

Early Civilization in the Indus Valley

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This photo from December 14, 2013, shows a Pakistani tourist visiting the remains of the ancient Indus Valley civilization in Harappa, Pakistan. About 4,500 years ago a remarkable civilization existed in the plains of the Indus River and its tributaries. Harappa existed at the same time as the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Photo by: Omer Saleem/Epa/REX/Shutterstock.

Much has been written about Egypt and Mesopotamia. Historians and everyday people alike are fascinated by their pyramids, mummies and golden tombs.

In the 1920s, there was a huge discovery in South Asia. It proved that Egypt and Mesopotamia were not the only early civilizations worth learning about.

The vast Indus River plains were located in what is today Pakistan and western India. There, under layers of land and mounds of dirt, archaeologists discovered the remains of a 4,600-year-old city. A thriving civilization had existed at the same time as Egyptian and Mesopotamian states.

A uniquely peaceful civilization

The people of this Indus Valley civilization did not build huge monuments like the Egyptians and Mesopotamians. Nor did they bury riches among their dead in golden tombs. There were no mummies, no emperors, and no bloody wars in their territory.

The lack of all these is what makes the Indus Valley civilization so exciting and unique. Other civilizations of this period spent time worshipping gods and carrying out the wishes of the rich. Meanwhile, Indus Valley peoples were taking a practical approach to supporting the common, living people.

They believed resources were more valuable when being shared among the living rather than when they were on display or buried underground.

Amazingly, the Indus Valley civilization appears to have been a peaceful one. Very few weapons have been found and no evidence of an army has been discovered.

Unearthed human bones reveal no signs of violence, and leftover buildings show no hints of battle. All evidence shows the Indus Valley preferred peace and were successful in achieving it.

So how did such a practical and peaceful civilization become so successful?

The twin cities

The ruins of two ancient cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, were found in modern-day Pakistan. These have revealed great clues to this mystery.

The first artifact uncovered in Harappa was a stone seal carved with a unicorn. Similar seals with different animal symbols and writings have since been found throughout the region. The writing has not yet been translated, but evidence suggests these were part of a bigger language system. Historians and the public have long been interested in Mesopotamia's cuneiform, a form of written language carved into stone or clay. Cuneiform looks like tiny lines and triangles. However, it was not just Mesopotamians who were writing. It looks like Indus Valley citizens were writing, too.

Archaeologists soon uncovered amazing city buildings across the valley. The findings clearly show that Harappan societies were well organized and very clean.

Protection from the elements

The settlements were built on giant raised platforms. These appeared to protect the city from seasonal floods and polluted waters. On these platforms, networks of streets were laid out in neat, straight patterns. The buildings along the roads were all made of bricks that were about equal in size.

The city's brick houses had bathing areas. These were fed with water from neighborhood wells. Pipe systems throughout the city carried dirty water and sewage outside of buildings. Even the smallest houses on the edges of the towns were connected to the systems. Cleanliness was clearly important to them.

The fall of Harappan Culture

These cities were impressively made. The remains of their walls give us clues about the culture of the Indus Valley. Clay figurines of goddesses, for example, are proof that religion was important. Toys and games show that even in 3000 B.C., kids liked to play. Pottery, textiles and beads are evidence of their skilled craftsmanship and thriving trade.

It was this appreciation for craftsmanship and trade that allowed the Harappan culture to spread widely and grow. Each time goods were traded or neighbors entered the gates of the cities to barter, their ideas were spread.

Eventually, though, around 1900 B.C., this growth came to an end. The group unity collapsed. Soon, the civilization split up into smaller cultures. Trade, writing, and seals all but disappeared.

What devoured the Indus Valley?

Many believe that the Harappan civilization declined after they were invaded by Aryan people from the north. This theory seems logical: the Aryans came to power in the Ganges Valley shortly after the death of the Indus Valley Civilization. However, there is little evidence of any type of invasion.



Many historians believe that nature brought the Indus Valley to an end. They say that changing river patterns disrupted the farming and trading systems and led to devastating floods.

The smaller details of the early Indus Valley culture might never be fully known. Still, many pieces of the ancient puzzle have been discovered. The remains of the Indus Valley cities continue to be unearthed and discussed today. With each new artifact, the story of this world becomes clearer and more interesting.