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A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE RELIGION OF THE INDUS CIVILIZATION

Forty-three years ago the shape of Indic studies was radically altered by the discovery of the Indus civilization.[1] On the basis of certain finds from Mohenjo-daro, Sir John Marshall asserted that mother-goddess worship in India and the cult of Śiva could be traced back to pre-Vedic, non-Āryan beginnings.[2]

Marshall's interpretation of the religion of the Harappā culture has been accepted almost universally and has greatly influenced scholarly understanding of the historical development of Hinduism. We feel compelled, however, to question whether the archaeological evidence fully supports all of Marshall's hypotheses and whether there might not be other equally, or even more, plausible interpretations of some of the finds. We do not intend to offer a whole new interpretation of Harappan religion, for this would involve a comprehensive examination of all aspects of the

[1] Among the important accounts of Indus archaeology are the following: D. H. Gordon, *The Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture* (Bombay, 1958); Sir John Marshall (ed.), *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization* (2 vols.; London, 1931); Ernest Mackay, *Chanhu-daro Excavations, 1935–1936* ("American Oriental Series," Vol. XX [New Haven, 1943]), *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro* (2 vols.; Delhi, 1938), *Early Indus Civilization* (London, 1948); S. Piggott, *Prehistoric India* ("Penguin Series" [Harmondsworth, 1950]); M. S. Vats, *Excavations at Harappā* (Delhi, 1940); Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Civilization* ("Supplement to the *Cambridge History of India*" [Cambridge, 1960]).

[2] Marshall, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, chap. v.

culture—a task far beyond the limited one of this discussion. Rather we wish only to re-examine the important material symbols upon which Marshall based his hypotheses and to reconsider his interpretations of these symbols.

Any interpretation of the Harappan religion is immediately beset by grave difficulties which render it completely hypothetical. First, there is the fact that of the variety of archaeological finds from Harappan sites there are few items, if any, which have an obviously or unquestionably religious significance. For example, there is no unambiguous evidence for the existence of a temple or religious shrine in the Indus cities. There may have been such buildings, but on the basis of the archaeological remains we cannot clearly recognize any.[3] As for possible cult objects, we encounter, as Wheeler reminds us, "the notorious incapacity of material symbols to represent the true content and affinity of a religion or belief," as well as "the indivisibility of religious and secular concepts in ancient times." Wheeler continues:

> Thus on the one hand the symbol of a mother and child may range through a whole gamut of ideas from the simplest physical to the most transcendentally metaphysical; and on the other a "king" may combine the virtues of a god with those of a priest and the presidency of a senate.[4]

Moreover, the fact that we are still unable to read the Indus script[5] is a serious obstacle to a complete understanding of the finds, especially the seals and tablets on which the script appears.

With these difficulties in mind we may re-examine the evidence for Marshall's hypotheses regarding the Indus religion. Firstly there are a number of terra-cotta figurines of a standing female who, except for a girdle of beads or cloth around her loins and often necklaces or collars of beads and medallions, is nude.[6] Nearly all the figurines also have fan-shaped headdresses sometimes with pannier-like projections which might have served as lamps or incense burners. Marshall regarded these figures as representations of the Great Mother Goddess who was absorbed into

[3] Wheeler, *op. cit.*, pp. 40 ff., conjectures that "House Al" in Mohenjo-daro may have been a temple. Likewise it is very possible that the "Great Bath" at Mohenjo-daro may have been a religious shrine, but on the other hand we presently have no way of certifying that either had religious significance.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[5] Our own efforts with the script lead us to agree with Wheeler (*ibid.*, p. 87, n. 3) that the several published attempts at decipherment are invalid. As Wheeler points out there will probably be no true decipherment until there is found either a bilingual inscription employing a known script or an inscription much longer than the longest yet discovered of seventeen signs.

[6] Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. XCIV:1, 5, 14; Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II,

the Āryan religion and transformed into the figure of Śakti and whose worship is seen today in the cults of the village goddesses or *Grāmadevatās*.

