

CUET · FINE ARTS · CLASS XI · CODE 312

# Arts of the Indus Valley

CUET unit: Indian Art (Pre-historic / Indus Valley sculpture, seals, pottery, terracotta)

By UniDrill · NCERT-grounded study material

[WWW.UNIDRILL.IN](http://WWW.UNIDRILL.IN)

UniDrill

## Snapshot

- The arts of the Indus/Harappan Civilisation (second half of the third millennium BCE) span sculpture (stone, bronze, terracotta), seals, pottery, beads, ornaments and textiles.
- Key artefacts CUET repeatedly tests: the **bearded priest** (soapstone, Mohenjodaro), the **male torso** (red sandstone, Harappa), the **Dancing Girl** (bronze/copper, Mohenjodaro), the **Pashupati seal** and the **Mother Goddess** terracotta.
- The **'lost-wax' bronze-casting technique** is a perennial CUET favourite.
- Key Indus sites: Harappa, Mohenjodaro (in Pakistan); Lothal, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, Ropar, Kalibangan, Chanhudaro, Daimabad, Farmana (in India / Subcontinent) — site-to-artefact matching questions appear regularly.
- Highlights material vocabulary (steatite, carnelian, faience, lapis lazuli, cinnabar) which feeds match-the-following type questions.
- Provides the technical lexicon — intaglio carving, burin engraving, knobbed ware, perforated pottery, polychrome ware — that re-appears in later chapters on Mauryan and Sunga art.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

The second chapter of NCERT Class XI Fine Arts moves from the rock-shelter art of the prehistoric period into the first fully urban civilisation of the subcontinent — the Indus or Harappan Civilisation. NCERT opens by dating these arts to the second half of the third millennium BCE and emphasising that the Harappans produced sculptures, seals, pottery, jewellery and terracotta figures with a realistic delineation of human and animal anatomy (NCERT §Intro, p. 9). This insistence on "realistic delineation" is crucial: it contrasts the stylised stick-figures of Bhimbetka with the volume, modelling and anatomical confidence of Harappan stone and bronze, and explains why CUET examiners constantly use the words "naturalistic" and "modelled" for Harappan figures.

Geographically, NCERT names the twin major sites along the Indus river — Harappa in the north and Mohenjodaro in the south, both now in Pakistan — and then lists the principal Indian-subcontinent sites: Lothal and Dholavira in Gujarat, Rakhigarhi in Haryana, Ropar in Punjab, Kalibangan in Rajasthan, with Chanhudaro, Daimabad and

Farmana appearing as specialised production or burial centres (NCERT §Intro, p. 9). This geographic catalogue is the basis of the site-to-artefact match-the-following questions that CUET sets every year.

Stone sculpture is taken up first. NCERT analyses two iconic male figures. The red sandstone male torso from Harappa is a frontally posed work with socket holes drilled into the neck and shoulders for attaching a separate head and arms; the shoulders are well baked, and the abdomen is slightly prominent — both features signalling a sophisticated understanding of the human body in three dimensions (NCERT §Male Torso, p. 17). The second figure is the soapstone bust of a bearded man from Mohenjodaro, popularly interpreted as a priest. He is draped in a shawl decorated with trefoil patterns; his eyes are half-closed in a meditative gaze; the ears are rendered like double shells; the hair is parted in the middle and held by a plain woven fillet; an armlet is shown on the right hand. NCERT specifies the trefoil pattern as the diagnostic feature — a three-lobed motif that CUET repeatedly tests in single-line factual questions (NCERT §Stone Statues, pp. 9–10).

The bronze section is structured around a single technique — the lost-wax method — and a small cluster of finds. NCERT explains the technique step by step: a wax figure is first prepared and then covered with a coating of clay, which is allowed to dry; the clay-cased model is heated and the molten wax drained out through a tiny hole; molten metal is then poured into the hollow mould; once the metal cools, the clay cover is broken off (NCERT §Bronze Casting, p. 10). Because the wax model is "lost" in the process, the technique is known as *cire perdue* or lost-wax. CUET examiners often present these four steps in scrambled order and ask candidates to reassemble them. NCERT stresses that the technique was practised on a wide scale, which is why bronze art is found from Mohenjodaro in the west to Daimabad in Maharashtra.

