
Possible Convergence of Historic Literature and Archaeology: Examples of Harappan Burial Practices and Customs

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Abstract: *The ancient literature of South Asia is a source for several features of the socio-cultural aspect of past societies. The ancient literature preserves a wide range of evidences that can date back to second millennium BCE even if its traditional chronology is taken into account. One among the evidences is the reference to various modes of disposal of dead starting from Rigveda onwards. It is interesting to note that these references could be correlated with the several excavated burial typologies from a host of Harappan sites. Various scholars starting with Datta as early as 1936 and as late as Bisht have done the correlation of literature with actual archaeological evidence from Harappan sites. This clearly indicates the vibrant nature of these evidences and the necessity to understand the wide corpus of data presented in ancient literature in relation to archaeological evidences not only from Harappan sites, but also with other contemporary cultures. In this regard, the evidence from a host of Harappan sites with emphasis to Sanauli is presented here to understand the possible convergence of historical literature and archaeology.*

Keywords: Literature, Archaeology, Harappan, Burials, Sanauli, Customs, Traditions

Introduction

The study of ancient literature of South Asia is an important source in understanding several aspects related to socio-cultural phenomena of past societies. Even though the exact dating of the earliest Sanskrit literature consisting of the *Vedas*, *Brahmanas*, *Upanishads* and *Sutra* is still in a fluid state, the earliest among them, i.e. compilation of *Rigveda* can be definitely dated to the beginning of the second millennium BCE as revealed from the various works in the recent past even though several scholars like Witzel proposes a minimum date of c. 1400 BCE.

As per Witzel, the traditional divisions of Vedas consist of four *sruti* levels consisting of *Samhita*, *Brahmana*, *Aranyaka* and *Upanishad* and the *smriti* level consisting of *Sutra* literature (Witzel, M 2001: 4). However, as per Witzel, the literature exhibits a clear linear linguistic development and can be distinguished into five clear levels consisting of the following (Witzel, M 2001: 4):

- *Rigvedic (with many hymns of RV 10 as a late addition);*
- *'Mantra language' (AV, SV as far as differing from RV, YV Mantras, RV Khila);*
- *Prose of the Krishna Yajurveda Samhitas (MS, KS/KpS, TS);*
- *Brahmana language, where the late (and mainly S.-E.) level includes the Aranyakas and the early Upanishads but also the early Sutras such as BSS;*
- *Sutra language which gradually gives way to Epic/Classical Sanskrit.*

Macdonnel (1990: 29) has aptly given the nature of the four Vedas. Macdonnel distinguishes three clear literary strata in the literature of Vedic period. The four Vedas have been described as belonging to different periods and are collections known as 'samhitas' "...of hymns and prayers made for different ritual purposes."(Macdonnel 1990: 29).

Various linguist scholars, historians and archaeologists differ in their views on placing the geography mentioned in the earliest literature, i.e. *Rigveda* in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Western India, etc. Some scholars like B.B. Lal (2002), Bhagwan Singh (1995), R.S. Bisht (1999: 398-438) advocate that the geography mentioned in *Rigveda* is of the Harappan region. Lal and Bisht discuss the geography along with the importance of River Sarasvati mentioned in *Rigveda* (X. 75.5 & 6, VII, 95.1&2) through the following verses:

इमं मे गङ्गे यमुने सरसवति शुतुद्रि स्तोमं सचता पुरुष्या ।
 असिक्न्या मरुद्वुधे वितस्तयार्जिकीये श्रृणुह्या सुषोमया ॥५ ॥
 तृष्टामया प्रथमं यातवे सजूः सुसर्त्वा रसया श्वत्या त्या ।
 त्वं सिन्धो कुभया गोमती क्रुमु मेहत्न्वा सरथं याभिरियसे ॥६ ॥

O Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Sutudri (Sutlej) and Parusni (Ravi), O Marudvridha with Asikni (Chenab), O Arjikiya with Vitasta (Jhelum) and Susoma (Sohan), please listen to and accept this hymn of mine. [5] (Lal, B.B. 2008: 2)

O Sindhu (Indus), flowing, you first meet the Tristama (and then) the Susartu, the Rasa, and the Sveta (Swat), and thereafter the Kubha (Kabul), the Gomati (Gomal), the Krumu (Kurram) with the Mehatnu; and (finally) you move on in the same chariot with them (i.e. carry their waters with you). [6](Lal, B.B. 2008: 2)

प्र क्षोदसा धायसा सस्र एसा सरसवती धरूणमायसी पूः ।
 प्रबाबधाना रथ्येव याति विश्वा अपो महिना सिन्धुरन्याः ॥१ ॥
 एकाचेतत्सरस्वती नदीनां शुचिर्यती गिरिभ्य आ समुद्रात ।
 रायश्चेतन्ती भुवनस्य भूरेर्धतं पयो दुदुहे नाहुषाय ॥२ ॥

This Sarasvati (river) gushes forward with her waters and protects all like a metal fortress; with

her might, like a charioteer, she surpasses (lit. obstructs) all other waters (rivers) [1] (Lal, B.B. 2008: 2).

Purest amongst all the rivers and vibrant, the Sarasvati moves on from the mountains to the ocean, manifesting immense riches of the world, she has provided milk and ghee (clarified butter) to Nahusa [2](Lal, B.B. 2008: 2).

The above verses clearly indicate that the River Sarasvati along with other rivers like Ganga, Yamuna and Indus were major rivers located to the west of the River Yamuna and in between the Rivers Yamuna and Sutlej in terms of reference in RV X.75.5. The verse VII.95.2 also speaks of the River Sarasvati originating from the mountains and ending into the sea. Often these two verses are quoted by scholars to prove the geographic context of *Rigveda*, while other scholars like R.S. Sharma traces the River Sarasvati to modern Afghanistan.

Bisht, while discussing the geography of the Rigvedic times, elaborately put forth the various divisions like the (i) the land of seven rivers, (ii) the mountains, (iii) the deserts and (iv) the seas mentioned in the *Rigveda* and tried to correlate the Harappan culture that can be associated with the geographical descriptions (Bisht, R.S. 1999: 396-399). Bisht observes (Bisht, R.S. 1999: 399), “.....the geographical horizon of the *Rigveda* corresponds well with the geographical extent of the Harappan culture and also, to a large extent, with the pre- / Early Harappan cultures.....no other archaeological culture, excepting the Harappans, is found ubiquitously distributed all over that area until we enter into the era of regular history several centuries later.”

The argument put forth by several scholars advocates the contemporaneity of *Rigveda* with the Harappan culture on one hand, while on other, a group of scholars differ diagrammatically and place *Rigveda* much later after the demise of Harappan Culture. Nevertheless, even if the Vedic literature is placed immediately after the demise of the Harappan Culture, the material culture, geography, metaphysical activities, etc., described in the literature can be correlated with the Harappan Culture, as it can be presumed that a vast and magnanimous culture like that of Harappan, might have definitely influenced even the later period cultures. In this regard, Lal has tried to showcase the continuity of several traditions of the Harappans that have continued till today in many regions of South Asia (Lal, B.B. 2008: 2). It is with this background, the burial practices of the Harappan Culture, with its preceding and succeeding phases, may be correlated with the earliest literature of South Asia to find out any similarities leaving aside the definitive chronology, which is non-consensual in nature. Again an argument is put forth here that even if the most conservative dating of *Rigveda* may be considered here, which is around 1800 – 1700 BCE, it coincides with the late Harappan cultures, and hence a continuity tends to occur and is discernible in both the archaeological culture as well as the contemporary literature.

The practice of disposing the dead in various modes is witnessed from the archaeological record since Neolithic period onwards in South Asia, particularly in the

Indus and Baluchistan Traditions (Prabhakar, V. N. 2012). Burials being one of the modes of disposal of dead are well preserved in the archaeological record due to its nature of survival when compared to other means like cremation, exposing to vagaries of nature, etc. A variety of burial modes could be discernible from the archaeological sites of formative period of the Harappans (Fig. 1), mature Harappans (Fig. 2) and late / post-urban Harappan (Fig. 3) periods. These modes of disposal of dead and burial practices have been compared with the references and commentaries from the ancient Sanskrit literature of the early and later Vedic periods predominantly ever since the Harappan Civilization was brought to light. In this regard, the interpretations of Datta, Vats, Rao, Bisht, and Kane have been presented here to have an overview and as the works of the other scholars overlap with each other.

Interpretation by B.N. Datta

One of the earliest attempts to correlate the funeral customs of the Vedic literature with the 'Indus Valley Culture' was by Datta (1936: 223-307). Datta cites from the *Rigveda* (X.18) and *Satapatha Brahmana* (XIII 8.1.9; XIII 8.2.12; XIII 8.3.11) on the evidence of burials. Through the above verses from *Satapatha Brahmana*, Datta draws attention on the nature of burial pits and their sizes for various groups prevalent during the period (Datta, B.N. 1936: 226). Datta further cites on the evidence of covering up the burial pits and providing a protection; enclosed with stones from SB XIII 8.2.12 (Datta, B.N. 1936: 226). Further he opines thus while quoting the verse SB XIII 8.3.11, "...let him not make it (the sepulchral mound) too large, lest he make the (deceased's) sin large. For a Kshatriya he may make it as high as a man with stretched arms, for a Brahmana reaching up to the mouth, for a woman up to the hips, for a Vaishya up to the thighs, for a Sudra up to the knee" (Datta, B.N. 1936: 226).

Datta further opines that only dead bodies could have been interred in the pits as they were mentioned according to the "...size of a man...", and for ashes or fragmentary bones, it was the urn-burials. Datta cites references from *Asvalayana Grihya Sutras* for the mention of urn burials wherein he mentions as, "...the gathering (of the bones is performed) after the tenth (tithi from the death) (4.5.1)...A man into a male Urn without special marks, a woman into a female one without special marks. (4.5.2)...Having well gathered them and purified them with a winnowing basket they should put (the urn) into a pit...He should throw earth (into the pit)...Having covered (the Urn) with a lid...they should go away without looking back, should bathe in water, and perform a Sraddha for the deceased (4.5.7-10)" (Datta, B.N. 1936: 227-228).