In support of this supposition Marshall cited an oblong seal from Harappā[7] depicting a nude female upside down with legs apart and a plant or tree growing from her vulva.[8] The intention of this scene would seem to be that of showing the production of vegetation from the womb of Mother Earth.[9] On the reverse side of the seal a nude woman is shown seated on the ground with her arms uplifted in what Marshall takes as an attitude of supplication. Before her stands a man (?) with a sickle-like knife in one hand and perhaps a bowl in the other. Marshall interpreted this as a scene of human sacrifice to the goddess depicted on the seal's other side.[10]

Marshall's supposition that a goddess of fertility and vegetation was worshiped in the Indus is further supported, we feel, by a number of seals depicting the manifestation of a tree divinity. One such seal from Mohenjo-daro[11] shows an apparently female deity, wearing a pigtail and a three-pointed headdress (composed of two horns and a center projection), standing in the midst of a pipal tree. Before her is a half-kneeling suppliant wearing a similar headdress and pigtail and accompanied by a goat (?). There are bangles on the arms of both the goddess and the suppliant. On the lower portion of the seal are seven female ministrants or votaries wearing tunics, pigtails, and, projecting from the top of their heads, what appear to be small branches.[12] In this and similar seal depictions we undoubtedly have an epiphany of the Great Goddess

Pls. LXXIII:6; LXXV:1, 6, 17, 21.

[7] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, p. 52, and Pl. XII:12.

[8] Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 86, suggests that rather than a tree it could be a scorpion or even a crocodile, but to us this seems very unlikely.

[9] There are on this side of the seal two animal "genii" (probably tigers), attendants of the goddess. Jean Przyluski, *La Grande déesse* (Paris, 1950), p. 116, sees in this seal "la plus ancienne représentation indienne de la Maîtresse des fauves." Whether or not the seal depicts the "Mistress of the Beasts," we shall later consider the Indus goddess in this role.

[10] Considering what is known of the worship of vegetation-fertility goddesses elsewhere, this is a reasonable assumption (see, e.g., Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* [London, 1958], pp. 341 ff.; and Przyluski, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–31, 105–6). A point of contact between the Indus goddess and the cult of the non-Āryan village goddesses (*Grāmadevatās*) is perhaps seen here, for blood sacrifice—now of animals but formerly of humans—to the village goddesses is of fundamental importance. On the *Grāmadevatās* and their worship see H. Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (London, 1921); W. T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1915); W. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Oxford, 1926); M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford, 1952).

[11] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, Pl. XII:18.

[12] Mackay, *Further Excavations*, I, 338, makes the very probable suggestion that the suppliant in this scene is "a goddess also, but one of lower degree than

in her sacred tree, the universal symbol of life and inexhaustible fertility.[13] The numerous seal depictions of trees—especially the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*)—by themselves[14] but more especially in association with divine beings (including the Goddess)[15] reinforces the impression that the tree was important in the Harappan cult as a symbol of the Great Goddess and that her worship was conducted at a tree shrine.[16]

We shall have occasion throughout the balance of this discussion to cite other evidence which we believe supports the supposition that worship of the Great Mother existed in the Indus civilization. Now, however, let us consider the evidence for the presence of Śiva or his prototype

Marshall's case for the Harappan prototype of Śiva was built largely upon a single seal.[17] This seal depicts a figure (whom Marshall saw as three-faced) seated somewhat cross-legged upon a throne or low platform. The figure's head is crowned with a three-pointed headdress of two horns and a central fan-shaped structure; and its arms, covered with bangles, are outstretched with the hands resting upon the bent knees. Around the neck and completely covering the chest are a series of triangular necklaces

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the one in the tree," and that "the seven figures below may be deities of lesser rank, or even the daughters of the principle deity." One is reminded of the goddess Sītala and her six sisters, the seven Canarese Māri goddesses, the seven Rānimārs or virgins of Tamil worship, and other representations of seven goddesses in the non-Āryan village cults today (see Whitehead, *op. cit.*, pp. 98 ff., and Elmore, *op. cit.*, chap. iii). However, perhaps not much should be made of the number seven here as this scene is repeated on another seal with six rather than seven "ministrants" (Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. CXVIII:7).

[13] For the rich associations of the tree and the Great Goddess see Eliade, *op. cit.*, esp. chap. vii and Przyluski, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–90.

[14] E.g., Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, Pl. XII; 16, 20, 21, 25, 26,

[15] E.g., *ibid.*, I, Pl. XIII:17; Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pls. LXXXII:1; XC:23.

