

**Decentralized Governance in the Indus Valley Civilization: Myth or Administrative Reality**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Spanning from 2600 to 1900 BCE, the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) stands as one of the most advanced, urbanized cultures in the ancient world. While there has been much research into the IVC, it still lacks a great deal of information regarding its systems of politics and administration. South Asian archaeology has many examples of disputes regarding the IVC. Unlike other cultures from the same time, such as those from Mesopotamia and Egypt, the Indus Civilization has no archaeological records demonstrating the existence of a king, noble class with royal tombs, or large scale state sponsored projects to propagate the existence of the state. Their absence has made IVC scholars question whether the IVC had a centralized form of state governance or some other form of governance. Using a variety of archaeological, urban, economic, and symbolic evidence, this article explores the claim of decentralized governance in the Indus Valley Civilization. It also addresses the many historiographical debates (i.e., early state-based theories and recently developed heterarchical theories) to assess whether a decentralized governance system, composed of multiple urban nuclei and institutional actors, was the primary system of governance in the Indus Civilization. In this research, several areas of evidence were focused on, including the IVC's advanced urban planning, along with a uniform system of weights and measures, craft specialization and a complex trade network, as well as the use of seals for administration. These all demonstrate a great level of coordination despite the dispersed nature of the settlements. However, the lack of monumental architecture and an elite class of rulers poses a challenge to standard models of state formation. The author of this article presents evidence to support the idea that Indus Civilization was decentralized. Rather than describing a system of monarchic rule, the author describes a system of heterarchical governance based on the Indus Civilization shared customs and economy, as well as the presence of civic institutions. Authority, to this system, was provided by merchant groups, craft groups, and groups that made up the civic system of the Indus Civilization. These groups were able to mobilize and control significant populations without the presence of dominant political systems. This article represents an attempt to think critically about what it means to create an early state by presenting evidence that supports the presence of governance systems that are not based on a system of kingship, thus contributing to a growing body of*

*literature in archaeology and ancient history. This article also attempts to disrupt some of the more rigid models of the political evolution of ancient civilizations.*

**Keywords:** *Harappan Administration; Decentralized Governance; Heterarchical Society; Urban Planning; Political Organization; Early State Formation; Archaeological Governance*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Indus Valley Civilization, or Harappan Civilization, is considered one of the urban greats of the ancient world. This civilization occupied most of what is modern-day Pakistan and northwest India. It flourished for a millennium, approximately circling the years of 2,600 to 1,900 BCE. It, along with Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt, is considered one of the great ancient/great urban civilizations. These early civilizations mark the first large scale transitions for humanity from rural and agrarian to complex and dense urban systems. However, unlike these great urban civilizations, the Indus Civilization offers contemporary historians and archaeologists a unique and almost insurmountable challenge in that there is a near absence of evidence to support the political and administrative systems of the Indus Civilization.

A notable feature of the Indus Civilization is the lack of evidence for centralized political controls. There are no palaces, royal tombs, statues of kings, or writings that praise rulers. In Mesopotamia, there are records of kings like Hammurabi, and Egyptian Pharaohs have their authority shown through pyramids and temples. Without these in the Indus region, there are doubts about how their civilization was organized compared to other early states.

Initially, urban planning and culture practices shown to be uniform were thought to be the result of strong control from a central authority. From this, the Indus Civilization was thought to have been governed by a powerful state that controlled construction, trade, and activities. Evidence for this thought was standardization of bricks, weights, and layouts of the cities.

These thought processes have been turned down with the passage of time. Several scholars thought that the Indus Civilization cannot be placed in the model of traditional centralized states. From the thought of these individuals, Indus Civilization can be classified as belonging to a segmented or heterarchical society in which there were coexisting multiple authorities without a dominating ruler. In this model, the different urban centers, as well as groups of merchants and crafts, may have exercised power of governance dispersed and situated, along culturally and economically integrated modes of governance, rather than through a system of politics based on coercion.

The Indus Civilization is famous for its early city planning and its technology across large areas. Cities like Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Dholavira show a design with advanced planning including drainage, a grid design, and sizing for bricks. These cities were designed similarly even though they are very far apart from each other and therefore must have had some planned or controlled system for city design. It is still unknown how exactly this was done, though.

