

10. Historic Period

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We have seen in lesson two that written records are available in the form of inscriptions, manuscripts, books, etc for the historic period. In all ancient civilizations, the art of writing was developed. They used fully developed scripts. In other words, with the rise of ancient civilizations, the New Stone Age came to an end and the Historic Period began.

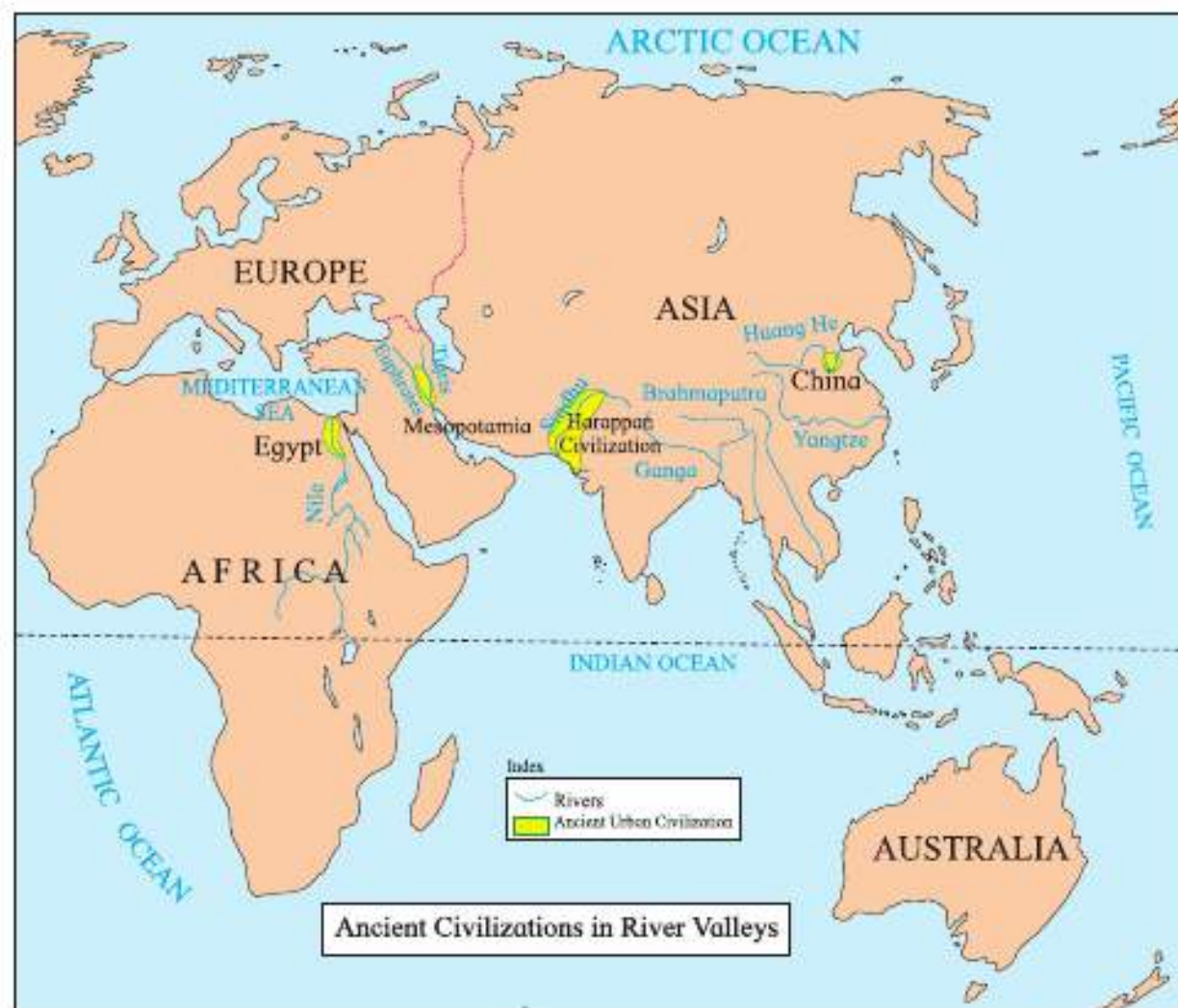
10.1 What is 'culture'?

