

THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

“With the discovery in the Indus Valley , we have to revise our ideas of the antiquity of the Indian civilization. As early as 3000 B.C. India ranked with Mesopotamia and Egypt and was far superior to the Western civilizations in city organization. In fine arts, the magnificent statues, seals and jewelry are found nowhere else in the world until we come to the age of Pericles in Greece and India had produced an entirely original civilization which has let a lasting legacy on later Hinduism”

- *Sir John Marshal, on importance of Indus Valley Civilization.*

Part of the BIG FOUR, one of the “*four Cradles of Civilization*”, the largest and the most urban civilizations of the world, the Indus Valley civilization got discovered only by 1820s, when in 1826 *Charles Masson*, an adventurer stood on mounds of Harappa and took it for a place where Alexander must have defeated Porus in battle of Hydaspes. In 1850s Alexander Cunningham harvesting deep interest in archaeology conducted a small excavation but wasn't much convinced. It was only after a span of 7 decades that the site got excavated in 1920 by Daya Ram Sahani . The official announcement regarding the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization was made in the year 1924 by the then Director General of Archaeological Survey of India in the year 1924.

Time Frame of the civilization

Indus valley civilization is placed in the Chalcolithic age, as stones were used in abundance and metals like bronze, copper, gold, silver had made their appearance. Iron was not known to the people of the age. The seven layers of city of Mohenjo-Daro were excavated under the auspices of *John Marshall* and on the basis of the stratigraphic excavations he proposed the time frame of the civilization as **3250 – 2750 BCE** (i.e. a length of 500 years.)

Mortimer Wheeler believed that the time frame was between **2500 – 1500 BCE** (i.e. a length of 1000 years.) based upon the relationship between Mesopotamia and Harappan people. *Piggot* supports the same time frame. *Allchin brothers* propose the time span to be between **2150 – 1750 BCE**, on the basis of the remains found at Kalibangan and Kot Diji. *Romilla*

Thapar places it between **2300 – 1750 BCE**. As per the *C-14 dating*, the remains were placed between **2400 – 1900 BCE**. *NCERT books* place it between **2500 -1800 BCE**. Therefore the most widely accepted dates based on archaeological examinations and C – 14 dating the various phases of harappan culture are dated as following:

-Early Harappa Phase : 3200 - 2600 BCE

-Mature Harappa Phase : 2500 - 1800 BCE

-Late Harappa Phase : 1700 - 1300 BCE

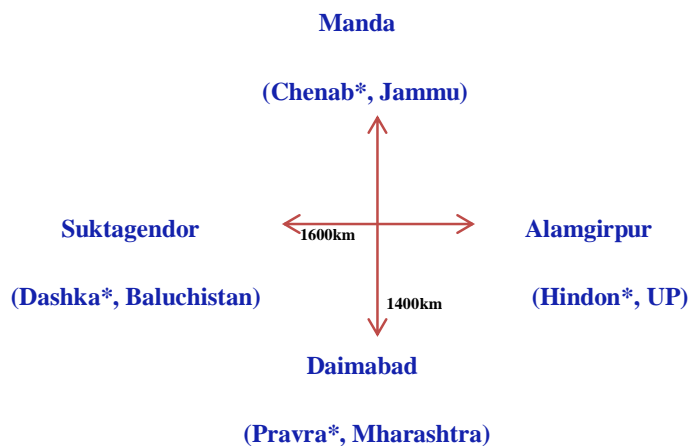
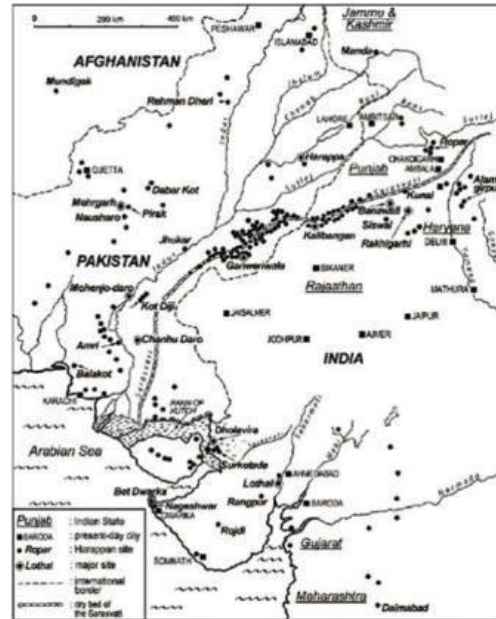
Nomenclature of the Civilization

The following table of contents will explain the various names given to the civilization, along with the reason that why these names were given.