[16] In the cult of the *Grāmadevatās* today the shrine usually consists of no more than some stones (often images of the female organ, *yoni*) or an altar-like slab of rough stone placed either at the foot of or in the general vicinity of trees. The importance of the trees as symbols of the power and presence of the Mother Goddess is stressed by the fact that they may never be cut, no matter how great the need for wood (see Whitehead, *op. cit.*). It is possible that the stone vulvas or "ring-stones," as well as other baetylic stones found in the Harappan sites were originally part of sacred tree shrines of the Indus Goddess as they are in the *Grāmadevatā* cult.

[17] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, Pl. XII:17. Since Marshall advanced his hypothesis two other seals (Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. LXXXVII:222, 235) have been found which are very similar to the "proto-Śiva" seal and have been taken by Mackay (*ibid.*, I, 335) and Wheeler (*op. cit.*, p. 85) to be further representations of that deity. These two depictions differ from the first in certain particulars which will be noted in the course of our discussion. There is another seal (Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pls. CXVI:29; CXVIII:11) showing a figure seated cross-legged on a platform with a serpent and worshiper to either side. But the seal is so badly worn that it is impossible to distinguish any features of the figure.

or torques, and around the waist is a band beneath which there seems to be an erect phallus. Surrounding the figure are animals: an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and a buffalo.

Briefly stated, Marshall's reasons for identifying this figure as Śiva or his prototype were: (1) the Indus "deity" is depicted as three-faced as Śiva himself has been in classical Indian art; (2) the yoga-like attitude of the Indus deity reminds us of Śiva's reputation as *Mahāyogī*, the great yogin and king of ascetics; (3) the company of wild animals around the Indus figure suggests Śiva's role as *paśupati*—"Lord of the Beasts"; and (4) the horns and headdress of the Indus figure are probably not only a sign of divinity but also the source of the later Śiva's important emblem, the *triśūla* or trident.

That the figure is a deity may be supposed from the headdress of horns—commonly a sign of divinity in archaic religions.[18] But is it a male deity? The headdress itself is like that worn by the Great Goddess in her tree epiphanies. Moreover what appears to be an erect phallus even Marshall conceded could be "in reality the end of the waistband."[19] A careful scrutiny of the waistbands on a number of the female terra-cotta figurines will show that it probably is part of the waistband.[20] This judgment is supported by the fact that on the other two seal representations of "proto-Śiva"[21] there is no suggestion of a phallus. Instead there is a tie or tassel hanging from the waistband.[22] Also, waistbands and girdles are found only on the *female* figurines, the male always shown nude.[23] Furthermore, the arm bangles and necklaces worn by the figure are the jewelry which lavishly adorns the female figure in Harappan art.[24] Finally, the pigtail worn by one of the other two "proto-Śiva" figures is the same as that seen on the tree goddess, and the coif framing the face of the other figure is like that on some of the female figurines.[25] All in all, there seems

[18] Cf. J. G. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris* (London, 1907), pp. 20–30, 94 ff.; M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion* (Lund, 1950), pp. 185 ff.

[19] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, 52. Marshall further admits (*ibid.*, p. 55, n. 5): "Whether the god is intended to be ithyphallic or not is doubtful."

[20] E.g., Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pls. LXXII:5, 6; LXXV:5, 17, 21; Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. XCIV:14.

[21] Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pls. LXXXVII:222, 235.

[22] Mackay (*ibid.*, I, 335) in comparing the figures on the three seals fails to see an erect phallus but finds only "a cincture worn round the waist and apparently also passed between the legs, a garment very similar to the *langat* worn at the present day in India."

[23] Mackay, *Early Indus Civilization*, pp. 54–55.

[24] E.g., Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. XCIV:6, 14.

[25] E.g., Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pls. LXXV:8, 19; LXXVI:21; Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pls. XCIV:14; XCV:22, 30, etc.

to be no positive evidence for the figure's being male but considerable suggestion for its being female.

