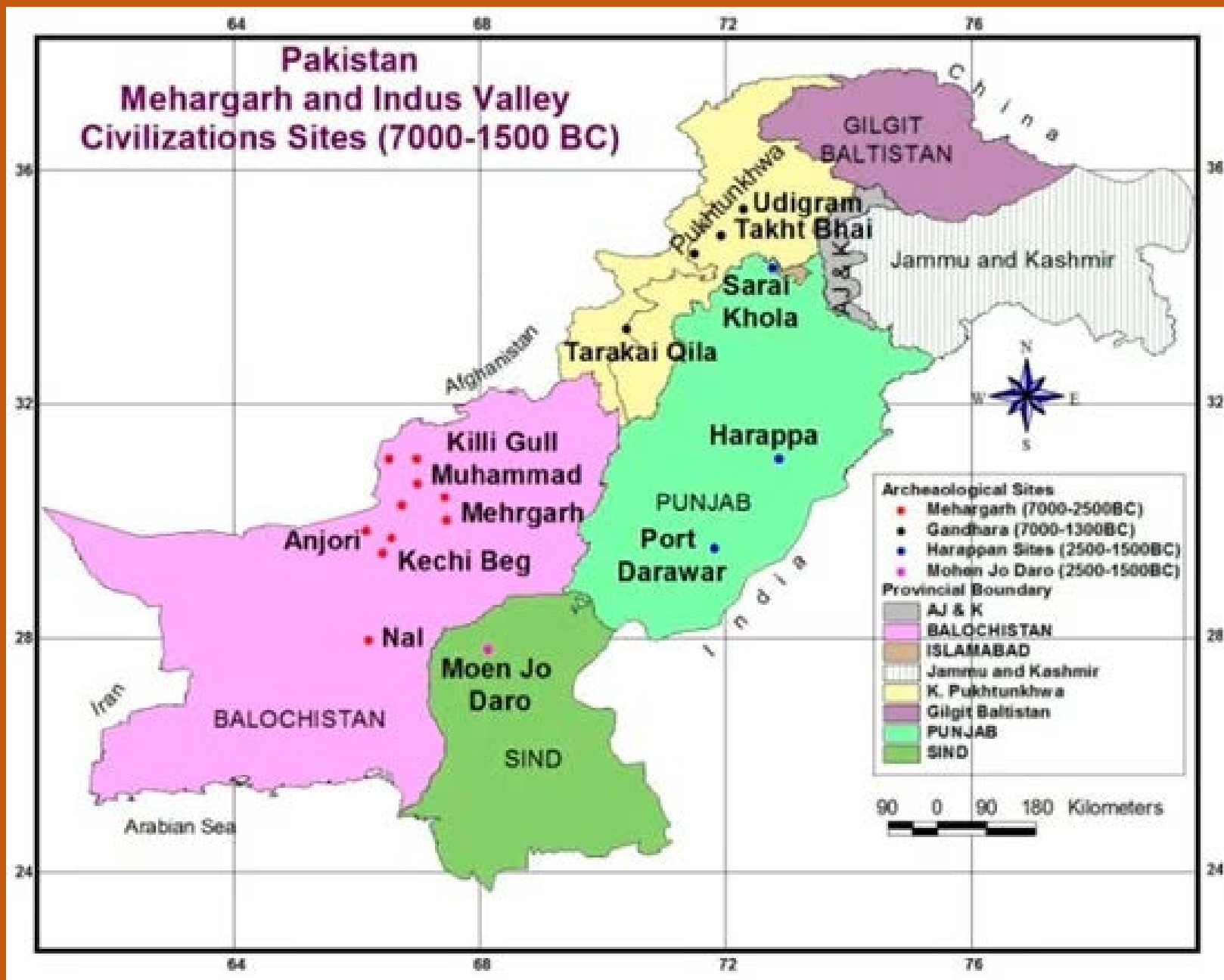


Pre and Early Harappan Cultures of North and North-West India: A study on Mehrgarh and Kalibangan

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Mehrgarh

- It is the best-known early village site in South Asia, and presents the earliest evidence for sedentary occupation, agriculture and pastoralism thus far discovered.
- Archaeological sites, spread over 300 hectares, have been discovered in the Kachchi plain near the Bolan Pass, to the west of the Indus River valley and between the present-day Pakistani cities of Quetta, Kalat and Sibi.
- Bolan Valley is one of the important routes linking the Indus plain and the mountainous terrain of Baluchistan.
- The settlement began its history as a camping site around 7000 BC and continued up to 1900 BCE.
- Excavations at the site began in 1974 under J. F. Jarrige and continued into 1980s and later.
- This imposing site bears the evidence of occupation in different periods, having been given separate numbers, such as MR 1, MR 2, MR 3 etc.
- There are eight periods, through which one sees a steady and obvious upward curve in the lifestyle and technology of the people.