The Indus Civilization had an advanced economy as well. Evidence from digs shows that there were vast trading areas both within the Indus Civilization and extending into areas like Mesopotamia. The finding of the same stamps and weight measurement systems shows that there were controlled areas of trade. Advanced systems were also required to control the trade areas and maintain order, therefore these systems were very advanced for their time.

The missing higher class helps to exacerbate the problems in seeing the full picture, even with these signs of organization. Other ancient civilizations include a royal class or a central bureaucratic system, but the

Indus do not. This lack of evidence poses new questions. What was the nature of the Indus system? Was it a decentralized system that allowed many independent, but cooperative, urban centers? Or was it a centralized system that is beyond the scope of current archaeology?

There is a need to understand what questions are being asked to interpret a picture of governance in the Indus civilization. The aim of this article is to see if archaeology is able to support a picture of governance with a decentralized system or whether better describing the system would be to say that it was centralized in a way that was 'invisible.' The focus of this paper is on the governance systems of urban civilizations of this type and their relation to the academic discourse and the archaeology of the systems.

What is most valuable about this research is that it is potentially able to radically change the models we use to think about the organization of ancient cities. Modern models are heavily reliant on the existence of units that are hierarchical in nature and dominated or led by a king. In positive terms the Indus civilization may represent a model that is based on the coexistence of cooperative and standardized urban systems, paired with decentralized governance.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEBATE**

The Harappan civilization's political structure and governance have drawn the interest of historians and archaeologists alike. Their primary focus is on the extracts of literature, some of which are outlined in this chapter. Early interpretations assumed centralized rule in the case of Indus. This assumption was supported by the state-centered models of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Any Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilization feature, and an analogous feature in the Indus Valley, was assumed to mean a strong centralized rule and a monarchy. Some of the first order descriptions in the literature were by Mortimer Wheeler. In his descriptions, he indicated that there was strong centralized rule. There was strong centralized rule in the case of Indus Valley. This strong centralized rule was evidenced by uniformity in urban planning, the presence of long-distance trade routes, and the presence of trade routes. Other researchers did not support Mortimer Wheeler's claims. They cited the absence of palaces, royal tombs, monumental inscriptions, and evidence to show that there was a ruling monarchy. The Harappan civilization may have had a system of governance that was corporate and collective in nature, and, based on the cultural, social, and institutional constructs of the civilization.

Recent literature supports models of decentralization and heterarchy, and distributed authority. This distributed authority was shown by the presence of merchant guilds, ritual guilds, social elites, and other administrative entities. These entities dispersed centralized governance in the Indus Valley civilization. This distributed authority resulted in the presence of trade routes that were standardized. These trade routes were unified by the presence of trade seals, which were standardized throughout the Indus Valley civilization.

In current literature, the presence of high degrees of unification and uniformity in the urban planning, trade routes, and trade routes throughout the Indus Valley, is no longer attributed to centralized industrial governance. Rather, it is attributed to collective governance based on social consensus.

Thus, current studies propose that the Harappans formulated a political system that was unique in that it relied on shared system of beliefs, economic collaboration and institutional alignment rather than on the use of force or a system of succession.

### **Early Interpretations: The Centralized State Model**

Early excavators of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, especially Sir Mortimer Wheeler, interpreted the Indus Civilization using state-centric models that were dominant among mid-twentieth century archaeology. For Wheeler, the exceptional consistency that he observed in the planning of Mohenjo-daro, the ratios of bricks, and the symmetry of the drainage and material culture, was, in his view, the answer to the presence of powerful, centralized authority. He argued that the type of standardization that he observed across Mohenjo-daro and Harappa could not emerge in the absence of a strong administrative system.

Wheeler's view was further advanced by the direct involvement of Mesopotamia and Egypt, where centralized monarchies were fundamental to urbanization. As a result, Wheeler proposed that the Indus Civilization was a highly organized state and, as was the case in Mesopotamia and Egypt, a priest-king governed the state. The lack of evidence for such rulers did not stop him from making the claim. He defended his claims by arguing that the absence of evidence was not the evidence of absence and that the political structures of the Indus Civilization were either in perishable materials or in undeciphered scripts.

