

The Indus Valley Civilisation (Harappan Civilisation)

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ABSTRACT

The Indus Valley Civilisation was a Bronze Age civilisation (3300–1300 BC; mature period 2600–1900 BC) mainly in northwest South Asia, extending from what today is northeast Afghanistan to Pakistan and northwest India. Along with ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia it was one of three early civilisations of the Old World, and of the three the most widespread. It flourished in the basins of the Indus River, one of the major rivers of Asia, and along a system of perennial, mostly monsoon-fed, rivers that once coursed in the vicinity of the seasonal Ghaggar-Hakra river in northwest India and eastern Pakistan.

At its peak, the Indus Civilisation may have had a population of over five million. Inhabitants of the ancient Indus river valley developed new techniques in handicraft and metallurgy.

The Early Harappan Ravi Phase, named after the nearby Ravi River, lasted from circa 3300 BC until 2800 BC. It is related to the Hakra Phase, identified in the Ghaggar-Hakra River Valley to the west, and predates the Kot Diji Phase (2800–2600 BC, Harappan 2), named after a site in northern Sindh, Pakistan, near Mohenjo Daro.

Keywords: The Indus Valley, Civilisation

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At its peak, the Indus Civilisation may have had a population of over five million. Inhabitants of the ancient Indus river valley developed new techniques in handicraft (carnelian products, seal carving) and metallurgy (copper, bronze, lead, and tin). The Indus cities are noted for their urban

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planning, baked brick houses, elaborate drainage systems, water supply systems, and clusters of large non-residential buildings.

The Indus Valley Civilisation is also known as the Harappan Civilisation, after Harappa, the first of its sites to be excavated in the 1920s, in what was then the Punjab province of British India, and now is Pakistan. The discovery of Harappa, and soon afterwards, Mohenjo-Daro, was the culmination of work beginning in 1861 with the founding of the Archaeological Survey of India in the British Raj. Excavation of Harappan sites has been ongoing since 1920, with important breakthroughs occurring as recently as 1999. There were earlier and later cultures, often called Early Harappan and Late Harappan, in the same area of the Harappan Civilisation. The Harappan civilisation is sometimes called the Mature Harappan culture to distinguish it from these cultures. As of 1999, over 1,056 cities and settlements had been found, of which 96 have been excavated, mainly in the general region of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra Rivers and their tributaries. Among the settlements were the major urban centres of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Dholavira, Ganeriwala in Cholistan and Rakhigarhi.

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The mature phase of earlier village cultures is represented by Rehman Dheri and Amri in Pakistan. Kot Diji represents the phase leading up to Mature Harappan, with the citadel representing centralised authority and an increasingly urban quality of life. Another town of this stage was found at Kalibangan in India on the Hakra River.

Trade networks linked this culture with related regional cultures and distant sources of raw materials, including lapis lazuli and other materials for bead-making. By this time, villagers had domesticated numerous crops, including peas, sesame seeds, dates, and cotton, as well as animals, including the water buffalo. Early Harappan communities turned to large urban centres by 2600 BCE, from where the mature Harappan phase started. The latest research shows that Indus Valley people migrated from villages to cities.

By 2600 BC, the Early Harappan communities turned into large urban centres. Such urban centres include Harappa, Ganeriwala, Mohenjo-Daro in modern-day Pakistan, and Dholavira, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi, Rupar, and Lothal in modern-day India. In total, more than 1,052 cities and settlements have been found, mainly in the general region of the Indus Rivers and their tributaries.

A sophisticated and technologically advanced urban culture is evident in the Indus Valley Civilisation making them the first urban centres in the region. The quality of municipal town planning suggests the knowledge of urban planning and efficient municipal governments which placed a high priority on hygiene, or, alternatively, accessibility to the means of religious ritual.

As seen in Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro and the recently partially excavated Rakhigarhi, this urban plan included the world's first known urban sanitation systems: see hydraulic engineering of the

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Indus Valley Civilisation. Within the city, individual homes or groups of homes obtained water from wells. From a room that appears to have been set aside for bathing, waste water was directed to covered drains, which lined the major streets. Houses opened only to inner courtyards and smaller lanes. The house-building in some villages in the region still resembles in some respects the house-building of the Harappans.

The ancient Indus systems of sewerage and drainage that were developed and used in cities throughout the Indus region were far more advanced than any found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East and even more efficient than those in many areas of Pakistan and India today. The advanced architecture of the Harappans is shown by their impressive dockyards, granaries, warehouses, brick platforms, and protective walls. The massive walls of Indus cities most likely protected the Harappans from floods and may have dissuaded military conflicts.