J. F. Jarrige

- From 1975 to 1985, the French Archaeological mission in collaboration with department of Archaeology of Pakistan has conducted excavations near the village of Mehrgarh.
- The publication of 'Mehrgarh, Field Reports 1974-1985- From the Neolithic Times to the Indus Civilization' provides the main results found by excavations in the Neolithic sector of Mehrgarh specially in MR 3 mound.
- From 1985 to 1996, the excavation conducted at Nausharo, 6 miles south of Mehrgarh. The Period I of this site is contemporary with Mehrgarh Period VI and VII. Nausharo Period II and III belong to Harappan civilization. This excavation at Nausharo gives a continuous sequence of occupation in the Kachi- Bolan plain from aceramic Neolithic period to Harappan cultural phase.
- From 2000 the work in the Neolithic sector of Mehrgarh (MR 3) was resumed and the internal stratigraphy of the whole aceramic neolithic period was published in South Asian Archaeology 1997 and 2001 session.

Period I of the Mehrgarh civilization

1. Between 7000 to 5500 BCE. (This is evaluated by the Radiocarbon-14 method).
2. Initially, it was a temporary habitat for hunters and nomadic pastoralists, after which it developed a permanent habitat and an agrarian way of life.
3. The dwellings were made of bricks of equal size with dry clay.
4. Mill, hammer, hoe, sickle and stone tools are found here.
5. Domestic animals included cows, sheep, goats and bulls, etc. were present there.
6. Various kinds of barley and wheat were cultivated here.
7. The pottery did not match in the corner of this period. However, six human statues have been found.
8. The lapidary industry seemed well developed as evidenced by ornaments made of seashell, limestone, turquoise, and lapis lazuli.
9. At this stage, the space between two houses or two houses was usually used as a graveyard. The bodies were buried on their knees and tilted to one side. However, the head was not always kept to one side.
10. In burial practices, one sees females being buried with some ornaments and young goats, while some males were buried with bladelets and other kinds of microliths.
11. Sea oysters used to come to this area due to the connection of the coastal area with Mehrgarh. But probably turquoise was imported from Central Asia or Persia and the Baidurya gems from Afghanistan.
12. From this time onwards it gradually started moving towards urbanization.



Periods II & III of the Mehrgarh civilization

- Period II is between 5500 BCE–4800 BCE and Period III is between 4800 BCE–3500 BCE.
- Period II is located at the site MR 4, and is subdivided into II A , II B and II C, while Period III is at MR 2.
- By the second and third Periods of Mehrgarh, ceramic technology had been discovered and largely used. Fine specimens of painted pottery have been excavated, along with detailed terracotta figures and glazed beads.
- The first terracotta seals also belong to this period.
- This connects well to the evidence of considerable Jewelry from glazed beads and trinkets manufacturing activity in these periods. Common technology included copper drills, updraft kilns, large pit kilns and copper melting crucibles.
- Wheel turned pottery and red ware pottery are hallmarks, especially of Period II A. This pottery is comparable to KGM III, Togau A, Hissar 1B & IC, Sialk III and Namazga II, characterised by geometric designs of dot tip motifs, rosettes, hatched or plain triangles, butterfly patterns, chequer board patterns.
- Period III is chalcolithic, marked by advances in the use of copper. Burial practices involved burying ornaments with female bodies and an otherwise reducing number of grave goods. Red ochre was found on some of the bones, suggesting that the grave may have been painted on the inside before the body was laid in.



Periods IV, V, VI and VII of the Mehrgarh civilization

- Periods IV is between 3500 to 3250 BCE
- Period V is between 3250 to 3000 BCE,
- Period VI is Circa 3000 BCE
- Period VII is between 2600 - 2000 BCE.
- The site containing Periods IV to VII is designated as MR1.
- These periods are marked by sophisticated ceramic activity, marked architectural development, and increased use of stone tools. With the decline of concentrated Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlement patterns, the focus seems to have shifted to smaller and more compact habitations.
- Period VII is thought to be contemporaneous with the middle Indus Valley Civilization and around this time, the people of Mehrgarh seemed to have abandoned this site and moved to the nearby site of Naushuro.
- Individual families with systematically built rectangular houses, grain storage jars and hearths became the norm.
- An apparent use of irrigation helped cultivate spaeorococcum variety of wheat, and this, alongwith more domestication of animals, led to a diversification in diet.

