

The Harappan Civilisation

Civilisation is regarded as an advanced stage of human cultural development. The period between 4000 BC and 3000 BC was a time when many civilisations were flourishing. The ancient civilisations began near the river banks as rivers provided water for drinking and irrigation.

The discovery and use of metals enabled people to advance to a new stage in the progress of civilisation. Copper was the first metal to be used by humans. The period when both stones and copper were used to make tools is known as the **Chalcolithic Period**.

Later, humans began to mix copper with tin or zinc and produced an alloy called bronze. Because bronze was harder, it began to be used for manufacturing agricultural tools and weapons. As a result, four civilisations developed in the world. As bronze played an important role in the growth of these civilisations, they came to be known as **Bronze Age civilisations**. The Harappan, Mesopotamian, Chinese and Egyptian civilisations were Bronze Age civilisations.

The Harappan Civilisation

The Harappan Civilisation is called so because the civilisation was first unearthed at Harappa in the province of West Punjab in Pakistan. In 1862, Sir Alexander Cunningham noticed the traits of the cities. Later, while collecting bricks for the laying down of a railway line, the cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were discovered. In 1921, Dayaram Sahni discovered Harappa and R. D. Banerjee discovered Mohenjo-daro. Other cities which were discovered alongside Harappa and Mohenjo-daro were Lothal, Dholavira and Surkotada (present Gujarat), Kalibangan (present Rajasthan) and Chanhudaro (present Pakistan). The civilisation encompassing these cities came to be known as the **Indus Valley Civilisation** as it developed on the banks of River Indus and its tributaries.

Sources

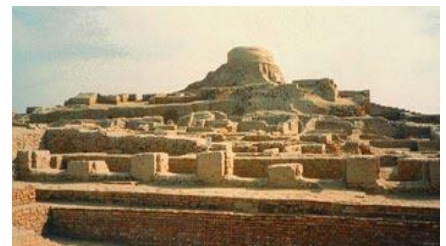
Archaeological remains of the civilisation such as seals, pottery, sculptures and buildings are one of the main sources of the Harappan Civilisation. Archaeological sources of the civilisation:

The Great Bath

- The Great Bath discovered at Mohenjo-daro revealed that the people had attained a high level of perfection in the art of building.
- It has been suggested that the Great Bath was used for bathing during religious ceremonies.
- It is also suggested that perhaps a hierarchal structure existed in a society where the ruling class collected taxes to build structures for public use.

The Citadel

- The cities of the civilisation were divided into two parts—lower and upper. The elevated portion of the city is known as citadel.
- Important buildings such as the Great Bath, granary, assembly halls and workshops were built in this part of the city.
- The citadel points towards an elaborate and efficient planning of the city which justifies that the Harappan Civilisation was an urban civilisation.
- Presence of some houses on the elevated platform and some on the lower parts of the city indicates that perhaps society was divided into the ruling and ruled classes.



The western part of the city was built on the higher platform known as citadel.

Seals

- About 2,000 seals were discovered from the sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro.
- Most of these seals were rectangular and square in shape. They bear the images of one-horned bull, goat, tiger, elephant and rhinoceros.

- These seals reveal the trade, religious beliefs and script of the people. The seal with an image of pashupati show that perhaps people believed in lord Shiva.
- Seals also tell us about the trading practices of the period. The discovered seals show that the Harappans were trading with other civilisations as many Harappan seals were found in Mesopotamia.

Bearded Man and Dancing Girl

- The discovery of the sculpture of a bearded man from Mohenjo-daro with a shawl worn over his left shoulder and half closed eyes is considered a sculpture of a *yogi*.
- This sculpture points towards the existence of skilled artisans in the Harappan Civilisation.
- Similarly, the bronze sculpture of a dancing girl also indicates skilled craftsmanship.



Sculpture of a yogi

Cemeteries

- The burials of people in the Harappan Civilisation give us an idea about religious rituals, beliefs and practices of the people.
- These cemeteries were found in Lothal, Kalibangan and Rupa. Excavation of various goods such as animals, copper, shell spoons with the dead body indicates that perhaps people believed in life after death.