Datta surmises based on the references from both *Satapatha Brahmana* and *Asvalayana Griha Sutras*, that as the former is older than the latter and as there is no mention of gathering of bones in the former, the practice of interring the dead bodies in sepulchers was prevalent and not urn-burials; while the latter clearly mention of post-cremation urn burials (Datta, B.N. 1936: 228). However, Datta also mentions on the two modes of disposal of dead mentioned in the *Rigveda*, viz., अग्निदग्धा and अनग्निदग्धा the former indicating an urn burial while the latter a burial (Datta, B.N. 1936: 285). Datta has also

made the correlation of Cemetery H burials from Harappa with the types described in *Asvalayana Grihya Sutras* for urn burials and also relating them with the homeland of Vedic Aryans, as it is located in Punjab (Datta, B.N. 1936: 229).

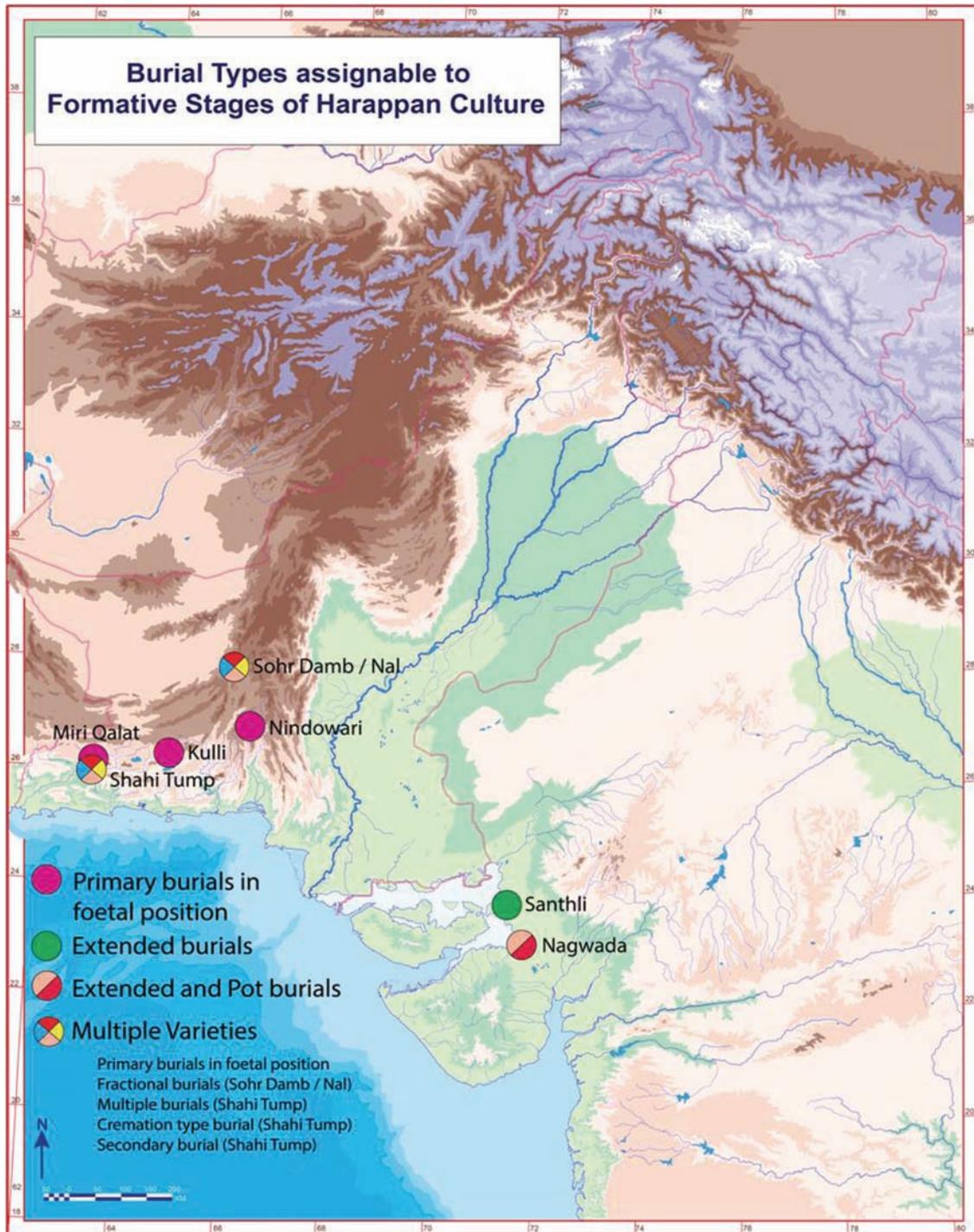


Figure 1: Map of Burial Sites Assignable to Formative Stages of Harappan Culture

Datta also mentions the verse *RV X.18.10-13* for reference of burial custom while the verse *RV X.16.1-6* mentions a cremation system (Datta, B.N. 1936: 286-87). Datta also

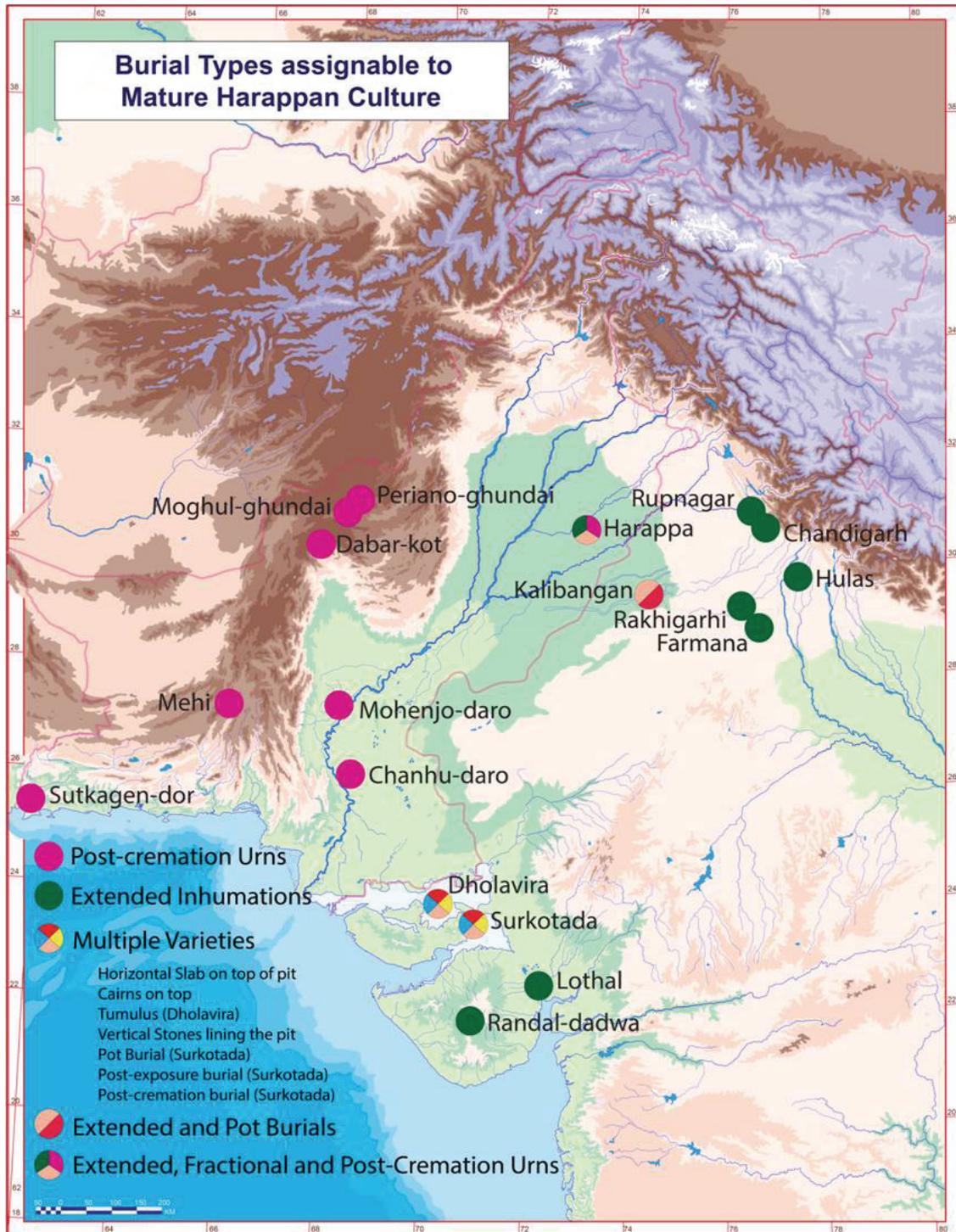


Figure 2: Map of Burial Sites Assignable to Mature Harappan Culture

suggests based on the interpretations of Max Muller and Winternitz on the internal chronology of *Rigveda*, and hence the burial system was earlier when compared to the cremation system, as X.16 is later in date than X. 18 (Datta, B.N. 1936: 286-87). The practice of disposing the dead in an urn after cremating the dead body was in vogue during the *Sutra* period as detailed descriptions are available in *Asvalayana Griya Sutra*

as mentioned above. Based on these evidences, Datta opines that burial system was prevalent during the early Vedic period, while urn burial system was in vogue during later Vedic period and later the cremation mode replaced the latter (Datta, B.N. 1936: 289-90). Datta, in summary correlates the funeral customs of the 'Indus Valley Culture' with the Vedic and later Vedic literature and customs described in them.

