

CHAPTER 8

GOING SHOPPING

ARTS AND CRAFTS IN THE INDUS VALLEY

“ TOY OXCART,
CARNELIAN BELT,
PRIEST KING
SCULPTURE, AND
SEAL IN PAKISTAN

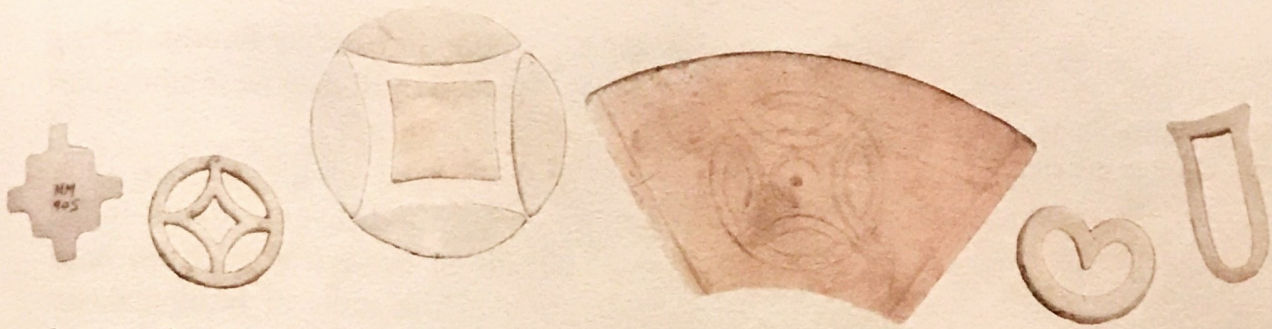
During the holidays, big cities like New York and London are even more crowded than usual. Why do people go to all the trouble and expense to travel to a big city? Because the stores are better. And because big cities are fun. They have theaters and museums and major-league sports. And even more activities than usual are going on during the holidays, like Thanksgiving and New Year's Day parades and holiday concerts and performances.

The weeks after the spring and fall harvests were probably a holiday for the people of the Indus Valley civilization. Farmers, fishermen, and herders gathered their goods and their families and made the long trip to the nearest city to sell their goods and thank the gods for the bounty of the harvest. Imagine the son of a farmer who is 12 or 13—old enough to bear the two-day walk to Harappa one autumn in about 2100 BCE. We'll call this boy Sarang. Sarang would have

“ Toy oxcart, Harappa,
Pakistan, 2600–1900 BCE



Kids in the Indus cities played with toys such as this terracotta oxcart. They also played with clay figures and pieces of miniature pottery.



begun the journey by helping to load the family's oxcart with the barley, wheat, and cotton that they had raised that year on their farm. He may have helped to harness the oxen that pulled the heavy load. He was probably wildly excited—and probably driven crazy by the oxen's slow pace through the wooded countryside and by the loud creaking of the cart.

If they lived too far away to make the journey in a single day, Sarang and his family would have set up camp with other travelers they had met along the way to help protect their goods from the bandits who hid in the forest. Eventually they would have emerged from the forest to see the walled city of Harappa in the distance, rising pale and beautiful above the plain.

If they arrived in the evening or early morning, they could have seen the fires of the coppersmiths and potters along the southern edge of the city. The wind blows from the north in Harappa. Limiting furnaces to the southern side of the city meant that their sparks would be blown away from the crowded city streets. As Sarang got closer to the city, he would have realized that the wind carried more than sparks. The leather dressers also worked on the edge of the city, and the stink of dead animals, which in some poor neighborhoods were left to rot on the street, must have been awful.

