

A "LOST" SEAL FROM HARAPPA IN THE NICHOLSON MUSEUM (SYDNEY)

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In the introduction to the first volume of their *Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions*, covering collections in India, J. P. Joshi and Asko Parpola announced the eventual publication of a third volume (the second having covered collections in Pakistan) which

will contain the relatively few objects known to exist in collections outside India and Pakistan and the large number of lost objects, which are not directly documentable but must be published as old photographs only (CISI I, p. xxvi).

This brief note is intended to provide documentation on one such lost seal from Harappa, now in Australia. It is but a small token of esteem for Asko, whom I first met during my year as a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Copenhagen in 1980, when he was very involved with the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, and who has never failed to be a great help to me concerning all matters Harappan.

A sensational title for this paper, along the lines of "Harappan seal found in Australia", might have set the hearts of experts on Harappan maritime trade beating a trifle faster. Unfortunately, while such a title is perfectly accurate, it would badly distort the taphonomy of our subject beyond recognition. For the seal published here was not brought by an Harappan trader to the shores of *terra Australis*. Rather, it was sent by the Government of India, along with a miscellany of sherds, small ceramic vessels, an ivory rod, a cubical weight, a bangle fragment and a terracotta cake, at the request of the late Prof. Arthur Dale Trendall.

Dale Trendall is a name which is unlikely to be familiar to Harappan experts, unless perhaps they cultivate a sideline in South Italian vase painting. Probably the greatest expert on the painted vases of the Greek colonies of Sicily and southern Italy in this century, and surely one of the greatest classical archaeologists ever produced in Australasia, Trendall was born in Auckland, New Zealand, on 28

March 1909. After completing his undergraduate degree at the University of Otago (1926–29) Trendall completed his studies in Classical Archaeology in Cambridge (1931–33). In 1939 Trendall took up the Chair of Greek at the University of Sydney and in 1948 he occupied concurrently the University's first Chair of Archaeology. Trendall served as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and as Curator of the Nicholson Museum of Antiquities before leaving the University of Sydney in 1954 in order to take up the post of Master of University House at the Australian National University. He held this position until his retirement in 1969, when he joined LaTrobe University in Melbourne as Resident Fellow. There he died on 13 November 1995 at the age of 86, active in his scholarship to the very end.

While Trendall was at the University of Sydney he was actively involved in building up the collections of the Nicholson Museum. Established in 1860 by a gift of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities from the private collection of Sir Charles Nicholson, Provost (1854–59) and later Chancellor (1859–61) of the University of Sydney, the Nicholson Museum houses the largest collection of antiquities in Australia. It is to Dale Trendall's initiative that the University of Sydney owes its small collection of Harappan objects. In the second edition of his *Handbook to the Nicholson Museum* Trendall wrote, after describing the progressive addition of purchased or donated material from Cyprus, Asia Minor and Egypt during his first decade in Sydney,

The governments of Greece, Palestine and India have kindly made available to us small collections of sherds, terracottas and other materials of the greatest value for teaching purposes (Trendall 1948: 2).

How the Nicholson Museum acquired its collection of Harappan material is a story told in a series of four letters preserved in the Museum's files. For permission to reproduce those letters, I am most grateful to the former Curator, Emeritus Prof. Alexander Cambitoglou, and the Assistant Curator, Ms. Karin Sowada.

Document 1.

30th May, 1947.

The Secretary,
Government of India
Education Department,
NEW DELHI.

Dear Sir,

I should be extremely grateful if you would allow the Nicholson Museum of the University of Sydney permission to have a small representative collection of the antiquities from the Indus Valley for display purposes. The Nicholson Museum contains extensive collections of Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities and we are trying to build up a Near and Middle Eastern Section. We have very large classes at the moment in Ancient World History and in Ancient Art and Archaeology and such a collection of specimens, representative of so important a phase of civilisation would be of inestimable value to both student and teacher alike. I need hardly add that the University would be prepared to pay all expenses involved in the way of transport, insurance, etc.

Yours faithfully,

Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and
Curator of the Nicholson Museum

Document 2.