TERM	PERSON	REASON
Indus Valley Civilization	John Marshall (1924)	Majority of the sites found in the very first of the diggings were found in and around the Indus Valley.
Indus Civilization	Mortimer Wheeler	When evidences of the civilization were found in areas other than the valley concerned.
Third Bronze Age Civilization	-	As one of the 3 civilizations where Bronze was put into use. The other two being Egypt and Mesopotamia.
Sindhu Saraswati Civilisation	-	80% of the antiquities found in the Gagghar - Hakara valley i.e. Ancient Saraswati.
Indus Valley Tradition	Jim Sheffer	To refer to the societal setup of the civilization.
Greater Indus Civilization	M.R. Mughal	Due to evidence of Harappan culture in greater Indus Valley
First Urban Civilization	V.G. Childe	Due to the Urban character of the culture
Harappan Civilization	-	First site excavated was Harappa.

Extent of the civilization

As many as 2800 Harappan sites are known today. Spread across an area of 15,00,000 km², the settlement was the largest of the ancient civilizations. Beautifully spanning in a triangular shape, the culture is concentrated in wheat grown areas of Gujarat, Sindh and Punjab. The settlement also enjoys an elaborate coastline of 1300 km thereby facilitating sea trade. The following maps and diagram will explain the extent of the civilizations in all the 4 directions.



*Name of the river on the bank of which the concerned city is located.

Important sites of the Civilization

Harappa: Located on the banks of river Ravi, in Montgomery, Punjab district of Pakistan Harappa is the first excavated and second largest site of the civilization. The city is divided into two halves by a raised citadel (460 x 215 yards).

Important findings : Male Torso made of red stone, furnaces, crucibles, 6 granaries in a row, workmen quarters, Cemety H, Cemety R-37, a seal with a fish and crocodile and another one with a dog and cat, lipstick, kajal and comb, stone phallus symbols, Copper symbol, dice, vanity box, etc.

Mohenjo-Daro: This site is located in Larkana district, Pakistan on the banks of river Indus. Literally, the name means “the mound of the dead” as the city is based on 2 mounds (First being 1300 x 600 and second being 400 x 300 yards in size.)

Important findings : The Great Bath (55 x 37 x 2.54 m²), a Stupa belonging to Kushana period, wells, drains, citadel made of kiln burnt bricks, bronze dancing girls and evidences of direct trade with Mesopotamia. It is the largest city of the civilization.

Chanhudaro: Chanhudaro is located in Sindh, Pakistan and consists of 3 small mounds. Evidences of Jhukar and Jhangar culture are found here. No fortifications found around the raised platform, citadel is also absent.

Important findings : Bead factory, workshops of shells ,gemstones, seals, sealings, etc. , Inkpot, kajal, lipstick, powder, dog paw imprint on a brick, Bronze toy cart.

Kalibangan: Located in Hanumangrah dist. of Rajasthan, the site has 2 citadels. It gives earliest evidences of Earthquake in the entire world.

Important findings : Bangles of terracotta and shells, absence of mother goddess , evidences of fractional burial, primary burial and crematories, fire altars with soot, ploughed field surface, Mesopotamian cylindrical seals.

Lothal: Located at the banks on Bhogavo River, in Ahmedabad dist., Gujarat. Dockyard is situated at the eastern side of the township.

Important findings: Rice husk (1 of the 2 sites where rice is found, the second site is Rangpur, in Ahmedabad), terracotta figure of horse, double burial, Iranian seal, Baharianian seal, painted jar.

Dholavira: Located in Kutch district of Gujarat, it lies on the banks of river Luni. Unique feature of the city is the water harnessing system with large reservoirs.

Important findings: A stadium, large Harappan inscription.

Banawali: Located in Fatehabad dist., Haryana on the banks of river Ghaggar. The town was not planned in chess – board pattern, unlike other harappan cities.

