

# UNIT 5 THE RIVER-VALLEY CIVILISATIONS

## Structure

- 5.0 Objectives**
- 5.1 Introduction**
- 5.2 Factors for the Growth of Early Civilisations**
- 5.3 Three Distinct River-Valley Landscapes**
- 5.4 City Dwellers of Lower Mesopotamia**
  - 5.4.1 The Sumerian Civilisation**
  - 5.4.2 Sources of Kings Power**
    - Chart-I The Chronology of Mesopotamia**
- 5.5 Egypt**
  - 5.5.1. The Egyptian Culture**
  - 5.5.2 Administration**
    - Chart 2 The Chronology of Egypt**
- 5.6 The Harappan Cities' Civilisation**
  - Chart-3 The Chronology of the North Western Subcontinent**
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up**
- 5.8 Key Words**
- 5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises**

## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we intend providing you an insight into the transition of the early agricultural societies to the stage of civilisation. It meant more complex social organisation, urban growth and development of advanced trade and market networks and political and cultural systems.

By the end of this Unit you would be able to know:

about the major civilisations, such as those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Mohenjodaro and Harappa which sprang up in the river valleys,  
the social, political, economic and cultural system of these civilisations, their common and unique features,  
chronological sequence in which these social and economic changes followed in  
each of the major river-valley civilisation, and  
the form of interaction among the political institutions, urban centres and patterns of culture.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The river-valley civilisations marked a definite stage of improvement over the agricultural societies. This process took time and it was not until 2600 B.C. that the Indus civilisation emerged. Civilisation could not

have emerged in the simple agricultural societies because its growth depended upon rise of new institutions, such as organised kingdoms in place of kin-based polity of tribal chiefs, rise of urban centres, civic officials, cultural specialists, written records, market, trade and commerce, etc. These did not exist in the agricultural societies which were based on simple community based economy. The major river-valley civilisations are those of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa. These arose in the valleys of rivers like Tigris and Euphrates, Nile and Indus. These rivers flooded the plains leaving behind fertile soil where cultivation led to economic surpluses. Great Urban civilisations arose in these valleys contributing to arts, crafts, trade and a unified complex political system. As you would note from the chronology of evolution in these civilisations that major social transformations took place in the course of millenia. It led to technological innovation in transport, navigation and architecture apart from the rise of sophisticated patterns of culture.

## **5.2 FACTORS FOR THE GROWTH OF EARLY CIVILISATIONS**

Let us now examine the factors that led to the growth of the early civilisations. After a look at the maps, we see that the first civilisations did not emerge in those regions where the first farming began. Moreover, if farming began by 5000 B.C. in northwestern India, it was not until 2600 B.C.-twenty four centuries later-that the Indus civilisation emerged. Thus, agriculture cannot be assumed to be the only 'causes' of civilization. Also, many early and late agricultural societies in the world did not develop into civilisations. But one can also confidently assert that no civilisation could emerge in a hunting gathering society, without sedentism, without permanently organised communities, and above all, without storable food. We all know that rice and wheat can be kept for years whereas meat and fruit rot within days. We shall discuss the importance of storable food and its relationship to the growth of civilisation a little later.

Civilisation represents a stage in history when several tribal communities are united into a political and economic order, i.e. when political and economic relationship cut across tribal boundaries. Such processes come from a ruler at the centre, whose officers carry out his orders which all are obliged to obey. This is very different from the structuring of community life around kin relationships. Here, we are not discussing the various theories about the origin of the ruler or king as a political institution. Suffice to say is that the political actions of the ruler (king) at the centre are effective because they are backed by force of social acceptance. People would not obey a command to join the army or build a palace for the king or surrender rent from their harvest to the king's officers unless they agreed to it or they had no choice. Rulers thus have the power to organize trade, raise armies, or sponsor craft production.

This gives rise to much movement of people and goods through the ruler's territory. In the civilisations of the Nile, Euphrates and Indus, cities ('urban centres') emerged. In urban centres many people were engaged in non-food-producing occupations like administration, craft or scribal work, trade, or as professional priests. Now, seal cutters or scribes did not produce food but they did consume it. So there had to be a regular supply of food which was met by the villages.

In such a society rulers will not be able to function and cities will not survive unless food is imperishable. Also, the cost of transportation between village and city must be low. For example, if a team of six oxen or donkeys transport 1000 kg. of grain between a village and a city, but it costs 1005 kg. to feed the animals and their drivers during the journey, it would effect the city economy adversely.

Thus, we find that civilisations cannot develop unless there is (a) a reliable agricultural base, and (b) easy transportation provided by nature. A quick glance at maps will show you that the three civilisations we will study are located in relatively flat valleys crossed by large river systems. Water transport was in ancient times much cheaper than land transport. This was because boats sailed with the energy of winds in river

currents and there were no animals to feed. The wheel also reduced the energy required from animals for transportation. In all three areas of our study, the river boat and the wheeled cart I were in use long before civilisation emerged.

