

Chapter 4: Central Asia and India's Beginnings: 4-1 Indus Valley Civilization and Early Trade

Book Title: World Civilizations

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4-1 Indus Valley Civilization and Early Trade

As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the earliest Indian civilization was located in the plain bordering two great streams, the Indus (IN-duhs) and the Saraswati (sah-rah-SWAH-tee) Rivers. Both flow south and west from the foothills of the Himalayan (him-ah-LAY-an) range, the world's loftiest and most forbidding mountains. The Himalayas are the highest of several ranges that separate India and Pakistan from Tajikistan and China (see [Map 4.1](#)).

Map 4.1

The Indian Subcontinent

India is a large and diverse geographic entity, ringed by the Himalayas and other high mountains to the north and northeast. The usual routes of contact with other peoples have been from the northwest and by sea, from both eastern and western directions. Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were part of a highly advanced, urbanized ancient civilization that flourished in the valley of the Indus River before the Aryan invasions.

Thinking About This Map

Examine the map and explain why India is classified as a subcontinent. In what mountain range shown on the map do you think most of Asia's greatest rivers have their origins? Why do you suppose that is so?



Archaeologists are still unsure about the precise origins of the [Indus Valley civilization](#) (Earliest known civilization of India that flourished c. 3000–1500 B.C.E. Largely known from archaeological discoveries at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.) , but because it was linked with the north and west by trade even before agriculture appeared, Mesopotamian civilization might have influenced its emergence. Farming on the floodplains of the Indus Valley began around 6000 B.C.E., and by 4000 B.C.E. the region had a dense population and numerous fortified farming villages. Soil erosion and frequent, violent flooding constantly plagued settled life along these riverbanks, so preplanning was essential. Evidence of flood-control systems and gridlike street layouts show up in the deepest (earliest) layers that archaeologists have excavated in early Indus Valley farming sites.

The third millennium B.C.E. saw explosive growth in the region and the enlargement of towns into cities. As in other early civilizations like Mesopotamia and Egypt, Indus Valley civilization rested firmly on the agrarian base of cereal cultivation—dryland or cereal crops such as wheat, barley, and cotton. But even more than in other civilizations, it seems, the central role of trade was striking, considering its importance and its endurance. Finds in the Indus Valley of items manufactured from cotton, metals, and lapis lazuli show that southwest Asia already traded extensively with northwest India by 2600 B.C.E.; by 2350 B.C.E. there even existed Indian settlements in southern Mesopotamia. Professional merchants gave this

trade a high degree of organization, and it is likely that it had a major impact on the growth and wealth of Indus urban life. In its earliest stages this trafficking relied chiefly on land routes through Central Asian trading centers like *Taxila*, although there was some waterborne trade within the Persian Gulf and along the rivers and coastal regions of southern Asia. Routes gradually opened into the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Persian Gulf, allowing for the expansion of early trade (see [Chapter 3](#)). Eventually, this development placed India at the center of a trade network that linked it with the eastern Mediterranean, East Africa, Arabia, and other parts of Asia.

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