Chapter 4: Central Asia and India's Beginnings: 4-1a Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa
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4-1a Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa

At two locations on the Indus River—*Mohenjo-Daro* (mo-HEN-jo-DAH-ro) and *Harappa* (hah-RAP-pah)—archaeologists have found the remnants of large, carefully constructed walls and the cities they enclosed. Each city was more than three miles across and probably housed more than 100,000 people. Many smaller towns and villages have also been found under the dust of centuries, scattered along the Indus River and its several tributaries in western India.

These cities and villages were built of fired brick and carefully planned. Streets ran at precise right angles, laid out in exact grid patterns. The main thoroughfares were thirty-four feet wide, large enough to allow two large carts to pass safely and still leave room for several pedestrians, whereas smaller avenues were nine feet wide. Many of the buildings had two or even three stories, which was unusual for residences in the ancient world. They were built of bricks that were almost always of two sizes—but only those two. The interior dimensions of the houses were almost identical. A sewage canal ran from each house to a larger canal in the street that carried off household waste. Small statues of gods and goddesses, almost always of the same size and posture, were frequently found in the house foundations.

Indus Valley Jewelry.

The fine workmanship and imagination exhibited here allow us to draw some conclusions about the state of the Indus civilization during this epoch—about 2000–1800 B.C.E. Some of the precious stones in this jewelry had to have been brought from as far away as China. Discoveries of such manufactures as well as others made from metals and ivory throughout the western Indian Ocean suggest the impact trade had on Indian civilization as early as the third millennium B.C.E.

National Museum of India, New Delhi, India/The Bridgement Art Library

All this regularity suggests a government that was powerful in the eyes of its subjects and possibly gained its authority from religious belief. Some experts on Indus civilization believe that it was a *theocracy* (thee-AH-crah-see), in which the priests ruled as representatives of the gods. In no other way, they think, could the government's power have been strong enough to command residential uniformity over a period of centuries, as happened in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.

Both cities also contain monumental buildings—probably a communal granary and the temples of the local gods—situated on a citadel. Harappa differs from Mohenjo-Daro in building style and other details, but the similarities are strong enough that the two cities and the surrounding villages are believed to have probably constituted one civilization, sometimes termed *Dravidian* (drah-VIH-dee-an).

For their food, the cities depended on the irrigated farms throughout the surrounding plain. As in Egypt, the ordinary people apparently enjoyed a high standard of living for many generations. Although scholars have unearthed many works of art and figurines, they have been unsuccessful in decoding Harappan writing. This, as well as the long period during which this civilization was forgotten, has hindered scholars' efforts to obtain a detailed

knowledge of the people. We still know next to nothing about their religion, their government, the social divisions, and their scientific and intellectual accomplishments. One thing now seems clear, however: the cities and villages were prosperous, expanding settlements from at least 2500 to about 1900 B.C.E.

For reasons still only guessed at, around 1900 B.C.E. there began a long decline, which ended with the abandonment of Mohenjo-Daro about 1200 B.C.E. and Harappa somewhat later. Some evidence indicates that landslides changed the course of the lower Indus River and that a noticeable shift to cooler and drier conditions prevented the continuation of the intensive farming that had supported the cities. Equally likely, the population may have fallen victim to malaria because the blocked river created mosquito-ridden swamps nearby. Others think that the irrigated land gradually became alkaline and nonproductive, as happened in lower Mesopotamia.

Whatever the role of natural disasters, it is certain that the decline of the Indus Valley was accelerated when groups of Indo-European nomads (called Indo-Iranians), who created the Persian empire, began a series of migrations out of their homelands, somewhere north of the Caspian Sea, into Iran, Afghanistan, and farther east after 1500 B.C.E. For many of these Indo-Iranians, this was not the end of their pastoralist wanderings. Some continued their movement south from Afghanistan, through the Khyber Pass, and into the Indus Valley. The name by which these people called themselves was closely related to that of their Iranian cousins to the north, namely, the **Aryans** ((AIR-ee-ans) A nomadic pastoral people from central Asia who migrated into the Indus and Ganges River Valleys between about 1500 B.C.E. and 500 B.C.E.) (AIR-ee-ans).