Important finding: Toy plough, clay figures of mother Goddess, etc.

Social life of the Harappan people

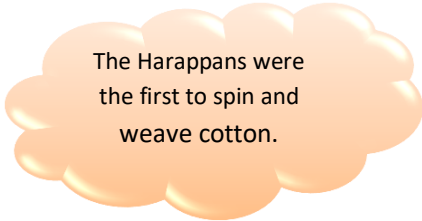
The Harappan people were largely Indoor people who enjoyed singing and dancing. Outdoor activities included hunting, fishing, bird fighting and grazing. As far as social hierarchy is concerned there was no caste system. The society was divided into 4 categories on the basis of their occupation. The first class included the priests, astrologers and physicians. The second category was of the warriors. The third category included traders, merchants and artisans. Whereas the fourth comprised of labors, peasants, fishermen, weavers, domestic servants, etc.

The people cultivated crops like wheat, barley, sesames, peas, fruits and vegetables. They consumed beef, mutton and poultry flesh. As far as clothing habits are concerned, men wore dhoti and shawl where as women wore shawl, skirt and a piece of cloth to cover their arms. Needles and buttons have been found, which suggests that the clothes were stitched. Men and women wore ornaments like necklaces, fillets, armlets, finger rings, etc. Women wore earrings and studs. Ornaments were made of gold, silver, ivory, faience and semi precious metals. Burial practices included cremation or burial along with objects probably for after life.

Religion had great concern for fertility as suggested by representations of Mother Goddess and Horned Fertility Goddess. As a result of such believes, women were considered as source of fertility and a key to survive. They were considered at par with men and did work like grinding flour, weaving clothes, looking after family and livestock.

Economic life of the people

The people of the Indus Valley civilization practiced the barter system to do transactions. The weights were measured in the multiples of 8. The people exported commodities like copper, ivory, pearls, cotton cloth, monkeys, etc. The commodities imported include Gold from Kolar mines of Karnataka, Persia and Afghanistan, Silver from Afghanistan, Persia and south India, Copper was imported from Khetri mines of Rajasthan, Baluchistan and Arabia, Tin from Bihar and Afghanistan. Harappan seals have been found in Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Sumerian excavations. Bullock cart was used for inland trade and ships used for foreign trade. Dockyard found at Lothal bears evidence to trade conducted via waterways.



The Harappans were the first to spin and weave cotton.

Religious life of the people

An idea of the religion of the Indus Valley people is formed by the study of seals, terracotta figurines and stone statues. Large number of terracotta female figures have been found in Punjab and Sindh. These are considered to be the representation of Mother Goddess. These are however absent in Rajasthan and Gujarat. These are considered as proto type of cosmic energy (*Prakriti*) and cosmic soul (*Purusha*). The worship of female forces coincide with that of the Egyptians of the contemporary times. They worshiped Goddess of river Nile, *Isis*.

Many seals depict a man sitting in a yogic posture, on a bandstand. With a tiger below and trident in one hand, he is surrounded by other animals like rhinoceros, bull and deer. He is regarded as proto Shiva or *Pashupati*. Phallus worship was also prevalent as suggested by large scale findings of *Linga* (polished stone representing male organs) and *Yonis* (pierced stones representing female organs). Incense burners have been found as well. The people practiced tree worship as well. A seal found at Mohenjo-Daro shows a man offering water to a tree, another seal shows men bowing in front of a tree. Religiously revered and worshipped trees included Peepal, Tulsi, Neem, etc.

Representation of animals on seals, sealings, tablets suggest animal worship. There exist two types of image, first set of images can be regarded as imaginary and second as real life imagery. Imaginary sacred animals include unicorn, an animal with 3 heads, etc. real life sacred animals include Bulls, Lions, Elephants, etc. *Swastik* symbol has been found in many potteries that represent sun worship. Presence of fire altars at sites like Kalibangan, Lothal suggest ritualistic worship.

Art and Architecture

The Harappan civilization is a Bronze age civilization, and a result of this the tools were made of both copper and bronze. Metal statues were made using Lost Wax Technique. Bronze statue of a Dancing girl has been discovered at Mohenjo-Daro. Other finding include Bronze Sheep and a Buffalo from Mohenjo-Daro, a bronze bullock cart found from Chanhudaro, a copper statue from Lothal and bronze chariot from Daimbad. Harappans were expert bead makers. Bead factories have been discovered at Lothal and Chanhudaro. They even exported beads to other areas. Terracotta figures include fire baked earthen clay images of birds, dogs, sheep, monkey, bull, men and women.