No. F.5-21/47-Arch.
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEW DELHI, dated the 27th June, 1947

From

Ram Lal, Esq., M.A.,
Assistant Secretary to the Government of India,

To

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Curator of
the Nicholson Museum,
The University of Sydney
Australia.

Subject:— University of Sydney, Nicholson Museum – supply of a
representative collection of the antiquities from the
Indus Valley for display purposes.

Sir,

I am directed to refer to your letter dated 30th May, 1947 and to say that the Government of India agree to supply a small type-collection of Indus Valley relics to the Nicholson Museum for display purposes. The Director General of Archaeology in India has been requested to select the necessary material and send it to you as soon as possible.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your most obedient servant,

(Ram Lal)
Assistant Secretary to the
Government of India.

Document 3.

3rd July, 1947.

Ram Lal, Esq., M.A.,
Assistant Secretary to the Government of India,
Government of India,
Department of Education,
NEW DELHI.

Dear Sir,

Very many thanks for your prompt reply to my letter dated 30th May, 1947. We are indeed deeply indebted to your Government for agreeing to supply to the Nicholson Museum a representative collection of antiquities from the Indus Valley for display purposes and I can assure you that every care will be taken of those relics. A collection of this nature will be of inestimable value for teaching purposes.

Yours faithfully,

Dean of the Faculty of Arts
and Curator of the Nicholson Museum.

Document 4.

ADT/FMT

26th November, 1947

The Director General of Archaeology in India,
New Delhi,
INDIA.

Dear Sir,

I have to thank you for your letter of November 14th informing us that you have handed over to Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son Ltd. a case of Indus Valley material for our Museum.

From the list of contents you enclose it looks as if this will be an acquisition of real value to our collection and I await its arrival with keen interest. I will let you know as soon as the case has reached Australia.

With grateful thanks,

Yours faithfully,

Curator of the Nicholson Museum

Document 5.

List of Indus Valley antiquities for presentation to the Nicholson Museum of Antiquities, The University of Sydney, Australia.

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1. Nine pots (plain ware).
 2. Two lids (plain ware).
 3. One handled lamp (plain ware).
 4. Nine fragments of painted pottery.
 5. Five animal figurines (terracotta).
 6. Two human figurines fragmentary.
 7. Part of a terracotta cart.
 8. Two clay wheels.
 9. One clay disc.
 10. One bird rattle.
 11. Two terracotta rings.
 12. Two terracotta gamesmen.
 13. Three terracotta beads.
 14. One terracotta bull.
 15. One chert core.
 16. Three chert flakes.
 17. One stone cube.
 18. Fragments of four faience bracelets.
 19. One fragmentary "unicorn" seal.
 20. Two faience studs.
 21. One faience animal-bead.
 22. Fragment of one shell bracelet.

Document stamped by Australian Customs, 12 April 1948.

Several years ago, while teaching a seminar using objects from the Nicholson Museum, I became aware of several trays of the Harappan finds in the museum's storerooms (see Table). In particular, my eye was caught by a black Harappan weight (NM 48.65), with a prior accession number "11421" written on it in white ink. But I soon realised that a fragmentary seal (NM 48.71), bearing the number "2811" might be of even greater interest in the context of Asko Parpola's efforts to publish the complete corpus of Harappan seals known throughout the world.

One of my students, Mr. Lyle Radford, was given the latter object to begin researching and it seemed obvious that, as the seal bore the Nicholson Museum inventory number 48.65, the other number on it, 2811, must have been an original excavation number. It was not long before he came to me with a photocopy of a page from M. S. Vats' *Excavations at Harappa* in which the excavations of 1920–21 and 1933–34 are reported upon (Vats 1940, I: 118). There we indeed find that object 2811 is the same fragmentary Harappan seal found in Area F, Sq. N 9/13, Trench III, Stratum V, at a depth of 14 ft. 4 in. An impression of the seal is illustrated in Vol. II of Vats' report as well (Vats 1940, II, Pl. XC, no. 182).

