

LOTHAL
A HARAPPAN PORT TOWN

73044

1955-62



By

S. R. RAO

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY PROF. S. S. SARKAR, Dr. B. B. LAL, V. K. CHARI,
BHOLANATH, G. V. SRINIVASA RAO, K. RAMESH RAO & KRISHNA LAL



PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

1985

CHAPTER XVIII

TERRACOTTA OBJECTS

1. INTRODUCTORY

Terracotta objects, like pottery, throw valuable light on the occupations, artistic achievements and religious beliefs of the people. This is true of Lothal also which has yielded more than three thousand terracotta objects excluding bangles. Owing to the extreme scarcity of stone, baked clay served as a substitute wherever possible. Slingballs, loom-weights and fish-net weights were also made of baked clay instead of stone. The poor man had to satisfy himself with ornaments made of terracotta, as metals and gemstones were very expensive. Another reason for preferring clay to stone is that it is a suitable medium for the modeller to exhibit his artistic urge in shaping human and animal figures, personal ornaments and toys.

A. MATERIAL

In ancient times it was regarded as essential that mother earth should be the material used for figures of mother-goddess. Even now clay figurines are considered more sacred than those of metal for worship on festive occasions. Clay is cheaper and easier to model or mould. Whatever be the reason, the Lothal folk used buffish alluvial clay mixed with mica for modelling figurines. This material when combined with sand as *degraisant* can stand high temperature.

B. FIRING

In general all terracotta objects are well-fired and resist water-action. Human figurines are better fired than some of the animal figurines, most of which were used as toys and perhaps baked at home. A small kiln of the type noticed in Block 'E' near the Acropolis might have been used for baking small objects without bringing them directly in contact with fire or smoke.

C. SLIP

It is only in a few cases that the traces of a red slip applied after firing is seen. The female figurines were invariably treated with a red slip. According to Mackay red slip is said to have been associated with the fertility cult, but it is noticed in the case of animal figurines also at Lothal. Occasionally a buff or chocolate slip was used, but cream is extremely rare. In the Indus Valley however cream, red and chocolate were frequently used.

¹ Mackay *op. cit.* 1938, I, p. 259.

² *Ibid* II, pl. LXXIII, 7; LXXVII, 10 and 12; LXXIV, 5; LXXX, 27.

I. TIGER

The tiger was known to the Harappans very well as can be made out from the engravings on the seals from the Indus Valley. Lothal has yielded a terracotta figure of a tiger produced from a double mould, (pl. CCII D). It has a large head, slit-mouth and incised nostrils. The applique eyes in the sunken eye-socket have fallen off. The chequered pattern incised on the body of the beast suggest the stripes on the animal. A large steatite seal from Lothal is also engraved with a striped animal which can be identified as tiger. The open claws suggest that the beast is about to strike; but owing to damage the head is missing.

J. RHINOCEROS

The rhinoceros is also represented on the seals and amulets from Harappa and Mohenjo-daro but not on any from Lothal. On the other hand, beautiful terracotta models have been found here. One of them is a head of rhinoceros. The artist must have made an extremely careful study of the animal before showing all the details such as the thick folds of the hide around the neck, the short horn on the snout, the beady eyes and nostrils. The ears are damaged and one of the pellet-eyes has fallen off. The thick eye-brow is indicated by a curved incised line and the tongue with a pellet inserted in the mouth. How this head was fixed to the body is not clear. A complete but smaller model of the rhinoceros (pl. CCIII D) has also been found. It has a sturdy body, thick short legs and short prick-ears. The mouth is indicated by a nail-punch. The models represent the *rhinoceros unicornis*, which has its habitat in Nepal and Assam even today. It must have lived in the swamps and marshes around Lothal in the protohistoric period. This animal is engraved on the seals from the Indus Valley. The food-trough depicted in front of the rhinoceros is said to suggest that the animal was kept in captivity. Ramachandran holds the view that the *varāha* mentioned in Vedic and Epic literature was none other than the rhinoceros and not the ordinary pig.¹ Considering the attributes of *varāha* as one capable of lifting the earth it should be admitted that the reference could not be to a weaker species like the ordinary pig, but to a stronger one such as the rhinoceros. The only representation of the animal outside India is on a pre-dynastic vase from Egypt.

K. LEOPARD

A terracotta animal figure with a long neck and thick head found at Lothal may represent a leopard (pl. CCIII B). Another animal with large circular depressions all over the body may suggest a spotted leopard but other features are more akin to those of a dog.

L. BEAR

Lothal has yielded a fine terracotta bust of a bear (pl. CCIV A). The transverse hole through the arms suggests that the bust could be attached to rest of the body and manipulated with a string as in the case of a horse. It has a long snout, prominent nostrils indicated by deep incisions, a slit-mouth and incised eyes. The purpose of perfora-

¹ T.N. Ramachandran, 'Presidential Address to Section I of the *Indian History Congress.*' *Proceedings of the Sixth Session* (Agra 1956), pp. 53-69.