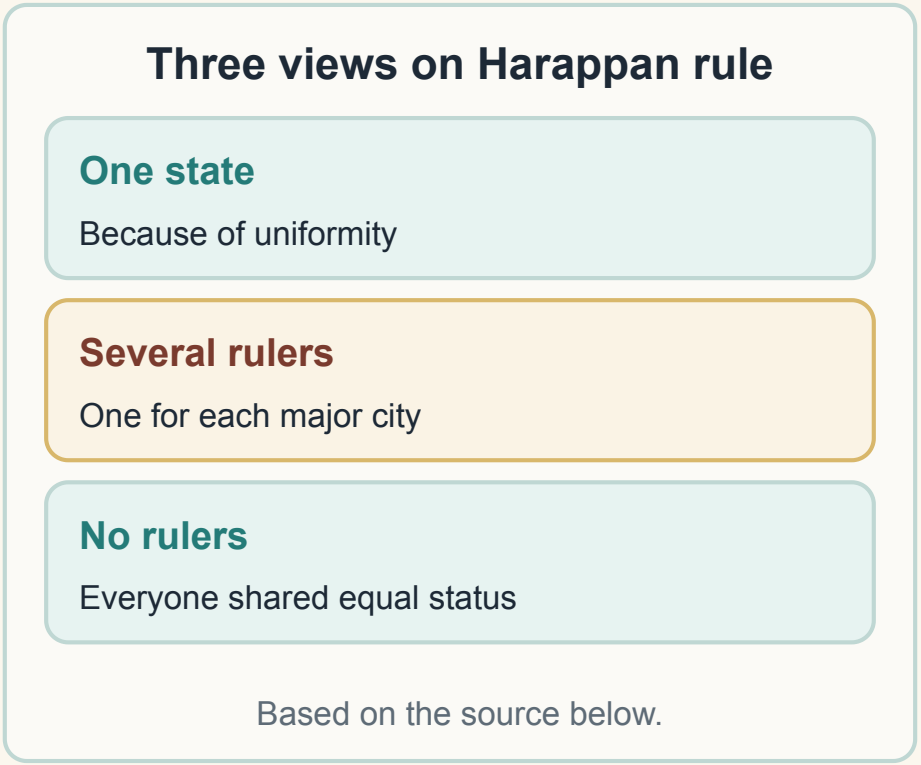
- NCERT, Themes in Indian History I, Chapter 1 (section 2)
- Coningham and Manuel, Priest-Kings or Puritans? (abstract)
- INFLIBNET, Indus Civilization (section 2)

Harappan bricks kept the same ratio from Jammu to Gujarat.

Think it through: why do uniform bricks suggest planning?

Bricks in one ratio over a huge area need a shared rule. Someone had to agree on that rule and keep it.

3. Three views, no final answer



The three views on who ruled. Original explanatory diagram.

3.1 What are the three views?

The textbook lists three views:

- Harappan society had **no rulers**, and everybody had equal status.

- There was **no single ruler** but several, such as one for Mohenjodaro and another for Harappa.
- There was a **single state**, because of the similar artefacts, planned settlements and standard brick ratio.

3.2 Who ruled, priests or merchants?

INFLIBNET says there is no clear evidence about the polity. D.D. Kosambi thought priests were the ruling class. R.S. Sharma thought merchants were. Either way, INFLIBNET sees an efficient and well-organised administrative machinery.

3.3 What happened when the uniformity ended?

Late in the civilisation, seals, the script and the standard weights disappeared. Local weights took their place. It suggests a strong unifying element, perhaps the Harappan state, came to an end.

3.4 What should you remember?

- **No palace or tomb** is certain; the “palace” and “Priest-King” are labels.
- **Standard bricks and weights** show shared rules across the region.
- **Three views**: no rulers, several rulers, one state.
- **Evidence fits more than one answer.**

Sources:

- NCERT, Themes in Indian History I, Chapter 1 (section 3)
- INFLIBNET, Indus Civilization (section 3)

Scholars agree that one single ruler governed the Harappan cities.

4. Which previous-year question tests this topic?

Which statements about Harappan cities are correct?

The answer is (c). Both statements are correct. The street plan was only approximate, and the bricks were uniform. See NCERT.

Your understanding checks

Your 3 quick checks Answered 0 of 3 · Correct 0
This score resets when the page reloads.

Practice: 5 MCQs

Practice MCQs

1. Which of these has NOT been found at any Indus Valley Civilization site?

A. Granaries

B. Standardised weights

C. A royal palace with royal tombs

D. Seals with animal motifs

See answer ↓

2. Uniform bricks and weights across a huge Harappan area are usually taken as a sign of what?

A. Foreign rule

B. Absence of any trade

C. Constant warfare

D. Some central control or planning

See answer ↓

3. The standard Harappan brick had a length and breadth that were how many times its height?

A. Four and two

B. Two and one

C. Eight and four

D. Three and two

See answer ↓

4. Which set of Harappan weights followed the decimal system?

A. 16 and 32

B. 3, 6, 9, 12

C. 1, 2, 4, 8

D. 160, 200, 320, 640

See answer ↓

5. Where at Mohenjodaro were the Great Bath and the Granary built?

A. On the raised Citadel

B. In the Lower Town

C. Near the river harbour

D. Outside the city wall

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.**
   The correct answer is **A royal palace with royal tombs**. The large building at Mohenjodaro was only labelled a palace, with no spectacular finds. No Indus site has a certain royal palace and royal tombs.
   Standardised weights, seals with animal motifs and granaries have all been found at Indus sites.
   Memory hook: No palace, no tomb.
   ↑ Q1
2. **D.**
   The correct answer is **Some central control or planning**. Bricks and weights of the same standard over a vast area point to organisation. Many scholars suspect a state or a strong unifying element.
   The uniformity does not suggest war, foreign rule or the end of trade.
   Memory hook: Same standard, same planning.
   ↑ Q2
3. **A.**
   The correct answer is **Four and two times**. The length was four times the height and the breadth twice the height, a 4:2:1 ratio. It held from Jammu to Gujarat.
   Other ratios were not the Harappan standard.
   Memory hook: 4 : 2 : 1.
   ↑ Q3
4. **D.**
   The correct answer is **160, 200, 320, 640**. The higher Harappan weights followed the decimal system. The lower ones were binary: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32.
   The binary series covers the small weights. The last option is not a Harappan series.
   Memory hook: Small binary, big decimal.
   ↑ Q4

5. **A.**

   The correct answer is **On the raised Citadel**. Mohenjodaro had two parts. The Citadel was higher and walled. The Great Bath, the Granary and the Assembly Hall stood there.

   The Lower Town held the ordinary houses and streets.

   Memory hook: Big public buildings on the high Citadel.

   ↑ Q5

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