- The pottery from this phase is most notable for its craftsmanship and artistry. There are instances of Faiz Muhammad Grey Ware, KGM Ware, Kechi Beg Ware, Togau B & C Pottery, Black on Red Ware and Quetta Ware across the time periods.
- Fish and Pipal leaf motifs were common as were geometrical patterns. This pottery is widely spread in the Mehrgarh region at sites like Lal Shah, Kiyani Damb, Hamada I, Hampada II, Khanwah.
- Period VII saw a prolific production of teracotta figurines, sometimes also referred to as Zhob figurines. These figurines - sometimes women holding children - may have been considered goddesses and consequently, a faint picture of the Mother cult may emerge.
- A graveyard for young children is also among the noteworthy finds from this period. Aged between 2-3 years, these bodies were found oriented in an East - West direction in flexed positions in small mud brick boxes.

Pottery



Period VIII of the Mehrgarh civilization

- Period VIII is around Circa 1900 BC.
- This last period of Mehrgarh is found at the Sibri cemetery, which is located at a distance of 8km from the village of Mehrgarh.
- This phase marks an important connection to the nearby location of Naushuro and some other cultures in Balochistan and the Bactro-Margiana region of Central Asia, with its similar geometric seals and pottery .
- This period also confirms Mehrgarh's connection with the Indus valley civilization, and thereby affixing an important piece to the historical puzzle of our ancestry.

Kalibangan

- Kalibangan lies along the left bank of the dried-up bed of river Ghaggar (ancient Sarasvati) in the northern part of Rajasthan and about 310-kilometer northwest of Delhi.
- Kalibangan literary meaning is Black Bangle.
- It is truly the first Harappan city of the Indian cultural heritage beyond Indus Valley.
- It comprises of three mounds, the larger one in the middle (KLB-2), the smaller in the west (KLB-1) and the smallest in the east (KLB-3). This cultural layer belongs to the Harappan Period.
- The discovery of non-Harappan settlement immediately underlying the occupational remains of Harappan citadel (KLB-1) is enhancing our knowledge of cultural style of the Indus civilization.
- Kalibangan site was discovered by Luigi Pio Tessitori, an Italian Indologist and linguist.
- Most extensive work on Kalibangan was done by A Ghosh in 1951-55 and later by BB Lal & B K Thapar in 1961.

Indus Valley Civilization



KALIBANGAN 1 (PRE–HARAPPAN)

- The settlement was situated on the bend of the river beyond the active flood-plain and was a parallelogram, some 250 m. from north to south and 160 m. from east to west.
- It was found to have been fortified from the very beginning of the occupation. The fortification wall was made of mud bricks (30 x 20 x 10 cm.; proportion, 3:2:1) and in its extant portion showed two structural phases. In the earlier phase, the basal width was 1.9 m. while in the latter, it measured 3 to 4 m., the extra thickness being added on the inner side. Both the inner and outer faces of the wall seem to have been originally plastered with mud, patches of which were found preserved at many places.
- Within the walled area, the houses were built of mud bricks of the same size as those used in the fortification wall, the masonry being in the English bonding technique, with alternate courses of headers and stretchers.
- The use of baked brick was attested by a drain, the size of the bricks being the same as that of mud bricks.
- A house consisted of three to four rooms with a courtyard was discovered from excavation.
- The excavation also brought to light part of a 1.5 m.-wide lane running in the east-west direction.
- From the width of the walls (some of them only a single brick length) it could be inferred that the houses were single storied.
- Interesting evidence regarding cooking practices was revealed by the presence, inside the houses, of ovens both underground and above-ground variety, closely resembling the present-day *tandoors* in the region.
- The former had mud-plastered walls with a slight over-hang near the mouth and the latter, also made of mud walls with bridged side opening for feeding fuel, seem to have been periodically plastered.
- Equally noteworthy was the existence of cylindrical pits lined with lime plaster, possibly for storing drinking water. The alignment of the houses no less than the size of the bricks used was significantly different from those of the succeeding Harappans.