The seal (Fig. 1) is badly broken on the upper and lower righthand corners, so that almost nothing remains of the inscription which it once bore, apart from the lowest portions of three signs. However, the seal still shows clearly a 'unicorn', probably the profile of an aurochs (*Bos primigenius primigenius*) with hatched neck standing in front of a 'double stand', a consistently associated pair of iconographic motives, according to U. Franke-Vogt (1991: 63 + Taf. XXIII, XLIII, XLIV).

Apart from resurrecting a 'lost' seal from Harappa and thus diminishing, in however small a way, the size of Asko Parpola's third volume of Harappan seals and inscriptions, this foray into the archives of the Nicholson Museum has shed a small bit of light on an intriguing episode in both modern Indian history and the history of Indian archaeology. Two points stand out in the Indian context, one of personality and one of chronology. For the Director General of Archaeology referred to in Document 2 as having been asked to select the objects for the Nicholson Museum was none other than Sir Mortimer Wheeler. As he described in *Still Digging*, Wheeler set sail on the *City of Exeter* in February, 1944, to take up his post of Director General of Archaeology in India (Wheeler 1955: 185). Yet the world he entered in 1944 would end on 15 August 1947 when Partition irrevocably severed India from Pakistan. How extraordinary, therefore, it is to contemplate the circumstances under which the selection of Harappan objects for the Nicholson Museum was initially made by Wheeler, in May or June of 1947; or the eventual packing and shipment of those pieces, which as a missing letter of 14 November (alluded to in Document 4) attests, were consigned to Messrs Thomas Cook several months after Partition took place. Neither *My archaeological mission to India and*

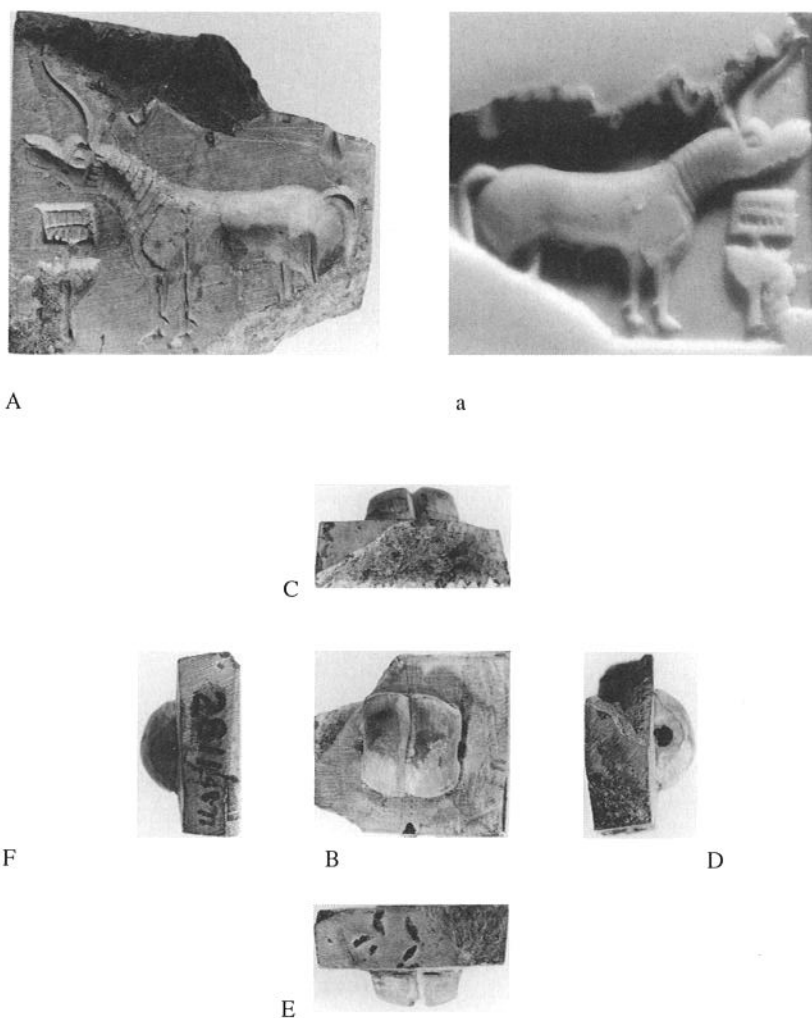


Fig. 1. A seal from Harappa (excavation no. 2811). Size 24 x 23 mm. The layout and the letters for different sides follow the CISI system.

