

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. Which is greater: The impact of the environment on people or people on the environment?
2. How does where you live affect how you live?
3. How does what you eat affect how you live?
4. What does it mean to be civilized?

TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

The Indus River Valley was home to one of the four river valley civilizations. Of all of these civilizations we know the least about the people who lived in the Indus River Valley. While there is much archeological evidence at this point in history, we have been unable to decipher any of their written language. Therefore, we are forced to gather as much information as we can from the archeological evidence that exists.

There is evidence of farming and people settling in the Indus River Valley as far back as 4000 BCE. There is

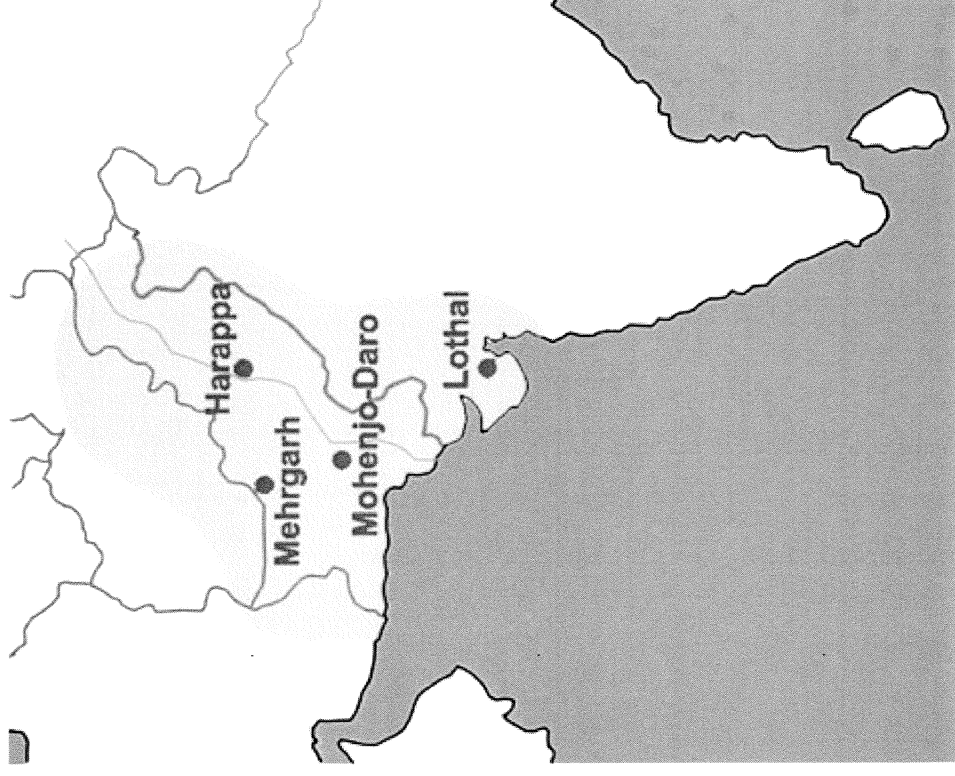


Image source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Civilt%C3%A0Vallindomappa.png>

also evidence that these people may have developed trade with the neighboring Mesopotamian civilization around this time. There is further evidence that the people in this region then developed into a civilization around the year 2500 BCE which lasted until around 1700 BCE. Very little evidence was uncovered about these ancient people until the 1920s when two cities were discovered in modern day Pakistan. Who built these cities and what were they all about? We will seek to answer these questions in this section.

The city of Harappa was uncovered in 1921 and the city of Mohenjo-Daro was discovered a year later in 1922. These are believed to have been two major cities in this early civilization. It is unclear what the status of the cities were. Were they individual city-states or part of a larger kingdom? Each city was approximately one square mile in size and showed a very high level of planning and organization. The cities had well-organized perpendicular streets and buildings constructed out of uniform-sized bricks. They also consisted of drainage and sewage systems that would carry dirty water away from the city.

It is clear that there had to be some sort of government and law that organized and ran the cities, though again, there is no specific or clear written evidence to support this. So how do we know? It seems incredibly unlikely that cities as highly organized as Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro would have been able to be



Image source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Civilit%C3%A0VallleIndoMappa.png>

constructed without some sort of governing organization to plan and then construct them. Without knowing their language, however, we are stuck at merely guessing what the government and law may have been like.

The evidence of written language is found across the Indus Valley. Stone seals and tablets, pottery, jewelry, and even copper weights all bear the same language. The problem is that no one has been able to crack the code and solve the mystery of this ancient language. It is clear that there was a uniform writing

system across the Indus Valley, but until it is deciphered, it remains a constant mystery for historians studying the Indus River Valley. We have evidence of extensive trade with Mesopotamia which can help us to make sense of this civilization.

Stone seals from the Indus Valley were found across Mesopotamia and Mesopotamian reports indicate that they traded with “people to the east.” There is also evidence of copper and other metals appearing in the Indus Valley. All of this can lead us to believe that the people of the Indus Valley were trading with the people of Mesopotamia and perhaps even beyond. This means that not only must the people of the Indus River Valley have had enough surplus goods to trade, but, they must also have had specialization which allowed them to trade.

The fact that there is a writing system, pottery, and the elaborate urban layout also lends support to the argument that they must have had specialization of labor.