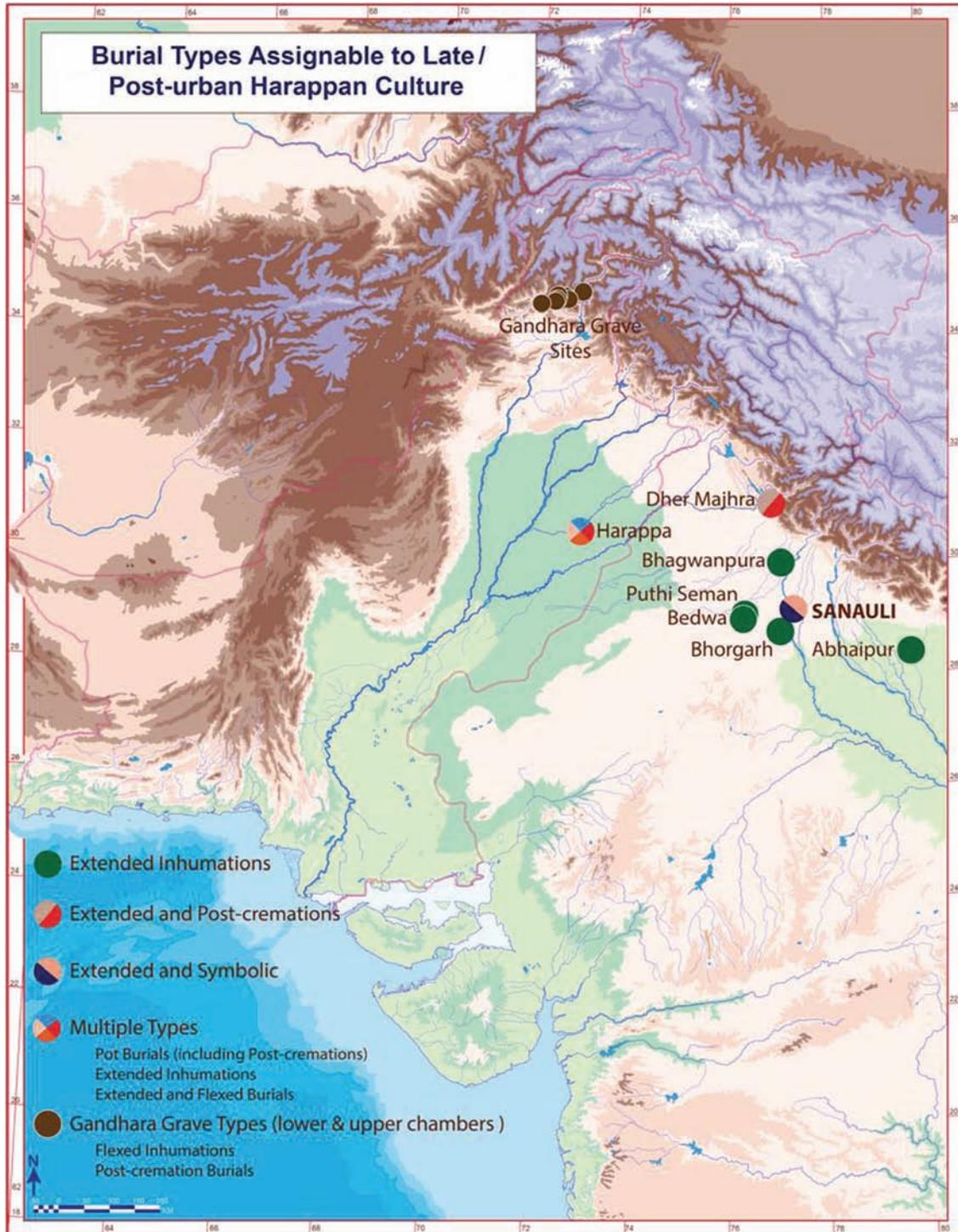


Figure 3: Map of Burial Sites Assignable to Late/Post Urban Harappan Culture

Interpretation by M. S. Vats

Another early attempt to link the dead and disposal of the dead of the Harappans with the Sanskrit literature is by Vats, while describing the Cemetery H burials from Harappa (Vats, M.S. 1974: 208-210). Vats identifies the depiction of bulls without entrails in the Pot Burial Group 206 of Stratum I (Fig. 4) with a prototype of Anustarani, and another one to the right to that of Vaitarni. Vats also quotes the verse X. 16.7 from *Rigveda* in support of this depiction (Vats, M.S. 1974: 208).

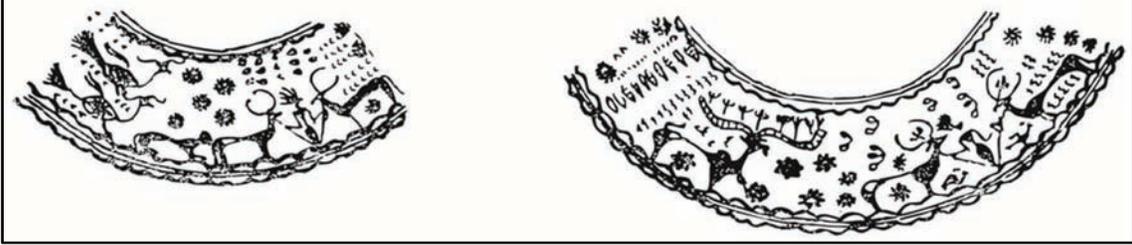


Figure 4: Depiction on Pot Burial Group 206, Stratum I, Cemetery H, Harappa

The verse X.16.7 from *Rigveda* reads as follows:

अग्नेर्वर्म परि गोभिर्व्ययस्व संप्रोर्णुष्व पीतसा मेदसा च ।
नेत्त्वा धृष्णुर्हरसा जर्हृषाणो दधृग्विधक्ष्यन्पर्यङ्ख्याते ॥७॥

The translation of the above verse as given by Arya *et al.* is, "Enclose the main of Agni with the (hid of the) cow; cover it with the fat and marrow: then will not (Agni), bold, exulting in his fierce heat, proud, embrace you roundabout to consume you (to ashes)." (Arya, R.P. and K.L. Joshi: 1997: 229) Vats also quotes several references from later period Sanskrit literature in support of this depiction. They are *Asvalayana Ghrihya Sutra* (IV.3), *Aitreya Brahmana* (III.3.8), *Katyayana Srauta Sutra* (XXV.7.30) all for the Anustarani, and for the Vaitarni, he further quotes from *Ramayana* (IV.44.65), *Mahabharata* (II.373) and *Harivamsa* (7736 and 9511) (Vats, M.S. 1974: 208). The depiction of another animal, that of outlined hindquarters of a goat from the same funeral vessels, Vats quotes again from *Rigveda* (X.16.1 and X.16.4) for its support (Vats, M.S. 1974: 209). The verse reads as follows:

मैनमग्ने शृतं दहो माभि शोचो मास्य त्वचं चिक्षिपो मा शरीरम् ।
यदा शृतं कृणवो जातवेदोऽथेमेनं प्र हिणुतात्पितृभ्यः ॥१॥

The translation of above is "Agni, consume him not entirely; afflict him not; scatter not (here and there) his skin nor his body; when Jatavedas, you have rendered him mature, then send him to the Pitrs." (Arya, R.P. and K.L. Joshi: 1997: 227)

अजो भागस्तपसा तं तपस्व तंते शोचिस्तपतु तं ते अर्चिः ।
यास्ते शिवास्तन्वो जातवेदस्ताभिवर्हैनं सुकृतासु लोकम् ॥४॥

The translation of above is “*The unborn portion (The goat is your portion); burn that, Agni, with your heat; let your flame, your splendor, consume it; with those glorious members which you have given him, Jatavedas, bear him to the world (of the virtuous)*” (Arya, R.P. and K.L. Joshi: 1997: 228). Vats interprets the depiction of cow and goat on the pottery vessels and the references from *Rigveda* that the interment of bones of the above-mentioned animals along with dead body for cremation / burial was meant to protect the deceased person from the flames of fires of Jatavedas (Agni), as the fire is meant to exhume only the animals and not the deceased person, who is to be guided to the region of pious by Agni (Vats, M.S. 1974: 209). However, Vats also mentions with caution on comparison from the literature as the examples from Harappa, which he discussed, were from post exposure fractional burials, while the references are from cremation context. Further, he also mentions that the comparison between Vedic Aryans and the culture of Harappa burials is difficult as the latter are yet to be identified with specific culture (Vats, M.S. 1974: 209).

Interpretation by S. R. Rao

The next major interpretation can be seen from the findings of Lothal excavations by S.R. Rao (Rao, S.R. 1979: 1-260). Rao, while discussing the findings from the cemetery compares the modes of disposal to several references in the early and later Vedic literature. Rao refers to both burial and cremation as two major modes of disposal of dead as mentioned in the Vedic literature.

Rao also refers to two terms, namely, अग्निदग्धा and अनग्निदग्धा for two major modes of disposal of dead. Rao points out that the term अग्निदग्धा refers to the practice of burning the body by fire, and hence can be identifiable with cremation and अनग्निदग्धा refers to the practice of disposing the dead one by methods other than that of burning by fire (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142). Rao, further refers from the *Atharvaveda* for means of disposal of dead other than by cremation. He refers to the terms, परोप्ता: *paroptah* for casting out and मृत्प्रक्षालनम् for exposure to the elements (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142).

The evidence from Harappa of a wooden coffin and mud brick chamber from Kalibangan for burying the dead is correlated with the reference from *Rigveda* and *Atharvaveda* regarding भूमिगृहः (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142). The references from *Satapatha Brahmana* regarding the shape of burial ground and disposal of dead in terms of its context to the settlement and the various modes practiced by Easterners (प्राच्यः) by having their burial mounds roundish are also made by Rao (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142) (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142). Rao also refers to the reference to post-cremation burials from *Vajasaneyi Samhita* (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142). Further, Rao also refers to the mention of wrapping the dead body with flax in the *Rigveda* and burning of a draft-ox along with the dead body in the *Atharvaveda* (Rao, S.R. 1979: 142).

