

Museum to unveil Harappan gallery

3,000-year-old artefacts to give a glimpse of the Indus Valley civilisation

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Mumbai: The dancing girl of Mohenjo Daro, the sculptures, tools, toys, and most of all the pottery, whose uniformity defined the borders of the Harappan civilisation, can now be seen in a refurbished gallery to be unveiled at the Chhatrapati Shivaji museum, formerly the Prince of Wales museum, on Wednesday.

Incidentally, the man who discovered the ruins of Mohenjo Daro, Rakhil Das Bandyopadhyay, or R D Banerjee as he is also known, was the first curator of the Prince of Wales Museum. His epoch-making discovery will be honoured on Wednesday through the gallery based on the Harappan civilisation.

Most of the artefacts dating back 3,000 years have been in the museum's custody, but the display has come together now, housed in new glass

cases with proper captions in English and Marathi. The aim is to encourage schoolchildren to discover India's heritage outside uninspiring history books. However, given that the founding fathers of Harappa were masters of the art of town planning, the gallery can offer lessons to civic authorities too. "Anybody who wishes to prepare a plan for Mumbai would do well to visit the Harappan site of Dholavira in Kutch," says museum director Sabyasachi Mukherjee, who did just that.

Archaeologists have recently begun to refer to the 3,000-year-old Indus Valley civilisation as the Harappan civilisation, because its influence is now known to span Afghanistan to Daimabad near Nashik. "The ruins of Dholavira were discovered only recently and in future, we may discover other sites further south," says research assis-



tant Gauri Pitale. "So rather than address it as the Indus Valley civilisation, we now call it the Harappan civilisation after the first site was discovered in 1921."

Huge lithographs show that the Harappans were skilled architects who built houses that had similar layouts, narrow alleys that opened on to wide roads, and a drainage system that modern planners may envy. "The sewage from each house emptied into the arterial drain that disposed of it outside the fortified city. It is believed that not a drop of sewage water ever spilled on to the streets of Mohenjo Daro or Harappa," says Pitale. "Moreover, un-



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Sabyasachi Mukherjee
| MUSEUM DIRECTOR

seals to be stamped upon their overseas consignments," Pitale says, pointing to small blocks in a neighbouring exhibit. She turns towards a map mounted on a nearby wall and says, "Besides, remnants of Harappan artefacts have been found in far-off places like the Gulf of Oman to show that even if they did not travel, their goods did."

Jewellery, for instance. Next to the pottery display is a polished range of ornaments, the kind that were traded with Mesopotamia and Egypt. Hundreds of discs of a soft stone named steatite, no more than one millimetre thick, are strung into a necklace. "Using crude implements, not fine needles or drills, the Harappans made holes for the thread to pass through," says Jathar. "And yet, the brittle carmelian and soapstone did not break."

It was an agrarian community that shaped a historic urban habitat.

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like today, all the drains were covered."

It was the pottery of the Harappans, identically shaped from Afghanistan to Gujarat and Nashik, that defined the natives. A small bowl bears grains of charred wheat which were retrieved from the bottom of the cooking pots that were excavated. "This not only shows the food habits of the Harappans but also proves that wheat was imported when it could not be grown," says assistant curator Renu Jathar.

Local and international trade via the sea route was a hallmark. "Traders manufactured an array of