The Harappan pottery was majorly red or pink in color with drawings painted on them in black ink. These designs included representation of animals like bull, deer, peacock, duck, etc. and geometric designs like triangles, circles, square, etc. Utensils largely comprised of storage jars, lids, plates, bowls, etc. Stone statues form an important part of Harappan sculpturing. A 25 cm tall statue showing a combination of an elephant and a sheep, made of limestone has been found in Mohenjo-Daro. A dancing lady made of stone has been found in Harappa.

Seals form an important part of the Indus Valley civilization. They were made from steatite, chart, faience and terracotta. Copper seals have been found in Lothal and Deshalpur. They were square, rectangle, circular and oval in shape. They were used to stamp the luggage. Seals have inscription on top with animal image of elephants, bulls, tiger, unicorn, etc. Boats on seals have been found at seals from Lothal and Mohen Jo Daro.

Seals form the main source of Harappan script and language. The script is undeciphered and comprises of 400-500 signs representing sound, emotions and objects. The most used symbol is of fish.

The civilization is very famous for its urban town planning and drainage system. The planning followed the grid pattern and roads intersected at 90 degree angle, dividing the town into large square or rectangular blocks. The houses were built of burnt and un-burnt bricks. Burnt bricks were smaller than un burnt bricks and were cooked in wood fire. Elsewhere bricks made of mud bricks were used. NO windows faced the streets. The streets were well lit with lamp post. Bathrooms have been found with water proof flooring with slope on one side to facilitate easy flow of water.

Every house had its own brick well. Some wells are fresh even today, supplying water to the area. Each house had a drain connected to the main street drain. Drainage channels were made of bricks and mud. Lime gypsum mortar was used to make them water tight. The drains were covered with loose bricks to facilitate easy removal and cleaning.

Decline of the Indus Valley Civilization

Several theories have been put forward to explain the downfall of the Indus Valley civilization. These theories are discussed as follows:

Theory of Aryan invasion- This theory is based on skull bearing cut marks in Mohenjo-Daro . These evidences suggest large scale massacre. This theory is supported by Mortimer Wheeler, Garden Childe and Piggot.

Theory of heavy flooding- This theory is based on evidence of devastation by flood at Mohenjo-Daro and Lothal. This theory is supported by John Marshall, Mackey and S.R. Rao.

Theory of change in climate- According to Aurel Stein and Amlanand Ghosh due to excessive deforestation climate change occurred and Rajasthan, which enjoyed heavy rains became arid gradually thereby bringing an end to the civilization.

Theory of geographical changes- Supported by historians like Dr. Sahini, R.L. Rikes, George F. Dales this is the main reason for the collapse of the civilization. Rivers changed their courses over time, as a result of which the people were left with no water for drinking, irrigation and cultivation purpose. Therefore they migrated in search of water and settled somewhere else.

Theory of Administrative decline- John Marshall suggests that administrative machinery weakened over time as suggested by haphazard town planning and large scale use of unburnt bricks, eventually leading to the decline of the civilization.

Theory of Epidemic- According to K.U.R. Kennedy, malaria lead to the sudden population decline.

As we can see, many theories are propounded regarding the downfall of the civilization. But the complete ruin of the civilization could not be attributed to just one factor because the civilization was spread over a large area. Several factors like over cultivation, scanty rainfalls, depletion of forest resources, floods, etc came together and contributed to the downfall of the civilization. Another notable fact is that the civilization didn't disappear suddenly, but gradually stretching over several decades. The discovery of Indus Valley Civilization pushed back the historicity of Indian antiquities as back as 3000 BCE. It is one of the earliest urban civilizations of the world with an urban economy and perfect town planning. It contributed immensely to the Bharata Dharma, introducing concepts of Mother Goddess, Proto Shiva, worship of forces of nature, phallus worships- rituals that are followed in India, even in the 21st century. S.B. Roy quotes it well that,

*“We are proud of being the descendants and heirs
of the technocrats of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro.”*