In all the three civilisations, tools were made of stone, copper and bronze. For ornaments and craft work, however, variety of stones, shell, silver and gold were used. Metal and precious stones were not found within the Nile, Euphrates or Indus valleys and could only be procured through trade. The sending of expeditions, or by settling colonies near their resources. All three of the river valleys were fertile and large; all were arid regions fed by rivers which draw their waters from high rainfall and mountain regions at their source, giving permanent water and fertile silt to their valleys. In all three civilisations wheat and barley were the staple crops, and animal wealth came from cattle, sheep and goat.

## **5.3 THREE DISTINCT RIVER-VALLEY LANDSCAPES**

But here the similarities end. Of all the three rivers, it is the Nile (the longest river in the world) which is the most reliable and the easiest to tame. The Nile enters Egypt at Aswan and then flows through a narrow valley flanked by high desert on east and west. Near Cairo it forms a wide delta, where much cultivable land is available, and near the apex of the delta was the most densely inhabited region of ancient Egypt. In September, the Nile overflows its banks in Egypt forming a huge lake, and it appears that the villages are islands floating in water. Having thoroughly moistened and fertilized most of the narrow valley, the flood subsides in October, and farmers are ready to plough. Egypt receives very little, almost negligible, rainfall but due to the long span of the Nile flood, the construction of irrigation canals was found to be unnecessary.

Mesopotamia is fed by two large rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The settlements of the Sumerian civilisation were situated along the Euphrates, as the Tigris is a swifter and suddenly flooding river. On entering Summer the Euphrates flows slowly and throws out several branches, which in turn bifurcate further. In Egypt flooding takes place before the crop season, but the Euphrates begins to rise in December and is at its highest level in April. Rainfall being deficient for crops, and river levels being high during the crop season, natural branches of the river or man-made ditches or canals are used to water the fields. In Mesopotamia much labour went into canal digging and cleaning canals of their mud deposits.

Like the Nile, the Indus also floods before the ploughing season: usually in August. But the Indus is not a manageable river it carries almost twice the volume of water compared to the Nile and flows much more swiftly. The Indus, therefore, does not produce a sheet flood-its flood waters escape in large overflow rivers like the Eastern Nara and the Western Nara, these in turn (like the Indus) overflow and change course frequently. The wide Indus valley thus receives its pre-plough water and fertilization in a haphazard manner, some tracts getting good water while others being left dry and this too varies in different years. Thus, the residents of the Indus valley civilisation must have faced the greatest challenge for agricultural production. Having made this scenario clear, and having assessed the geographic similarities and differences, let us proceed to look at the various features of each of the three civilisations, each unique and worthy of study in its own right.

## **5.4 CITY DWELLERS OF LOWER MESOPOTAMIA**

Mesopotamian history is extremely rich in sources, and Mesopotamia takes a high place in world history because it saw the earliest cities and states, had the most prosperous agricultural economy of ancient times, and left a strong legacy to the world in literature, mathematics and astronomy. In the accompanying Chart-1, we have given you only the barest chronological outline and in this short lesson, we will only be able to trace an outline of the first period of its civilisation in the third millennium. Why is the history of Mesopotamia known to us in such vivid details? For decades archaeologists have been digging its ancient towns so that we have by now masses of temple plans, pottery, sculptures, seals, metal artefacts, graves and above all, clay tablets. You would like to know what are clay tablets? The Mesopotamians wrote on wet mud tablets by pressing the wedged-shaped end of a stylus (of reed or wood) on to the surface. When written, the tablet was dried or baked. Baked mud, as you know, can survive burial in the soil for centuries unlike paper, bark or wooden boards, which are organic materials and therefore perishable. The study of the writings on these tablets tell us a lot about that period.

On clay were written epic stories about the earliest king; myths about the doings of the gods and the creation of world; folk stories; laws promulgated by kings; letters from kings to their officers; and detailed account of all public offices. No more than three kings in all Mesopotamian history could read and write, but by 2000 B.C. writing had become indispensable to the management of state affairs. Copies would be kept of all letters written by a king to his deputies; when the replies were received they were 'filed' together with the copies in boxes or on shelves in what we could say were archive room. We can reconstruct much economic history as there are several accounts of merchants listing intake and outgoings, as well as accounts of state cattle pens and temple workshops employing people in spinning and weaving. All work on temple land was recorded: the people working at various tasks, ploughs and seeds handed out to them, the sizes of various fields, and the amount of harvest reaped from them.

## 5.4.1 The Sumerian Civilisation

The language used by the first city-dwellers was Sumerian, and so we call this the 'Suzerain Civilisation'. Each written sign stood either for a whole word or for a syllable, unlike modern alphabets in which one sign stands for one vowel or one consonant only. Because they were pressed with the end of a stylus, the signs were geometric in shape. From the chronological chart, we find out the name of the second language used in Mesopotamia and the dates when it was in use. For both languages the writing, being wedge-shaped, was called 'Cuneiform'.

### 7. Akkadian Writing in Cuneiform Letters

Suzerain settlements began as humble villages (see the first horizontal column in the chronological chart), but by 2500 B.C. grew to the size of cities. Extensive archaeological surveys show that these cities were very much larger than the contemporary cities of the Indus or of Egypt. From temple accounts of agricultural work we can see that the productivity of the land was very high, probably the highest known in the ancient and medieval world. So, the output of the farmers could meet the needs of a substantial non-food-producing population living in cities.