Interpretations by R. S. Bisht and P. V. Kane

The most recent work on the correlation of various modes of disposal of dead with the ancient literature is by R.S. Bisht (Bisht, R.S. 2014). Bisht discusses the relevance of

literature in terms of the evidence obtained from the Dholavira excavations. Bisht outlines that the various modes of disposal of dead have been found in *Rigveda* and other later Vedic literature like *Atharvaveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, *Satapatha Brahmana*, just to name a few (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 293-302). The special category of burial tumuli discovered and excavated from Dholavira has been compared and correlated with the evidences from various literary works like *Maitrāyanī-samhitā*, *Taittirīya-samhitā*, *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa*, *Śulba-sūtras* of *Baudhāyana*, *Āpastamba*, *Kātyāyana* and *Mānava* (Bisht, R.S. 2014:294). The radial pattern or the spoked-wheel pattern emerged from Tumuli 1 and 2 has been correlated with the references from *Rigveda* (I.64.1, 2, 14, 30, 48, 11, 12; I.105.9; I.164; IV.17.14; V.31.11; VII.63.2), *Satapatha Brahmana* (XIII.8.1.1.17) and *Maitrayani Samhita* (III.2.6) (Bisht, R.S. 2014). Bisht has identified these tumuli burials as “...an altar simulating a chariot-wheel with spokes or one with segments of the felly only...” (Bisht, R.S. 2014:294-296).

Bisht also discusses the two broad modes of disposal of dead mentioned in the literature, viz., those who were subjected to fire (अग्निदग्धा) and those disposed of with means other than fire (अनग्निदग्धा) (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297). The further classification of interment burials of the category not subjected to fire is also found from *Rigveda* as discussed by Bisht, who refers to “...seated in the cases (perhaps, coffins) (RV X.15.5) of or upon a spread of barhi grass (RV X.15.3-4), or seated in (pottery) jars (RV X.15.9-10), or lying (in their graves) on their right side by drawing up (their) legs (RV X.15.6), certainly in crouched position like a foetus in the womb of mother” (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297). Similar references in the literature on the interment of husband and wife together in one instance (RV X.18.7-9); the brother of the deceased pulls out the wife and objects retrieved; piling of earth over a burial (RV X.18.10-12); erecting a pillar (RV X.18.13) on or near the pile of earth and also putting a boundary of ring of stones between living and dead (RV X.18.4) (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 298).

Bisht also draws attention to a verse from *Atharvaveda* wherein four modes of disposal of dead are referred to as निखाता, परोप्ताः, दग्धा and उद्धिताः (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 298). The term निखाता indicates the disposal of body or relics by burying; परोप्ताः indicates ‘cast away’, implying “... something uprooted from one place and transplanted at another, hence importing exhuming of a buried body...”; दग्धा indicates cremation and उद्धिताः indicates “...exposure of the dead body to the elements by way of keeping it on a higher place or on some such thing like a tree for carnivorous animals, birds and insects to feed on” (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 298). Bisht also refers to the reference from *Satapatha Brahmana* on the nature of burial places and dimensions of sepulchers for various categories of people (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 299).

In this regard, the references cited by P.V. Kane from the *Satapatha Brahmana* are relevant regarding the nature of the burial ground, their shape and during which season the pit should be dug up (Kane, P.V. 1953: 247). Kane mentions that, “...*Satapatha Brahmana*... prescribes that he should make the burial mound on any level ground where the waters flowing from a southerly direction come to the east and stand still without dashing forward and on such a ground one may make it (burial mound)” (Kane, P.V.

1953: 247). Kane further cites that, "... make it on a pleasant and peaceful spot, but not on a road nor in an open space... should have the sun shining on it (at mid-day)... should not be made at a place where it would be visible from the village and there should be charming objects to its west (woods, gardens, etc.)... make it on salt (barren) soil, on such ground as abounds in roots.....must not make it too large... should make it just a man's size, broader behind (to the west) and broader on the north side....encloses it with cords twisted in the non-sunwise way... bids them to cut out the earth which would be just sufficient for making the mound of a man's size." (Kane, P. V. 1953: 247-248). Kane also discusses elaborately on the references from *Satapatha Brahmana* on the rites of sepulchral mounds, rites of erecting mound over bones, stages in the disposal of dead bodies (Kane, P.V. 1953: 249-256).

Thus, it has been observed from the above interpretations given here of five scholars, the early and later Vedic literature is replete with references on the metaphysical and practical issues concerned with disposal of the dead and the rituals connected therein. In the following pages, an attempt has been made to again discuss the individual references along with the translation wherever possible and to correlate the typology and modes of disposal with the archaeological evidences as far as possible.

Modes of Disposal of Dead

As discussed above, both Rao and Bisht have referred to the instances in the literature on the two broad modes of disposal, i.e. dead bodies confined to fire and those modes other than confining to fire. The *Rigveda* (X.15.14) mentions these two modes of disposal as follows:

ये अ॒ग्नि॒दग्धा॑ ये अ॒नग्नि॒दग्धा॑ म॒ध्यै दि॒वः स्व॒धया॑ मा॒दय॑न्ते ।
तेभिः॑ स्व॒राळ॑सु॒नीति॑मेतां यथा॒वशं॑ त॒न्वं क॑ल्पयस्व ॥१४ ॥

Bisht also refers to *RV X.15.11* and *AV VIII.3.44* which gives specifies the name of अग्निष्वात्ता: for those who practiced अग्निदग्धा mode of disposal of dead (Bisht, R.S. 2013). The relevant verses are reproduced below:

X.15.11

अग्नि॑ष्वात्ताः पि॒तर ए॒ह ग॑च्छत॒ सदः॑सदः॒ सदत॑ सु॒प्रणी॑तयः ।
अ॒त्ता ह॒वीषि॑ प्र॒यतानि॑ ब॒र्हिष्य॑था रयिं॒ सर्व॑वीरं॒ दधा॑तन ॥११ ॥

AV VIII.3.44

अग्नि॑ष्वात्ताः पि॒तर ए॒ह ग॑च्छत॒ सदः॑सदः॒ सदत॑ सु॒प्रणी॑तयः ।
अ॒त्तो ह॒वीषि॑ प्र॒यतानि॑ ब॒र्हिषि॑ रयिं च नः॒ सर्व॑वीरं॒ दधा॑त ॥४४ ॥

Further, Bisht also mentions that the term अग्निष्वात्ता: was modified and a new term was coined subsequently as अनग्निष्वात्ता during *Yajurveda* for those who practiced अनग्निदग्धा

mode of disposal (YV XIX.60) (Bisht, R.S. 2014). The relevant verse is reproduced as follows:

ये अग्निष्वात्ता ये अनग्निष्वात्ता मध्ये दिवः स्वधया मादयन्ते ।

तेभ्यः स्वराडसुनीतिमेतां यथावशं तन्वं कल्पयाति ॥६० ॥

The four modes of disposal mentioned in *Atharvaveda* (VIII.2.34) are reproduced below:

ये निखाता ये परोप्ता ये दग्धा ये चोद्धिताः ।

सर्वास्तानग्न आ वह पितृन् हविषे उत्तवे ॥३४ ॥

Thus, it may be evident from the above references on the broad categories of disposal of dead during early and later Vedic period, which are:

- Disposal of dead by confining the dead to fire, i.e. cremating the deceased person and
- Disposal of dead by means other than confining the body to fire, i.e. non-cremation.
 - Burying the dead body or relics, i.e. may represent both primary and secondary burials;
 - Building a burial for a person or individual expired somewhere else with the available evidences, which may represent a secondary or a symbolic burial and
 - Exposing the bodily remains at a high place to decompose and be consumed by animals, birds or insects, for which the archaeological evidence is very difficult to find.

The evidence for the modes of disposal of burying the dead in the form of either a primary or a secondary and interment of body relics or symbolic burials has been encountered from many of the Harappan sites. The best example can be quoted here from the Sanauli evidence, wherein the evidence for primary burials has been found from a majority of the burial contexts, while secondary burials are absent from Sanauli. However, the symbolic burials represented by Burials 14, 28, 106 and 116 clearly indicate a परोप्ता: type of burial as mentioned in *AV VII.2.34*.

Burial 28 (Fig. 5) particularly is of interest as here a torso-shaped copper container has 28 stylised copper objects, which might represent 28 individuals who died away from the homeland and whose bodily remains could not be found and hence a monument erected in their memory. It can be further added here that the copper container is accompanied by two dish-on-stands of the typical Late Harappan variety of drooping rims and base. It is also associated with a baked brick wall, only one arm of which could be found aligned in a northwest – southeast direction as in the case of majority of the burials.



Figure 5: Details of Burial 28, Sanauli

Burial 14 (Fig. 6) from Sanauli is an example of another symbolic burial wherein the personal weapons of a deceased individual could only be found and hence they were interred along with the usual burial pottery in an alignment meant for a regular burial. This burial also falls under the category of परोक्षः of burial. This burial could have been erected for only one individual as in the case of other three symbolic burials, i.e. Burials 106 and 116.

The अनग्निदग्धा category of burials is a broad typology and Bisht cites evidence from *Rigveda* on the sub-categories and types of this variety. The various sub-categories that are discussed by Bisht (2014: 297) are “...seated in the cases (perhaps, coffins) of, or upon a spread of, barhis grass, sacrificial kusa grass, or seated in (pottery) jars, or lying (in their graves) on their right side by drawing up (their) legs, certainly in crouched position like a foetus in the womb of mother.”



Figure 6: Details of Burial 14, Sanauli

Disposal of Dead in Coffins

The various references for burying the dead in coffins from *RV* are given below:

RVX.15.5 reference to coffins

उप॒हू॒ताः पि॒तरः सो॒म्यासो॑ ब॒र्हिष्ये॑षु नि॒धिषु॑ प्रि॒येषु॑ ।
त आ ग॑मन्तु॒ त इ॒ह श्रु॑वन्त्वधि॒ ब्रु॑वन्तु॒ तेऽव॑न्त्वस्मान् ॥५॥

RV VII.89.1 reference to house of earth

मो॒ षु वरु॑ण मृ॒न्मयं॑ गृहं॒ राज॑न्नहं॒ गम॑म् ।
मृ॒ळा सु॑क्षत्र॒ मृ॒ळय॑ ॥१॥

AVV.30.14 Mention of mud chamber

प्राणेनाग्ने चक्षुसा सं सृजेमं समीरय तन्वा३ सं बलेन ।

वेत्थामृतस्य मा नु गान्मा नु भूमिगृहो भुवत् ॥१४ ॥

Bisht refers to RV X.15.5 for a possible reference to coffins / container in the word निधि (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297). The verse AV V.30.14 clearly mentions of a भूमिगृहः for the placement of dead body. The भूमिगृहः may be either a wooden coffin or a mud-brick chamber inside the burial pit. The remains of a wooden coffin and a mud-brick coffin burial have been reported from the excavation at R 37 cemetery (Figs. 7 and 8) by Wheeler at Harappa (Wheeler, R.E.M. 1949: 86-89). The remains of mud brick enclosure around Burial 6 at Lothal (Fig. 9) can also be cited as an example of coffin burials.