The most famous Harappan bronze is the so-called Dancing Girl, a roughly four-inch-high copper figure cast in bronze, recovered from Mohenjodaro. She wears stacked bangles on her left arm, a bracelet and amulet on the right arm, and a cowry-shell necklace; her right hand rests on her hip and her left hand is clasped in a traditional Indian dance gesture (NCERT §Dancing Girl, p. 16). A bronze bull from Mohenjodaro captures the massiveness and fury of the charge, with the head turned right and a cord around its neck (NCERT §Bull, p. 16). Other named bronze and copper finds include a copper dog and bird from Lothal, a separate bronze bull from Kalibangan, and the late-Harappan or Chalcolithic metal-cast sculptures from Daimabad in Maharashtra, which demonstrate the continuity of Indus figure-sculpture into later regional cultures (NCERT §Bronze Casting, pp. 10–11).

Terracotta is the third sculptural medium. Terracotta human figures from the Indus Valley are crude compared with the stone and bronze pieces, but that they are more realistic at the Gujarat sites and at Kalibangan — a regional distinction that recurs as a single-line test item (NCERT §Terracotta, p. 11). The most important terracotta is the Mother Goddess: crude standing female figures wearing necklaces over prominent breasts, with a loin cloth and girdle; the diagnostic feature is the fan-shaped head-dress

with a cup-like projection on each side, paired with pellet eyes, a beaked nose and a slit mouth (NCERT §Mother Goddess, p. 17). Also found are a terracotta mask of a horned deity, rigidly upright bearded male figurines that may represent deities, and a wide range of toys — carts, whistles, rattles, birds, animals, gamesmen and discs — showing that terracotta served both ritual and play.

Seals are the most famous and most numerous Harappan artefacts. Thousands of seals have been recovered, mostly of steatite, occasionally of agate, chert, copper, faience, terracotta and ivory. The standard size is two inches by two inches (square), and the figures and animals are carved in intaglio — that is, cut into the surface so that an impression in clay would yield a raised image (NCERT §Seals, pp. 11–12). The script accompanying these images is pictographic and remains undeciphered. The seals served chiefly as commercial markers — used to seal bales of goods — but some doubled as amulets or identity cards. NCERT gives extended attention to one famous example: the so-called Pashupati seal from Mohenjodaro (c. 2500–1900 BCE), which shows a cross-legged human figure flanked by an elephant and a tiger on the right, a rhinoceros and a buffalo on the left, with two antelopes below the seat (NCERT §Seals, p. 12). The exact arrangement of these animals is one of the most frequently tested CUET facts. Copper tablets — square or rectangular — bear an animal or human figure on one side and an inscription on the other, carefully cut with an engraving tool called a burin, probably used as amulets.

The pottery section emphasises that Harappan pottery is chiefly fine wheel-made ware, with plain pottery (red clay, sometimes finished with a red or grey slip, and including the distinctive knobbed ware) outnumbering painted pottery (NCERT §Pottery, p. 13). Black-painted ware carries geometric and animal designs on a red slip. Polychrome pottery is rare, consisting of small vases with red, black and green (and very rarely white or yellow) geometric patterns. Incised ware is restricted to the bases of pans and offering stands, and perforated pottery — a vessel with a large central hole and many smaller wall holes — was almost certainly used for straining beverages, possibly an early form of beer or fermented milk. A single named example stands out: the painted earthen jar from Mohenjodaro, which was wheel-thrown, baked, painted black and then highly polished, with motifs that are predominantly vegetal and geometric and tend toward abstraction (NCERT §Painted Earthen Jar, p. 17).

Beads, ornaments and textiles complete the picture. Beads were made from carnelian, amethyst, jasper, crystal, quartz, steatite, turquoise and lapis lazuli, as well as from copper, bronze, gold, shell, faience and terracotta; shapes range across disc, cylindrical, spherical, barrel and segmented. Bead factories operated at Chanhudaro and Lothal, and a cemetery at Farmana in Haryana yielded bodies buried with ornaments (NCERT §Beads and Ornaments, pp. 13–14). Necklaces, fillets, armlets and finger-rings were worn by both sexes; women additionally wore girdles, earrings and anklets. Cosmetic practice included the use of cinnabar as face paint, lipstick and collyrium as eyeliner. The discovery of spindles and spindle whorls in faience, pottery and shell proves that both cotton and wool were being spun; the standard dress was a dhoti and a shawl (the

