

Dholavira: A Unique Harappan City

by Dr. R.S. Bisht

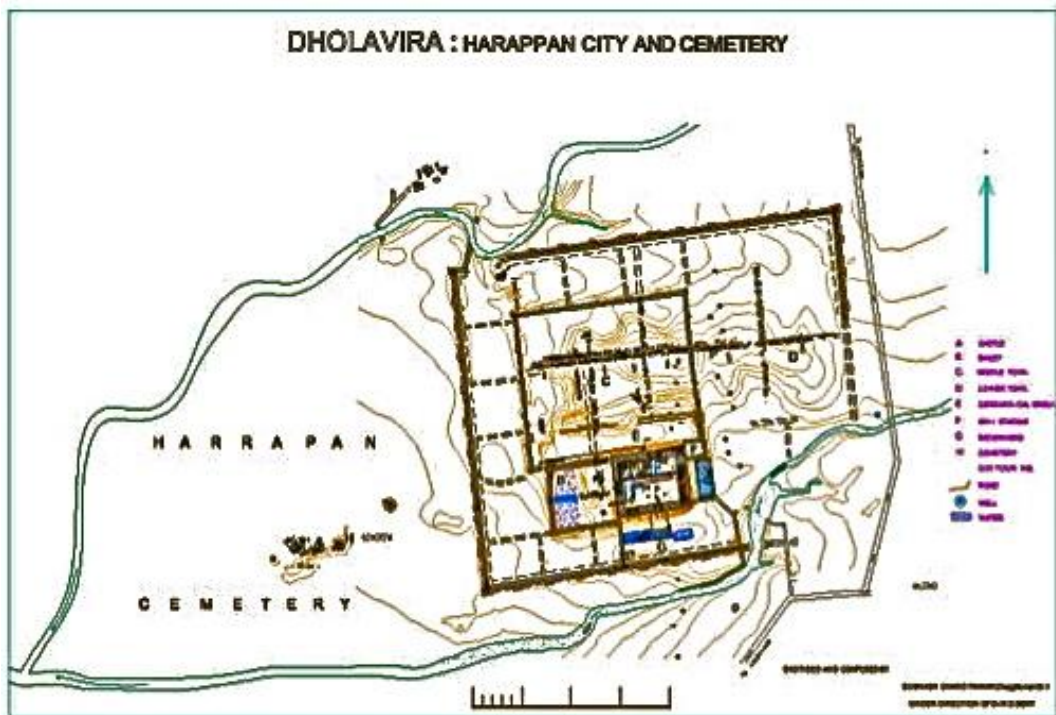
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Dholavira (Taluka Bhachau, District Kachchh, Gujarat) is one amongst five largest urban centers of Harappan civilization, the other four being Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Ganweriwala (all in Pakistan) and Rakhigarhi (India). Having yielded almost identical cultural milieu, Dholavira has yielded an enormous amount of material assemblage which is substantially complementary and supplementary to what has been found elsewhere.

Thirteen field seasons of excavation from 1989-90 to 2004-05 through an enormous deposit caused by the successive settlements at the site for over 1500 years during all through the 3rd millennium and unto the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE have revealed seven significant cultural stages, documenting the rise and fall of the Indus civilization. The excavation has revealed a major, a model city, which is remarkable for its exquisite planning, monumental structures, aesthetic architecture, amazing water harvesting system and a variety in funerary architecture.

The salient components of the full-grown cityscape consisted of a bipartite 'citadel', a 'middle town' and a 'lower town', two 'stadia', an 'annexe', a series of reservoirs all set within an enormous fortification running on all four sides. Interestingly, inside the city, too, there was an intricate system of fortifications. The city was, perhaps, configured like a large parallelogram, boldly outlined by massive walls with their longer axis being from the east to west. On the bases of their relative location, planning, defenses and architecture, the three principal divisions are designed tentatively as 'citadel', 'middle town', and 'lower town'.

The site also enjoys the unique distinction of yielding an inscription made up of ten large-sized signs of the Indus script. Another unique find is a fragment of a large slab engraved with three large signs of the script. A rich harvest of antiquities include a stone statue of a deity-phallus erectus, a stone sculpture of a mongoose and a variety of limestone pillar members of superb workmanship and art. Besides, there are seals, weights, a variety of jewellery of gold, silver, copper, semi-precious stones, ivory, faience, shell and clay; tools of copper, stone, shell, etc., ceramics and other objects.