Figure 7: Evidence of Wooden Coffin Burial 5, Cemetery R 37, Harappa (1946)



Figure 8: Evidence of Mud-brick Coffin, Burial 10, Cemetery R 37, Harappa (1946)



Figure 9: Burial 6 with Mud-brick Chamber, Lothal

The presence of wooden coffins is also reported during the excavations at R 37 carried out by Harappa Archaeological Research Project (HARP), under the direction of G.F. Dales, Richard Meadow, R.P. Wright and J.M. Kenoyer (Dales, G.F. and J.M. Kenoyer 1990: 78-91). The remains of possible wooden lids in two burials have also been reported from the excavations by HARP at R 37 (Dales, G.F. and J.M. Kenoyer 1990: 89). The evidence of coffins from R 37 is reported from the Lot Nos. 220, 198, 136, 197, 194, 198, 220, and 136 (Dales, G.F. and J.M. Kenoyer 1990: 86-89). The evidence from Harappa is a clear indication of the interment of dead ones in specially made wooden chambers or coffins, the mode of which is described both in the early and later Vedic literature. The remains of a mud coffin are also reported from the excavation at Dholavira (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 259). The Burial 29 from Kalibangan (Fig. 10) is an elaborate one, containing a mud-brick rectangular chamber, plastered with mud plaster on the interior portion. The burial also contains well over 70 burial pottery vessels, indicating the importance of the individual interred in it.

The evidence of a mud-brick chamber is also found from the Sanauli excavations, even though only a portion of the mud-brick walls is preserved in this case. The Burial 116 from Sanauli (Figs. 11-14) is a symbolic burial wherein no skeletal remains were found, even though an elaborate arrangement of burial pottery is found at the northern portion of the chamber. The chamber is made of mud-bricks, of which only portions of north and west walls are preserved. The evidence also indicates nine extant courses of mud-bricks, and the original height is indeterminable. Another interesting feature of this burial is the representation of a human torso arranged through over 600 faience beads.

The evidences presented above from the Harappan and late Harappan periods corroborate with those from literary references to a chamber or coffin (भूमिगृहः) for interment of a deceased person. The possibility of a social hierarchy for such a necessity of preparation of either a mud-brick chamber or a wooden coffin cannot be ruled out, as the evidence for such elaborate burials are rare from the archaeological context. Nevertheless, it may be surmised here that the archaeological evidence indicates a definite correlation with the literary evidences in terms of a chamber / coffin executed underneath the ground for the dead bodies.

References to Placement of Dead Bodies on *barhi* Grass

Bisht also alludes to the reference to other activities related to burial practices in the *Rigveda*. One such activity is the reference to the dead bodies seated on *barhi* grass, the verses have been reproduced here for ready reference. It has been argued (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297) that the activity of placing the body on *barhi* grass is associated with the interment of dead persons in the burial pit / chamber / coffin, depending upon the nature of burial. The special type of grass mentioned implies some ritualistic significance associated with the burial practices. Even though there is no evidence for the placement of dead bodies on *barhi* grass from the archaeological context due to want of specialised scientific studies of the soil and other sediments from the

Harappan burials, the practice alluded in the above reference from *Rigveda*(X. 15.3-4) cannot completely rule out such a possibility.

आहं॑ पित॑न्त॒सुवि॒दत्राँ॑ अ॒वित्सि॑ न॒पातं॑ च॒ विक्र॑मणं च॒ विष्णोः॑ ।
ब॒र्हिष॑दो॒ ये स्व॒धया॑ सु॒तस्य॑ भ॒जन्त॑ पित॒वस्त॑ इ॒हाग॑मि॒ष्टाः ॥३॥

ब॒र्हिष॑दः पित॒र ऊ॒त्यश्वा॑गि॒मा वौ॑ ह॒व्या च॑कृ॒मा जु॑षध्व॒म् ।
त आ॑ ग॒ताव॑सा॒ शन्त॑मे॒था नः॑ शं॒ योर॑रपो॒ दधा॑त ॥४॥

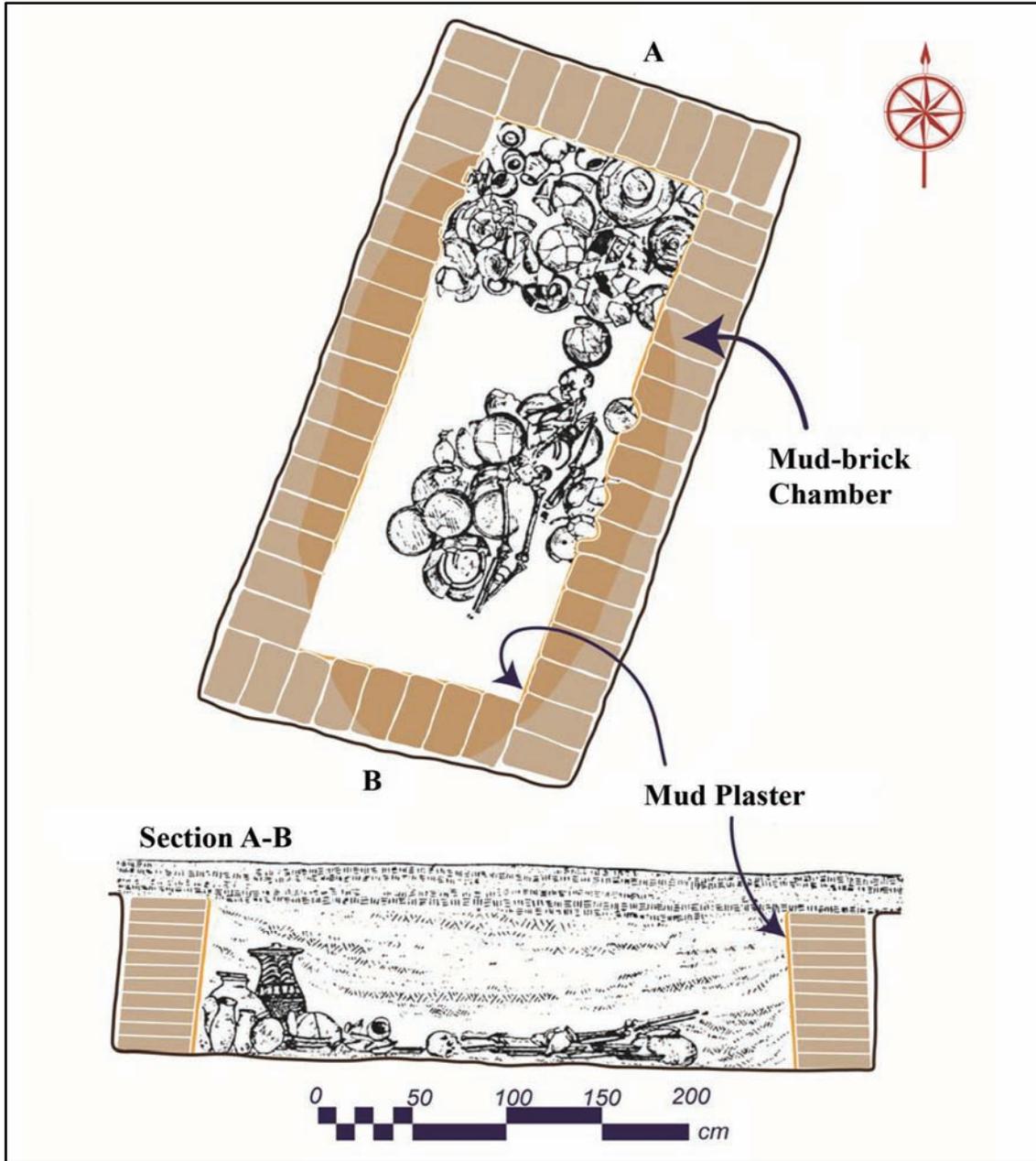


Figure 10: Details of Burial 29, Kalibangan, Rajasthan (After Lal et al. 2007)