shawl draped over the left shoulder and passing below the right). The stone structural remains at Dholavira are evidence of architectural stone-use (NCERT §Beads and Ornaments, p. 15).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Lost-wax technique	Bronze-casting method: wax model → clay coating → wax drained through a hole → molten metal poured into the hollow mould → clay removed	10
Trefoil pattern	Three-lobed motif decorating the shawl of the bearded priest (Mohenjodaro soapstone bust)	9
Intaglio	Carving technique in which the design is cut into the surface; used on Harappan seals	12
Burin	Engraving tool used to carefully cut figures and signs on copper tablets	12
Steatite	Soft soapstone — material of the bearded priest bust and of the standard Harappan seal	9, 11
Soapstone	Common name for steatite	9
Knobbed ware	Plain Harappan pottery ornamented with rows of knobs	13
Perforated pottery	Pot with a large central hole and small wall holes, probably used for straining beverages	13
Polychrome pottery	Rare red-black-green (and rarely white/yellow) Harappan ware	13
Incised ware	Pottery decorated by cutting designs into the surface; restricted to bases of pans	13
Faience	Glazed material used for spindle whorls, pendants, buttons and beads	13, 14
Cinnabar	Red pigment used as cosmetic / face paint by the Harappans	15
Collyrium	Eye-liner known to the Indus Valley people	15
Carnelian	Reddish stone used for Harappan beads	13
Lapis lazuli	Blue stone used for Harappan beads	13
Pashupati seal	Mohenjodaro seal showing a cross-legged figure flanked by elephant, tiger, rhinoceros, buffalo, with two antelopes below	12
Fan-shaped head-dress	Distinctive crown with cup-like projections, identifying Indus Mother-Goddess terracottas	17
Mother Goddess	Crude standing female terracotta with prominent breasts and fan-shaped head-dress	17
Dancing Girl	~4-inch copper-bronze figure from Mohenjodaro in a dance gesture	16

Term	Definition	Page
Bearded Priest	Soapstone bust from Mohenjodaro with trefoil-patterned shawl	9
Male Torso	Red sandstone Harappa figure with socket holes for head and arms	17
Daimabad	Late-Harappan/Chalcolithic site in Maharashtra with metal-cast sculptures	11
Chanhudaro	Indus bead-factory site	13
Lothal	Indus port-town with copper dog/bird and bead factory	11, 13
Farmana	Haryana site with cemetery containing ornament-clad bodies	14

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Candidates should be able to identify each of the named Harappan masterpieces at sight, since CUET image-MCQs reliably draw from NCERT plates. The bust of the bearded priest (soapstone, Mohenjodaro) is recognised by its trefoil-patterned shawl draped over the left shoulder, the half-closed meditative eyes, the woven fillet across the forehead and the armband on the right hand (p. 9). The red sandstone male torso from Harappa is recognised by the socket holes in the neck and shoulders, the frontal posture, and the slightly prominent abdomen (p. 17). The Dancing Girl is recognised by the stacked bangles up the left arm, the cowry-shell necklace, the right hand on the hip and the slightly tilted head (p. 16). The bronze bull is recognised by the turned-right head and the cord around the neck (p. 16). The Mother Goddess is recognised by the fan-shaped head-dress with cup-like projections at each side (p. 17).

The lost-wax casting process is best memorised in four crisp steps, since CUET examiners almost always present these scrambled: (1) prepare a wax figure of the desired shape; (2) coat the wax model with clay and allow it to dry; (3) heat the clay-cased model so that the molten wax drains out through a small hole, leaving a hollow mould; (4) pour molten metal into the mould; once cool, break away the clay shell to reveal the cast figure. The Pashupati seal layout is best memorised as a compass: central seated cross-legged figure → right side elephant + tiger → left side rhinoceros + buffalo → below the seat two antelopes. The standard Harappan seal is a 2 × 2 inch steatite square with intaglio animal carving and pictographic script. Painted earthen jar from Mohenjodaro: wheel-thrown, baked, then black-painted and polished, with vegetal-geometric abstraction.