Each city was the religious and political centre of an independent city state. There were many states in Sumer, often at war with one another. A city state comprised its urban centre with surrounding villages

and agricultural lands, fisheries and pasture grounds for sheep and goat herders. The grandest buildings in the city were the palace of the rulers and the temples of the chief deity.

Although the gods lived in the heaven, they owned estates on earth. The temple was literally the god's house on earth, in which he was offered regular meals, rich clothing and jewellery. The temple fields, fisheries, herds and workshops comprised the god's estate. According to Mesopotamian belief, man was created to serve the gods so that they could enjoy themselves. In the temple, singer-priests and chanter-priests 'pleased' the gods; ordinary people came with their food offerings; craftsmen made furnishings and decorations for the gods; and animals were regularly slaughtered as sacrifice.

Some temple fields were parcelled out to tenants in return for about 10% of the harvest; some were given to peasants as payment for their service. The animals were herded and cloth was woven from sheep's wool by temple servants. For this work, these servants received sufficient rations in flour, oil and clothes to meet their basic needs. In contrast to tribal societies, then, there was now a section of society which did not have its own resources and gave its labour in return for bare subsistence. Kings played a rather ambiguous role in all this. In their inscriptions, kings would boast that particular gods had chosen them to be the king and organize prosperity for the gods. So the kings were the foremost servant of the gods, never claiming to be gods themselves. They spent heavy resources on temple building. At the same time, kings were never actual priests, exclusively occupied in natural and temple administration. Though temple builders, kings were also law givers, the chief administrators, organizers of trade and owners of large private estate. Their palaces were much larger than temples, and heavily fortified. A large number of people were employed to work in the palaces and on the private estates of the kings.

We should not consider the early kings as only religious figures. Sumerian kings were primarily the wielders of military power, but were involved in temple building and administration to legitimise their authority; that is, to justify their power in the eyes of the people, and above all to gain control of temple wealth. Temples had by the Early Dynastic period accumulated much wealth and controlled a lot of land. Originally, all this wealth was public property but the Sumerian kings had the necessary power to use the wealth as if it was their private property. Early dynastic temple records name the king, and not the god, as the owner of temple lands.

## **5.4.2 Sources of King's Power**

But, one may ask, what gave the kings such power that they could undermine the position of the temple priests ?

About fifty years ago, archaeologists digging at the city of Ur came upon a huge cemetery. They found hundreds of graves of ordinary people, buried with a few ornaments and pots. They also found sixteen graves of a very special character, large brick chambers built underground, for kings and queens. Royal persons were buried with masses of jewellery, musical instruments, gold and silver vessels, as well as ceremonial weapons made of gold and silver. In some graves the king or queen was buried with many courtiers, guards, ox-drawn chariots, and their drivers. The enormous wealth of these tombs is specially striking when we recall that no metal or stone was locally available in Sumer, but had to be imported from the Zagros or Syria or Turkey or India. Thus, the kings must have grown wealthy and powerful by successfully organizing long distance trade, sending large quantities of cheaply produced grain, oil and textiles to exchange for minerals. Texts found in a palace indicate that merchants went abroad to trade as agents of the king, returning with much wealth. And we find that often the kings boasted about their success in foreign trade in their temple inscriptions. Wealth and military power must have gone hand in hand. Early in the third millennium warfare was perennial in Sumer. Although the land was immensely fertile,

agriculture remained unstable. The channels of the Euphrates could suddenly change course, depriving all communities located down them, of water. Canals had a short life because they silted up at a fast rate, and after some years could not be cleaned effectively. Thus, communities were periodically obliged to fight for land or for access to water.

Successful military leaders would acquire war captives with whom they could enlarge their armies and become even more powerful. They could gain wealth from captured booty, especially from wealthy cities of their enemies (some sumerian temples were clearly sacked and destroyed by enemies, judging from the broken debris and ruined objects and ash found on their floors by archaeologists). And the more copper and bronze a king could import for the making of weaponry, the more successful he would be in the war. A Sumerian proverb says, 'It is the poor who are the silent men in Summer'. We know little about the ordinary farmer or potter. Ordinary people took regular offerings to the temple, and were obliged to do labour for the king or join the army. Occasionally in literature, we come across stories in which the people complain about the king. But the complaints are never about taxation; they are about the amount of work they are expected to do for building temples, or city walls, or going on expeditions. It seems that ordinary people in the country-side were not subject to a harvest tax or to rent. The state drew its revenues from the temple and palace estate and from compulsory labour and foreign trade.