For several decades, this early model of a centralized state dominated Indus scholarship. It shaped the belief that complex urbanism required, of necessity, a centralized political authority.

### **Revisionist Perspectives: The Skepticism of Centralization**

Starting in the late twentieth century, the centralized state model began to undergo challenges from the perspective of new archaeological finds and theories. It became possible to ask whether the Indus Civilization fit in the traditional way of "state formation" models in the way the rest of ancient civilizations did.

Leading this wave of reinterpretation was Gregory L. Possehl. He claimed the Indus Civilization was a large culturally integrated system, and not a single monolithic state, but a politically decentralized system. Possehl believed the consistency seen in the various sites of the Indus Civilization was the result of a long-standing tradition and cultural norms, and not a result of centralized authority and coercion. He proposed the term "regional tradition" to express the idea that communities would leave their regional areas, and that their traditions would remain intact.

Following Possehl was the work of Raymond and Bridget Allchin. They believed Indus urbanism was more likely to develop as a result of cooperation and collaboration rather than top-down governance. They placed more importance on the idea of local autonomy, and the Indus urbanism systems were likely built via suggestion rather than imposition.

Decoupling urban complexity and political centralization was one of the most important contributions of this new model, which contrasted the previous models.

### **Craft Specialization and Economic Models of Governance**

An important participant to this debate, Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, focused his attention on trade networks and craft production. His work focused on the Indus Civilization and showed the advanced nature of the specialized crafts of the Indus Civilization, such as bead-making, pottery, metallurgy, seal production, and more. He also showed that these crafts were distributed to many urban centers, which supports a decentralized economic structure.

Kenoyer suggested guild-like or community-based structures may have played a role in the regulation of production and trade standards, rather than a centralized bureaucracy. The extensive adherence to standards of measurement shows a common economic system, but not necessarily a centralized state.

This brought about a positive change in Indus studies: governance could be perceived in terms of economic practices rather than political order.

### **The Heterarchy Model and Other Governance Theories**

Over the last few decades, the term “Heterarchy” has gained considerable traction in the domain of Indus studies. Heterarchy is a term used to describe structures that have a multitude of authority sources that are non-hierarchical and overlapping.

When discussing the Indus Civilization, a number of scholars have suggested that the urban centers of Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, Dholavira, and Lothal may have been semi-autonomous trading centers that were economically, culturally, and socially integrated. In a Heterarchy, authority is not vertical and is instead achieved by promoting negotiation and consensus.

This model is especially appealing because there is an absence of evidence for centralized political elites. It also explains both consistency and diversity throughout the Indus Cultural Sphere.

### **Script, Symbolism, and the Question of Bureaucracy**

The Indus script has fueled considerable debate around the role of bureaucracy at this time. The discovery of many seals at Indus sites implies the existence of a symbolic framework that may have served administrative purposes. Because the Indus script is indecipherable, we cannot clarify its administrative role.

Some scholars view these seals as a form of early bureaucracy, perhaps concerning trade, personal identification, or tax collection. While this may have been the case, these scholars argue against viewing seals as indicative of centralized bureaucracy, as similar systems of seals may exist in decentralized entities.

The absence of long or bilingual texts further complicates the reconstruction of the political structure of this society.

### **Absence of Monumental Authority and Its Interpretations**

The absence of monumental structures is one of the core points of debate in Indus studies. Unlike the pyramids of Egypt or ziggurats of Mesopotamia, Indus sites do not indicate central propaganda or elite burial practices.

Some scholars view the absence of these structures as decentralized or egalitarian governance. Some of these scholars argue that a non-structural dominance may have occurred through trade, the water system, or ritual practices. These remain undocumented in the archaeological record.

This prompts a core methodological question: how do we make a political interpretation from the archaeological record?

### **Synthesis of Scholarly Debate**

Indus governance historiography shows a clear evolution from centralized views toward more pluralistic models. For example, the previously held beliefs about the level of control exercised by the state have increasingly been questioned with the assistance of evidence regarding the presence of piecemeal economic systems, the absence of royal institutions, along with the regional heterogeneity of a unifying cultural system.

