

# The Indus Valley Civilization



# Indus Valley Civilization Daily Life

3000BCE – 1500BCE

We know very little about the Indus Valley civilization, but what we do know is fascinating! Over 4,000 years ago, in the Indus River Valley, people built huge, well-planned cities, with straight streets, and brick homes with private baths! Kids played with toys and women even wore lipstick!

How do we know this? In 1922, archaeologists found something very exciting! They found the remains **of an ancient city called Harappa**. They found another city, located 400 miles southwest of Harappa, called Mohenjo-Daro. Over 1,400 cities from the same period, arranged in the same way, have been found since! Collectively, this civilization is referred to as the Indus Valley Civilization (sometimes it's called the Harappan Civilization). This civilization existed about 3000BCE – 1500BCE, **which means it existed at about the same time as the Egyptian and Sumerian civilizations**. However, the ruins of their cities are the only clues to their culture.

What was life like, over 4,000 years ago in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, two busy cities of about 35,000 people each? Would you have wanted to live in one of these flourishing ancient cities?

## Homes:

Houses were one or two stories high made of baked brick, with flat roofs, and they were all just about identical. Each was built around a courtyard, with windows overlooking that courtyard. The outside walls had no windows. Each home had its own private drinking well along with its own private bathroom. Clay pipes led from the bathrooms to sewers located under the streets. These sewers drained into nearby rivers and streams. **This was a very advanced civilization!**

## Clothing:

Men and women dressed in colorful robes. Women wore jewelry of gold and precious stone, and even wore lipstick! Among the treasures found was a statue of a woman wearing a bracelet. Bracelets with similar designs are still worn today in India.

## Entertainment:

A beautiful small bronze statue of a dancer was found, which tells us that they enjoyed dance and had great skills working with metals. In the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro, scientists have found the remains of a large central pool, with steps leading down at both ends. This could have been a public swimming pool, or perhaps it was used for religious ceremonies. Around this central pool were smaller rooms, that might have been dressing rooms, and smaller pools that might have been private baths.

## Food:

Dinner might have been warm and tasty wheat bread served with barley or rice. It would appear that they were very good farmers. They grew barley, peas, melons, wheat, and dates. Farmers raised cotton and kept herds of sheep, pigs, zebu (a kind of cow), and water buffalo. Fish were caught in the river with fish hooks! Each town had a large central storage building for grain, called a granary. Crops were grown, **and the harvest stored centrally**, for all in the town to enjoy.

## Toys:

Some of the toys found were small carts, whistles shaped like birds, and toy monkeys which could slide down a string!

## Art:

This ancient civilization must have had **marvelous craftsmen**, skilled in pottery, weaving, and metal working. The pottery that has been found is of very high quality, with unusually beautiful designs. Several small figures of animals have been found, like monkeys, which could have been the object of art or toys. There are no large statues that have been found. There are small statues of what we believe are female goddesses. Archaeologists have found bowls made of bronze and silver. Goldsmiths made beads and ornaments. The metals used are not found in the Indus Valley, meaning they had to import all of these items, or more probably, had to import the metals to make them form something else.

## Transportation:

The people used camels, oxen, and elephants to travel over land. They had carts with wooden wheels. They had ships, with one mast, probably used to sail around the Arabian Sea. Seals with a pictographic script, which has not been deciphered yet, were found at Indus Valley sites. **Similar seals were found in Mesopotamia**, which seems to indicate possible trade between these two civilizations.

## The Riddle of the Indus:

What does it take to build a city with straight streets and well-designed sewers? It takes smart engineers and a lot of planning. These well-organized cities suggest a well-organized government and probably a well-developed social class system.

What is amazing is that it appears the Harappan cities did not develop slowly, which suggests that whoever built these cities learned to do so in another place. **As the Indus flooded, cities were rebuilt on top of each other.** Archaeologists have discovered several different cities, one built over the other, each built a little less skillfully. The most skillful was on bottom. It would appear that builders grew less able or less interested in perfection over time. Still, each city is a marvel, and each greatly advanced for its time.

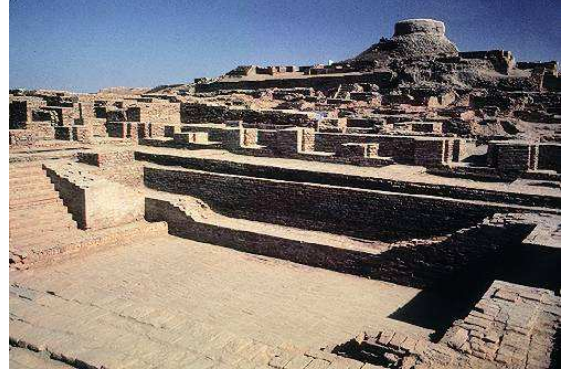
**So far, scientists have found no wall carvings or tomb paintings to tell us about their life.** We do know that had a written language, but only a few sentences, on pottery and amulets, have been found. We still don't know what it says. Scholars have quite a few mysteries yet to solve about the ancient Indus civilization. For one thing, the people who lived in these marvelous cities disappeared around 1500BCE. Perhaps they ran out of wood to hold back flooding, or perhaps their soil gave out and would no longer grow crops. No one really knows what happened to these people, or where they went next. Historians are still very curious. It will be interesting to see what they dig up next!