The purpose of the citadel remains debated. In sharp contrast to this civilisation's contemporaries, Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, no large monumental structures were built. There is no conclusive evidence of palaces or temples—or of kings, armies, or priests. Some structures are thought to have been granaries. Found at one city is an enormous well-built bath, which may have been a public bath. Although the citadels were walled, it is far from clear that these structures were defensive. They may have been built to divert flood waters.

Most city dwellers appear to have been traders or artisans, who lived with others pursuing the same occupation in well-defined neighbourhoods. Materials from distant regions were used in the cities for constructing seals, beads and other objects. Among the artefacts discovered were beautiful glazed faience beads. Steatite seals have images of animals, people (perhaps gods), and other types of inscriptions, including the yet un-deciphered writing system of the Indus Valley Civilisation. Some of the seals were used to stamp clay on trade goods and most probably had other uses as well.

Although some houses were larger than others, Indus Civilisation cities were remarkable for their apparent, if relative, egalitarianism. All the houses had access to water and drainage facilities. This gives the impression of a society with relatively low wealth concentration, though clear social levelling is seen in personal adornments. The prehistory of Indo-Iranian borderlands shows a steady increase over time in the number and density of settlements. The population increased in Indus plains because of hunting and gathering.

The Harappan language is not directly attested and its affiliation is uncertain since the Indus script is still undeciphered. A relationship with the Dravidian or Elamo-Dravidian language family is favored by a section of scholars.

The ruins of Harappa were first described in 1842 by Charles Masson in his Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, and the Punjab, where locals talked of an ancient city extending thirteen cosses (about 25 miles), but no archaeological interest would attach to this for nearly a century.

In 1856, General Alexander Cunningham, later director general of the archaeological survey of northern India, visited Harappa where the British engineers John and William Brunton were laying the East Indian Railway Company line connecting the cities of Karachi and Lahore. They

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were told of an ancient ruined city near the lines, called Brahminabad. The city of Brahminabad was reduced to ballast. A few months later, further north, John's brother William Brunton's "section of the line ran near another ruined city, bricks from which had already been used by villagers in the nearby village of Harappa at the same site. These bricks now provided ballast along 93 miles (150 km) of the railroad track running from Karachi to Lahore".

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In 1872–75 Alexander Cunningham published the first Harappan seal (with an erroneous identification as Brahmi letters). It was half a century later, in 1912, that more Harappan seals were discovered by J. Fleet, prompting an excavation campaign under Sir John Hubert Marshall in 1921–22 and resulting in the discovery of the civilisation at Harappa by Marshall, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni and Madho Sarup Vats, and at Mohenjo-daro by Rakhal Das Banerjee, E. J. H. MacKay, and Marshall. By 1931, much of Mohenjo-Daro had been excavated, but excavations continued, such as that led by Sir Mortimer Wheeler, director of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1944. Among other archaeologists who worked on IVC sites before the independence in 1947 were Ahmad Hasan Dani, Brij Basi Lal, Nani Gopal Majumdar, and Sir Marc Aurel Stein.

Following the independence, the bulk of the archaeological finds were inherited by Pakistan where most of the Indus Valley Civilisation was based, and excavations from this time include those led by Wheeler in 1949, archaeological adviser to the Government of Pakistan. Outposts of the Indus Valley civilisation were excavated as far west as Sutkagan Dor in Pakistani Balochistan, as far north as at Shortugai on the Amu Darya (the river's ancient name was Oxus) in current Afghanistan, as far east as at Alamgirpur, Uttar Pradesh, India and as far south as at Malwan, in modern-day Surat, Gujarat, India.^[22]

In 2010, heavy floods hit Haryana in India and damaged the archaeological site of Jognakhera, where ancient copper smelting furnaces were found dating back almost 5,000 years. The Indus Valley Civilisation site was hit by almost 10 feet of water as the Sutlej Yamuna link canal overflowed.

The mature phase of the Harappan civilisation lasted from c. 2600 to 1900 BC. With the inclusion of the predecessor and successor cultures — Early Harappan and Late Harappan, respectively — the entire Indus Valley Civilisation may be taken to have lasted from the 33rd to the 14th centuries BC. The early Harappan cultures are preceded by the Mehrgarh culture (c.7000-3300 BC) in Balochistan, Pakistan.