### 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Material of the bearded priest vs the male torso: priest = soapstone (Mohenjodaro); torso = red sandstone (Harappa). NTA loves to swap these.
- The Dancing Girl is a copper figure cast in bronze (~4 inches high) from Mohenjodaro — not Harappa. The bull bronze is also from Mohenjodaro, while the

bronze bull from Kalibangan and the copper dog and bird from Lothal are separate finds.

- Pashupati-seal animals: elephant + tiger on the RIGHT, rhinoceros + buffalo on the LEFT, two antelopes BELOW the seat. Distractors shuffle the sides or swap antelope for deer/goat or place them above the head.
- The standard seal size is 2 × 2 square inches and the chief material is steatite — not terracotta or faience.
- Bead factories: Chanhudaro and Lothal. Cemetery with ornaments: Farmana (Haryana). Stone structural remains: Dholavira. Site-to-feature pairing is a frequent trap.
- Terracotta human figures are crude overall but more realistic at Gujarat sites and Kalibangan — not at Harappa or Mohenjodaro.
- Perforated pottery had ONE large central hole + many small wall holes, used for straining. NTA distractors describe it as a "sieve with many large holes."
- The Harappan script is pictographic and undeciphered; do not be tricked into "Brahmi" or "Kharosthi" options.
- The lost-wax technique is also called *cire perdue* (French) but NCERT uses "lost-wax." Stick to the NCERT wording.
- Cinnabar is a red cosmetic pigment, not a green dye.
- The painted earthen jar is from Mohenjodaro, not Harappa.
- The shawl on the bearded priest covers the left shoulder, passing below the right — NTA may invert.

## 2.5 Key artworks / artists

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Bearded Priest bust	c. 2500–1900 BCE, Mohenjodaro	Soapstone, trefoil-patterned shawl, meditative eyes	9
Male Torso	Harappan, Harappa	Red sandstone, socket holes for head/arms	17
Dancing Girl	Harappan, Mohenjodaro	~4-inch bronze, traditional dance gesture	16
Bronze Bull, Mohenjodaro	Harappan	Charging bull with cord around neck	16
Copper Dog and Bird	Harappan, Lothal	Small lost-wax bronzes	11
Bronze Bull, Kalibangan	Harappan	Separate cast piece	11
Daimabad bronzes	Late Harappan / Chalcolithic, Maharashtra	Metal-cast sculptures showing continuity	11

Artwork or Artist	Period	Significance	NCERT page
Mother Goddess terracotta	Harappan	Fan-shaped head-dress, pellet eyes	17
Horned-deity terracotta mask	Harappan	Ritual mask	11
Bearded male terracotta figurines	Harappan	Rigidly upright, possibly deities	11
Pashupati Seal	c. 2500–1900 BCE, Mohenjodaro	Cross-legged figure with four animals + antelopes	12
Unicorn seals	Harappan	Standard 2x2 in. steatite squares	12
Copper tablets	Harappan	Burin-cut figure + inscription, amulets	12
Painted Earthen Jar	Harappan, Mohenjodaro	Wheel-made, black-painted, polished, vegetal motifs	17
Knobbed ware	Harappan	Plain pottery with rows of knobs	13
Perforated pottery	Harappan	Straining vessel	13
Polychrome vases	Harappan	Rare red-black-green ware	13
Carnelian beads	Harappan, Chanhudaro / Lothal	Bead-factory product	13
Lapis lazuli beads	Harappan	Imported blue-stone luxury beads	13
Spindle whorls	Harappan	Evidence of cotton and wool spinning	15

## Practice MCQs

## PYQ Alignment

This chapter is one of the most frequently tested in CUET Fine Arts (Domain 312); virtually every recent paper carries 4–6 MCQs from it. Typical question types include site-to-artefact matching (Lothal/Kalibangan/Daimabad/Mohenjodaro), material identification (soapstone, red sandstone, steatite, faience), the ordered steps of the lost-wax technique, identification of the Pashupati-seal animals, and one-line descriptors of named pieces (Dancing Girl, Mother Goddess, Bearded Priest, Male Torso, Painted Earthen Jar). CUET



2023 carried a four-step lost-wax sequencing question; CUET 2024 set an Assertion-Reason on standard seal dimensions; CUET 2025 used a Pashupati-seal animal arrangement question. Candidates should also be ready for terminology MCQs on intaglio, burin, knobbed ware and perforated pottery.