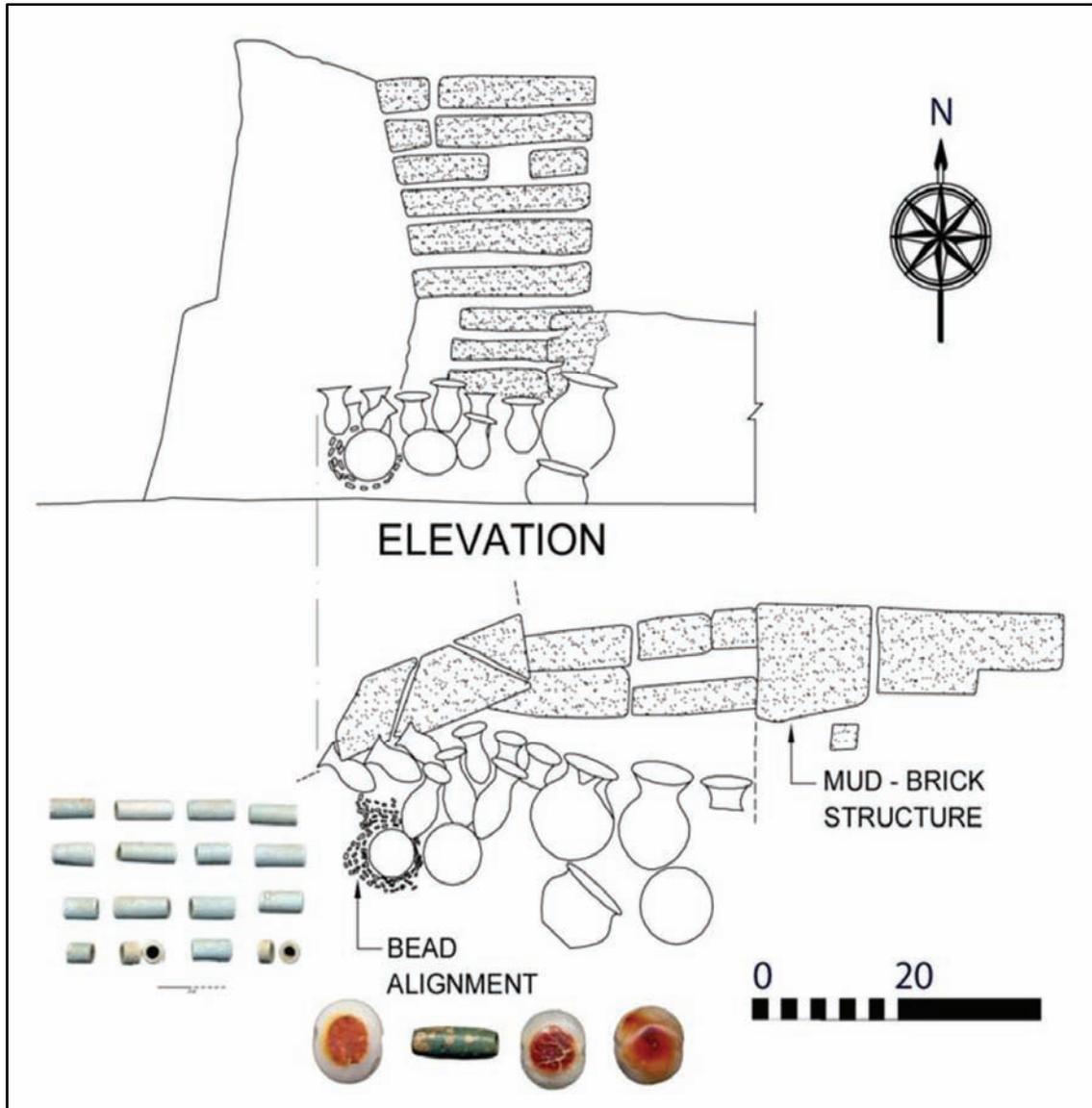


Figure 11: Burial 116 Showing the Features of Mud-brick Chamber, Sanauli



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Figures 12 -14: Burial Goods, Burial 116, Sanauli

References to Placement of Dead in Pottery Jars

Bisht also discusses the mode of disposal of dead bodies in pottery jars as mentioned in the *Rigveda* (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297). The verses X.15.9-10 have been identified by Bisht

which mentions the placement of *pitrs* in pottery jars and the word घर्मसद्भिः has been identified with the pottery vessels by Bisht (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297).

ये ता॒तृषु॑र्दे॒वत्रा॑ जेह॒माना॑ हो॒त्रावि॑दः स्तो॒म॒त॒ष्टासो॑ अ॒कै ।
आग्ने॑ या॒हि सु॒वि॒द॒त्रेभि॑र॒वाङ् स॒त्यैः क॒व्यैः पि॒तृभि॑र्घर्म॒सद्भिः ॥९॥

ये स॒त्यासो॑ ह॒विर॑दो॒ ह॒विष्या॑ इन्द्रै॒ण दे॒वैः सर॑थं द॒धानाः ।
आग्ने॑ या॒हि स॒हस्रं॑ दे॒वव॑न्दैः प॒रैः पू॒वैः पि॒तृभि॑र्घर्म॒सद्भिः ॥१०॥

In terms of archaeological evidence from Harappan sites, the pot burials have been reported from both mature and Late Harappan contexts. The reference of several instances of post-cremation urns from Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and several other Baluchistan sites can be quoted here as evidence to pottery jars used for either cremated body fragments, ash, and other contents, etc. In particular, the evidences from the sites of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Kalibangan, Chanhudaro, Periano-ghundai, Mughal-ghundai, Mehi, Sutkagen-dor, Dabar-kot are worth mentioning. The evidence from Kalibangan for pot burials (Fig. 15-17) in the cemetery area to the west of habitation is interesting. The pot burials were designated a separate area in the cemetery at Kalibangan, to its northern periphery while the rectangular burials occupy a larger space in the southern portion. This may also indicate existence of people of different social customs and beliefs.

The Late Harappan burials from Cemetery H at Harappa can also be quoted as evidence for pottery burials containing human fragmentary bones that were interred after exposure as well as post-cremation ones.



Figure 15: Pot Burial 18, Kalibangan

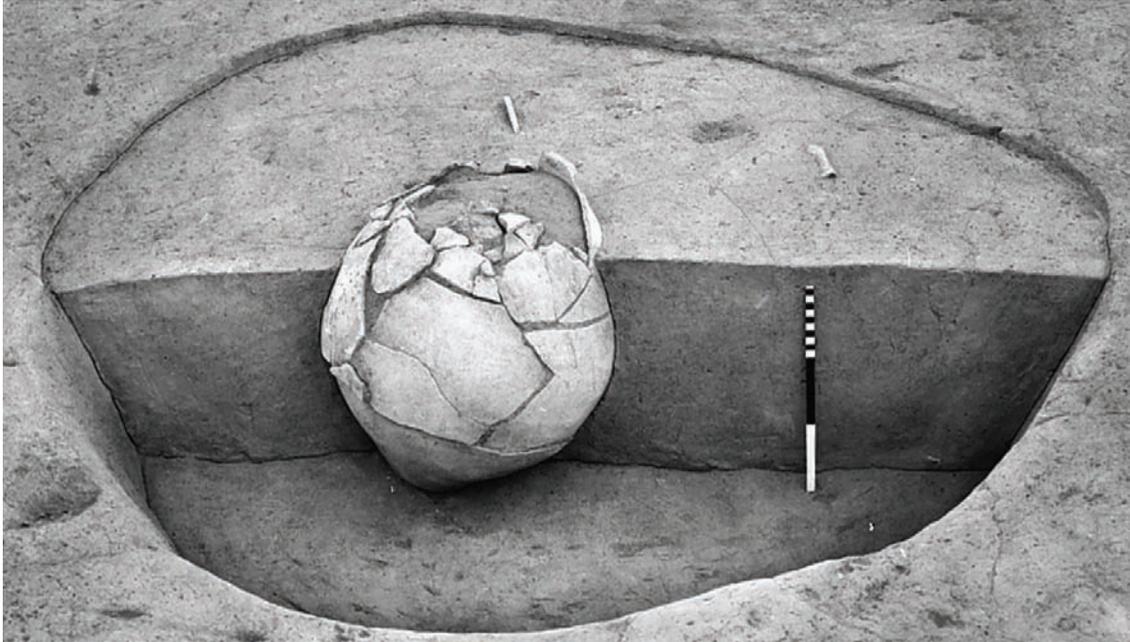


Figure 16: Pot Burial 20, Kalibangan



Figure 17: Pot Burial 25, Kalibangan

The body laid on one side together with drawing up the legs is also noticed from *Rigveda* and discussed by Bisht (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 297). The verse *RV X.15.6* mentions the nature of laying the dead on their right side while drawing up their legs in a crouched position. The drawing up of the legs and placing the hands in front of the face resembles the utero position in the foetal condition.

In the archaeological context, the laying of dead body on one side with legs drawn up is noticed right from the Neolithic period onwards from Mehrgarh. However, the mode of disposal of dead of this particular variety is not noticed during the Harappan and Late Harappan cultures, which indicates a clear demarcation from certain burial

beliefs and customs or an indication of people from different socio-cultural beliefs and traditions.

RV X.15.6 mentioning the burial lying on their right side and drawing up their legs.

आच्या जानु दक्षिणतो निषद्येमं यज्ञमभि गृणीत विश्वे ।
मा हिंसिष्ट पितरः केन चिन्नो यद्वा आगः पुरुषता कराम ॥६॥

The evidence from Mehrgarh is most striking in that the burials contain interment of dead bodies placed to the left (instead of right as noticed in the reference from *Rigveda*) with the legs drawn up. The evidence is noticed right from the Neolithic period up to the Advanced Chalcolithic period (Period VII).

The evidence from other Baluchistan sites during the formative stages of Harappan culture (Pre / Early Harappan period) also indicates similar modes of disposal. Examples can be quoted here from the sites of Sohr Damb/Nal, Shahi Tump (right side), Miri Qalat, Nindowari (right side).

Among the evidences from the sites mentioned above, the disposal of dead from the sites of Period VII from Mehrgarh, Shahi Tump and Nindowari is of special interest as the placement and arrangement of the dead body corresponds to the description available in the *Rigveda*. The position of dead bodies from these sites is laid on their right side with their legs drawn up along with burial pottery and furniture in a majority of cases. It is surprising to note as mentioned above that this particular mode of disposal of dead is not present during the mature or late Harappan Cultures.

References to Joint Burials

The reference to a possible joint burial of a wife along with her husband in one verse of the *Rigveda* (X.18.7) and in another verse (X.18.8) the wife is being told to rise from the grave (possibly) to leave the husband as he is lifeless, while in X.18.9 it is indicated that the person was interred with bow and arrow, and Bisht interprets that the brother of the person interred pulls out the wife from the grave (Bisht, R.S. 2014: 298). The translation of the three verses is given below. The verses indicate that there could have been a tradition to either bury the widow of the dead man along with him, or as a custom and tradition, a ritual is performed to lay the woman along with the dead man for a brief period and then the brother of the dead person raises her. It is also indicated by X.18.9 that the personal weapons were also buried along with the dead person for a brief period and then taken back.

इमा नारीरविधवाः सुपत्नीराञ्जनेन सर्पिषा सं विशन्तु ।
अनश्रवोऽनमीवाः सुरतना आ रोहन्तु जनयो योनिमग्रे ॥७॥

Let these women who are not widows, who have good husbands, enter (anointed) with unguent

and butter. Let women without tears, without sorrow, and decorated with jewels, first proceed to the house (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 235).