Marshall stresses the fact that the figure has three faces as further indication of its being the prototype of Śiva, who in classical Hindu iconography is often depicted with three or even four faces.[26] But does this figure have three faces? What are supposed to be three faces together look more like the head of a Brahmani bull[27] with its long, drooping, pointed ears (giving the illusion of facial profiles) and sagging, wrinkled jowls and long snout. Or it could be instead the head of another horned animal such as the short-horned bull[28] or perhaps even the head of a tiger.[29] Furthermore, the other two seal depictions of the deity[30] do not show three faces but in one case a single face in profile and in the other, a face framed in a coif.

As for the Yoga aspect of the figure, the sitting posture which Marshall interpreted as an *āsana* seems to us a natural enough one and need not be a yogic posture at all. However, in further support of his hypothesis that the figure on the seal is the prototype of Śiva as the *Mahāyogī*, Marshall refers to another find, the bust of a male whose eyes seem concentrated on the tip of his nose in yogic fashion.[31] Even if this is so—and it is difficult to say that it is since the shell inlay from both eyes is missing—it is not conclusive for, as Mackay observes, "the same kind of eye has been noticed in very early clay figures from Kish and Ur."[32]

In addition to the "proto-Śiva" seal, there are three other items which Marshall regarded as substantiating his supposition that the worship of Śiva or at least his prototype is found in the Indus civilization, namely: phallic symbols suggestive of the *Śiva-liṇga*; the apparent worship of the bull and the historic association of the bull with Śiva; and the trident headdress of the dieties as the origin of Śiva's trident.

It is impossible to say just how many of the phallus-like stones found at the Indus sites were actually *liṇgas*.[33] And even if it

[26] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, 53.

[27] Cf., for example, Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. LXXXVIII.

[28] Cf., Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. CX:318.

[29] If this is so, then what appear to be triangular torques or necklaces on the figure may really be stripes. The possibility that the tiger was worshipped as a hierophany of the Indus Goddess is indicated below (see n. 49). The manifestation of the goddess as a tiger is known today among the Koshti of Maratha and other jungle tribes (see Crooke, *op. cit.*, pp. 354–55).

[30] See n. 21 above.

[31] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, 54 and III, Pl. XCVIII.

[32] Mackay, *Early Indus Civilization*, p. 53.

[33] Mackay (*Chanhu-daro*, p. 171) could recognize no *liṇgas* at Chanhu-daro among the great number of conical stones found. Likewise there are really very

could be safely assumed that "phallus worship" was part of the Harappan religion, this would not argue for the cult of prototypal Śiva. Indeed the association of the *liṇga* with Rudra-Śiva appears quite late in the development of the cult, for it does not occur in the Vedic literature and evidently had not yet become a cult symbol by the time of Patañjali (second century B.C.?).[34] In fact, the earliest known *Śiva-liṇgas*—one found at Gudimallan and the other at Bhita—are datable from the first century B.C.[35] When the Rudra-Śiva cult did acquire the *liṇga* symbol from the non-Āryan "phallus worshippers" (*Śiśna-devāḥ*) mentioned in the *Ṛg-Veda*,[36] it was incorporated into a philosophy which greatly devoided it of its original sexual or phallic significance.[37]

As for the supposed worship of the bull in the Harappā culture, although the prevalence of its representation on the seals and the incorporation of its horns in the headdresses would suggest that it was a sacred animal, the attention paid other animals on the seals and the use of other animals' horns (goat, ram) make it difficult to say just what the place of the bull was in the cult.[38] Furthermore, it is necessary to refer the association of the bull with the Vedic storm god Rudra-Śiva back to the Indus religion, for storm and atmospheric deities are very often regarded as bulls in primitive and archaic cults. This is no less true in the case of the Vedic picture of Rudra, who—like Indra and Agni with whom he is associated—is spoken of as a bull,[39] and whose name, "Howler"[40]

few stones from Mohenjo-daro and elsewhere which look like phalli. It could be that many of the conical stones identified as *liṇgas* were not such at all but that, if they had a religious significance, it was because of their association with the shrines of the goddess. Cf. Whitehead, *op. cit.*, p. 36, who, describing the shrines of the *Grāmadevatās*, says, "Often the stones, which represent the different deities, are simply small conical stones not more than five or six inches high, blackened with the anointing oil."

[34] R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913), pp. 114 ff.