Despite the improvements, a lack of consensus continues. Of the various interpretations, the main focus centers on the following two accounts:

1.      An Invisible Centralization Theory – a centralized state existed, but with limited archaeological evidence.
2.      A Decentralized / Heterarchical Model – the presence of multiple institutional and urban centers of governance.

Most scholars increasingly prefer to reconcile the two positions by arguing that both coordination and decentralization coexisted in Indus society.

### **Conclusion of Literature Review**

The existing literature on Indus governance suggests that the civilization in question could not be conveniently placed in the more established typologies of ancient state formations. In fact, it could be placed somewhere along the continuum of cases that dispute the presence of a monarch or a centralized bureaucracy and the urbanization of the state. The discourse will continue to be advanced by archaeological discoveries alongside new theories that focus on social frameworks of a non-hierarchical nature.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR ADMINISTRATION IN THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION**

As there are no known decipherable written records to explain the political structures of the Indus Valley Civilization, the archaeological remains are the main source of information about its administrative structures. Even without written documents, the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization provide a lot of information about the large-scale administration, control and regulation of urban settlements. The main types of archaeological evidence are urban planning, evidence for management of standards, control of production, seals, drainage and water control, and evidence for long-distance trade. All these pieces of evidence point toward a complex and differentiated society that functioned through standardized rules, without the need of a clearly identifiable elite.

### **Urban Planning as Evidence of Coordinated Administration**

One highly developed feature of the Indus Civilization is the highly organized design of the cities. Indus Valley cities like Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, and Dholavira contain a design that is consistent with grid patterns, right angles, and designated areas for residence and public activities. This consistency suggests that regulation of the design of the city was a planned activity.

The consistency of design, even between cities and towns that are separated by a large distance, suggests that there was a central design authority or a set of design norms for the cities that was recognized in the

entire Indus Valley. The planning and design of the cities was further controlled through standards for street widths and the segregation of residential, commercial, and drainage areas.

Dholavira is notable for showing sophisticated urban planning with a water storage and distribution system built as part of the city's design. Such a system illustrates both advanced engineering and the foresight of administrators to plan resource management for an area with limited water supplies.

### **Standardization of Bricks, Weights and Measures**

An additional example of the advanced administration within the Indus Valley is the impressive standardization of both building materials and the systems of measurement. The bricks of the Indus Civilization had a standard size with a ratio of 1: 2: 4 and this was consistent across the various Indus Civilization sites and across time. This consistency likely demonstrates the enforcement of a construction standard through an administration system or a construction guild.

There was also a similar system of standardization with the weights of the Indus Civilization. This system was also a binary system and was consistent across the large Indus Civilization area. The presence of standardized weights was indicative of regulated trade. The presence of standardized weights also meant that economic transactions were carried out using the weights that were standardized.

Such a level of standardization was likely the product of an enforcement administration system, but the type of governance, whether centralized or distributed, is a subject of ongoing debate.

### **Seals as a System of Administration Control**

The large number of Indus Valley seals, which were made of steatite and had engravings of animals and a script that remains undeciphered, indicate that they had a major role in the economic and administrative systems of the Indus Valley Civilization.

Marks of ownership, goods, or commercial transactions likely used seals. Their widespread use in domestic, urban, and trade contexts supports the idea that seals served administrative functions, particularly for identification and control. Some seals recovered from Mesopotamia suggest they were used in international trade.

Seals show a high degree of standardization in production and the iconography was strictly regulated. This suggests that the use of seals was likely regulated by a certain community of producers or by some administrative organization. The lack of any wording or inscriptions of a royal or bureaucratic nature means that a direct relation to a centralized state system is unlikely.

### **Craft Production and Workshop Organization**

Indus Civilization craft production shows a high degree of specialization and organization. This is evident in a number of locations, such as in production of beads at Chanhudaro, of shell goods at Balakot, and of metal goods at various settlements. All of these suggest a system of production that was organized, though decentralized.