Humans and all other animals are dependent on their environment and nature for satisfying their needs. However, other animals do not cause any significant change in their surroundings. For example, bears live in caves and monkeys live on trees, but humans build houses. It means that we humans change the natural character of our surroundings to some extent. Humans do not eat their food in its natural form as other animals do. They roast or cook the food. Or, in other words, they process foodstuffs before eating them. They process many substances in a similar manner. They

work on stone, metal, etc. to make tools and various objects. They make pots, bricks and many other things from clay. They obtain yarn from cotton and weave cloth from the yarn. In short, according to their needs, they change the form of materials available in nature. They need skills to do this. They need to think and plan before they shape an object. Then they have to put in efforts to actually shape it. The tradition of thought, skills and efforts gave rise to various arts. Every generation handed over the knowledge of the artistic skills and traditions to the next generation. With this exchange of thoughts and ideas, language was enriched. The knowledge of various arts, skills and traditions inherited from generation to generation and the way of life founded on that knowledge is what we call 'culture'.

10.2 Ancient civilizations in river valleys

Cultures which flourished in the New Stone Age were based on an agricultural way of life. Fertile soil and constant water supply are essential for growing good crops. Naturally, people in the New Stone Age established their village-settlements on the banks of various rivers. The New Stone Age cultures flourished along the river banks.



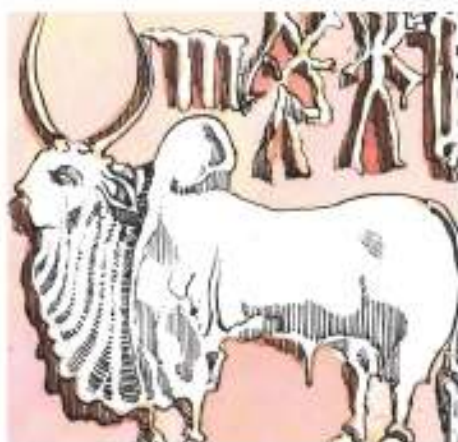
In the course of time, New Stone Age cultures gave rise to early civilizations. Increase in production due to various skills, the use of the wheel, flourishing trade, use of well-developed scripts, etc. were the major factors responsible for the rise of the early civilizations. These civilizations came into existence in roughly the same period, that is, around 3000 BC in four regions of the world. They are : Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indian subcontinent and China. The civilizations in these four regions developed in river valleys, hence they are known as ‘Riverine Civilizations’.

10.3 Ancient riverine civilizations : Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Harappa

Mesopotamia : ‘Mesopotamia’ is the name of a region and not of any particular country. It means ‘the land between two rivers’. Ancient Mesopotamia was the land between the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates. These two rivers mainly flow through Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Ancient Mesopotamia had great cities like Ur, Uruk, Nippur, etc. These cities were home to very prosperous cultures.

Egypt : The river Nile flows through the eastern part of the Sahara desert, in the north of Africa. One of the ancient civilizations flourished along its banks. It is known as the 'Egyptian Civilization'. The Nile gets flooded every year. The land along her banks has become very fertile because of the flood deposits. Also, Ancient Egyptians used to build small embankments on the river to store the flood water. After the soil in the flood water settled to the bottom, the water was used for irrigation.

China : The ancient civilization of China developed and flourished in the valley of the Huang He River. According to the Chinese tradition, a king named Huangdi introduced agriculture, animal husbandry, wheeled carts and chariots, boats, and clothing in China. Chinese people believe that his queen invented the technique of silk production and silk dyeing. Luoyang, Beijing and Chang'an were among the important cities of ancient China.



Harappa : The earliest civilization on the Indian subcontinent is known as the 'Harappan Civilization'. It flourished in the Indus valley. Indus is the English word for the name 'Sindhu'. Harappa in Punjab and Mohen-jo-daro in Sind are the two sites of Harappan Civilization to be discovered first. Now they are in Pakistan. Lothal and Dhola Vira in Gujarat and Kalibangan in Rajasthan are among the famous sites of Harappan Civilization in India.

