

Origins

The people to whom these ruined sites belonged, lacking posts, these many settlements, widely distributed, they, O Agni, having been expelled by thee, have migrated to another land.

Taittiriya Brahmana (2.4.6.8)

The most widely known period in South Asian prehistory is the “Indus Age”—a term that encompasses settled life in Pakistan and north-western India from incipient agricultural production after 7000 B.C. to the beginning of the Iron Age about 1000 B.C. (Possehl 2002). The term “Indus civilization” refers to a time during the latter half of the third millennium (2400–1900 B.C.) when Indus sites went through a “mature” phase, best represented by the archaeological record at large urban centers such as Harappa, Mohenjo Daro, Lothal, and Kalibangan (see the Harappa web site at <http://www.harappa.com/> for more information). Trade goods, technology, seals, symbols, systems, and ideas were shared by more than a thousand settlements along the banks of the Indus River system—from the seven rivers that made up its headwaters to its fertile deltas on the Arabian Sea (Fig. 1.1).

The mature phase of the Indus civilization ended circa 1900 B.C., and the succeeding post-urban phase lasted for most of the second millennium (1900–1000 B.C.) in northwest India and Pakistan. The post-urban phase was characterized by significant decentralization of the core Indus territory. Many of the large population centers were abandoned and an increasing number of small villages and encampments proliferated at the margins of Indus territory and beyond, to the western end of the Ganges-Jumna doab, southern Gujarat, and south into peninsular India. In the Ganges-Jumna region alone, the number of settlements increased from 218 during the mature Harappan to 853 in the post-urban phase (Possehl

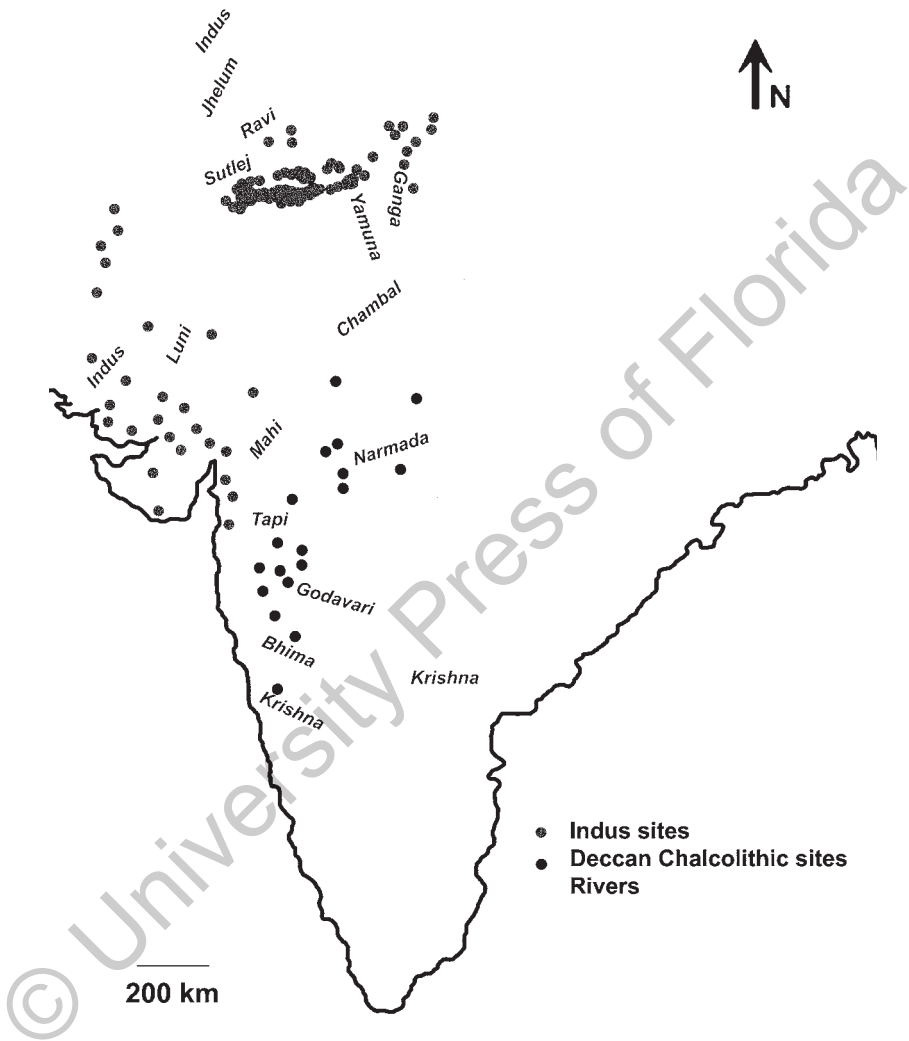


Figure 1.1. Map of archaeological sites in the Indus Age and the Deccan Chalcolithic.

