

American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS) - Junior Scholar Fellowship Report

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The Indus or Harappan Civilization is Pakistan's earliest urban civilization, and among the first in world history. My dissertation research focuses on an important craft tradition from this civilization (2600-1900 BCE), inscribed steatite seals. These small, carved stone objects were among the most important types of artifacts used in the Indus and are today considered diagnostic features of material culture assemblages from the civilization. Using complementary research methods, I am investigating the production technologies, artistic styles, and consumption patterns associated with seal production and use in order to further understand how production was organized. These studies are providing new insights into Indus craft production and its relationship to larger issues of social and political organization and control. My research has benefitted immensely from the AIPS Junior Scholar Fellowship, which provided me the data necessary to complete my dissertation and move towards my goal of becoming a south Asian archaeologist.

During May-June 2011 I traveled to Helsinki, Finland, and London, England, to examine archival and museum collections of Indus seals to be included in my dissertation research. This analyzing both actual seals and high-quality photographs of seals using low power digital microscopy. My research also included detailed measurements and a formal stylistic analysis of seal iconography. These data will supplement the research that I have already completed and undoubtedly provide new perspectives about seal production in the Indus civilization. Ultimately I plan to publish most of this data, through my dissertation and scholarly articles, fulfilling my commitment to sharing what I have learned in and outside of the classroom.

Additionally, I had the opportunity to meet with and foster relationships with fellow south Asian scholars and specialists working outside of Pakistan and the U.S. Working with the renowned Indologist Professor Asko Parpola in Helsinki has positively impacted my research on many levels, and through my studies at the British Museum and the Institute of Archaeology and University College London I have met new colleagues that I hope to work with in the future. Since collaborative research is a major goal of mine, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet and work with other scholars and students interested in Pakistan. Overall my research trip was a great success and I am confident that my research will contribute to our understanding of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage.

Continued analysis of Indus seals will contribute to our extensive knowledge of craft production in Pakistan's earliest urban society. Ultimately the data can be used to test models of social and political organization, which remain among the most important questions concerning the Indus civilization. Digital documentation of existing seal collections creates duplicate records that serve as safeguards against future damage or loss, ensuring that future generations will be able to study and appreciate them. The results of my research will also be disseminated to a wide audience in Pakistan and beyond, encouraging continued international scholarly collaboration and discourse that is the cornerstone of the American Institute of Pakistan studies.