Evidence for the degree of specialization seen is the standardization of artifacts produced in different places that suggests a high degree of control over the production process and the regulation of labor. This suggests decentralized systems of production and quality control.

### **Water Management and Civic Infrastructure**

Water management systems show some of the best examples of organized administration of the Indus Civilization. Examples of this include the Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro, the sophisticated drainage systems of the city, and the water reservoir systems of Dholavira, which show advanced skills in hydraulic engineering.

Maintaining such systems would have needed coordinated efforts, and the systems especially the drainage systems as a part of the residential planning indicate that at the civic level there was likely some form of sanitation regulation.

This indicates there were some administrative systems at least for the provision of public service. It is unknown whether these systems were centralized or local, but the complexity of the public works systems means there was likely a considerable amount of sustained coordination.

### **Economic Control and Trade**

The Indus Civilization was part of a complex trade system of South Asia that included Mesopotamia and Central Asia and the Arabian Peninsula. Archaeological records show that Indus Valley seals have been found in Mesopotamia and that ancient Sumerian writings contained references to Meluhha, which is thought to have been in the Indus Valley.

Long distance trade requires a controlled economy which involves the keeping of trust and communication and the use of standard measures over a long distance. In trade, especially over long distances, the use of standard weights and measures, seals, and manufactured goods is of vital importance.

This economic integration shows that there were institutional arrangements for trade. However, these arrangements were likely along the merchant networks rather than a formal structure of control.

### **An Absence of Royal Tombs & an Absence of Administrative Centers**

Although urban infrastructure was highly developed, there is no evidence of royal tombs, palaces, or centralized administrative buildings. Buildings such as the "Great Granary" in Harappa or the "Great Bath" in Mohenjo Daro have been interpreted in a plethora of ways, but none indicate a formal structure of royal control.

The model of governance has to incorporate flexible systems of thinking. Rather than thinking administrative systems were absent, we can suggest governance was exercised through non-monumental systems or distributed governance.

### **Synthesis of Archaeological Evidence**

The archaeology of the Indus Civilization is interesting in that it provides contradictory evidence. On the one hand, evidence of large-scale urban planning is coupled with a high degree of standardization and a high degree of coordination. On the other hand, evidence of centralized political institutions or a ruling elite is completely absent.

This statement of contradiction can be resolved in two ways. Either the Indus Civilization had a high degree of centralization of control, and the elite class had a low degree of visibility, or the civilization was based

on a high degree of shared norms, control of the economy, and voluntary cooperation, and therefore operated effectively with a low degree of centralization.

The distribution of the various centers of production, the high degree of standardization, and the absence of monumental royal architecture support the second statement of contradiction.

### **MYTH AND REALITY OF DECENTRALIZATION IN THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION**

In South Asian archaeology, the centralization versus decentralization debate in relation to the governance style of the Indus Valley Civilization is one of the most controversial topics. Evidence from archaeology suggests interconnectedness and integration of an economy and urbanization. However, the lack of evidence for rulers and the absence of monumental political architecture creates interpretive problems. As a result, two alternative but opposing theories have emerged. The first, the “myth of decentralization,” posits that governance of the Indus Valley Civilization was likely centralized, but this centralization was archaeologically concealed. The second, the “reality of decentralization,” holds that the Indus Valley Civilization governance was decentralized. To understand the debate, it is necessary to move away from the dichotomous state versus non-state theories, and adopt a more flexible conceptualization of the early forms of organization of authority and governance.

#### **The Concept of “Myth of Decentralization”**

The “myth of decentralization” pertains to the possibility of central governance in the Indus Civilization. This could occur through administrative and ideological structures that are not reliant on monumental frameworks of governance, or visible cues of kingship are not present. In this case, the lack of palaces or temples, and royal inscriptions, do not necessarily signify the presence of decentralized governance. Rather, this can be a different way of presenting and expressing authority.

Advocates of this view maintain that there is no need for states to exhibit their power in the form of visible monumental structures. Political power can be expressed through control of the economic system, monopolies on standardization, and administrative networks, all of which can leave a small footprint on the archaeological record. Concerning the Indus Civilization, the overall standardization of weights, bricks, and urban design may be interpreted as evidence of dominant control of a central power.