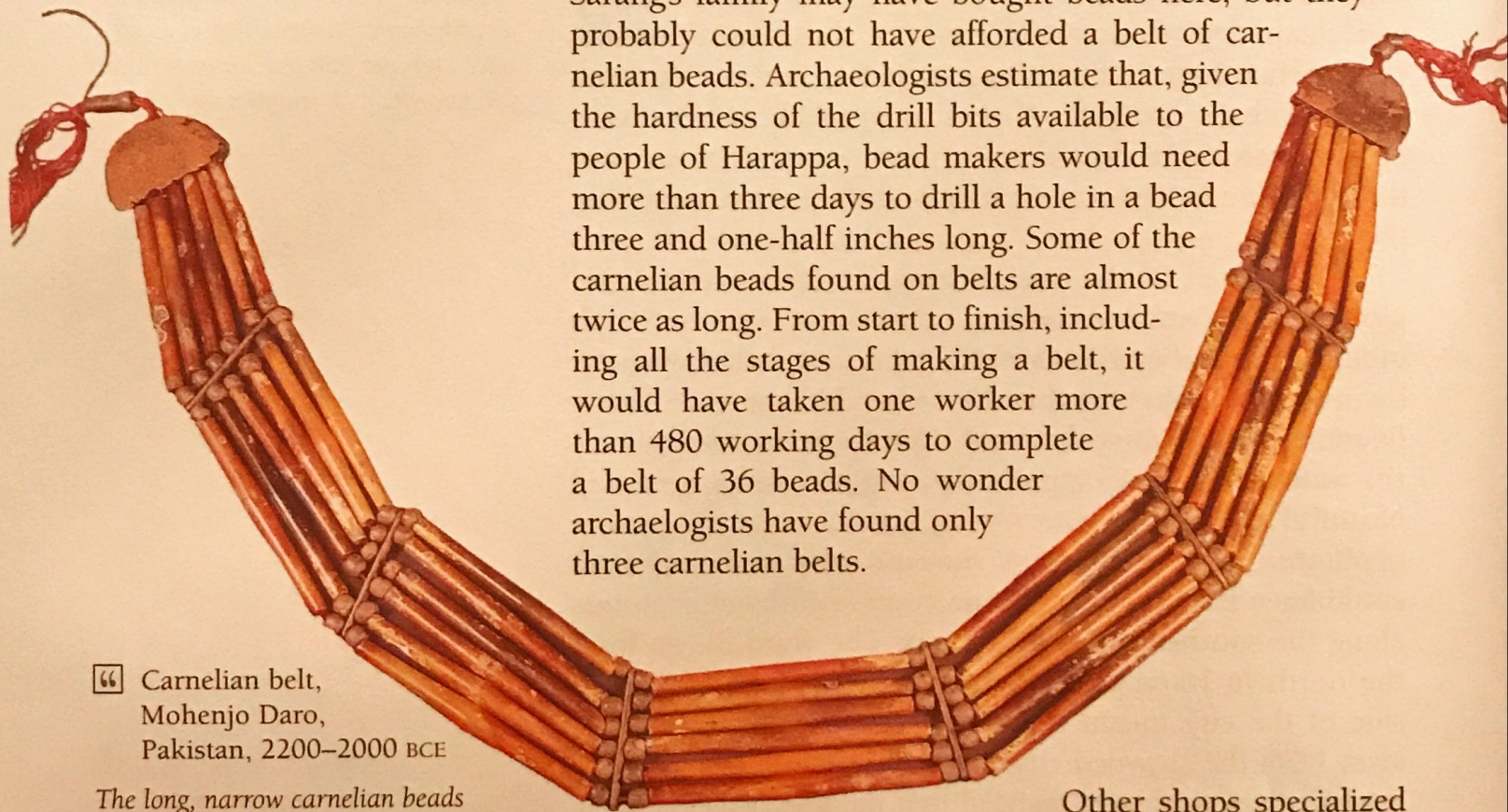
Once inside the city gates, the sights and sounds of the crowded market would most likely have overwhelmed a farm boy like Sarang. One part of the city specialized in wood carving and carpentry. Here his mother could have bought cedar chests to keep the family's clothing safe from moths and insects. Stonecutters, who made everything from drills to grinding stones to sharp stone blades, lived in

This white conch shell inlay, found in a workshop at Mohenjo Daro, could have been put into jewelry or furniture for decoration or religious symbolism.

Inlay is a decorative filling of a different color or material. }

another quarter. Sarang would have seen booths selling carved ivory ornaments, polished until they were smooth as butter, and **inlay** for wooden furniture.