[35] See S. Chattopadhyaya, *The Evolution of Theistic Sects in Ancient India* (Calcutta, 1962), pp. 10 ff. Cf. W. Kirfel, *Symbolik des Hinduismus und des Jinismus* ("Symbolik der Religionen," Vol. IV [Stuttgart, 1959]), pp. 18–19.

[36] *Ṛg.* VII. 21.5; X. 99.3.

[37] Chattopadhyaya, *op. cit.*, pp. 82 ff.

[38] The suggestion made by Mackay (*Further Excavations*, I, 659–60) and adopted by others that there were "bull games" in the Indus is founded on no clear evidence at all. There is a single, badly worn seal from Mohenjo-daro (*ibid.*, II, Pl. CIII: 8) on which crowded together there appear a tree, the deity (?), a buffalo, and a human figure suspended lengthwise above the beast. As Mackay (*ibid.*, I, 362) himself admitted, this could as well be a scene of a man being tossed by the guardian animal of a shrine. Indeed, it could be any number of happenings!

[39] *Ṛg-Veda*, II. 34.2 cited by Eliade, *Patterns*, p. 86.

[40] From *rud*, "to cry" or "to howl." See A. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads* ("Harvard Oriental Series," Vol. XXXI [Cambridge, Mass., 1925]), p. 146, who rejects the suggestions that *rud* means either "to be

points to this identification. The *triśūla* or trident of Śiva also most likely comes from Rudra's original Vedic role as storm deity—not, as Marshall suggests, from the three-pointed headdress of the Indus deity—and represents, as did originally the trident of Poseidon,[41] the dreadful lightning bolt with which the "auspicious one" (*śiva*) destroys man and beast.

It would appear, then, that the "proto-Śiva" hypothesis is founded upon ambiguous and inconclusive evidence and that there is no positive basis for asserting the presence in the Indus religion of Śiva or his prototype. It is possible, however, that the "proto-Śiva" and other seals may offer further evidence of the cult of the Great Goddess in Harappan culture.

As we have already suggested, the figure on the "proto-Śiva" seal is probably not a male, but a female deity—in fact, the same deity who, wearing the three-pointed headdress, manifests herself in the sacred tree as goddess of vegetation-fertility. Could it be that surrounded by beasts she appears on the "proto-Śiva" seal in another role—namely as the "Mistress of the Animals"?[42] That this could be so is perhaps supported by representations on other seals of an apparently female deity associated with wild beasts. There is, for example, on one seal[43] a scene of a horned deity—semihuman, semibovine—apparently in combat with a horned tiger beneath a tree. In spite of the total absence of a phallus—which one might expect if this were a bull-man—and the prominent presence of well-shaped breasts, Marshall regarded the seal as a possible representation of "the Sumerian Eabani or Enkidu—the half-man, half-bull monster, whom the goddess Aruru created to combat Gilgamesh, but who afterwards became his ally and with him fought against the wild beasts."[44] Another seal—an elongated one with two engraved surfaces[45] seems to combine the two motifs of the animal mistress (or divine huntress) and the tree goddess. On one side, following a series of signs, there appears a crouching or sitting figure making an offering or possibly playing a harplike instrument before a sacred tree. On the reverse side

ruddy" or "to shine" and that "Śiva" is derived from the Tamil *śivan*, "red man" (*ibid.*, p. 143, n. 2).

[41] W. Otto, *The Homeric Gods* (London, 1954), p. 28.

[42] Marshall, (*op. cit.*, I, 54) viewed the animals around the figure as showing "proto-Śiva" as "Lord of the Beasts" (*paśupati*), but they could as easily surround the "Mistress of the Animals"—a role known elsewhere in cults of the Great Goddess (cf. Przyluski, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–51, 166, etc.; E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother-Goddess* [New York, 1958], chap. v).

[43] Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, Pl. XIII:17; III, Pl. CXI:357.

[44] *Ibid.*, I, 67.

[45] Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. XC:23, 24.