From this perspective, the Indus elite may have ruled through bureaucratic channels that refrained from the construction of monumental power. Control may have instead resided on the regulatory frameworks of trade and standardization of urban design and control. The absence of royal imagery should then be interpreted as a different system of governance rather than evidence of a decentralized system.

Other scholars argue that the Indus script, which remains undeciphered, may be a form of centralized record-keeping that would be evidential of a centralized governance, should it be unraveled. Thus, the apparent absence of political hierarchy may be a consequence of inadequate archaeological interpretation.

#### **The Decentralized Governance Reality**

The decentralized governance model, on the other hand, asserts that the Indus Civilization reflects a different type of early urban organization that was not founded on kingship or power of a central authority that is coercive, but rather, that it was founded on a distribution of governance across several urban centers, groups of institutions, and a plurality of economic actors.

An incomplete picture of Indus elite residences, royal palaces, or burials suggests that elite governance was not expressed materially. Most ancient civilizations display some level of centralized authority, sophisticated settlement planning, and burial of the elites. The complete absence of these features suggests the presence of a different political logic, perhaps based on some level of collective or civic governance.

Uniformity in settlement planning is frequently cited as a sign of direct central control. This can be interpreted in alternative ways, including shared customs, similar levels of professional skill, and regional inter-settlement contacts. Once professional skills were established, standards could be maintained by the community, controlled by a form of self-policing, or by institutional memory.

Furthermore, decentralized systems were demonstrated by the regional dispersion of craft production. Rather than having one city as the primary control of craft production, a large number of cities may have controlled a particular form of production. This type of system may represent a coordinated economy based on a self-organizing system.

### **Heterarchy as a Middle Framework**

Most of the recent studies have adopted the concept of Heterarchy, in response to the difficulty associated with interpreting both central and decentralized systems. In Heterarchy, more than one system of control exists simultaneously and there is no direct dominance of one control over the others. Power is distributed more or less equally and is contextually variable.

Heterarchy offers an excellent approach to understanding the Indus Civilization. Urban centers such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa may have been linked to one another as semi-autonomous units through trade networks and shared customs and administrative standards. In this context, authority was situational. Merchants, craftspeople, and even the community of Harappa had control over the varying aspects of their lives.

This approach accounts for the unity of a civilization that has no record of a politically unified society. It considers variation within the confines of the Indus civilization by providing flexibility of design within a given structure of a civilization.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the Indus civilization was the degree to which economic systems were integrated. Trade networks connected the urban centers and extended the reach of the Indus Civilization to as far as Central Asia and Mesopotamia. The presence of a system of exchange was confirmed by uplifted block seals and weights of a standard size.

Decentralization does not preclude integration of a system. Standardization, mutual interest, and trust permit the establishment of systems of trade and networks of great complexity, as demonstrated by the evidence of the Indus civilization. Merchant groups and crafts specialists were most likely the deciders of the economic order and enabled a system to be established without the need for centralized governance.

### **Symbolic Authority and Non-Monumental Governance**

The degree of symbolic authority must also be considered in the context of the decentralization discourse. Within most of the early states, the concentration of power at the disposal of the ruler was legitimized through the combination of monumental buildings, religious ideologies, and public inscriptions. In the case of the Indus Civilization, there is little to no evidence of such expressive capabilities.

The absence of such expressions may also mean that authority was distributed among different social classes and that the seals and symbols that did provide some form of social communication conformed to a culturally unified system and were not tools of elite class propaganda.

It can be argued that in the Indus Civilization, legitimacy was granted through observance of the cultural customs of the society and not through the obedience of a ruler of a unified state. This is a proposition of a different political system compared to those of the contemporary ancient civilizations.

### **Limitations of the Archaeological Record**

The fragmentary nature of the archaeological record is a serious limitation of this discourse. The Indus script is still un-deciphered, and structures of governance that are built from ephemeral materials such as wood, textiles, and organic records of administration are simply absent. Therefore, all theories of governance are abstract and have a high degree of speculation.