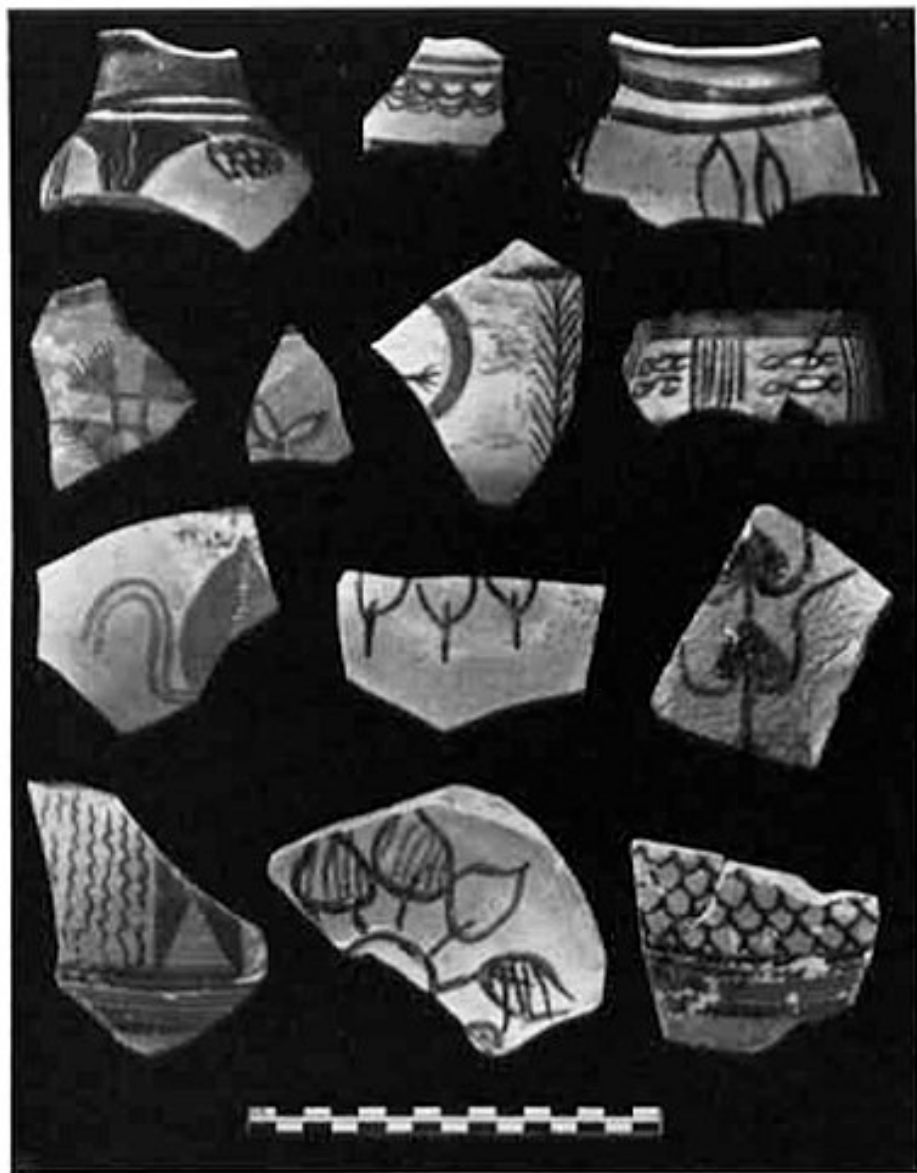
- The distinctive trait of this Period was the pottery (Thapar 1969) which was characterized by six fabrics, labelled A, B, C, D, E and F.
- Of these, fabrics E and F, distinguished essentially by surface color (E for buff and F for grey], did not show marked individualities either in shape or in painted design, their main features being shared by other fabrics. Furthermore, in frequency they were somewhat uncommon, the latter being particularly scarce.
- **Fabric A** was marked by an individuality which isolated it from the other fabrics. This was the most used pottery.
- The vessels of this fabric, although made on the wheel, were carelessly potted, showing un-skilled handling with tell-tale traces of irregular striations.
- It was drab red to pinkish in surface color and painted over in light black, combined at times with white, the field of decoration being confined to the portion above the girth.
- The design elements, drawn in free style, included horizontal bands, loops fringed below or enclosed by horizontal bands, a criss-cross moustache-like bifold scroll within wavy lines, symmetrically joined semicircles, latticed triangles, lenticulars, segments or scallops with figures. The range of shape was, however, very limited and comprised vases with outturned or outcurve rims and disc or ring bases, and bowls with tapering or convex sides. Of unusual interest were a vase with a pedestal base and another with a hole mouth.
- **Fabric B** was distinguished primarily by its paste, texture and surface treatment. The pottery of this fabric was carefully potted on the wheel and was treated with a red slip up to the shoulder, the slipped area being further diversified by black painted designs. The remaining surface of the pot was covered by a thin clayey solution and, while wet, seems to have been roughened by horizontal or wavy combings or by tortoise shell or dendritic impressions. Over this rusticated surface, naturalistic designs—floral, animal and bird—were painted in black.