Dr. R.S. Bisht

Dr. R.S. Bisht is a leading archaeologist of international repute. His excavations at Dholavira (Gujarat) and Banawali (Haryana) have added many a new, hitherto unknown, facet to the personality of the Harappan civilization. His excavations at Sanghol (Panjab), Chechar and Nalanda-Sarai-Tila (both in Bihar), and Semthan (J&K), too, have also made many significant contributions. Presently, he is focusing on his report on Dholavira and Banawali, besides preparing academic dossiers on each for getting them inscribing along with other Indus sites in a serial nomination as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

Dr. R.S. Bisht had his graduation from Nainital, and post-graduation from Lucknow University, Lucknow, and obtained Post-graduate Diploma in Archaeology from the School (now Institute) of Archaeology of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), New Delhi and doctorate degree on *Emerging perspectives of the Harappan civilization in the light of recent excavations at Banawali and Dholavira*, from the Kumaun University, Nainital.

During his 35 years of career he has assiduously climbed up through various positions to that of Joint Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and amassed vast experience in conservation, excavation, exploration, antiquities, besides attending to peripheral duties. He started his career in 1968 in the Department of Archaeology and Museums of the Govt. of Panjab and in 1972 joined the department of similar name of the Govt. of Haryana which he left as

Deputy Director to join Archaeological Survey of India in 1977 as Superintending Archaeologist. Subsequently, he served the Survey as Director before he laid down office of Joint Director General on attaining superannuation. His duties took him to different parts of India.

Credit goes to him for developing an Archaeological Cell in Haryana into a full-fledged Department having three well-defined wings, viz. Archaeology, Archives and Museum. His contribution in ASI has also been very important towards the augmentation of different sections and branches of the department, besides his academic activities in most of the branches.

He had a vision for transforming the Institute of Archaeology of ASI into a world class institution that should be well equipped for training, research and field activities in all disciplines of archaeology and applied sciences and technology and as such was instrumental in purchasing 2.5 acres of land in Greater NOIDA so as to raise there an institute of international standard housing faculties of archaeobotany, archaeo-geology, archaeo-zoology, archaeo-metallurgy, archaeo-mineralogy, palaeo-climate, palaeo-environment, archaeo-astronomy, dating laboratories, GIS and many other routine disciplines of archaeology in addition to having a representative collection of all kinds of archaeological objects. Likewise, he has many ideas about restricting, etc. for ASI, too.

He has delivered lectures and presented his research in several national and international forums, universities, research institutions, colleges and schools, besides chairing academic sessions, delivering prestigious commemorative lectures. He delivered lectures at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Harvard University, Cambridge, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Loyola Mount University, Los Angeles, (all in U.S.A.), Kansai University, Kansai University, Osaka, Japan in addition to participating in international conferences organized by Musee Guimet, Paris, (France) on three occasion, Cambridge University, Cambridge, (U.K), University of Wisconsin, Madison (U.S.A.), Abdul Latif University, Khairpur (Pakistan). Also, delivered prestigious K.A. Nilakanta Sastry Memorial lecture at Madras University (Chennai), another such lecture at the Prince of Wales Museum, Mumbai. He was also given honour of giving the presidential address to the Archaeological Society of India conference at Tirupati, amongst a few.

To his credit are more than 60 lectures, address and seminar presentations and 30 research papers, including booklets, in addition to 2 co-edited volumes. His academic and official assignments have taken him to a number of countries such as France, U.K, Italy, U.S.A, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Pakistan and Oman. He has been member on several academic and technical committees.

Presently, he is a member of Panel of Experts for the JICA (earlier JBIC) project for Ajanta-Ellora Conservation and Tourism Committee; of Expert Advisory Committee for ASI, and an invited member for National Mission on Monuments & Antiquities. Earlier, he has served as a member of ICHR. He has also been member of Selection Committees, evaluation committees of universities and in research organizations, visiting faculty to the Institute of Archaeology, ASI.

Presently, Dr. R.S. Bisht has been unanimously elected as the President of the Society for Marine Archaeology. He has also been nominated by the Govt. of India in the Ministry of Culture as the Chairman of the National Screening and Evolution Committee. Dr. Bisht has been awarded in 2013 Padmashri by the President of India.

Dr. Bisht is best known for excavating and interpreting the internationally renowned Harappan site of Dholavira which has added many a hitherto unknown facet of Harappan Civilization. He is hailed for his work by the international scholars throughout the world. He has always been dynamic in action, pragmatic in approach, scientific in outlook, a dreamer and a doer and, overall, an astute and stern administrator of exemplary integrity.

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