The absence of evidence for the existence of a centralized authority may also be a function of the nature of preservation as opposed to the political disposition of the state. On the other hand, the existence of centralized authority may be a projection of modern historical models onto a civilization that operated, most likely, under a different system of governance.

Because of this, we must exercise caution in making claims about Indus governance that are not substantiated by evidence. Within the constraints of the current state of evidence, both decentralization and hidden centralization are plausible theories.

### **Synthesis: Beyond the Binary Model**

The 'myth versus reality' decentralization debate is a narrower manifestation of a more general problem in archaeology – the binary categorization of ancient societies as either state/non-state or centralized/decentralized.

The Indus Civilization is a unique case. The evidence points to a highly coordinated system that left a lot of room for openness and low levels of hierarchy. Most probably, the Indus Civilization reflects a hybrid system of governance.

Thus, decentralization is somewhat of a reality and somewhat of a myth. A more fitting description of the Indus Civilization would be a distributed governance system highly culturally and economically integrated, where power resided in the system and not in the individuals.

### **Conclusion of the Debate**

The Indus Valley Civilization, once again, defies simple means of political categorization. While the evidence does not exclude a certain degree of centralization, the growing body of evidence strongly supports decentralized or heterarchical models of governance. The apparent ability of this civilization to sustain urban, economically integrated, and technologically advanced systems without a monopoly on political power points to the fact that complex societies have the ability to devise different means of political systems.

This also undermines the long accepted view that state systems are predicated on a unitary system of governance and the presence of a king.

## CONCLUSION

Indus Valley Civilization is one of the most intricate ancient civilizations to study. Indus Valley Civilization is unique. In the ancient world, civilizations established political systems that were easily identifiable through kings, monumental structures, or written records. In contrast, the Indus Valley Civilization established a sophisticated urban settlement system that has yet to reveal the presence of rulers or established political systems.

This dissertation attempts to evaluate the extent to which the Indus Valley Civilization was governed through decentralized systems, or if it substantiates a form of centralized governance that is covert and, to date, has not been unearthed in the archaeological record. By addressing the relevant historiographical disputes, archaeological findings, and the conceptual frameworks of heterarchy, it becomes apparent that no single theoretical construct accounts for the totality of the evidence.

The archaeological findings of the Indus Valley Civilization attest to the presence of large-scale cooperative efforts. Constructed urban settlements show evidence of standardization. The ratio of bricks used, the precision of the systems of weights and measures, and trade networks were all standardized and extended beyond the settlements. The use of seals points to an advanced state of economic interactivity. Taken together, the evidence points to greater administrative autonomy and cultural homogeneity.

However, large scale cooperative efforts conceal established systems of centralized governance. The Indus Valley Civilization lacks monumental structures that celebrate the existence of rulers, such as palaces and royal tombs. In addition, there is no clear evidence of a centralized bureaucracy or ruling class that dominated the settlement. The absence of these systems proves that the Indus Valley Civilization was governed through decentralized systems.

The most plausible conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that there was no single governing system in the Indus Civilization, but rather a decentralized or heterarchical system. There was no need for coercive state power or kingship. There are likely many urban centers and a plethora of institutions. Governance could have relied on a multitude of networks, such as civic or professional, and incorporated cultural norms and economic practices of the community.

However, there could have been a “hidden centralization.” We have a buried script, likely some sort of perishable administrative record, and the archaeology of the Indus Valley has more to offer. There can be centralized systems of governance that don’t require large inscriptions and can be a part of the record, they just haven't been found yet.

The Indus Valley Civilization is an example of the many systems that can exist without centralization. The absence of overt displays of kingship or monumental displays can be used as a justification for refusing to consider the system complex. It also demonstrates that the many systems of the Eastern Evolving political systems can be expanded. The Indus Valley Civilization also can be an example of the many ways that ancient societies have had the ability to organize systems of power and administration.

The Indus Valley Civilization represents an advanced political system that is both urban and non-monarchical at the same time. Because there are a number of ways of governing, most likely a decentralized system of power, the Indus Civilization has distributed organizational systems. It is also the first civilization to have a number of urban settlements.

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