उदीर्ष्व॑ नार्य॑भि जी॒वलोकं॑ ग॒तासु॑मे॒तमु॑प॒ शेष॑ ए॒हि ।
ह॒स्त॒ग्रा॒भस्य॑ दि॒धिषो॑स्त॒वेदं॑ प॒त्युर्ज॑नि॒त्वम॑भि सं॒ बभू॑थ ॥८॥

Rise, woman, (and go) to the world of living beings; come this man near whom you sleep is lifeless: you have enjoyed this state of being the wife of your husband, the suitor who took you by the band (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 236).

In terms of archaeological evidence, there are a few instances of joint burials from the Harappan sites, the best among them is the Burial 6 from Lothal cemetery (Fig. 9, above). Another example of a joint burial is from Burial 69, Sanauli (Fig. 18), wherein the skeletal remains of three persons were unearthed. The sex determination of two of the individuals could be carried out which indicated that one is a male and other that of a female. It is difficult to interpret both these evidences in terms of the references found in *Rigveda* as the verses clearly indicate that the woman was raised by from the grave, which indicates that she was not buried, even though a ritual might have been performed.

Nevertheless, the evidence from archaeological record of at least two instances wherein both a male and female skeletal remains were found triggers new questions and interpretations as the excavator of Lothal even interpreted its evidence as a practice of *Sati* during Harappan period (Rao, S.R. 1979: 243).

धनु॑र्हस्तादाद॒दानो॑ मृ॒तस्या॑स्मे॒ क्षत्राय॑ वर्च॒स ब॒लाय॑ ।
अ॒त्रैव॑ त्वमि॒ह वयं॑ सु॒वीरा॑ विश्वाः स्मृ॒धो अ॒भिमा॑ती॒र्जये॑म ॥९॥

Taking his bow from the hand of the dead man, for the sake of our vigour, energy and strength, (I say) you are there may we (who are) here, blessed with male offspring, overcome all the enemies who assail us (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 236).

References to Piling up of Earth above Burials

Bisht quotes several verses from the *Rigveda* on the surface indications of burials (Bisht R.S. 2014: 298). It can be interpreted from the references in the Sanskrit literature that there was a definite practice during Vedic times to indicate the burials as leaving the surface flattened will lead to damage to the graves. One such instance is the piling of earth above the burial, in the form of a tumulus to indicate the burial. The verses, which indicate the piling up of earth above the burials, are X.18.10-12, are reproduced below along with the translations.

उप॑ सर्प॒ मातरं॑ भूमि॒मेता॑मु॒रुव्य॑च॒सं पृ॒थिवी॑ सु॒शेवाम्॑ ।
उ॒र्ण॑भ्र॒दा यु॒वति॑र्दक्षि॒णाव॑त् ए॒षा त्वा॑ पातु॒ नि॒ऋ॒तेरु॑प॒स्थात् ॥१०॥

Go to this your mother-earth, the wide-spread, delightful earth; this virgin (earth is) as soft as wool, to the liberal (worshipper) may she protect you from the proximity of Nirrti (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 236).



Figure 18: Triple Burial (Burial 69) from Sanauli

उञ्चस्व पृथिवि मा नि बाधथाः सूपायनास्मै भव सूपवञ्चना ।
माता पुत्रं यथा सिचाभ्येनं भूम ऊर्णाहि ॥११ ॥

Earth, rise up above him; oppress him not; be attentive to him (and) comfortable; cover him up, earth, as a mother covers her child with the skirt of her garment (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 236).

उ॒च्च॑मा॒ना पृ॒थि॒वि॒ सु॒ ति॒ष्ठ॒तु॒ स॒ह॒स्रं॑ मित॒ उप॒ हि॒ श्र॒य॒न्ता॒म ।
ते॒ गृ॒हा॒सो॑ घृ॒त॒श्चु॒तो॑ भ॒वन्तु॑ वि॒श्व॒हा॒स्मै॑ श॒रणाः॒ स॒न्त्व॒त्र ॥१२॥

May the earth heaped over him lie light; may thousands of particles (of dust) envelope him; may these mansions distil ghee (for him); may they every day be an asylum to him in this world (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 236).

The above references clearly speak of a resting place for the deceased person in the laps of mother earth, where a grave pit could have been excavated and in order to further protect the buried individual, heap of earth was placed above it.

The placing of a heap of mud or earth can serve two purposes, first to indicate the presence of a burial so that it may not be desecrated and the second to further protect from the vagaries of nature to expose it. In terms of archaeological evidence from a Harappan site, clear and distinctive evidence is gleaned from the cemetery at Dholavira. At Dholavira, the presence of several tumuli were noticed on the north and northwest of a now dried up lake to the southwest of the settlement. Bisht excavated two of these tumuli, namely Tumulus 1 (Figs. 19-21) and Tumulus 2 (Figs. 22-23) and both revealed an extensive arrangement of burial complex, hitherto unearthed from any Harappan site. One of the burials from Sanauli also has an indication of a surface piling of up earth that might have been placed over the burial after interment of skeletal remains and grave goods. The evidence is obtained from Burial 15 (Fig. 24), wherein a clear-cut pit line was also determined unlike most of the other burials where a clear grave pit line was very difficult to demarcate.



Figure 19



Figure 20

Figures 19 and 20: General view of Tumuli 1 During Excavation, Dholavira

References to Surface Indications of Burials

There are references to other surface indications of burials other than the above-mentioned piling of earth or tumulus. Bisht refers to RV X.18.13 and X.18.4 for such a surface indication in the form of erecting a pillar on top or side of the tumulus in the former and placing a ring of stones as a boundary between the living and the dead in the latter (Bisht R.S. 2014: 298).

उत्ते॑ स्त॒भ्नामि॑ पृथि॒वी त्वत्प॑रीमं॒ लो॒गं नि॒दध॑न्मो॒ अहं॑ रिष॒म् ।
ए॒तां॒स्थू॒णां पि॒तरो॑ धार॒यन्तु॑ तेऽत्रा॒ यमः॑ सा॒दना॑ ते मि॒नोतु॑ ॥१३॥

इ॒मं जी॒वेभ्यः॑ परि॒धिः द॑धामि॒ मैषां॑ नु॒ गाद॑परो॒ अथ॑मै॒तम् ।
श॒तं जी॒वन्तु॑ श॒रदः॑ पु॒रूची॑रन्त॒र्मृत्युं॑ द॒धतां॑ प॒र्वते॑न ॥१४॥

In terms of archaeological evidence, the burial types from Dholavira and Surkotada exhibit the presence of vertical stones marking the presence of burials as well as cairn topplings on the surface over the burials.



Figure 21a



Figure 21b

Figure 21a: Jewellery Unearthed from Tumuli 1; Figure 21 b: Arrangement of Pottery and Funerary Goods inside the Tumuli, Dholavira

References to Funerary Offerings and Vessels

There are references from the later Vedic literature on the nature of offerings to the dead and pottery in which they are placed. The references from *Atharvaveda* have been quoted by Bisht (2014: 298) in this regard and the relevant verses are *AV VIII.4.16-30*, which are reproduced below for ready reference:

अ॒पूप॑वान् क्षी॒रवांश्च॑रु॒रेह॑ सी॒दतु॑ ।
लोक॑कृतः पथि॒कृतो॑ य॒जाम॑हे॒ ये दे॒वानां॑ हु॒तभा॑गा॒ इह॑ स्थ ॥१६॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and food cooked in milk (क्षीर) made to the *pitrs*.

अ॒पूप॑वान् द॒धिवांश्च॑रु॒रेह॑ सी॒दतु॑ ।
लोक॑कृतः पथि॒कृतो॑ य॒जाम॑हे॒ ये दे॒वानां॑ हु॒तभा॑गा॒ इह॑ स्थ ॥१७॥



Figure 22: General View of the Tumulus 2, Dholavira



Figure 23: Details of Interior of Tumulus 2, Dholavira

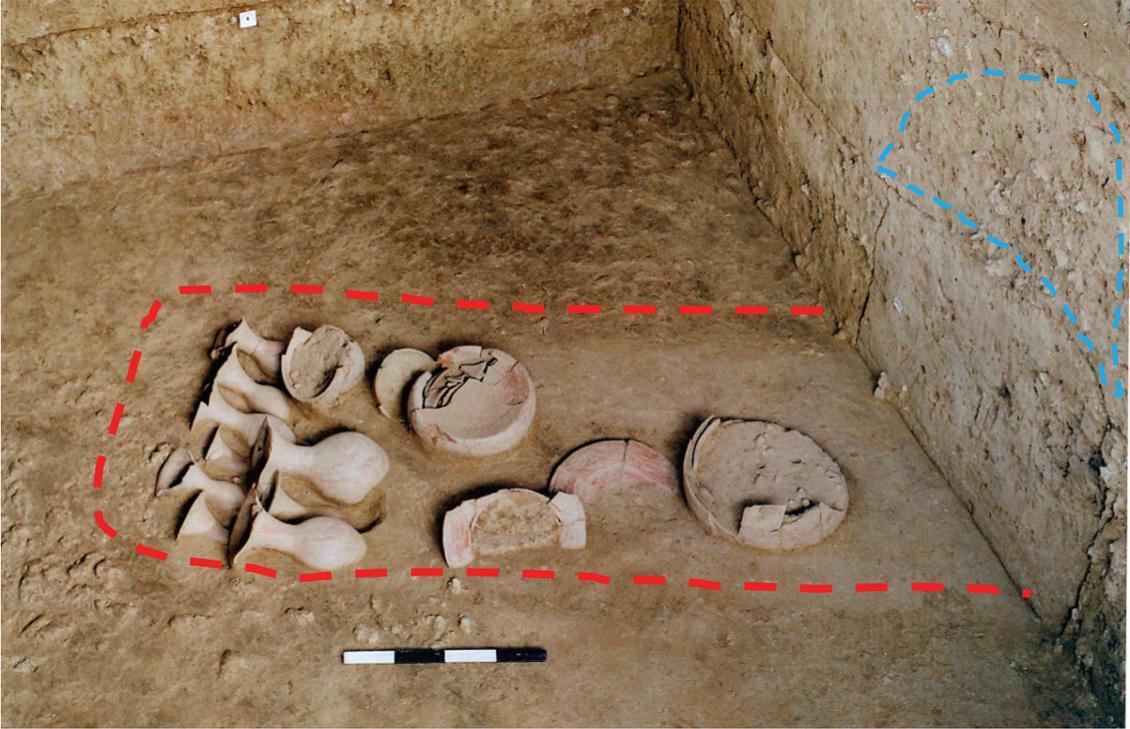


Figure 24: Pit Line Indicate by Red Dashed Line and Heap of Earth Indicated by Blue Dashed Line, Burial 15, Sanauli

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and curds.