Cities of this civilization are well-known for their systematic town planning. The houses were built in blocks created by parallel roads that crossed each other at right angles. Huge granaries and spacious houses were the special features of these cities. There were bathrooms and latrines in every house and a covered drainage system which indicates a concern for public hygiene. There were carefully constructed private and public wells. The cities were divided into two to four parts, each with a separate fortification.



A Harappan seal and clay figurine

The characteristic earthen pots of the Harappans are well-baked, red in colour and with beautiful designs like pipal leaves and fish scales. When tapped,

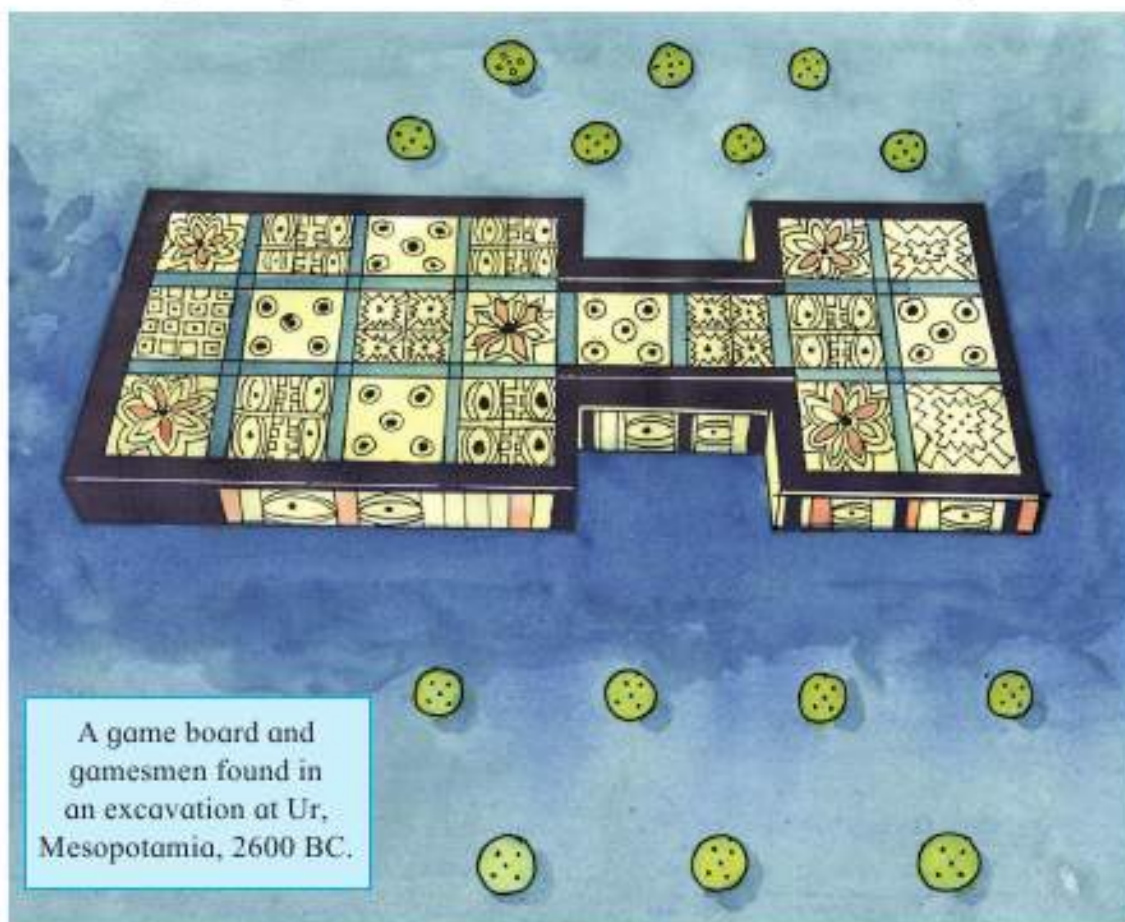
these pots produce a metallic sound. The Harappan craftsmen were highly skilled in making bronze objects and beads from semi-precious stones of various colours.



A king hunting a lion



Wrestling



These things were in great demand in Mesopotamia. The names of Harappan gods and goddesses are not yet known. However, we know with the help of the Harappan seals and clay figurines that they worshipped 'Pashupati' (Lord of all living animals) and a Mother Goddess.