At the same time, several legal contracts of the period show that farmers-perhaps because they were impoverished or in distress -were selling their land to members of royal families or the nobility. To be fair to the kings, however, we find from the contracts that they did not seize lands but paid a fair price for them, in grain, bread, fish, oil or copper

## CHART-1: The Chronology of Mesopotamia

<b>4500 to 2900 B.C.</b>	<b>UBAID URUK AND JAMDAT NASR PERIODS</b>	Lower Euphrates plain was first occupied by fishermen and farmers: nest of the plain was settled very gradually. Small temples raised at settlements. From modest beginnings, copper and bronze metallurgy come to high technical standards. Late in this period, writing appears. cylinder seats begin to be used and temples become large and elaborately decorated buildings come up.
<b>2900 to 2300 B.C.</b>	<b>EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD</b>	The period of the Sumerian city-states and the earliest civilisation. See text
<b>2300 TO 2000 B.C.</b>	<b>DYNASTY OF AKKAD AND IIIrd DYNASTY OF UR</b>	Sumerian is gradually replaced by the official and household language, but Sumerian is taught in schools and 6th writing system remains the same. Sargon of Akkad conquers part of Assyria Syria and becomes the world's

		first emperor The IIIrd Dynasty of UR consolidates its administration of all Summer.
<b>2000 TO 1600 B.C.</b>	<b>OLD BABYLONIAN PERIOD</b>	New peoples immigrate into Mesopotamia but use the Akkadian language. Several kings fight for supremacy, including Hammurabi of Babylon. Many documents are copied in the scribal schools.
<b>1600 TO 1150 B.C.</b>	<b>KASSITTE PERIOD</b>	People from the Zagros seize the throne of Babylon and adopt Mesopotamian culture. Akkadian becomes the language of international diplomacy all over western Asia.
<b>MINOR</b>	<b>DYNASTIES</b>	The iron Age begins. The camel is domesticated.
<b>1000 TO 612 B.C.</b>	<b>ASSYRIANS</b>	With its huge and efficient military machine, Assyria, by 750 B.C created an empire including the South Syria, Palestine and hill kingdoms of the Zagros Assyrian kings cheated the world's first zoo and library. Their capital, Nineveh, fell to the Babylonians and Medes in 612 B C.
<b>625 TO 539 B.C.</b>	<b>NEO-BABYLONIAN PERIOD</b>	Babylon, the bitter enemy of Assyria, now becomes the great Mesopotamian power Babylon becomes the world's largest city, famed, for its wealth and its intellectual traditions The sign for zero may have been invented in this period Babylon falls to the Achemenid Persians in 539BC.
<b>539 TO 331 B.C.</b>	<b>ACHAEMENID RULE</b>	Babylon is the granary of the Persian empire. Persian kings make Babylon their winter residence.
<b>331 B.C.</b>	<b>INVASION OF ALEXANDER</b>	Alexander, successor to 6th Persians, is awed by the cosmopolitan sophistication of Babylon and resolves to make it, his Asian capital, but dies before he can do so.
<b>311 TO 125 B.C.</b>	<b>SELEUCIDS</b>	Minor Greek rulers rake much interest in Mesopotamian literature and astronomy. The Akkadian language and cuneiform

		script goes out of use after 75 A D Babylon, once the centre of use world, drifts towards decline.
--	--	--

## Check your Progress 1

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer

ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

1) Outline the distinctive features which you would associate with 'civilisations'.

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

2) The Mesopotamian civilisation grew up in the river valley of (Check one of the following for correct answer):

- a) Indus
- b) Ganges
- c) Tigris and Euphrates
- d) Nile

3) Writing became indispensable for management of state affairs in Mesopotamian valley civilisation (Check one of the following for correct answer) by about:

- a) 5000 B.C.
- b) 2000 B.C.
- c) 1000 B.C.
- d) 500 B.C.

4) Write a note on role of religion in Sumerian civilisation.

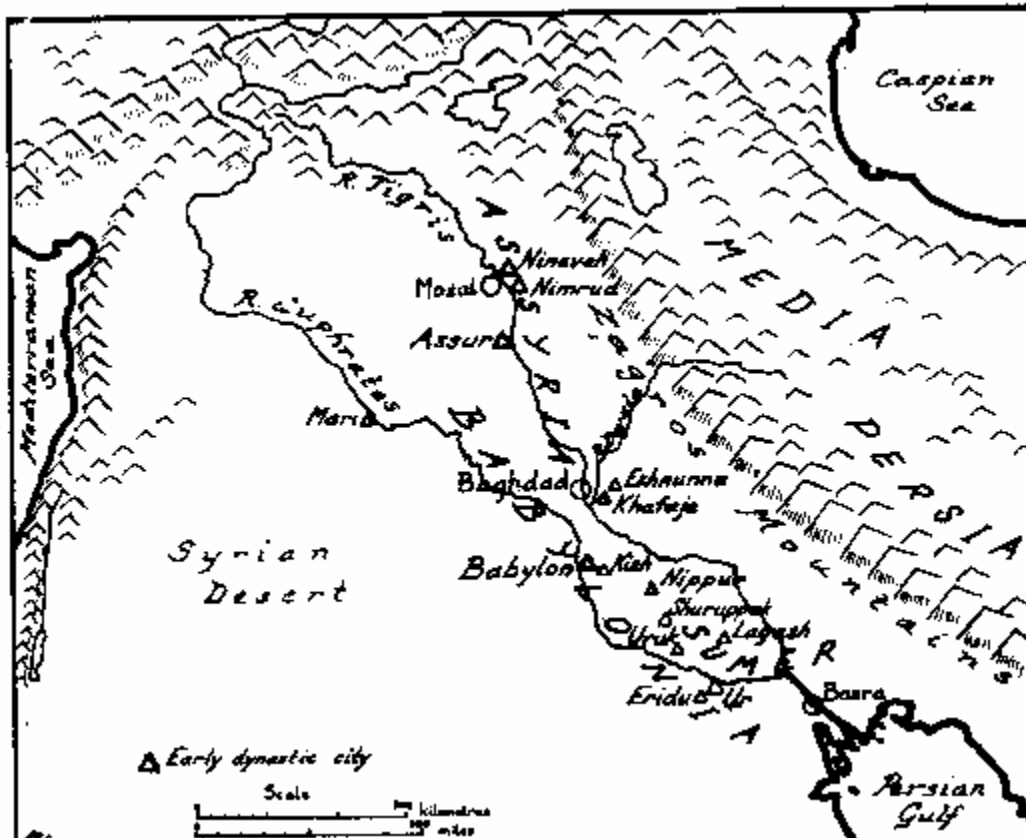
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