Pakistan nor *Still Digging* makes any mention of Wheeler's selection of objects for the Nicholson Museum and doubtless it struck him as a small order of business, perhaps one which he delegated in the first instance to a subordinate. We in Australia are grateful, however, for Dale Trendall's initiative, the Government of India's acquiescence, Wheeler's choices and the fact that the end of the Raj and what Wheeler called "the great blood-letting" of Partition did not hinder the arrival of the small collection housed today at the University of Sydney.

TABLE

Object category	NM no.	Harappa reg. no.	Vats 1940 reference ¹
zoomorphic figurine (dog? bull?)	48.42	2072	
zoomorphic figurine – bull	48.43	Aj (?) 289	
zoomorphic figurine – rhinoceros	48.44	Ab 718	
zoomorphic figurine – bull	48.45	10780	
ceramic wheel	48.49	13535	
ceramic wheel	48.50	10509	
ceramic cart fragment	48.48	971	
ceramic male figurine fragment	48.46	Ab 708	
ceramic female figurine fragment	48.47	Ab 843	
ceramic “cake”	48.77	B 57	
ceramic bead – long	48.54	A 793	
ceramic bead – long	48.55	4526	
ceramic bead – biconical	48.60	7540	cf. Pl. CXXXIV, Fig. 1d–e
ceramic bird vessel	48.51	Af 253	
ceramic bangle	48.67	Ab 342	
ceramic spool	48.56	11556	
ceramic ring/bracelet	48.52	3848 (a)	
ceramic ball	48.59	532	cf. “Balls and marbles”, p. 455
ceramic lid	48.31	10507	
ceramic vessel – tray	48.27	H 801 (k) / B	
ceramic jar – button-base	48.21	A 174 (c) 4'	
ceramic vessel – miniature	48.23	Ae 346, 4'	
ceramic vessel – miniature	48.25	5331, 4'5"	
ceramic vessel – miniature	48.28	3037	
ceramic vessel – miniature	48.29	J 504, 6"	
ceramic vessel – miniature	48.30	8700	
painted sherd	48.33	10243, 3'–6'	
painted sherd	48.34	5430, 6'–9'	
painted sherd	48.35	14313	

¹ Because the Vats volumes have no concordance or detailed index to the registered artifacts, it proved a time-consuming and immensely tedious task to attempt to locate the objects from Harappa now in the Nicholson Museum within the text of the excavation report. This explains why so few references are given here. No doubt if someone wishes to pore over Vats' text it should be possible to locate a few more. Only by doing so can one identify what area and statum a particular find came from. I leave this thankless task to someone with a deeper interest in the history of excavations at Harappa than the writer.

painted sherd	48.36	8797, 3'-6'	
painted sherd	48.37	B 577	
painted sherd	48.38	11017	
painted sherd	48.39	H 502 (d), 4'6"	p. 223: 1 of "five flat covers (d), four of which were broken', in burial H 502, Area H prehist. cem.
painted sherd	48.40	7756	
painted sherd	48.41	J 196, 6'-9'	
flint core	48.61	11845	
flint blade	48.62	49	
flint blade	48.63	10336	
flint blade	48.64	7373	
stone "gamesman" – conical	48.57	11555	
ceramic "gamesman" – conical	48.58	5416	
ivory rod, dotted circles	48.75	460	
shell bangle fragment	48.74	3138	
faience bangle fragment	48.79	illegible	
faience ear buttons	48.72	12929?	cf. Pl. CXXXIX, 22–23
faience ear button	48.73	3081	p. 446 and Pl. CXXXIX, 13
faience bead	48.76	A??216	cf. p. 429 and Pl. CXXXII, Fig. 9d
faience bangle	48.68	588	
faience bangle	48.69	A 884 or 889?	
stone recumbent ram bead	48.66	7305	
stone weight – cuboid, chert	48.65	11421	p. 363
stone stamp seal	48.71	2811	p. 118 and Pl. XC, 182

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