

33 AN ADJUSTED CUBICAL CHERT WEIGHT

Indus Valley, 5th millennium BC

Size: 3.5 × 3.8 cm

Weight: 125 g



Cubical weights conform to the standard Harappan binary weight system that was used in all of the settlements. Based on a tiny black and red seed called a *gunja*, each weight doubled until the 16th ratio when the system became a decimal increase. The largest weight found at Mohenjo-daro is the equivalent of 100,000 *gunja*. While different from the weight systems of Egypt and Mesopotamia, the standardization of the Indus Valley was a tremendous facilitator of trade. The chert used for most of the weights came from the highland river-beds of Baluchistan and Afghanistan.

Edward Gibbs has written an elegiac description of his relationship with this weight, which he found in the grounds of his grandparents' house in the village of Barcombe, near Lewes. He provides a fine example of how even the most modest-seeming objects can open up a wide world to whoever has the curiosity to seek it. For 20 years it sat in his drawer of treasured finds, until a visit to the British Museum while he was student at SOAS revealed its origin. It is now recorded at the British Museum as the most westerly proof of trade with the Indus Valley. We find it difficult to imagine who we were in the 5th millennium bc, but this weight shows that we were part of a vast trading network.

Provenance: Edward Gibbs