5) One gets evidence about the power of the King over that of priests in Sumerian civilisation. From the archaeological site of (Check one of the following for correct answer):



- a) Euphrates
- b) Nineveh
- c) Ur
- d) Babylon

Map3.



## 5.5 EGYPT

We will now discuss the Old Kingdom of Egypt and its civilization. One can get a rough idea of the developments in a chronological setting from the chronology in Chart-2. In ancient Egypt the names and order of succession of the Pharaohs (kings) was remembered as a part of a strong tradition, and often this information as well as information on important events during a reign were recorded either in chronicles or on temple and tomb walls. It was a custom for Pharaohs to honour their royal ancestors. A Pharaoh could organize the offering of sacrifices to even sixty or seventy five dead kings, in which case all these previous kings would be named on the walls of the temple where the rituals were conducted. We, therefore, have a reliable chronology of kings, derived from many inscriptions.

It may surprise one that archaeology gives us only limited information on ancient Egypt. The extremely dry climate of Egypt has helped the preservation of ancient remains-even the mummified bodies of dead Pharaohs-in the soil. But the dry desert soil was the location of only burial monuments and temples. Egyptian towns and villages stood within the cultivated plain of the Nile. This is a narrow plain, annually inundated. Medieval and modern settlements of ten overlaid ancient villages in this densely populated valley. Therefore, the remains of ordinary village houses or village shrines, or even important town building, have either been washed away by floods, or lie in wet soils or lie buried under later settlements. We know little about the sizes of towns, of villages, about ordinary houses and the life of the peasants.

## 5.5.1 Egyptian Culture

Fortunately, Egyptian history is not merely a list of the names and wars of the Pharaohs. Paintings and reliefs on temple and tomb walls vividly depict scenes from everyday life: the ploughing of a field, carpenters at work, scribes writing. Or a monkey biting its keeper. There are also written accounts: biographies of people inscribed on their tombs, and letters and stories on papyrus.

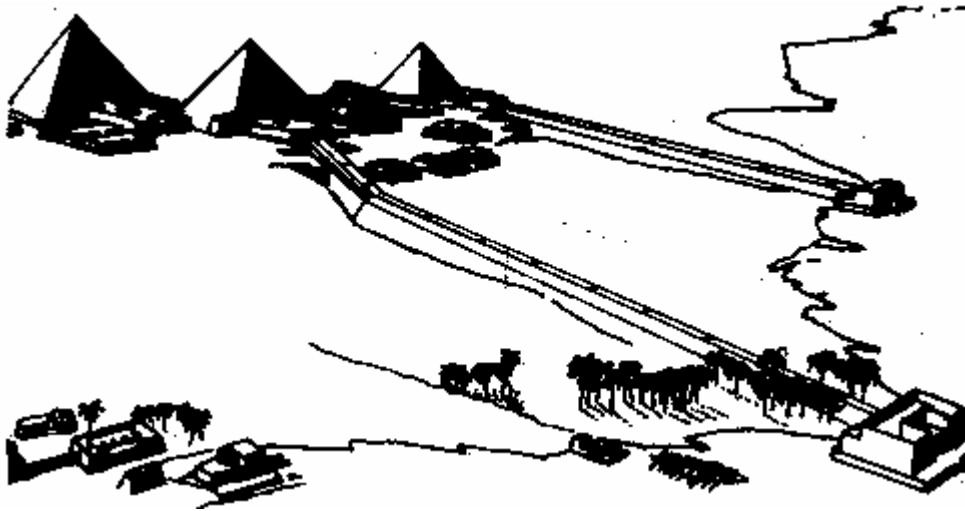
Egyptian writing was 'hieroglyphic'; consisting of picture-like signs. A picture could mean what was drawn, e.g. for 'house', other picture-signs, however, stood for only one sound: e.g. for 'n', and for 'd'. So there were sense-signs as well as sound signs. When the Egyptians wrote on papyrus (this is the origin of our word 'paper'), the signs were joined up and looked less like pictures.

Papyrus is a reed-like plant of Egypt. Its green stems were sliced thin, the strips were then laid side by side and crosswise over each other, and then pounded into sheets. After being pressed and dried in the sun, the sheets were ready for writing. Ink or various colours were used in small dry cakes to which a wet brush was applied. Therefore, Egyptian writing is multi-coloured, an extension of drawings, and very pleasing to the eye.