Jewelers clustered at the center of the market, their workbenches glittering with gold and silver pendants inlaid with precious stones. Strings of beads carved from hard stones of every color hung in the stalls of bead makers. Sarang's family may have bought beads here, but they probably could not have afforded a belt of carnelian beads. Archaeologists estimate that, given the hardness of the drill bits available to the people of Harappa, bead makers would need more than three days to drill a hole in a bead three and one-half inches long. Some of the carnelian beads found on belts are almost twice as long. From start to finish, including all the stages of making a belt, it would have taken one worker more than 480 working days to complete a belt of 36 beads. No wonder archaeologists have found only three carnelian belts.



“ Carnelian belt,
Mohenjo Daro,
Pakistan, 2200–2000 BCE

The long, narrow carnelian beads of this elegant belt make a delicate clinking sound when it's worn around the waist. It would have been worn by a very wealthy and powerful woman.

Other shops specialized in the ceramic art of faience, their shelves stocked with beads and bangles as well as small bottles for perfume and medicines. Still others offered white soapstone beads and pendants, delicately fashioned inlay, and intricately carved and inscribed seals with geometric designs. At this same shop, merchants could have ordered inscribed seals with special animal designs that stood for their clan or religious beliefs.

Seals show a person who talks to tigers from a thorny tree. Other seals and figurines show mother goddesses; a bearded, horned god; or the ritual killing of a water buffalo.

This seal shows a god or goddess with three faces wearing bangles on both arms and a headdress made with horns and a branch. The figure sits on his or her heels, in yogic position, on a throne with feet in the shape of animal hooves.



Many of these scenes include a holy man sitting on his heels and meditating in the shade of the pipal, or sacred fig, tree. Archaeologists believe that communities of holy men practiced the discipline of *yoga* in sacred groves outside the city walls. Sarang's family may well have gone to visit these holy men to bring them offerings as part of the harvest festival.

Sarang's family certainly would have stopped in the potter's quarter to buy pots and small clay figurines for worship at the harvest festival. If Sarang had glanced into the courtyard behind any potter's shop, he might well have seen children at work.

Artisans' shops were attached to their homes and workshops, and their children would have helped with simple tasks, such as sweeping or fetching materials. Archaeologists have found that some of the flat clay disks that were used to cover pots have child-sized hand- and footprints pressed into



This stone sculpture from Mohenjo Daro, Pakistan, shows a bearded man seated with one knee raised and one knee tucked underneath him. One eye has a piece of shell inlay still in place.

Yoga = "union" in Sanskrit, or union with the Supreme Spirit. Yoga is a series of exercises designed to help people learn to concentrate. At first, people used it focus their attention on religious worship. Today, many people practice yoga to relax.

WHO ARE THE HINDUS?

Most people living in India today worship gods such as Krishna and the goddess Devi and make fire sacrifices. The beliefs and practices are grouped together under the general term Hinduism. This religious tradition has roots extending back into the Indus period around 2600–1900 BCE, where certain symbols, such as the swastika, which represents good luck and the pipal leaf design, which stands for fertility, were first used. Like most religious practices, Hindu ways of worship changed over time.