Dockyard

- Discovery of a rectangular dockyard at Lothal in Gujarat indicates that the people had maritime trade relations with other civilisations.

Script

- The Harappans used a pictographic script with signs representing birds, animals, fish and varieties of human forms.
- There are about 375–400 signs of the Harappan script.
- The Harappan script has not been deciphered till yet.

Origin of the Civilisation

There are many theories regarding the origin of the Harappan Civilisation. While some scholars believe that the civilisation came into existence because of the sudden migration of people into the Indus basin, many believe that the Harappan Civilisation was not indigenous. Recent research has shown that the civilisation was an extension of local villages.

Extent of the Civilisation

The Harappan Civilisation covered the parts of Punjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Western Uttar Pradesh. After Partition, Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Chanudaro and Sutkagendor have become parts of Pakistan. Manda, Banawali, Kalibangan, Alamgiri, Lothal, Rupara and Rangpur are in India.



Map of the western part of ancient India showing the location of major Indus Valley Civilisations.

Urban Planning

The Harappan Civilisation is known for its urban planning.

Town Planning

- Each city of the civilisation was divided into two parts—the elevated area known as citadel and the lower town. The citadel was separated from the lower town by a wall. Important buildings such as the Great Bath, granary and assembly hall were located in the citadel.
- Roads of the Harappan Civilisation were well laid in straight lines which intersected each other at right angles. The main road in Mohenjo-daro was about 10.5 metres wide and 800 metres long.
- The cities of Harappa are known for their well-developed drainage system. They were laid out in straight lines and had a gentle slope so that water could flow through. Drains in the houses were connected to the bigger drains in the streets.
- Drains were covered and had inspection holes at a regular distance to clean them.



Well-laid drainage system of the Harappan Civilisation.

Houses

- The houses in the city were built on a high mound to protect them from floods.
- Each house had a covered drain which was connected to street drains.
- Houses found in the cities were either of one or two storeys. Rooms were built around the courtyard which was a basic feature of house planning.
- Most of the houses had a separate bathing area, and in some houses, wells have also been discovered.
- Each house had doors, windows and ventilators. Doors and windows opened on the side of the streets and not on the main roads.

Monumental Architecture

The Great Bath

- It is one of the largest public buildings in Mohenjo-daro. It is a 39-feet long bathing pool, 28 feet wide and 8 feet deep.
- This Great Bath was made of brick and coated with plaster and a layer of natural tar to avoid any water seepage.
- Steps were constructed on both sides leading to the Great Bath. It was surrounded by rooms on all sides.
- Scholars are of the view that these rooms were either meant for the members of the priestly class or for changing clothes.



The Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro

Granaries

- Granaries were found at several sites such as Harappa, Lothal and Mohenjo-daro. At Mohenjo-daro, the granary was 45.71 metres in length and 15.23 metres in breadth.
- Two rows of six granaries were found at Harappa. Working floors consisting of rows of circular brick platforms were discovered to the south of the granaries in Harappa. It is believed that it was built for threshing grains as remains of grains of wheat and barley were found in crevices of the floor.
- Near the granaries, two-roomed barracks have been found which might have housed labourers.
- The granary was built on a raised platform to protect it from floods.

Trade

- There is enough evidence to prove that the people of the Harappan Civilisation had trade relations with many countries of Asia.
- Within the Indus Valley Civilisation, trade was carried out in stone, metal and shell. It is believed that barter trade existed at this time.
- Cities of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro and Lothal produced tools, weapons, kitchenware and other tools.
- Rice was perhaps imported to Punjab from Gujarat.
- Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Banawali and Balakot were centres of bangle making. Bead making was done exclusively in Lothal and Chanudaro.
- Lothal, Surkotda and Balakot were some centres which had trade relations with Mesopotamia and West Asian countries. A trading colony was set up in northern Afghanistan to facilitate trade with Central Asia.
- The Harappans imported gold from North Karnataka and Afghanistan, and copper from Rajasthan, south India, Baluchistan and Arabia.