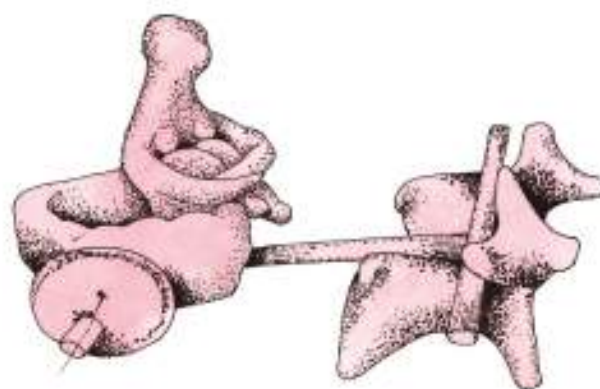


Archaeologists feel that these clay objects found in excavations of Harappan sites were used as gamesmen.

10.4 Sports and entertainment

There were a variety of sports and means of entertainment in the ancient civilizations. Hunting and wrestling were the important ones. Games played with the help of game boards and gamesmen were also popular.

In ancient Egypt, people played a game that was similar to chess.



A Harappan toy



A Harappan toy

This game was played with a game board and gamesmen. It was known as 'Senat'. In ancient China also, there were many games played with boards and gamesmen. Similar games were popular in Mesopotamia and Harappan Civilization, too.

Many toys are found in the excavations of Harappan sites. They include whirrs, whistles, rattles, bullock carts, animals and birds on wheels, etc.

Music and dance were also very important in early civilizations. They were an essential part of celebrating a festival. Ancient people used many types of musical instruments. In Mesopotamia, a stringed instrument known as 'Balag' was very popular. Besides, instruments like cymbals, rattles, flutes, drums, etc. were also played. The Egyptian kings were known as 'Pharaohs'. On the occasion of certain festivals, the Pharaoh himself used to participate in the celebrations and dance. The bronze image of a dancer found in the excavation at Mohen-jo-daro is evidence that dance was important in the Harappan Civilization as well.

Till now, we have learnt in brief about the history of human civilization from the Stone Age to the early civilizations. Next year, we shall study in detail the Harappan Civilization that developed in the Indian subcontinent. We shall also study the ancient history of India.



A Balag

A musical string instrument made of gold, named 'Balag' found in the excavations at the city of Ur, a Mesopotamian site.

The Balag has 11 strings. Its height is approximately 2.1 metres. It dates back to about 2650 BC. It was found in the burial of a Mesopotamian queen. Her name was Puabi.

Exercises

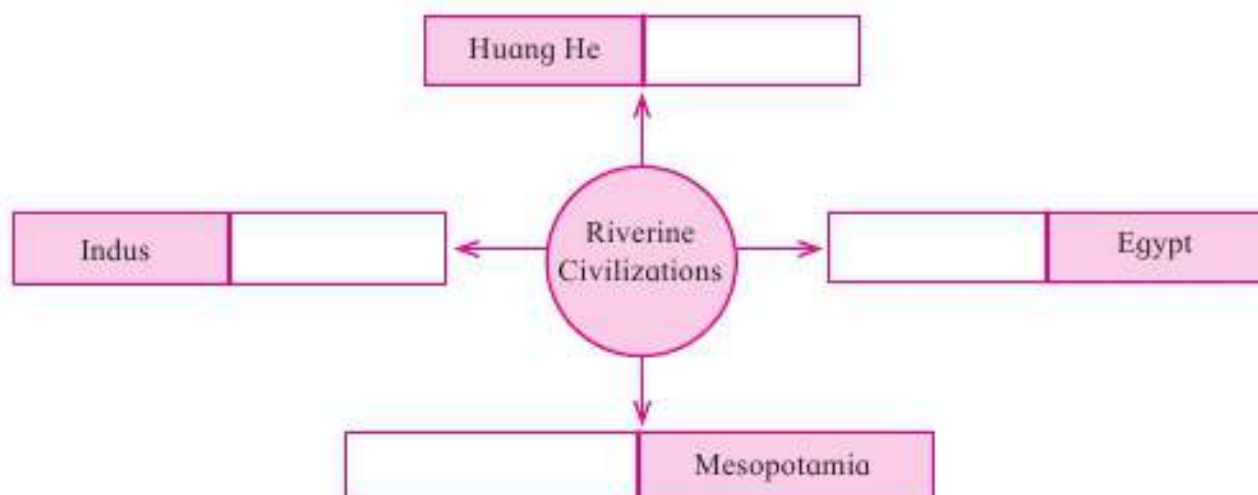
1. Answer each of the following questions in one sentence.

