

The Indus River Valley Civilization



The Indus River Valley is located in Pakistan on the Indian subcontinent and its earliest civilization dates back to around 3000 B.C.E. This fertile river valley is created by a series of rivers that begin in the Himalayan Mountains and end into the Arabian Sea. The melting mountain snows and the seasonal monsoons add valuable water to the rivers that carry silt deposits down the river valleys. Today, most of the region is arid and desolate but back then it was a predominantly agricultural society.

Remains found of the earliest people show that they were farmers who grew wheat and barley and used sophisticated agricultural tools and cropping techniques. They knew how to make bronze weapons, tools, mirrors, and pottery. Their decorated bowls had designs of bulls, long-horned cattle and fish painted on them, giving evidence of their food sources.



The early people of the Indus River Valley carved large numbers of small figurines of women. These statuettes differ from those found in many other early cultures in the detailed attention given to hairstyles and jewelry. Early village sites also contained tiny carts with clay wheels that may be the earliest children's toys yet discovered.

Over time city-states emerged as the populations grew within this fertile region. The civilization contained two major cities: Harappa in the north and Mohenjo-Daro in the south. These cities were linked to a complex of smaller urban centers and villages that covered an area four times the size of Sumer and twice the size of Egypt during the Old Kingdom. Harappan civilization was unable to survive natural catastrophes and nomadic invasions. Until the mid-19th century it was "lost" or forgotten, even by the peoples who lived in the vicinity of its sand-covered ruins. It was rediscovered by the British in the 1850's while building a railroad and then became a major archaeological site in the 1920's and 1930's.

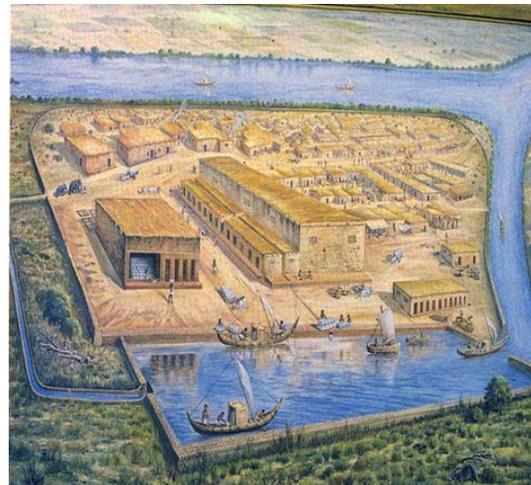


Picture of the Indus River today



Typical animal carving with writing symbols

What these archaeologists found were the remains of two advanced, well-planned and organized cities that were built in grid patterns. Artifacts and remains from other civilizations such as Mesopotamia, China, and Southeast Asia meant that they were trading centers. Several buildings were found that were once grain storage centers, providing evidence of a strong political government that took care of the populations in times of need. Each of these buildings was located close to a citadel or temple, also proving evidence that religion was of great importance to these societies.

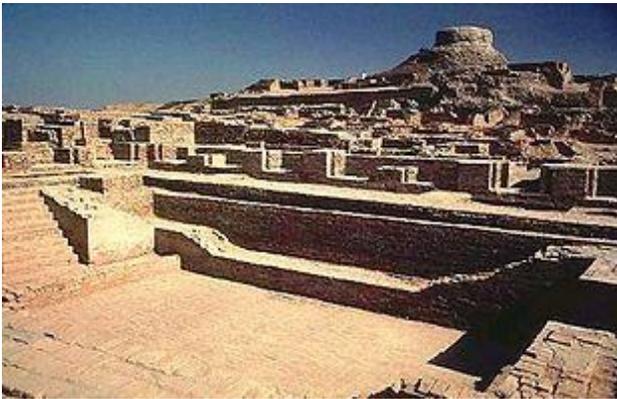


Artists Impression of Harappa

The downfall of this civilization was a combination of several factors. The area was invaded by Aryans around 2000 B.C.E. From archaeological evidence, it appeared that the original people of the Indus River Valley did not possess strong military weapons so they offered little resistance to outside invaders. The dominance of these invaders in the Harappan core regions and much of the rest of northern India by 1000 B.C. meant the end of India's first civilization.

Rapid changes in types of pottery suggest a series of sudden waves of migrants into the region. It is possible that the Harappans were too weak militarily to prevent these incoming peoples from settling in or taking over their towns and cities. The marked decline in the quality of building and town planning indicates that the priestly elite were losing control.

There is also evidence of severe flooding at Mohenjo-Daro and other sites. Short-term natural disasters may have compounded the adverse effects of long-term climatic changes. Shifts in the monsoon pattern and changes in temperature may have begun the process of desertification that eventually transformed the region into the arid steppe land as it is found today.



Ruins at Mohenjo-Daro

The Indus valley proved capable of nurturing a civilization that endured for over a thousand years. When the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro collapsed, the plains of the Indus were bypassed in favor of the far more lush and extensive lands in the basin of the Ganges River network to the east.



Bronze Indus dancing girl



Indus River Valley jewelry