SUMER, COASTAL ARABIA AND THE INDUS VALLEY IN PROTOLITERATE AND EARLY DYNASTIC ERAS
Supporting Evidence for a Cultural Linkage

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Well-known cuneiform evidence from various phases of the late third and early second millennia B.C., deal with the southern maritime trade route through the Gulf, linking the Near East with the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. This provides clear and indisputable proof of factual knowledge of one another’s existence and of no doubt closer details relating to the intermediaries within the complex and intricate commercial apparatus of the time. Several cultures bordering upon the Gulf share a common deficit of available resources, resulting in the organization of a fully developed trade exchange with varied recorded cargoes of raw materials, finished products and other goods.

This paper, however, focuses attention upon the possibilities of contact prior to these known records, during Protoliterate and Early Dynastic times. Certain limited archaeological phenomena, draw attention to the existence of cultural concepts commonly shared by the people of the Mesopotamian plains, Bahrain and its environs and the “Greater Indus Valley”. It still remains to be judged, as to whether these representational parallels should be considered as having been effected by mercantile transaction, or whether in the late 4th and early third millennia B.C. there was in existence between these three cultural areas, a closer, more intimate and interdependent relationship than that previously suspected.

When dealing with the apparently minor objects of commercial exchange which turn up from time to time along a well-established mercantile route, it is all too easy to undervalue their importance as
one sees them against the great staple commodities which were the main preoccupation of the traders. Nevertheless, the Mesopotamian cuneiform documents sometimes refer to freight orders which include specific requests for just such items, underlining the importance the merchants and recipients laid upon them.

Far less tangible to evaluate are the transferred nuances of half-remembered shapes and details of stylistic device, but when placed against the proven background of commercial alliance, these also serve to confirm and add to the general body of knowledge.

Calibrated dates of $2050 \pm 100$ B.C. and $2080 \pm 100$ B.C.\(^1\) are given for two C\(_{14}\) samples obtained from the Barbar Temple III on Bahrain Island. Beads, pendants and one gaming piece of lapis lazuli found here, thus fall within the recognized period of Mesopotamian-Arabian Gulf-Indus Valley contact which, generally speaking, spans the time between 2400 and 1900 B.C. The gaming piece has exact counterparts in all levels of the main Indus sites, where they are found fashioned of various stones, pottery and, at least once, of lapis lazuli. In the Royal Cemetery at Ur\(^2\), Leonard Woolley found similar pieces made of shell or lapis lazuli, and decorated at the head with inlay, a further outstanding detail found also on some of the Indus gamesmen. The \textit{grosso modo} date for the finds lies between ca. 2600-2200 B.C. and thus strongly favours a pre-Akkadian commencement of maritime contact via the southern Gulf, even though Mortensen's C\(_{14}\) dates appear to give a somewhat later arrival for the lapis objects at Barbar.

The establishment of a sea trade via the Gulf is known from the inscriptions of Ur-Nanshe and it is reasonable to propose shipments of raw material, precious metals such as gold, and precious and semi-precious stones like cornelian, agate, lapis lazuli and so on, in the time antedating the Early Dynastic III period. Again, a number of such commodities are recorded, together with their land of origin, in the cuneiform texts of the later \textit{ensi}'s of the Lagash dynasty, Lugalanda