A dockyard has been discovered at Lothal. This shows that people had trade relations with many Asian countries.

Weights and Measures

- Many stone weights have been discovered from several excavations. The Harappans used cubical stone weights.
- The basic unit was 16 (equal to 14 grams today). Large weights were in multiples of 16 like 32, 48 and 64. Smaller ones were fractions of 16.

Transport

- Boats and ships were used for transporting goods and materials from production centres to cities.
- Bullock carts were used for travelling within the city.

Arts and Crafts

- In Harappan cities, many figurines of clay and terracotta such as bullock carts and ploughs have been found. Many beads, weights and blades have also been found.
- While copper and bronze were used to make tools, weapons and vessels, gold and silver were used to make ornaments.
- Glossy shining pottery was made by the potters in Harappa. Earthen vessels and pottery were decorated with black geometrical designs. These show the skilled craftsmanship of the people.

Sculpture

- The Harappan artists were great sculptors. Many stone images have been found. Among these, an image of a yogi wearing a shawl on his left arm is well known.
- The bronze statue of a dancing girl is another brilliant piece of art.
- Apart from these, several bronze figures of animals like buffalo and carts have been found.
- The metal statues were made through a special lost wax process. In this process, first figures in wax were created. They were then coated with clay. Later, the wax was removed after heating and the hollow mould was filled with molten metal which then took the shape of the object.



Sculpture of a 'dancing girl'

Ornaments

Various ornaments such as necklaces, finger rings, bangles, armlets, anklets, nose rings and ear rings were made of gold, silver, precious stones and ivory.

Toys and Amusements

Many pieces of toys and musical instruments have been found during excavations. Drum and lyre were the main musical instruments. Toys of birds, animal figurines, carts and whistles have been found.

It is assumed that people played with dice and went on hunting and fishing expeditions.



Various beads made up of stone and metals have been found from the Harappan cities.

Religion

- Seals form an important source of information about the religious life of the Harappans. Apart from the discovery of the fire altar at Kalibangan, no cult objects, temples or places of worship have been found.
- From the seals which have been discovered, it has been concluded that religion during the Harappan times bore traces of later Hinduism as images of pashupati, goddesses and sacred trees and animals have been discovered.
- In one of the figures, a plant is shown as growing out of a woman's body. Historians believe it to be Mother Earth, who was also worshipped in the Middle East and Europe.
- Many seals bearing the images of animals have been discovered. Animals which were considered sacred were bull, humped bull, elephant and tiger.
- Discovery of amulets in large numbers show that the Harappans believed in the existence of evil forces.

Decline of the Civilisation

The Harappan Civilisation seemed to have declined during 1800 BC. Some factors which are believed to have led to its decline are

Climatic Changes and Floods

- It is believed that the amount of rainfall increased around 3000 BC and later declined. This may have affected agriculture and animal breeding.
- Many scholars contend that the decrease in the fertility of soil because of increased salinity led to the desertification of the area.
- Changes in the course of rivers may have led to disastrous floods and the decline in the civilisation.

Deforestation

- The people in the Indus Valley civilisation used wood in large quantities to produce bronze and to make pottery, boats, furniture and jewellery.
- This may have led to deforestation resulting in various climatic changes in the region.

Earthquake

- It is believed by several historians that earthquakes resulted in changes in the course of River Indus which must have led to the inundation of the interior areas of Mohenjo-daro.

Attack of the Aryans

- Historians like Mortimer Wheeler believed that the Aryans coming from Central Asia invaded and destroyed the Indus settlements.
- The discovery of skeletons of several men, women and children indicate that the Harappans probably met some violent death. In the last phase of Mohenjo-daro, skeletons of men, women and children have been found lying in a street. Skeletons of 13 males, females and one child have been discovered from one of the rooms.
- This indicates that the civilisation declined as a result of the attacks of the invading Aryans.