Gandhara Civilization

Gandhara refers to a historical region and a civilization or culture that existed, in one form or another, from the early 1st millennium BC to the 11th century AD in what is now northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. Although its geographical footprint changed over time, its heart lay in the valley of Peshawar, the Potohar plateau and along the Kabul River. The kingdom was ruled at various times from capitals at Pushkalavati (modern Charsadda), Takshashila (today the ruined Taxila), Purushapura (modern Peshawar) and in its final days from Udabhandapura (Hund) on the Indus.

Being situated on the main overland route that connected India, Central Asia (and thus China), and Persia (and thus the Middle East and Mediterranean), Gandhara was always an important crossroads for trade and culture and therefore a prized goal for many a conqueror!

The region came under Persian rule in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE as part of the great Achaemenid Empire that stretched from Greece to the Indus River, following this it was held briefly by Alexander the Great and his successors and was thereafter ruled by the Mauryan dynasty of India, when it became a centre of Buddhist learning. During the last two centuries BCE the Graeco-Bactrians of Central Asia invaded Gandhara and it became the centre of the Indo-Greek Kingdom which combined Hellenistic, Buddhist and Indian culture.

About 75 CE the Kushans from Central Asia gained control of Gandhara, and Peshawar became the capital of a great empire stretching from Bengal to Central Asia. The Kushan period is considered to be the Golden Period of Gandhara, when it became a holy land for Buddhists and from where Buddhism spread to Central Asia and the Far East as far as China. The Peshawar Valley and Taxila are full of ruins of stupas\* and monasteries of this period, including those of the Jaulian Buddhist monastery which some say was the world’s first university. Gandharan art flourished and produced some of the best pieces of Indian sculpture.

In the 5th century CE the White Huns captured Ghandara, Hinduism was revived and the Gandharan civilization declined.Gandhara is noted for the distinctive Gandhara style of Buddhist art which developed out of a merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian, and Indian artistic influence. In 1980, Taxila was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Mehrgahr Civilization**

Merhgarh also spelled as Mehrgahr, Merhgarh, or Merhgahr) is one of the most important [Neolithic](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Neolithic) (7000 B.C.E. to 3200 B.C.E.) sites in South Asia. [Archaeological](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Archaeology) digs have unearthed some of the earliest evidence of farming and husbandry in that region. Located near the Bolan Pass, to the west of the [Indus River](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Indus_River) valley and between the present-day [Pakistani](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pakistan) cities of Quetta, Kalat, and Sibi, Merhgarh was discovered in 1974 by an the archaeological team directed by French archaeologist Jean-François Jarrige. The site was excavated continuously between 1974 and 1986. After a ten year hiatus, the team resumed excavations in 1996. The earliest settlement at Merhgarh, located in the northeast corner of the 495-acre (2.00 km²) site, had been a small farming village dated between 7000 B.C.E.–5500 B.C.E.

Evidence gleaned from the dig at Merhgarh provides a rare insight to life before and during the first stages of the [Indus Valley civilization](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Indus_Valley_civilization), one of the earliest sites of human civilization. Archaeologists have been piecing together a picture of life in the pre-Indus Valley civilization from [pottery](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pottery), mud-brick ruins, tools, as well as human and animal bones. No evidence of written language exists. Little is known about the religious beliefs and practices of the Merhgarh civilization, although extensive burial plots have been unearthed. The Department of Archaeology and Museums in [Pakistan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Pakistan) submitted the Archaeological Site of Merhgarh to [UNESCO](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/UNESCO) for consideration as a [World Heritage Site](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/World_Heritage_Site) in 2004.

**Lifestyle and technology**

Early Merhgarh residents lived in mud brick houses, stored their grain in granaries, fashioned tools with local copper ore, and lined their large basket containers with [bitumen](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bitumen). They cultivated six-row barley, einkorn and emmer wheat, [jujubes](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jujube) and dates, and herded sheep, goats and cattle. Residents of the later period (5500 B.C.E. to 2600 B.C.E.) put much effort into crafts, including flint knapping, tanning, bead production, and metal working. The site had been occupied continuously until about 2600 B.C.E.

