

ARCPIP supports excavations at Navinal, Gujarat, India with the University of Kerala and related collaborative research with the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

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In January 2014, ARCP/IP supported the ongoing collaborative research project "Excavation at Navinal, Taluka Mundra, District Kachchh, Gujarat, and Exploration in Kachchh District, Gujarat." The project is directed by Dr. Rajesh S.V., the University of Kerala, and co-directed by myself along with other co-directors from the Maharaja Sayajirao (MS) University of Baroda, the Gujarat State Department of Archaeology, and the Krantiguru Shyamji Krishna Verma (KSKV) Kachchh University. My role in this project is as the project's environmental archaeologist ensuring that the environmental materials (bones, seeds, soils, etc.) are collected in a way that will allow for robust interpretations regarding human-environment relationships. In addition to my participation, ARCP/IP also supported the participation of one undergraduate student from Albion College in the Navinal project and ongoing collaborative research with the Maharaja Sayajirao University.

Based upon systematic intensive surface collections undertaken this season, it appears that the small coastal settlement of Navinal was established and occupied during the period when the Indus Civilization undergoing a significant transformation around 1900 BC. Specifically, while there are relatively few items of classically Harappan material culture (particular ceramic forms and jewelry types) found at the site, the majority of the ceramics from Navinal date to the time when the cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro in decline and the trade networks that linked the residents of this region to the wider Indus Civilization were weakening. Based on this evidence, it appears that Navinal was likely established just as nearby Harappan settlements such as Shikarpur (excavated by archaeologists from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda also with support from ARCP/IP) were being abandoned. Data from Navinal will therefore allow us to explore the extent to which this important period of social transformation was accompanied by corresponding environmental changes.

Towards this end, the second portion of my ARCP/IP supported research in January 2014 involved travel throughout the state of Gujarat, collecting modern environmental samples, as part of an ongoing study of ancient land-use practices undertaken in collaboration with Dr. P. Ajithprasad of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. These samples will allow us to develop a high-resolution map of isotopic variation across the geological landscape of the region. This variation can then be matched to isotope values observed in the remains of animals excavated from ancient archaeological sites in the region, revealing how humans managed their livestock in the past. In this way it will be possible to reconstruct land-use practices and document the trade in agricultural products between settlements such as Navinal and Shikarpur. More importantly, the map that will result from this ARCP/IP supported research will allow us to explore how these patterns of human-environmental interaction changed during the tumultuous social transformations that characterized the end of the Indus Civilization in Gujarat.