**South Asian Civilisations (Part IV)**

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The Indus Valley Civilisation was a Bronze Age civilisation in the northwestern regions of South Asia, lasting approximately from 3300 BC to 1300 BC ( in its mature form from 2600 BC to 1900 BC). Together with ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, it was one of three early civilisations of the Near East and South Asia, and of the three, the most widespread-its sites spanning an area stretching from today’s northeast Afghanistan, through much of Pakistan, and into western and northwestern India. It flourished in the basins of the Indus River, which flows through the length of Pakistan, and along with 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.

Gradual drying of the region’s soil and reduced water supply caused the local population to move out.

The Indus Valley civilisation is also named after its two most important ancient cities and excavation sites: Harappan civilisation or Mohenjo Daro civilisation.

Harappa

Harappa is an archaeological site in Punjab about 24 kilometres west of Sahiwal. The site takes its name from a modern village located near the former course of the Ravi River, which now runs eight kilometres to the north. The site of the ancient city contains the ruins of a Bronze Age fortified city, which was a part of the Indus Valley Civilisation centred in Sindh and Punjab. The city is believed to have had as many as 23,500 residents and occupied about 150 hectares (370 acres) with clay brick houses at its greatest extent during the Mature Harappan phase (2600 BC – 1900 BC), which is considered large for its time. The ruins of Harappa were first detected in the 19th century by Charles Masson (a British East India Company soldier and reporter, independent explorer and pioneering archaeologist and numismatist). Harappa and Mohenjo Daro were excavated much later, between 1920 and 1934, by the Archaeological Survey of India. By 2002, over 1,000 mature Harappan cities and settlements had been reported, of which just under a hundred had been excavated. However, there are only five major urban sites: Harappa, Mohenjo Daro (which has the status of UNESCO World Heritage Site), Dholavira (Kutch), Ganeriwala (Cholistan desert southern Punjab), and Rakhigarhi (Hisar district Haryana, India). The early Harappan cultures were preceded by local Neolithic agricultural villages, from which the river plains were populated. The Indus valley civilisation is preceded by and culturally connected to its historical predecessor, Mehrgarh. It extended from Pakistan’s Balochistan in the west to India’s western Uttar Pradesh in the east, from northeastern Afghanistan in the north to India’s Gujarat state in the south.

Mohenjo Daro

Mohenjo Daro is an archaeological site in the province of Sindh. Built around 2500 BC, it was one of the largest settlements of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation, and one of the world’s earliest major cities, contemporaneous with the civilisations of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Mohenjo Daro was abandoned in the 19th century BC as the Indus Valley Civilisation declined, and the site was not rediscovered until the 1920s.

These two cities of the Indus Valley civilisation are noted for their urban planning. Mohenjo Daro has a planned layout with rectilinear buildings arranged on a grid plan. Most were built of fired and mortared brick; some incorporated sun-dried mud-brick and wooden superstructures. The sheer size of the city and its provision of public buildings and facilities suggests a high level of social organization. The city is divided into two parts: the so-called Citadel and the Lower City. The Citadel – a mud-brick mound around 12 metres high – is known to have supported public baths, a large residential structure designed to house about 5,000 citizens, and two large assembly halls. The city had a central marketplace, with a large central well. Individual households or groups of households obtained their water from smaller wells. Wastewater was channelled to covered drains that lined the major streets. Some houses, presumably those of more prestigious inhabitants, include rooms that appear to have been set aside for bathing, and one building had an underground furnace, possibly for heated bathing. Most houses had inner courtyards, with doors that opened onto side-lanes. Some buildings even had two stories.

Certain wall divisions of one large building with a massive wooden superstructure appear to be grain storage-bays, complete with air-ducts to dry the grain. Close to the “Great Granary” is a large and elaborate public bath. From a collonaded courtyard, steps lead down to the brick-built pool, which was waterproofed by a lining of bitumen. The pool measures 12 metres (39 ft) long, seven metres (23 ft) wide and 2.4 metres (7.9 ft) deep. It may have been used for religious purification. Other large buildings include a “Pillared Hall,” thought to be an assembly hall of some kind, and the so-called “College Hall,” a complex of buildings comprising 78 rooms, thought to have been a priestly residence. Mohenjo Daro had no city walls but was fortified with guard towers to the west of the main settlement, and defensive fortifications to the south. Both Harappa and Mohenjo Daro share relatively the same architectural layout and were generally not heavily fortified like other Indus Valley sites. It is obvious from the identical city layouts of all Indus sites that there was some kind of political or administrative centrality, but the extent and functioning of an administrative centre remain unclear.

Numerous objects found in excavation include seated and standing figures, copper and stone tools, carved seals, balance scales and weights, gold and jasper jewellery, and children’s toys. Many bronze and copper pieces, such as figurines and bowls, have been recovered from the sites, showing that the inhabitants understood how to utilise the lost wax technique. The furnaces found at the site are believed to have been used for copperworks and melting the metals as opposed to smelting. Some of the most prominent copperworks recovered from the site are the copper tablets which have examples of the untranslated Indus script and iconography. While the script has not been deciphered yet, many of the images on the tablets match another tablet and both hold the same caption in the Indus language, with the example given showing three tablets with the image of a mountain goat and the inscription on the back reading the same letters for the three tablets. Pottery and terracotta sherds have been recovered from the site, with many of the pots having deposits of ash in them, leading archaeologists to believe they were either used to hold the ashes of a person or as a way to warm up a home located in the site. These heaters, or braziers, were ways to heat the house while also being able to be utilized in a manner of cooking or straining, while others solely believe they were used for heating.

The reasons for the decay and fall of the civilisations are still under discussion today. One argument that seems to have some validity is climate change and the relocation of the river flow of Indus and its tributaries. Gradual drying of the region’s soil, weaker monsoon and reduced water supply caused the population to abandon the places and move eastwards and southwards. Theories that the cities and their inhabitants were conquered and killed by invading Aryan tribes have now been rejected. In any case, the remnants of the Indus valley civilisation make Pakistan an early centre of human civilisation and development and the knowledge about them should be securely entrenched into our people – both young and old. It adds to strengthening our identity even when it might provoke unfavourable comparisons with the current state of city planning, water provision and others in today’s Pakistan.

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