**8. Papyrus Plants**

The pyramids are great tourist attraction of Egypt today. Pyramids are gigantic stone tombs square at the base, with four triangular sides meeting at the top. They were each part of a larger complex containing a temple near the Nile, a causeway between this and the pyramid, and death chapels



### 9. A Pyramid Complex with Valley Temples and Causeways.

When a Pharaoh died his body was brought in a large wooden boat down the Nile to the valley temple and then carried up the causeway to its final resting place within the body of the pyramid. Often, a large boat has been found buried by the side of a pyramid. The Egyptians conceived of the after-life as a mirror reflection of life on earth and the dead Pharaoh was not only sumptuously dressed but provided with food, furniture and weapons, etc.

Pyramids were in many ways the symbols of the power of the Pharaohs. They were huge monuments. Their size, however, was not a simple outcome of Pharaonic pride or 'egomania'. A Pharaoh was regarded as a sacral figure formed, it was believed, by a deity 'in order to do for Him what should be done'. He was an incarnation of Horus, the falcon-god, and descendant of Re, the Sun-god. He guaranteed the cosmic order and was the high priest of every temple in the land. Much more a sacral figure than the Sumerian king, the Pharaoh nevertheless was very much the human head of state. Ritually purified at his coronation and crowned with the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Pharaoh led a life of lavish display, engaged in administration and toured



10. (a) The Red Crown of Lower Egypt



10. (b) The White Crown of Upper Egypt

his whole kingdom every two years. We had mentioned earlier the importance of honouring dead kings. A fund was established at each pyramid complex for the continuous honouring of the dead kings. A tract of

land was donated to the priests in charge of the cult of a dead Pharaoh. The income from this land supported the personnel and provided the material for offerings and sacrifices.



## 11. Egyptian Script

### 5.5.2 Administration

Originally, all high officers of the realm were given what they needed by the palace. But rulers of the Vth Dynasty started a custom of making large land grants to men in high positions. With royal permission these estates could be inherited by the recipient's sons.

Privileged with such land holdings, provincial officers, especially those in Upper Egypt, began to acquire independence. The Vth Dynasty was then obliged to create the office of the 'Governor of Upper Egypt' to check on their independence. Let us explore the career of one officer who rose to be the Governor of Upper Egypt. His life story is inscribed on a slab of stone on his tomb.

Weni-the officer, was a man of humble birth who climbed the political ladder under the patronage of the VIth Dynasty. "When I was a mere magistrate," he writes "His Majesty made me King's friend and overseer of the Palace. I displaced four Overseers already there. I acted to His Majesty's satisfaction in giving escort, preparing the king's path, and taking up courtly positions, so that His Majesty praised me beyond anything. When there was trouble in the King's harem, he made me hear the matter, myself alone, because he had confidence in me. It was I who put it in writing, although my rank was only Overseer of the Palace. Never before had the like of me heard a secret matter of the King's harem".

"When the King inflicted punishment on the Asiatics (Palestinians) and Sand-dwellers (people of the Sinai desert), he made up an army of many tens of thousands from Upper and Lower Egypt. He sent me forth at the head of the army, in which were King's friends, Seal bearers of the King, Heads of towns, Official Translators, and Overseers of temple tenants. It was I who was in command, though merely an Overseer of

the Palace, because only I could prevent one quarrelling with his fellow, prevent men from snatching bread or sandals from a wayfarer, or stealing from a village".

"The army returned in peace; ... it had razed the land of the Sand-dwellers, ... slain thousands of the enemy ... and carried away many as prisoners... His Majesty praised me more than anything."

Weni led several more military campaigns and then was made Governor of Upper Egypt, incharge of collecting taxes and recruiting labour. He was ordered to quarry stone near the Upper Nile and despatch it to the Pharaoh. He boasts that he carried out the work very fast. Like all people of status, he was keen to be buried in a splendid tomb, and asked the Pharaoh for assistance. "His Majesty sent a Seal-Bearer and sailors to cross the Nile and fetch me limestone from Tura. They brought back a coffin, lid, doorway and liberation-table. Never had the like been done for any servant."

Weni had been sent as Governor to the southern frontier of Egypt. This region was becoming economically important. Agricultural resources came to the Pharaoh from lands owned by him as king, and from harvest taxes levied on ordinary people. But the state required other resources; good timber, stones, and metal. Nubia, to the mouth of Egypt, was a source of many of these goods. Harkhuf, a prince of the VIth Dynasty, writes on his tomb at Aswan: "His Majesty sent me together with my father the Unique Friend, and a priest, to Nubia to open up the way to this country. I did it in seven months and brought back all kinds of good". On his third visit, Harkhuf "returned with 300 asses laden with incense, ebony, oil, leopard skins, elephant tusks, and throwing sticks (boomerangs?)". Also inscribed on this tomb is a letter from the Pharaoh to Harkhuf, concerning a pygmy Harkhuf had brought into Egypt. Apparently this pygmy knew strange dances. Pharaoh writes: "You say in your letter that you have brought a Ding (pygmy) of the god's dances from the land of the Horizon-dwellers (the heart of Africa), just like the Deng someone had brought years ago...I will perform many excellent requests to benefit you and even the son of your son... come north to the palace at once. Hurry and bring with you this Deng... Get stalwart men to guard him on the boat so that he does not fall into the water I want to see this Deng more than all the tribute of distant lands...".