(which is badly worn) we see first a fierce tiger (without horns), head turned backwards looking menacingly at a figure seated in the branches of the tree which holds what appears to be a dagger or knife in its extended arm. Next to this scene is that of two females (?) pulling a tree apart to reveal standing in their midst the goddess, her arms covered with bangles, hooflike hands, and—although the seal is badly effaced—possibly horns and/or pigtail upon her head. Yet another seal[46]—an elongated, three-sided one—seems to repeat this combination of motifs. On one of the three sides we have again the goddess in her tree, the tiger beneath. On a second side the goddess wearing the trident headdress and pigtail is revealed in the midst of a tree. Before her is a goat and behind that animal, seated on the ground, is a female figure with pigtail and trident headdress, her hands outstretched toward the animal.[47] The theme of a tiger menacing a figure (the goddess?) in a tree is repeated on at least three other seals from Mohenjo-daro.[48] The figure in all three cases is sketchy but appears to wear in each case a pigtail or bunlike arrangement of the hair and, in one case, horns. On all three seals the figure's arms are extended in an embracing attitude—salutation or possibly benediction—and in two cases the hands appear to be hooves. Thus, it would seem that the bovine goddess on the "Eabani" seal combatting the tiger is akin to—if not the same as—the tree figure menaced by a tiger[49] and the goddess who manifests herself in trees.

Considering what we know of the ancient Harappā culture and its economy, this dual nature of the Indus Goddess as vegetation-fertility deity and mistress of the animals is altogether probable. Although agriculture was undoubtedly fundamental to the food

[46] *Ibid.*, II, Pl. LXXXII:1, 2.

[47] This scene is reminiscent of the two other seals mentioned earlier (see n. 12) and may be like them depictions of cult worship involving a sacred animal—the goat—and a priestess (rather than a lesser goddess as Mackay had suggested) wearing the sacred, trident headdress and worshiping the Great Goddess in her tree.

[48] Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. CXI:353, 355; and Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. XCVI:522.

[49] That the tiger itself might be a heirophany of the Indus Goddess or at least sacred to her cult is suggested by another Mohenjo-daro seal (Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. LXXXIX:347) showing a combination of the Goddess with a tiger's body—not in centaur fashion, however, for the Goddess is shown fully with legs and arms as the front part of the composition, the trunk and hind quarters of the tiger projecting from her buttocks. She wears a flowing pigtail and a pair of horns which are not, however, those of a bull but of a goat, perhaps indicating the sacrality of this animal as well (see n. 47). It is interesting that Mackay (*ibid.*, I, 339) taking this figure to be a goddess, states that it and the figure on one of the three supposedly "proto-Śiva" seals (Seal 235—see n. 21) "appear to be of the same sex,"—namely female.

economy of the Harappā culture, hunting and fishing also had a considerable place. This is evidenced not only by a large number of fishhooks and hunting weapons found at Mohenjo-daro but also by seal depictions of hunting scenes.[50] Hunting was clearly an important activity in the Harappan culture as it was in the peasant communities of the Sind and Baluchistan which both preceded and were contemporaneous with it.[51] It is not unlikely, then, that the Goddess should have been not only the giver of vegetational life but also the "Mistress of the Beasts" and patroness of the hunt. This is suggested not only by the bovine goddess on the "Eabani" seal and her representations elsewhere[52] but also by two copper tablets[53] showing an upright semibeast, semihuman figure with pigtail, two horns, and tail in full stride, carrying in one hand a bow and in the other an indistinguishable item.[54]

In this regard mention might also be made of four seals from

[50] E.g., Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pls. LXXXVIII:279; XCII:11b; XCI:24.

[51] See Gordon, *op. cit.* and Piggott, *op. cit.*

[52] For example, on another seal (Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. CXI:356) where she appears standing fully upright with dangling tail, hooves, horns, and pigtail. The face is obscured, but possibly it is also bovine as on the "Eabani" and "proto-Śiva" seals. She is perhaps represented in a pottery figurine, only the upper portion of which was found at Mohenjo-daro (Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. LXXII:7). The head and face of the figurine are not clearly human, and only one of the two horns is whole. Mackay (*op. cit.*, I, 367) takes this to be a figurine of a bull-man—as he supposes the seal representation to be also—in spite of the distinctive necklaces which this figure wears in common with most of the other female figurines. The horns on the figure—as the horns in the headdress of the goddess in the seal depictions—could refer to the Great Mother's nature as the fecund cow, as she was in ancient Egyptian and Minoan religion (see, e.g. Nilsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 186 ff., who refers to the opinions of Williams, Lagrange, and others; cf. also W. B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion* [The Hague, 1960], pp. 105 f., 464 f., who interprets the sacred horns in the ancient fertility cults—e.g., Crete, Egypt—as referring to "the bull of the earth, representative of the mystical, self-renewing, and creative life of the earth." Thus the horns are symbols of earth's fertility). Undoubtedly the horns of the Indus Goddess were symbols of her life-giving powers, but what significance they had beyond this is impossible to say with any certainty.