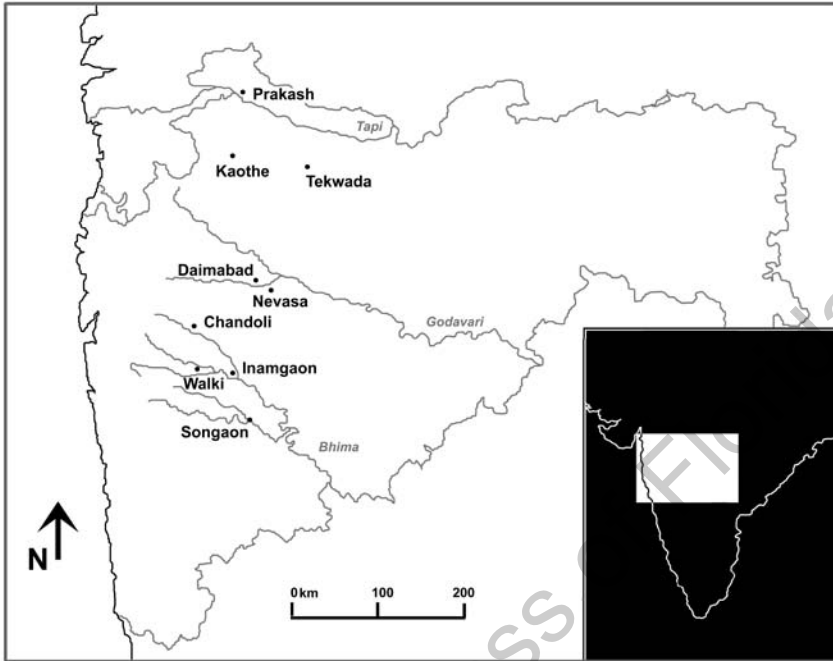


Figure 1.2. Map of Chalcolithic sites in Maharashtra during the second millennium B.C.

2002). The average size of these settlements declined from 13.5 hectares (ha) to 3.6 ha during the post-urban phase.

During the second millennium B.C. agricultural villages also dotted the landscape of Maharashtra (Fig. 1.2). These ‘Copper and Stone Age’ villages of west-central peninsular India are collectively referred to by the culture history term “Deccan Chalcolithic.” Based primarily on ceramic typology, this period is divided into four major phases: the Savalda (2200–1800 B.C.), Late Harappan (1800–1600 B.C.), Malwa (1600–1400 B.C.), and Jorwe (1400–700 B.C.). It was during the Savalda (2000–1800 B.C.) that the first Deccan Chalcolithic settlements appear in northern Maharashtra, in the Tapi and Pravara river valleys. The majority of these villages were small, covering about 1 ha of land, and population size in an average village was approximately 100 to 200 people¹ (Dhavalikar 1988). During this time, Deccan Chalcolithic people built round or rectangular mud and mud-brick houses. They practiced a diverse subsistence economy based on hunting, fishing, foraging, stock raising, and subsistence agriculture

(Dhavalikar 1988; Dhavalikar, Sankalia, and Ansari 1988; Shinde 2002). They had well-built ceramics and copper technology, although the use of copper was sporadic, perhaps due to the scarcity of raw materials in this area.

There were about 50 Deccan Chalcolithic settlements in northern Maharashtra by the beginning of the Late Harappan phase (1800–1600 B.C.). A brick-lined burial chamber, bronze figures, and carved inscriptions at Daimabad resembling Harappan seals are evidence that some of these villages maintained contact with Indus trade networks during this time (Sali 1986). Significant population expansion began during the subsequent Malwa phase (1600–1400 B.C.), and the site of Daimabad soon became a regional center within the Pravara River valley. Archaeologists have speculated that population growth was the impetus for Chalcolithic people to incorporate more agricultural production into their lifestyle during the subsequent Jorwe phase (Dhavalikar 1988).