Egypt acquired goods from other lands also. The Sinai/desert (land of the Sand-dwellers) was a source of turquoise and copper. Inscriptions of Old Kingdom Pharaohs have been found near these mines. From the mountains of Lebanon, Egypt acquired cedar wood, and at the port of Byblos, objects were found inscribed with the names of some Pharaohs. Meanwhile, let us not forget that the eastern desert also had minerals like shiny alabaster, copper and small deposits of gold.

Let us turn our concluding thoughts to the pyramids again. Two million granite blocks, each weighing 2.5 tons and requiring eight men to lift it, went into the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza. The stone was quarried in Upper Egypt and transported 700 miles down the Nile. The whole project must have taken the labour of thousands of men working for about twenty years. The state would have had to feed all these workmen over the entire period. It has, therefore, been suggested that pyramid building exhausted the resources of the Old Kingdom. The First intermediate period saw weak kings, invasions from Asia, bloodshed and anarchy. It was left to the Middle Kingdom Pharaohs to revitalize the administration. But never again was Egypt to witness the building of such colossal geometric line.

#### **CHART -2 The Chronology of Egypt**

<b>3100 B.C. TO</b>	<b>PREHISTORIC PERIOD</b>	Many farming villages are established The uses of copper and bronze are discovered: gold
<b>2686 B.C.</b>	<b>DYNASTIES I</b>	is imported: crafts develop and writings begins
	<b>AND II</b>	Legendary kings fight wars to

		unify many parts of Egypt
<b>2686</b>	<b>OLD KINGDOM</b>	See text.
<b>TO</b>		
<b>1647 B.C.</b>		

Pharaohs build pyramids Memphis is the capital.

..... (Period of invasions and chaos)

Thebes is now the capital. Administration becomes efficient Military campaigns against Libya. Sinai Nub, Palestine Many works of literature are produced.

..... (Hyksos from Asia invade

Egypt)

The horse is introduced in

Egypt Temples built at Karnak,

Thebes. Abydos. Queen Hatshepsut sends a

daring expedition to the coast of northeast

Africa which returns with baboons ivory, gold,

and ebony-the whole adventure is depicted

in pictures on her funerary temple Egypt

conquers Palestine and Syria and Pharaohs

many Asian princesses Pharaoh Tutankhamen

is today famous because of the discovery of

his mummified body wearing a gold mask and

splendid jewellery.

## 5.6 THE HARAPPAN CITIES' CIVILISATION

If for Egypt the archaeological data on habitations are limited and we rely heavily on monuments and texts for historical studies, for the first civilisation of the Indian subcontinent, the reverse is true. We rely exclusively on archaeological data, for although the Harappans had a system of writing, (with the use of signs indicating whole words) we have not yet been able to decipher the writing. We may remember that Egyptian, Sumerian and Akkadian scripts were deciphered only through the use of bilingual inscriptions. In these, the same text was written in two (or more) languages or scripts, one of which was known to modern scholars and thus provided the key to the unknown. So far, we have no bilingual inscription giving a text in both the Harappan script and a known ancient script and language. In any case the Harappan inscriptions are short, usually on seals and occasionally on pots or copper sheets. Perhaps, the Harappans wrote on cloth, bark or other perishable materials-we will never know.

Another Contrast with early Egypt and Mesopotamia is that no temples or magnificent tombs have been found at Harappan sites. We can only infer that Harappan rituals did not take place in specially constructed sacred buildings (we may recall that early Hindu ritual also, until the Gupta period, involved no structural temples). And Harappan ideas about death may not have led to the erection of sumptuary tombs for kings.

'But', one may ask, 'were there any kings in Harappan society?' We suggest that there were rulers of some sort. In a previous section we had talked about the complex economics of civilisations and cities. As is evident from the following paragraph, the Harappans had true cities (with many specialists making seals,

metal tools, shell bangles and decorated beads) and a well organized economic network that connected villages and cities (for example, there was a standardized system of weights in use in all the Harappan areas. See illustration No. 17. page 53 of the Block). Without a class of rulers to impose their laws and direct the economy such institutions of complexity would not have been possible. 'Then', one will ask, 'where are the Harappan rulers? Are there palaces, if not royal tombs?' There is no single building at either Mohenjodaro or Harappa, the two largest excavated sites, (presumably one or both of them were the capital) which can be easily identified as a palace. But in some Harappan settlements there was a feature totally absent in Egypt and Summer.

At Mohen-jo-daro, Harappan, as well as some small settlements, there was one area distinct from the rest, artificially raised, walled in, and often carrying non-residential buildings. These sections have been called 'citadels'. At Mohen-jo-daro the Great Bath, the large granary and pillared hall lie within the citadel, and at Lothal there was a large storage structure in the citadel. In the Kalibangan citadel, there was an elaborate ritual area. Therefore, 'citadels' may have been the counterparts of the Sumerian fortified palaces where state functions (including state rituals) were carried out. The problem, however, remains. Why should the rulers have wanted to separate themselves, why did they fortify the 'government' areas against the population of their own towns? We have no answer; some scholars have suggested that the rulers were alien; others, that citadels were convenient points of defence in times of war.