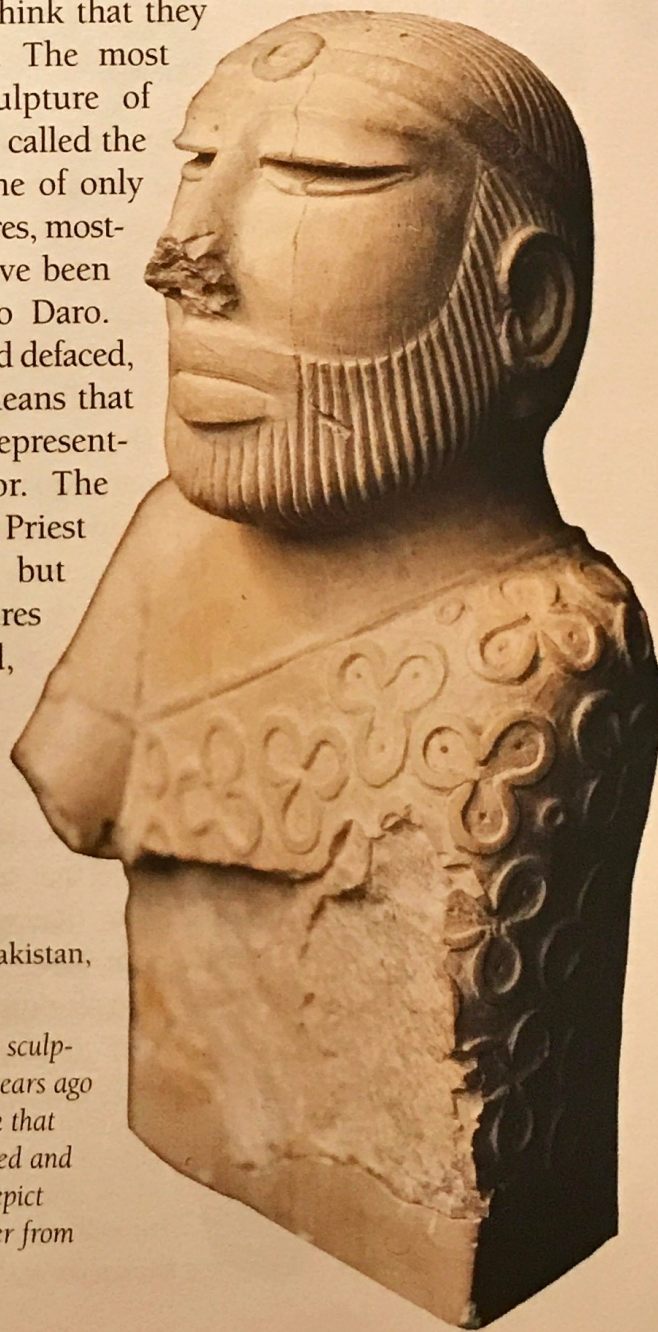
them. Bead makers' children, with their small hands and good eyesight, probably also helped string tiny beads.

Besides pots, potters made small figurines that were used as offerings to the gods. Even today, many Hindus use small clay or paper figures as part of their prayers and offerings to the gods. Could some of the gods and goddesses they worship have come from Harappan times? No one knows.

Harappan cities were orderly, well-organized places—were they possibly controlled by kings? One clue led some early scholars to think that they might have been. The most famous stone sculpture of the Indus valley is called the Priest King. It's one of only nine stone sculptures, mostly of men, that have been found at Mohenjo Daro. All were broken and defaced, which probably means that the people they represented had lost favor. The lower half of the Priest King is missing, but most stone sculptures with a preserved, lower portion are seated with one knee bent to the

“ Priest King,
Mohenjo Daro, Pakistan,
about 2000 BCE

This broken Priest-King sculpture from about 4,000 years ago wears a patterned cloak that was originally colored red and blue or green. It may depict an important clan leader from Mohenjo Daro.





On this seal, a kneeling bearded figure wearing a horned headdress worships a tree god. A worshipper has placed an offering of a person's head on a small stool. A horned mythical ram and seven worshippers complete the scene.

ground and the other raised. People sitting in this position are seen on many of the Indus seals worshipping a deity in a tree or a figure seated in a cross-legged yoga position. This suggests that the sculpture does not represent a priest-king, as its name suggests, but instead an important clan or community leader.

We know a lot about the objects Sarang and his family would have seen in the town, but many questions remain. What was the harvest festival like? Would Sarang and his family have seen dancing and heard singing? Were there plays about the gods? Or were the celebrations solemn, with fasting and prayer? We can only guess. But it's probably safe to say that Sarang would have thought that his trip to the city was one of the most exciting times of the year.

66 Seal, Mohenjo Daro, Pakistan, 2200–2000 BCE

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU

In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, wealthy people and royalty were buried with many of their most valuable possessions. In the Indus Valley, however, women were buried with just a few ornaments, such as shell bangles and sometimes a copper ring or a mirror or small amulet. In South Asia today, glass wedding bangles and personal good luck charms are seldom passed on to another person, but are broken, burned or buried with the dead. The ornaments included with Harappan burials were probably just such special objects that could not be passed on to the next generation. But most valuable items, such as seals, metal tools, and everyday jewelry were kept for living people to use.