[53] Marshall, *op. cit.*, III, Pl. CXVII:16; Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pl. XCIII:14.

[54] Of course, this could be a hunter wearing an animal skin and horns disguised for the hunt. On the other hand it could be a "Lord of the Beasts," a male deity, but the absence of a phallus and the resemblance to the huntress-deity might argue against this identification. This figure is quite suggestive of figures found in upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic hunters' art such as the "musician" sorcerer or hunting spirit of the Grotte des Trois Freres, France (see J. Maringer, *The Gods of Prehistoric Man* [London, 1956], p. 101) and the dancing sorcerers or hunters in the rock paintings of the Mahadeo Hills, India [Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 104]). It is interesting that the jungle peoples of the Mahadeo Hills, although they used metal arrow heads were, as Gordon remarks, "in every essential Mesolithic hunters" (*ibid.*, p. 26), probably not unlike the people of the forest hunting cultures which immediately preceded the Harappā culture in the Sind and Punjab. It is possible that the figure on the copper tablets is a hunting sorcerer or deity inherited from an older hunting culture in the Sind.

Mohenjo-daro[55] which show an apparently completely human figure standing between two upright tigers, holding each off with an outstretched arm. The sex of the figure is indeterminate but the absence of a phallus and the peculiar arrangement of the hair suggest that this may be another representation of the Goddess as "Mistress of the Beasts."

Considering the available evidence, then, it would appear that Marshall's interpretation of the religion of the Indus civilization is not the only one possible and, indeed, not even the most plausible. Given the few archaeological facts we have, the most that can be said with any certainty is that there appears to have been a cult centered around the figure of a mother goddess. If there was any distinct male deity, it is impossible to say just what his nature and his role were.[56] Certainly there is really little basis for reading back the later Vedic and post-Vedic god Śiva into the Indus civilization.[57]

The fact is that we are really quite ignorant of the religion (as well as many other aspects) of the ancient Indus cities. Although it is tempting to build a satisfying, comprehensive structure of the Indus religion, the fragmentary and ambiguous data we have presently will not support any such elaborate theory. Until the script is deciphered or more illuminating archaeological materials found, we shall have to live with our ignorance.

[55] Mackay, *Further Excavations*, II, Pls. LXXXIV:75, 86; LXXXV:122; XVC:454.

[56] This is not to say that there was no male deity. On the other hand the situation in the Indus religion could have been as it is today in the cult of the village goddesses (*Grāmadevatā*) who, almost without exception, do not have spouses. Where there are males associated with the cult they are usually only attendants to the goddess, their place being entirely subordinate and virtually servile (see Whitehead, *op. cit.*, p. 18). However, as Eliade has well pointed out (*Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* [New York, 1960], pp. 174 ff.), vegetation-fertility divinities are often androgynous, even though they are pre-eminently male or female.

[57] It is far beyond the scope of this discussion to consider the very complex problem of the origin and development of Rudra-Śiva. However, we agree with Keith (*op. cit.*, p. 147) that "There is nothing in the conception of the god as he is found in the Rigveda, which cannot be explained by the idea of a storm god considered mainly in the form of lightning, the tempest being viewed on its destructive rather than its healing aspect." In confrontation with the fertility cults of the indigenous peoples the nature and role of such a "bull of heaven" becomes that of a bountiful divine fecundator—a natural evolution of a storm deity. The bull becomes his sacred animal and the phallus his sacred symbol, both indicative of the power of the inseminating rains. The complex picture of the god which we have in the late Vedic and post-Vedic literature is then the product of an evolution and conflation of forms and motifs, Āryan and non-Āryan, and not simply a transference of a non-Āryan deity into the Āryan cult.