At present, the origin of Deccan Chalcolithic people and their connection to the Harappans remains unclear. The Indus Origin hypothesis suggests that Indus people resettled in central India after the breakup of the Indus civilization, founding villages in what became known as the Malwa and Ahar cultures. Subsequently, through progressive moves southward roughly every 200 years, they eventually colonized Maharashtra (Shinde 1990). Geography, settlement pattern, radiocarbon dates, and some of the structural features at villages assigned to the Malwa culture provide some support for the hypothesis that the Deccan Chalcolithic region was at least in contact with post-urban Indus people. The Malwa region lies east of the Banas Valley and the Aravalli Hills, and south-west of the Ganges-Jumna doab, in an intermediate zone between northwest India and the peninsula. Furthermore, radiocarbon dates suggest some of the settlements were contemporaneous with the post-urban phase of the Indus Age, from 1865–1365 B.C. (Possehl and Rissman 1992). Chalcolithic villages share features with Indus Age settlements, for example, Navdatoli (Sankalia, Deo and Ansari 1971), Nagda (IAR 1956), and Eran (IAR 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1988) were located on the tributaries of major rivers, the Narmada and Chambal. Navdatoli had a twin village settlement pattern, a feature common to Indus villages (Sankalia, Deo, and Ansari 1971). Similarly, Nagda was a well-planned, organized settlement constructed of mud bricks, resembling standardized brick sizes found at Indus villages (Banerjee, 1986). Ramparts constructed at Nagda and Eran

to contain flooding also resemble architectural features common at Indus villages (Dhavalikar 1997), although this feature could be coincidental.

However, radiocarbon dates at Chalcolithic sites in Madhya Pradesh indicate the situation was more complex than the Indus Origins hypothesis suggests. For example, the village of Kayatha shared similarities in artifact styles with Malwa and Ahar material culture and the early, pre-urban Indus village at Kalibangan (Dhavalikar 1997). However, radiocarbon dates demonstrate Kayatha was founded at the height of the Indus civilization, around 2400 B.C., and was abandoned around 2000 B.C. indicating that Indus influences in central Indian villages are not entirely explained by settlement of post-urban Indus refugees (Dhavalikar 1997).

Similarly, radiocarbon dates from villages ascribed to the Ahar culture of Rajasthan revised ideas about the relationship among Ahar, Indus, and Deccan Chalcolithic villages. The Ahar culture of Rajasthan includes more than 100 sites spread over 32,000 km² between 24 and 27 degrees north latitude and 73 to 76 degrees east longitude in the contemporary state of Rajasthan (Hooja 1988), a geographic location between Indus and Deccan Chalcolithic territory. The village of Balathal (24°43' N, 73°59' E) in Rajasthan demonstrates affinities with Indus traditions in the layout of the settlement, construction methods used to build a large stone enclosure at the village, and in ceramic styles (Misra 1997). This village also possesses some defining characteristics of Deccan Chalcolithic culture, such as some similarities in burial traditions; wheel-thrown, decorated ceramics; specialized blade/flake industry; subsistence based on farming, stock raising, and limited hunting; and rectangular houses (Shinde 2000; Robbins et al. 2009). Yet radiocarbon dates from Balathal indicate that sedentary village life in the Copper and Stone Age of Rajasthan had its own indigenous development circa 3400 B.C., contemporaneous with the early Kot Diji phase of the Indus civilization, long before the post-urban phase (Misra 2005). This settlement was occupied until 2000 B.C., after the founding of the first Deccan Chalcolithic villages.

Thus the origin of the Deccan Chalcolithic and the relationships among Indus, Malwa, Kayatha, Ahar, and Deccan Chalcolithic traditions remain uncertain. It seems likely that individual villages in these regions had different relationships with one another and that the relationships were dynamic, changing over the centuries. Many Deccan Chalcolithic traditions may have been a product of indigenous development and culture contact. Material culture of the earliest Savalda villages in the Tapi Valley