# The Indus Valley Civilization [3000BCE – 1500BCE]

Several thousand years ago, in modern-day India, a highly developed civilization rose to power. It is named after the river that flows in that area, the Indus River. The cities in this area were much more advanced than the civilizations in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, or anywhere else in Western Asia. As in most ancient civilizations, agriculture was what made the Indus Valley civilization great. The Indus Valley people farmed a great deal, and they used a wooden plow to make agriculture easier!

<http://images.encarta.msn.com/xrefmedia/sharemed/targets/images/pho/t002/T002537B.jpjan>

Barley and wheat were the main food crops. Perhaps the most remarkable achievement was the development of cotton. Cotton is a very difficult plant to turn into clothing. The people ate cereals, vegetables, fruits, birds, mutton, beef, and pork. There is also evidence these people domesticated cats, dogs, goats, sheep, and even the elephant!



The Indus people used a lot of bronze and copper. However, iron was not known to them. The people were very artistic. Evidence can be found in the pottery, stone sculptures, and seals they made. The pottery was very advanced for its time. People worshipped natural forces like the tree, humped bull, and Mother goddess. Even amulets and good luck charms were used by the people to ward off evil spirits.

Unlike civilizations in the rest of the world, who were managed by kings, the Indus people were probably ruled by groups of merchants. They had traded with people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. Trade was in the form of “barter”, so there was no money exchanged. Instead, they simply traded goods with each other. There was a cleverly organized system of weights and measures. The script used during this time, which was seemingly pictographic, has not yet been deciphered.

There is a major difference between the Indus Valley civilization and the other civilizations. In other areas, much value was put into building the magnificent temples for the gods or the palaces and tombs of kings. The common people seemingly had to content themselves with small dwellings made of mud. However, in the Indus, the picture is reversed. The finest structures were built for the common civilians!

After 2000BCE, the Indus Valley culture slowly started to decline. Eventually, they faded out altogether. Some believe this was a result of the soil becoming harder to plant in because the desert was getting bigger. Others think it was some kind of other natural disasters. Perhaps the Indus River changed course. Perhaps there was a devastating earthquake. Still others believe it may have been caused by the invading race of people called the Aryans. Even with all of these theories, we may never know for sure how this great civilization came to an end.



<http://www.harappa.com/script/gif/parpola12.gif>

# The Indus Valley Civilization

India's first known civilization started on the fertile banks of the Indus River. The weather back then was much like it is today, hot and dry. There were wet and dry seasons. During the wet season, the monsoon winds brought rain which caused the river to flood. This flooding created rich deposits of silt for growing crops like wheat, barley, dates, and melons.

Around 5,000BCE, hunter-gatherers began settling in many different villages near the river. Each season they traveled down into the valley and planted their crops. They could not live in the valley itself. The flood waters were so destructive, that they would destroy everything. Eventually though, they developed a way to bake bricks in an oven. Oven bricks are stronger than sun-dried bricks. Because of this, people could move closer to the fertile area without fear of the terrible floods.

With the discovery of oven baked bricks, the people moved closer to the river and the civilization grew quickly. There was plenty of farmland and the river supplied plenty of water for drinking and irrigation. Just like the Nile River in Egypt, the Indus River provided fish for food and highways for trade and transportation. The forests that grew around them provided wood for building, fuel, and lots of animals. With such wonderful resources, larger towns soon grew, and a division of labor developed. Some individuals took up jobs like weaving, tanning leather, making pottery, or building furniture. There were even cloth-dryers, bead makers, goldsmiths, and stone-cutters.

By about 2300BCE, the towns had grown into bustling cities. Many advances were being made throughout the Indus Valley. An advanced government kept order, a writing system was developed, religious beliefs emerged, and many other inventions were developed. The Indus Valley Civilization grew to be larger than any other ancient empire, including those of Egypt and Mesopotamia! Its two great centers were the cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.



Until the early part of the 20th Century, few people knew anything about the Indus Valley Civilization. Only mounds of dirt, some as tall as 60 feet high, remained where the great cities once stood. Between 1856 and 1919, bricks from ancient Harappan roads and walls were carried away to be used in the Indian railway beds. Archaeological excavations of the Indus cities began during the 1920s and 1930s. Several great cities were uncovered, revealing carefully planned and constructed cities.