Two terms are employed for the periodisation of the Indus Valley Civilisation: Phases and Eras. The Early Harappan, Mature Harappan, and Late Harappan phases are also called the Regionalisation, Integration, and Localisation eras, respectively, with the Regionalization era reaching back to the Neolithic Mehrgarh II period.

The Indus Valley Civilisation encompassed most of Pakistan and parts of western India, and Afghanistan, extending from Pakistani Balochistan in the west to Uttar Pradesh in the east, northeastern Afghanistan to the north and Maharashtra to the south. The geography of the Indus Valley put the civilisations that arose there in a highly similar situation to those in Egypt and Peru, with rich agricultural lands being surrounded by highlands, desert, and ocean. Recently, Indus sites

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have been discovered in Pakistan's northwestern Frontier Province as well. Other IVC colonies can be found in Afghanistan while smaller isolated colonies can be found as far away as Turkmenistan and in Gujarat. Coastal settlements extended from Sutkagan Dor in Western Baluchistan to Lothal in Gujarat. An Indus Valley site has been found on the Oxus River at Shortughai in northern Afghanistan, in the Gomul River valley in northwestern Pakistan, at Manda, Jammu on the Beas River near Jammu, India, and at Alamgirpur on the Hindon River, only 28 km from Delhi. Indus Valley sites have been found most often on rivers, but also on the ancient seacoast, for example, Balakot, and on islands, for example, Dholavira.

There is evidence of dry river beds overlapping with the Hakra channel in Pakistan and the seasonal Ghaggar River in India. Many Indus Valley sites have been discovered along the Ghaggar-Hakra beds. Among them are: Rupar, Rakhigarhi, Sothi, Kalibangan, and Ganwariwala. According to J. G. Shaffer and D. A. Lichtenstein, the Harappan Civilisation "is a fusion of the Bagor, Hakra, and Kot Diji traditions or 'ethnic groups' in the Ghaggar-Hakra valley on the borders of India and Pakistan".

According to some archaeologists, more than 500 Harappan sites have been discovered along the dried up river beds of the Ghaggar-Hakra River and its tributaries, in contrast to only about 100 along the Indus and its tributaries; consequently, in their opinion, the appellation Indus Ghaggar-Hakra civilisation or Indus-Saraswati civilisation is justified. However, these politically inspired arguments are disputed by other archaeologists who state that the Ghaggar-Hakra desert area has been left untouched by settlements and agriculture since the end of the Indus period and hence shows more sites than those found in the alluvium of the Indus valley; second, that the number of Harappan sites along the Ghaggar-Hakra river beds has been exaggerated and that the Ghaggar-Hakra, when it existed, was a tributary of the Indus, so the new nomenclature is redundant. "Harappan Civilisation" remains the correct one, according to the common archaeological usage of naming a civilisation after its first findspot.

Mehrgarh is a Neolithic (7000 BC to c. 2500 BC) site to the west of the Indus River valley, near the capital of the Kachi District in Pakistan, on the Kacchi Plain of Balochistan, near the Bolan Pass. According to Ahmad Hasan Dani, professor emeritus at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, the discovery of Mehrgarh "changed the entire concept of the Indus civilisation. There we have the whole sequence, right from the beginning of settled village life."

Mehrgarh is one of the earliest sites with evidence of farming and herding in South Asia. According to Parpola, the culture migrated into the Indus Valley and became the Indus Valley Civilisation. According to Lukacs and Hemphill, while there is a strong continuity between the neolithic and chalcolithic (Copper Age) cultures of Mehrgarh, there is a biological discontinuity between the neolithic population and the chalcolithic population of Mehrgarh, which suggests a change of population.

Excavations at Bhirrana, Haryana, in India between 2006 and 2009, by archaeologist K. N. Dikshit, provided nineteen artifacts which could be dated radiometric. Six were from the earliest level, which provided a time bracket between 7380 and 6201 BC. These six samples included "relatively advanced pottery," so called Hakra ware. These dates compete with Mehrgarh for being the oldest site for cultural remains in the area.

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- Wright 2010, p. 107: Quote: "Five major Indus cities are discussed in this chapter. During the Urban period, the early town of Harappa expanded in size and population and became a major center in the Upper Indus. Other cities emerging during the Urban period include Mohenjodaro in the Lower Indus, Dholavira to the south on the western edge of peninsular India in Kutch, Ganweriwala in Cholistan, and a fifth city, Rakhigarhi, on the

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Ghaggar-Hakra. Rakhigarhi will be discussed briefly in view of the limited published material."

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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