

Unit 3: Lesson 2: The Early River Valley Civilizations

Directions: Use “Evidence from the Textbook” (taken from MI Open Book pages 52-61 on Weebly).

Characteristics of a Civilization – India (M)

Evidence from the Text

Cities

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***.

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.

Government and Law

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 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.

System of Writing

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.

Specialization

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.

Social System or Hierarchy

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 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.

Complex Technology and Achievements

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.

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Organized Religion

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 do 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.