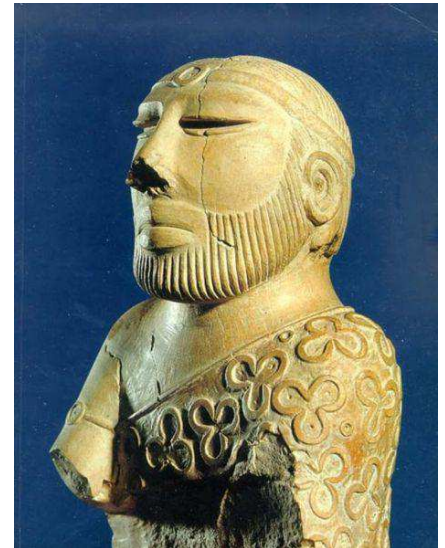
In the center of each city was a fortress, or citadel, which was raised on a mud-brick platform about 400 by 200 yards (1,200 by 600 feet) in size. This citadel, and other public buildings, was surrounded by very thick walls of baked brick. Outside the walls, the town extended for at least one square mile. The sewer systems of the Indus Valley Civilization are considered one of its greatest achievements, unequalled by any other civilization until the time of the Romans.

By studying the artifacts at the various sites, we can learn about the everyday life of these ancient people, including their clothing, jewelry, games, weapons, and tools. Parts of their written language have been found on small stone seals that were most likely used for identification, although they have yet to be deciphered. The seals do show, however, pictures of animals, gods, and scenes from religious legends.



Although written records are unavailable, we can learn something about the ancient customs and ideas of this civilization from the remains of their cities. Because cities far from one another were the same in town layout, sewage system, weights and measures, brick size, home construction, pottery style, religious articles, and jewelry designs, we can reason that they were so similar because of excellent communication between the cities. This type of contact usually means an advanced, centralized government.

Archaeologists also note that there were very few changes in the 1,000 years that the civilization prospered. Objects found in the earliest settlements are almost identical to objects found in the latest settlements. This also indicates that the government must have been strong throughout the centuries. Curiously, the few weapons that have been found are poorly constructed, owing to the fact that these people had not discovered the uses of iron. Apparently, the rulers of this great civilization did not rely on force to achieve strict obedience from their people. Perhaps religious and cultural beliefs held them together as a nation. If this is true, it may explain the great continuity of Indian culture that extends even to this day.



Scholars believe that this great civilization declined around 1500BCE. They have suggested several theories for its fall. The Indus people may have overgrazed their lands and cut down too many trees for fuel and building projects, leading to smaller harvests and a decrease in trade. In addition, they may have disrupted the natural habitat of the native animals. Today there are no animals or forests around the area where this civilization once was. Flooding or insufficient flooding of the river during a planting season may have caused a famine. Some of the Indus people may have moved to other parts of India, like the Ganges River Valley, using their farming techniques to shift from wheat and grain to rice.

The idea of the Indus Valley people moving into other areas of India may help to explain the great continuity in Indian culture. Although the fate of these people will never be known for certain, there is much evidence that many of their ideas and customs never entirely died out. Chickens were first domesticated for use as a food source in the Indus Valley. Toys used in towns along the Arabian Sea are practically identical to those unearthed in ancient Harappa. The bangles worn by Harappan women on wrists and ankles, as well as necklaces and earrings, are still fashionable in India today. Pictures show that pigtails were a popular hairstyle among Harappan women, and they remain the most common hairstyle among Indian women today. The Indus Valley people began spinning and weaving cotton cloth around 2000BCE. Today, cotton textiles are still an important industry in India.



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Ancient Indus Valley

Directions: Answer the following questions using POQ (complete sentences!)

1. When was this civilization first discovered?
2. Where was the harvest stored?
3. What is a clue that leads scientists to believe the Indus people traded with Mesopotamians?
4. Why don't we know a lot about these people?
5. How did this civilization get its name?
6. Who was in charge of the people?
7. Who lived in the best buildings in the city?
8. What are some theories as to how these people disappeared?
9. Why didn't the early people live right on the river?
10. Why were the cities so similar, even though they were far apart?

**Directions:**

Now that you have read about the Indus Valley Civilization, it is your job to test someone else on their knowledge! Put together a ten question POQ Quiz for another group about the Indus Valley Civilization. Make sure that the answer to every question can be found in this packet. Please do not write questions about the pictures in the packet; just write questions about the information. You cannot use the POQ questions that you have already been asked. Remember, the harder your questions, the better the quiz!