It is impossible to know what life was like for people of the ancient Indus civilization but the archeological clues may reveal some interesting things. Nearly all homes, despite differing in size, had access to wells and drainage systems. We can imply from this that, despite status in society, access to water and cleanliness was important to these people. This is further reinforced by the fact that the largest public building in the city of

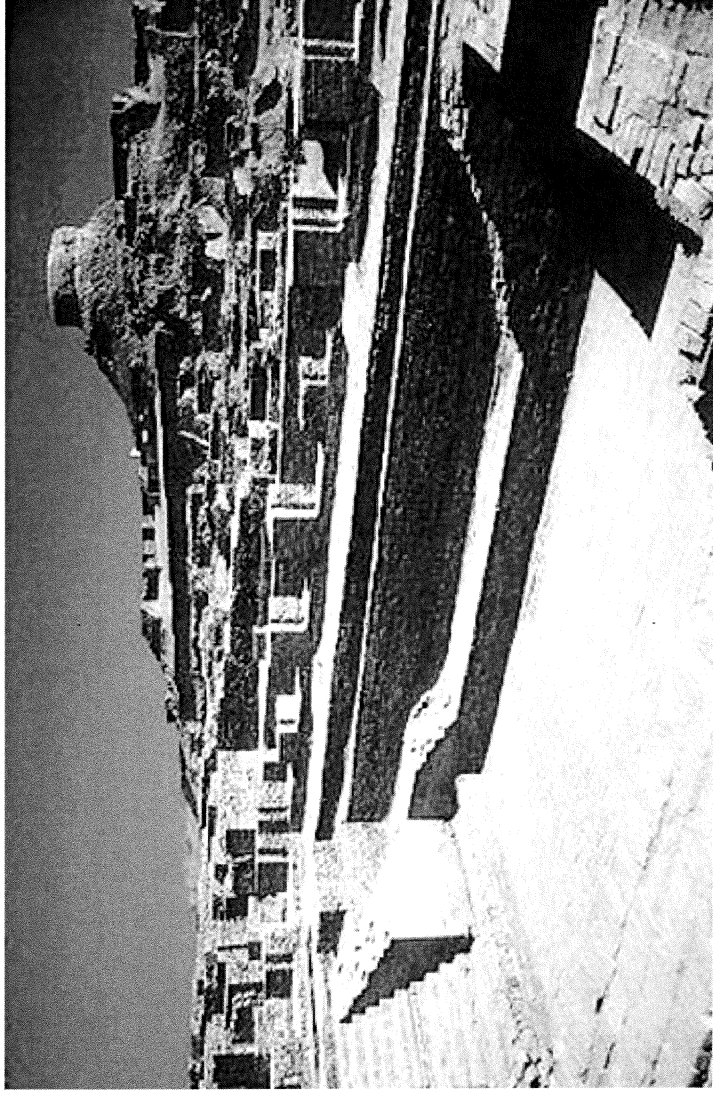


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Mohenjo-Daro was a public bath. There is also significant evidence that the people of this time lived in relative peace with each other. There have been very few weapons found in all of the excavations, human skeletons do not show signs of violence, and the buildings themselves do not appear as though they were involved in any great battles or sieges. This leads us to believe that the people living in the Indus Valley lived a relatively peaceful life.

Whether or not the Indus people practiced any sort of an organized religion is a question that is as mysterious as the civilization itself. It is likely that they practiced some form of organized religion, but it may have been very different from the evidence found in the other River Valley civilizations. While the Egyptians built grand pyramids to their god-kings and the Mesopotamians constructed statues of their leaders and Ziggurats to serve as the houses of their gods, there is none of that in the Indus civilization. There are no statues or depictions of any rulers or any types of gods. Some of the most interesting pieces come from the small stone seals found throughout the Indus Valley and even in Mesopotamia. Some feature depictions of typical animals while others portray imaginary animal mashups. Is it possible that these have something to with a religion or belief? We may speculate about this more in a later chapter when we examine one of the world's major religions that eventually developed in this region.

So what happened to the people of the Indus River Valley? Historians have come with several possible answers to explain the disappearance of these people. It is possible that one, or all, of these was responsible for the decline. Many historians believe that there was some sort of natural disaster that drove the people from this land. Some believe it was a great flood or possibly even an earthquake as both happen regularly in this region. Other historians believe that they were invaded, conquered, or driven out by a group from the north known as the

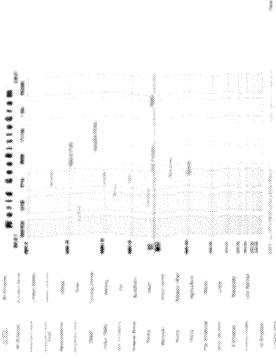
Aryans. Later Hindu texts, written in a language we can decipher, describe how indigenous people were driven out of the land; it is possible that they mean the people of the Indus River Valley. The last possible reason is a collapse in their agricultural system. Whether they over-farmed the land or suffered from natural disasters, it is possible that their food supply collapsed thus bringing about their end.

The Indus River Valley civilization is one of the most interesting and curious of all of the early River Valley civilizations. While archaeological evidence points to the fact that they were highly sophisticated and organized, our lack of understanding of their written language prevents us to gain a full understanding of this



civilization. Hopefully, in time, historians can uncover more evidence and attempt to answer the questions surrounding this great civilization

Interactive 3.11 World GeoHistoGram



Once again, fire up the World GeoHistoGram and click on the buttons for Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley. What do you notice now about the three different civilizations?