- Where did the people in the New Stone Age establish their village-settlements?
- What articles were the Harappan craftsmen skilled at making?

2. Answer the following questions in brief.

- What are some of the well-known characteristics of Harappan cities?
- What made the soil on the banks of the Nile fertile?

3. Complete the following chart.



Activities

- (a) Show the sites of Harappan Culture in an outline map of India.
- (b) Visit various artistes in your locality who play musical instruments. Collect information about their instruments.
- (c) Visit some senior citizens in your locality and collect information about the traditional sports and games of their times.

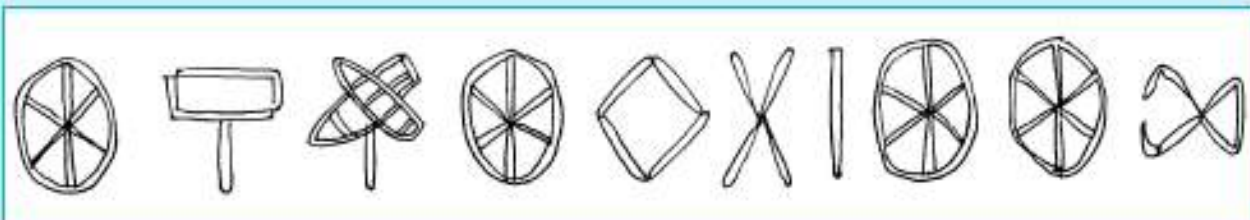
Do you know this?

The names of the four ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia are as follows: 1. Sumerian 2. Akkadian 3. Babylonian 4. Assyrian. The Akkadian empire arose around 2350 BC. In the reign of the Akkadian emperor, Sargon, trade between the Harappan Civilization and Mesopotamia flourished to a great extent. Hammurabi, the king of Babylon (1792 – 1750 BC) was the first to give a written law code to his subjects.

A unique achievement of the ancient Egyptians was their science of architecture. The grandeur of the ancient Egyptians pyramids and temples are ample evidence of it. Ancient Egyptians mainly used unbaked stone and bricks for construction. They had made great progress in the fields of mathematics, medicine and irrigation. Egypt was known for building ships of excellent quality. They had also made significant progress in the fields of production of faience objects (ceramic objects with a blue glaze), and in making paper from a plant called papyrus.

Excavations at Harappa and Mohen-jo-daro began in 1921-22 AD and the Harappan Civilization came to light. Harappa was the place where the civilization was first discovered. Therefore, it is named as 'Harappan Civilization'.

Inscriptions in the Harappan script are found at various sites of the Harappan civilization. Scholars have tried to read those inscriptions. However, so far, efforts to read them have not been successful. Therefore, those inscriptions cannot be used to learn more about the history of the Harappan Civilization. Considering that the Harappans used a developed script and that the Harappan Civilization is contemporary to other ancient civilizations, its period is called the 'Protohistoric period' of the history of the Indian subcontinent.



Inscription in the Harappan Script

Characteristics of early civilizations :

1. Permanent agricultural settlements established along river banks. 2. Use of copper and bronze. 3. Developed technology and craft specialization based on special skills. 4. Centrally controlled distribution of water and a developed irrigation system. 5. Surplus production of agricultural and other products. 6. Art of writing based on a well-developed script. 7. Long distance trade and a developed transport system – wheeled vehicles and use of waterways. 8. Planned cities – protective enclosure walls, paved roads, separation between settlements of administrators and common people. 9. Developed science of architecture and sculptural art. 10. Development of sciences like mathematics, astronomy and medicine.