अपूपवान् द्रप्सवांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥१८ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and drops / juices.

अपूपवान् घृतवांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥१९ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and clarified butter (*ghee*).

अपूपवान् मांसवांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥२० ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and flesh / meat.

अपूपवानन्नवांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥२१ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and food.

अपूपवान् मधुमांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥२२ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and honey.

अपूपवान् रसवांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥२३ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and juices.

अपूपवानपवांश्चरुरेह सीदतु ।

लोककृतः पथिकृतो यजामहे ये देवानां हुतभागा इह स्थ ॥२४ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings of cakes made of flour (of rice / wheat) cooked with *ghee* (पुण) and water.

अपूपापिहितान् कुम्भान् यांस्ते देवा अधारयन् ।

ते ते सन्तु स्वधावन्तो मधुमन्तो घृतश्रुतः ॥२५ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings prepared of rice cakes mixed with *ghee*

(पुर) which are placed in covered pottery vessels (कलश or कुम्भ) and full of fatness and honey juices. Thus, this verse is a direct reference to pottery vessels filled with offerings.

यास्ते धाना अनुकिरामि तिलमिश्राः स्वधावतीः ।
तास्ते सन्तूद्भवीः प्रभ्वीस्तास्ते यमो राजानु मन्यताम् ॥२६ ॥

The above verse mentions about the offerings consisting of grains and sesame seeds soaked in water and heated in pans, which are offered for safe passage through the netherworld.

अक्षितिं भूयसीम् ॥२७ ॥

The above verse mentions that let these offerings made (through the above verses) be available for the deceased person and Yama may grant permission for usage for a longer period.

द्रप्सश्चस्कन्द पृथिवीमनु द्यामिमं च योनिमनु यश्च पूर्वः ।
समानं योनिमनु संचरन्तं द्रप्सं जुहोम्यनु सप्त होत्राः ॥२८ ॥

The above verse mentions that the sacred juice (*Soma*), which is only available to the great seers and holy men, is offered through seven oblations.

शतधारं वायुमर्कं स्वर्विदं नृचक्षसस्ते अभि चक्षते रयिम् ।
ये पूणान्ति प्र च यच्छन्ति सर्वदा ते दुहते दक्षिणां सप्तमातरम् ॥२९ ॥

The above verse mentions about the various gods like Vayu, Aditya, Deva, etc., and these offerings made help in the safe passage.

कोशं दुहन्ति कलशं चतुर्बिलमिडां थेनुं मधुमतीं स्वस्तये ।
ऊर्जं मदन्तीमदितिं जनेष्वग्ने मा हिंसीः परमे व्योमन् ॥३० ॥

The above verse requests the god Agni not to cause harm or injury or offerings made so that the purpose for which they were caused to be serve the purpose. The above verses clearly indicate that the various pottery vessels placed in the burial pit were meant for holding different types of food offerings like "...cake, milk, curd, ghee, meat, juices, honey, other eatables, some mixed with sesame seeds and so on.." as mentioned by Bisht (Bisht R.S. 2014: 298). The various pottery vessels found from the burials of Harappan and Late Harappan period could have served a definite purpose of holding some sort of food items. The exact food items it was holding can be scientifically identified by lipid profile tests. However, from the foregoing references of Vedic and

later Vedic literature, it can be presumed that a variety of food items were placed, also in covered pottery vessels. The burial pottery from the cemeteries of various sites includes a wide variety of types and shapes. Sanauli too, is not an exception in this case, and the general typology of burial pottery consists of tall, elliptical vases; bowls, small pots, large vases, storage jars with / without lids, dish-on-stands, etc (Figs. 25-28).



Figure 25: Pottery Vessels in Burial 15, Sanauli



Figure 26: Pottery Vessels in Burial 14, Sanauli



Figure 27: Pottery Vessels in Burial 69, Sanauli



Figure 28: Pottery Vessels in Burial 8, Sanauli

References to Recitation During the Death Ceremony

The *Rigveda* in the *Sukta* 16 of X Mandala also contains verses that are referred to as recited at or upon the death of a person (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 227-228).

This is also an indication of the standardisation of rituals and practices related to death. The verses that are commonly recited at or upon the death of a person are *RV X.16.1-6* which are mentioned below along with translation:

मैनमग्ने शृतं दहो माभि शोचो मास्य त्वचं चिक्षिपो मा शरीरम् ।

यदा शृतं कृणवो जातवेदोऽथेमेनं प्र हिणुतात्पितृभ्यः ॥१॥

Agni, consume him not entirely; afflict him not; scatter not (here and there) his skin nor his body; when Jatavedas, you have rendered him mature, then send him to the Pitrs (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 227).

शृतं यदा करसि जातवेदोऽथेमेनं परि दत्तात्पितृभ्यः ।

यदा गच्छात्यसुनीतिमेतामथा देवानां वशनीर्भवाति ॥२॥

When you have rendered him mature, then give him up, Jatavedas, to the Pitrs; when he proceeds to that world of spirits, then he becomes subject to the will of the gods (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 227).

सूर्यं चक्षुर्गच्छतु वातमात्मा द्यां व गच्छ पृथिवीं च धर्मणा ।

अपो वा गच्छ यदि तत्रं ते हितमोषधीषु प्रति तिष्ठा शरीरैः ॥३॥

Let the eye repair to the sun; the breath to the wind; go you to the heaven or to the earth, according to your merit; or go to the waters if it suits you (to be) there, or abide with your members in the plants (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 228).

अजो भागस्तपसा तं तपस्व तंते शोचिस्तपतु तं ते अर्चिः ।

यास्ते शिवास्तन्वो जातवेदस्ताभिवहैनं सुकृतामु लोकम् ॥४॥

The unborn portion, burn that, Agni, with your heat; let your flame, your splendor, consume it; with those glorious members which you have given him, Jatavedas, bear him to the world (of the virtuous)(Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 228).

अव सृज पुनरग्ने पितृभ्यो यस्त आहुतश्चरति स्वधाभिः ।

आयुर्वसान उप वेतु शेषः सं गच्छतां तन्वा जातवेदः ॥५॥

Dismiss again to the Pitrs, Agni, him who offered on you, comes with the Svadhas: putting on (celestial) life, let the remains (of bodily life) depart: let him, Jatavedas, be associated with a body (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 228).

यत्ते कृष्णः शकु आतुतोद पिपीलः सर्प उत वा श्वापदः ।

अग्निष्टद्विश्वादगदं कृणातु सोमश्च यो ब्राह्मणा आविवेश ॥६॥

Should the black crow, the ant, the snake, the wild beast, harm (a limb) of you, may Agni the all devourer, and the Soma that has pervaded the Brahmanas, make it whole (Arya, R.P. and Joshi, K.L. 1997: 228).

Reference Regarding the Size of Burial Pits

It is also interesting to note that the Vedic literature also contains information on the

various sizes of pits that are to be dug for various classes of people. In this regard, Bisht cites reference from the *Satapatha Brahmana* which indicates the various sizes of pits. Like Datta above, Bisht also mentions that “...a sepulchre should be of man’s size and not too large and yet... the dimension of the mound differently for each class of people such for a Kshatriya as high as a man with stretched arms, for a brahmana reaching up to the mouth, for a woman up to the hips, a vaisya up to the thighs, for a sudra up to the knee” (Bisht R.S. 2014: 299). The reference for the above is from the verse XIII.8.3.11 from *Satapatha Brahmana*.

The above reference is an indication of the varying sizes of burial pits depending upon the class of people to be interred. This also reflects the social conditions prevailing in the contemporary society. Archaeologically speaking, it is very difficult to determine the exact depth of the grave pits, as it has been largely observed in cemeteries at Harappa, Kalibangan, or Sanauli they were in continuous use for a longer duration and hence levelled and used. It is also due to this fact that several older burials have been disturbed by later period burials. Subsequently, after the sites have been abandoned and later period activities largely affected the surface contour of the ancient sites as well as the cemeteries. The cemeteries of Harappa and Sanauli are excellent examples in this regard, wherein the burials are found very close to the surface and also the upper level burials are often affected by ploughing and other levelling activities.

Conclusion

Several scholars in the past attempted the correlation of customs and practices related to burial rituals between the archaeological evidences and the earliest Sanskrit literature as observed above. However, the present attempt was aimed at collating the most important interpretations and correlations at a single place and inferring from the available archaeological evidences vis-à-vis the literary references already available in the form of published references. It was observed that the archaeological evidences from Harappa, Lothal, Kalibangan, Dholavira and Sanauli, etc., correlates with the literary references to disposal of dead and certain rituals performed to a larger extent. However, the consensus on the dating of the literary sources vis-à-vis the archaeological evidence from Harappan culture is a major issue. Nevertheless, even if the early Vedic and later Vedic literature is dated to the mid of second millennium BCE, it preserves definitive references for the kind of rituals and practices related to disposal of dead and it can be easily presumed that even compiling and putting into a vast quantity of literature in the form of a corpus requires a vast accumulation of knowledge of the bygone eras and cultures.

Thus, the information contained in the Vedic literature along with the contemporary cultural beliefs and customs of the people, may also preserves the knowledge of the bygone eras to a certain extent. In this context, the correlation of archaeological evidence from the Harappan Culture with the Vedic literature by various scholars are worthwhile and the present attempt in surveying several burials sites including Sanauli clearly demonstrates a possibility of continuity of traditions of Harappans and its preservation in ancient literature. The scientific analysis of pottery contents from

the burials of Harappan sites including that of Sanauli may also help in the future to exactly correlate with the references from AV VIII.4.16-30 regarding the nature of food items made as offerings in pottery vessels. The scientific analysis may also strengthen and identify the belief in afterlife of Harappans through the identification of food materials stored with the burials.

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