In April 2006, the scientific journal Nature announced that the oldest (and first early Neolithic) evidence in human history for the drilling of teeth in vivo (that is, in a living person) had been found in Merhgarh.

## Archaeological significance

Merhgarh had been a precursor to the [Indus Valley Civilization](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Indus_Valley_Civilization). "Discoveries at Merhgarh changed the entire concept of the Indus civilization, " according to **Ahmad Hasan Dani**, professor emeritus of archaeology at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. "There we have the whole sequence, right from the beginning of settled village life."[[3]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mehrgarh#cite_note-2) According to Catherine Jarrige of the Center for Archaeological Research Indus Baluchistan, Musée Guimet, [and Paris](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Paris):

“The Kachi plain and in the Bolan basin (are) situated at the Bolan peak pass, one of the main routes connecting southern [Afghanistan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Afghanistan), eastern [Iran](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Iran), the Baluchistan hills and the Indus valley. This area of rolling hills is thus located on the western edge of the Indus valley, where, around 2500 B.C.E., a large urban civilization emerged at the same time as those of Mesopotamia and the [ancient Egyptian empire](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ancient_Egypt). For the first time in the Indian subcontinent, a continuous sequence of dwelling-sites has been established from 7000 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E., (as a result of the) explorations in Pirak from 1968 to 1974; in Merhgarh from 1975 to 1985; and of Nausharo from 1985 to 1996”.

The chalcolithic people of Merhgarh also had contacts with contemporaneous cultures in northern [Afghanistan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Afghanistan), northeastern [Iran](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Iran) and southern central Asia.

## Merhgarh Period I

Archaeologists divide the occupation at the site into several periods. Merhgarh Period I (7000 B.C.E.–5500 B.C.E.) was Neolithic and aceramic (that is, without the use of pottery). Semi-nomadic people using plants such as [wheat](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Wheat) and [barley](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Barley) and animals such as sheep, goats and [cattle](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Cattle) developed the earliest [farming](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Farming) in the area. The settlement had been constructed with simple mud buildings with four internal subdivisions. Numerous burials have been found, many with elaborate goods such as baskets, stone and bone tools, beads, bangles, pendants and occasionally animal sacrifices, with more goods left with burials of males. Ornaments of sea shell, limestone, turquoise, [lapis lazuli](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lapis_lazuli), [sandstone](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sandstone), and polished [copper](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Copper) have been found, along with simple figurines of women and animals. Sea shells from far sea shore and lapis lazuli found far in Badakshan, [Afghanistan](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Afghanistan) shows good contact with those areas. A single ground stone axe had been discovered in a [burial](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Burial), and several more found on the surface. Those ground stone axes represent the earliest to come from a stratified context in the South Asia.

In 2001, archaeologists studying the remains of two men from Merhgarh made the discovery that the people of the [Indus Valley Civilization](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Indus_Valley_Civilization), from the early Harappan periods, had knowledge of proto-[dentistry](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Dentistry). Later, in April 2006, the scientific journal Nature announced that the oldest (and first early Neolithic) evidence for the drilling of human teeth in vivo (that is, in a living person) had been found in Merhgarh. According to the authors, their discoveries point to a tradition of proto-dentistry in the early farming cultures of that region. "Here we describe eleven drilled molar crowns from nine adults discovered in a Neolithic graveyard in Pakistan that dates from 7,500 to 9,000 years ago. These findings provide evidence for a long tradition of a type of proto-dentistry in an early farming culture."[[6]](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mehrgarh#cite_note-5)

## Merhgarh Period II and Period III

Merhgarh Period II (5500 B.C.E.–4800 B.C.E.) and Merhgarh Period III (4800 B.C.E.–3500 B.C.E.) were ceramic Neolithic (that is, pottery was now in use) and later chalcolithic. Much evidence of manufacturing activity has been found and more advanced techniques were used. Glazed [faience](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Faience) beads were produced and terracotta figurines became more detailed. Figurines of females were decorated with paint and had diverse hairstyles and ornaments. Two flexed [burials](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Burial) were found in period II with a covering of red ochre on the body. The amount of burial goods decreased over time, becoming limited to ornaments and with more goods left with burials of females. The first button seals were produced from terracotta and bone and had geometric designs. Technologies included stone and copper drills, updraft [kilns](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Kiln), large pit kilns and copper melting crucibles. There is further evidence of long-distance trade in period II: Important as an indication of this is the discovery of several beads of [lapis lazuli](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Lapis_lazuli)—originally from Badakshan.