- **Fabric C** was marked by a fine-textured paste and all-over smooth-slipped surface in shades of red and purple or plum red, the latter recalling pottery from below the defensive walls at Harappa. The repertory of painted designs included, besides the recurrent carefully ruled horizontal bands or loops or crisscross, borders of plants, fish-scale, metopes, pendent triangles, etc. The shapes represented in this fabric comprised globular and ovoid vases with disc bases, lids, straight-sided bowls, dishes and offering stands. Except for a few diagnostic shapes, this fabric was the nearest in correspondence to the Harappan pottery.
- **Fabric D** was characterized by a thick sturdy section and a slipped red surface. Common shapes included heavy jars, troughs and basins, The last named was, however, the most characteristic type. The basin interiors were decorated on the sides with sharp ridged incisions of varying pattern and on the outside with single or multiple rows of cord impressions. The shape and design of this basin are closely paralleled at Amri in Period II B.
- **Tools**-Among the other finds of this Period, the more noteworthy were small-sized blades of chalcedony and agate, sometimes serrated or backed; beads, variously of steatite (disc), shell, carnelian, terracotta and copper; bangles of copper, shell and terracotta; terracotta objects like a toy cart-wheel and a bull; quern stones with mullers; a bone point; and copper celts including a curious axe.

- **Ploughed field-** An outstanding discovery of the excavation, was a ploughed field situated the southeast of the settlement, outside the town wall. It showed a grid of furrows with one set more closely spaced (about 10 cm. apart) running east-west and the other, widely spaced (about 1.90 m. apart), running north-south. Here two types of crops (pulse one direction and mustard in the other) are grown in the same field. No remains of either a plough or ploughshare or coulter have, so far, been obtained from the excavation. Since cultivation during this Period seems to have depended flood-irrigation, supplemented by seasonal precipitation, it is reasonable to infer that of the winter crop (rabi) was grown, the sowing being done in the autumn after the river flow resulting from the tropical monsoon had subsided. Although no cereals were found during excavation, cereal-type pollen has been attested in good numbers in the deposit of Period I (Singh et al. 1974).
- The occupation endured through five structural phases, rising to a height of 1.6 m. above the natural soil, when it was ended by a catastrophe (perhaps seismic), as evidenced by the occurrence of displaced strata and subsided walls in different parts of the excavated area. Thereafter, the site seems to have been abandoned, though only temporarily, and a thin layer of sand, largely infertile and wind blown, accumulated over the ruins. During this period, the peripheral portions of the mound, particularly on the east and the west, seem to have been badly eroded and gullied.

- **Chronology:** The stratigraphical position of the settlement of Period I clearly establishes its priority in time-range to that of the succeeding Period which represented the Harappa Culture. The chronological bracket of the latter (2500-1750 B.C. at Mohenjo-daro) cannot be applied mechanically to Indus towns and villages in all locations. Many of the settlements, particularly those in the Ghaggar Valley, may have been founded later than the nuclear cities of Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, etc. In the light of the available evidence, it may be postulated that the Harappan occupation at Kalibangan would have begun around 2300 B.C. and lasted up to 1750 B.C.
- **Absolute chronology,** nine samples (five from the Early, one from the Middle, and three from the Late levels of Period I) have been dated by radiocarbon determination. Except for one, the dates are all consistent and indicate an inclusive time range of 2450-1900 B.C. which suggests an apparent overlap between the two cultural Periods. No such phenomenon, however, was recognized by the excavations, except that in the lower levels of the Harappan occupation, especially in the lower city area, pottery of Period I assemblage occurred alongside of the Harappan. This suggests only that the old inhabitants remained in contact with the new arrivals. On the other hand, there is conclusive evidence, as previously stated, to suggest a break in the occupation of the site after the close of Period I. As the excavated cuttings from which the samples have been obtained for radiocarbon dating lie on the slopes of the mound with very little soil cover (Agrawal 1968), the dangers of humus contamination must be kept in mind, especially in respect to the samples belonging to the Late levels of the Period. The duration of Period I, therefore, would in fact be much shorter, and on the above showing is estimated as 2450—2300 B.C., with a margin of some years for the abandonment of the site at the upper end of the scale. The five structural phases, of which the upper three were largely rebuilding (without changes of plan), would fully support this postulate.





A



B

Kalibangan: pre-Harappan painted pottery

THANK YOU