## Merhgarh Period VII

Somewhere between 2600 B.C.E. and 2000 B.C.E., at the time the [Indus Valley Civilization](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Indus_Valley_Civilization) had been in its middle stages of development, the city seems to have been largely abandoned. It has been surmised that the inhabitants of Merhgarh migrated to the fertile Indus valley as the Baluchistan became more arid with climatic changes.

**Kot Diji**

Kot Diji is an important Harappan civilization site located in the [Rohri Hills](http://www.rohri.net/hills.htm) of Khairpur district of Pakistan. The Kot Diji Forerunner was the forerunner of the Indus Civilization. The fort was built between 1785 to 1795 by Mir Sohrab Khan Talpur, founder of the Kingdom of Upper Sindh in 1783. In addition to the fort, a 5 kilometer, 12 feet wide mud wall was built around the city. This defensive wall had bastions throughout its length and a huge iron gate served as the city's only entrance.

The site consists of two parts: one comprising of the **citadel area** on the high ground where the ruling elite lived and an outer area inhabited by common man. The Kot Diji culture is marked by well-furnished, well-made pottery and houses built of mud bricks on solid stone foundations. In fact, the Kot Dijian ceramics, though different in form and technique, are in no way less artistic than the sophisticated back-on-red pottery of Harappans.  
  
Kot Diji is a very practical **fort** constructed on a limestone hill with kiln-baked bricks. Bricks were used because the locally available limestone rock was very brittle and would have shattered easily on impact with a cannonball. The hill is about 110 feet high, above which the walls of the fort rise another 30 feet. Ithas three strategically placed towers about 50 feet tall.  
  
The fort is over half a kilometer long. Its walls are segmented by about 50 bastions, and its 1.8 km outer perimeter wall identically follows the double crescent-shaped contours of the hill it stands on. This allows the fort to surround the **attacking enemy on three sides** on the west front. On the east, where the entrance lies, the fort is divided by three elephant-proof gates into three overlapping levels, so that the first two levels can be attacked by the next level above them in the event of the lower level being overrun by the enemy. The first gate is not a prominent portal but rather an indirect entry so that the gate cannot be rammed on a charge. The walls and bastions have arrow slits in them, allowing defenders to attack their enemy from two levels: from the battlement on top and from within the wall.  
  
The fort was built at a time when cannons had become common and its design and position reveals that. It includes a multitude of stations for cannons and, because it is positioned high on a narrow ridge, enemy cannons would have had to fire at a great distance, permitting little accuracy. Cannonballs could either hit the hill or perimeter or would simply fly over the fort and fall on the enemies' own forces on the other side.  
The tomb of Fakir Qadir Bakhsh, after whom this site is named, lies to the west of the village of the same name. Inside the tomb there are two graves, one obviously being that of Fakir Qadir Bakhsh, of whom little is known, but nothing is known about the other; it is presumed to be that of a disciple, the Fakir never having married. The tomb of Golo Shahani, the commander-in-chief of the army of Mir Suhrab Khan, is also situated here, as well as a number of other graves of the Shahanis. Golo Shahani died in battle at *Shikarpur* in AH 1249 (AD 1833). On the eastern side of the tomb of Fakir Qadir is the tomb of Syed Saleh Shah, of whom nothing is known, and to the west of it, a mosque which is said to have been constructed by Fakir Qadir Bakhsh himself. The village has a population of approximately 500 individuals, who live in fifty houses.