When we study the map we locate the two largest sites, Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa. We also find Ganweriwala-it is almost as large as the two former sites, but has not been excavated. We notice that, unlike Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa, Ganweriwala is surrounded by a dense cluster of settlements. From the map, it is clear that the Harappan heartland was the Saraswati river system. In the third millennium, the Saraswati may have been a major tributary of the Indus. We may note that there are more settlements in Sind than in Punjab, more in Kutch than in Kathiawad. We also find the outlying sites in Makran, the south Gujarat coastal plain, the Upper Chenab and Sultan rivers, Baluchistan and northern Afghanistan.

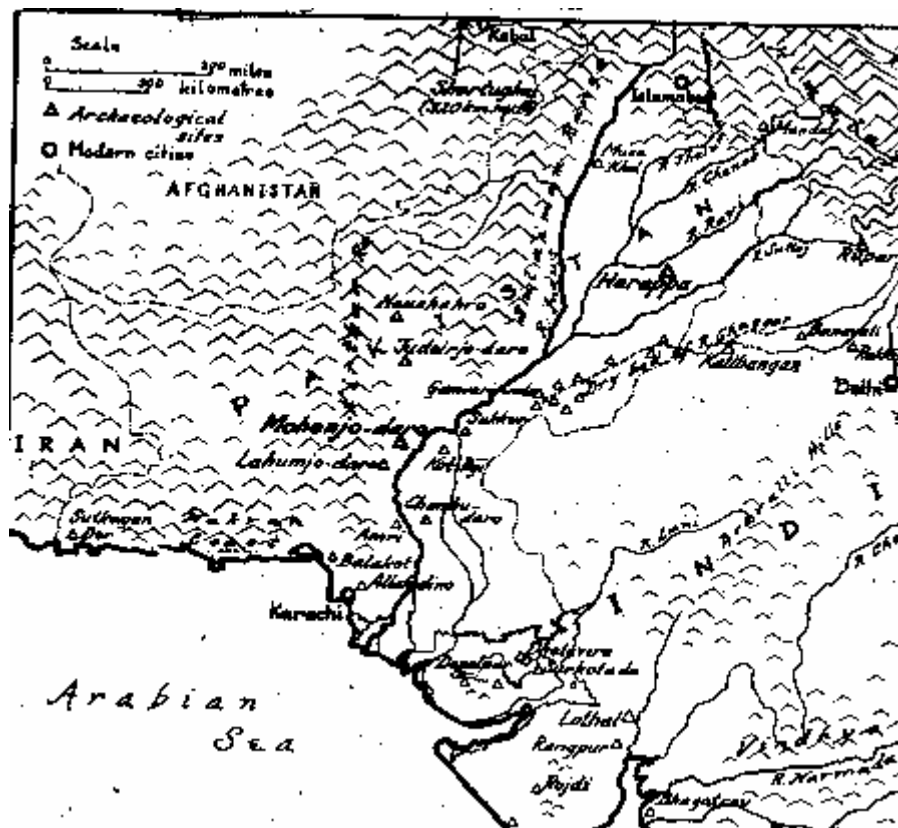
### **CHART-3 The Chronology of the North-Western Subcontinent**

5500 B.C.	NEOLITHIC	Beginning with Mehrgarh. farming and/ or herding communities are found in Baluchistan and the Indus plains, raising wheat, barley, dates, cotton, and seep, goat and cattle. (See Unit 5) Use of mud Houses, ground stone axed, pottery, flaked stone tools, grinding stones and bone tools Craft production-pottery in large quantities, and sea shells, turquoise and lapis ornaments-begin at Mehrgarh.
-----------	-----------	--

3500 B.C. to 2600 B.C.	EARLY INDUS PERIOD	<p>More retirements established in the plains and hills. Great flow of people and pottery between sites in hills and perhaps The use of copper begins, so also of wheel and plough. For the rest, no great changes in technology. A few seals are in use perhaps in validate exchange transactions and identity of the owner Granaries for community use at Mehrgarh Many settlements are surrounded by defensive walls Mehrgarh and Rahman Dheri are very large and use many imported materials.</p>
2600 B.C. to 1800 B.C.	MATURE HARRAPA PERIOD	<p>Sites characterised by use of chart Flakes, copper/bronze tools of, uniform type, large bricks of shape 4:2 I, stone weights, stone seats, shankh bangles. long carnelian beads, tiny disc beads of steatite, and often citadels, town planning and drains (see text). Sites with these artefacts found in central Indus plains Sind, between Sutlej; and Jamuna, also in Kutch Kathiawad, costal south Gujarat, upper Chenab, North Afghanistan and Makran coast.</p>
1800 B.C. onwards	REGIONAL CULTURE	<p>Many Harappan sites abandoned No foreign trade inter-regional exchanges decline, poorer, local cultures in Sind, Lower Punjab, Sutlej Jamuna divide and Gujarat Writing and city-life abandoned Pew seals or weight Copper/bronze in use Fewer and poorer crafts</p>

**Map. 5**





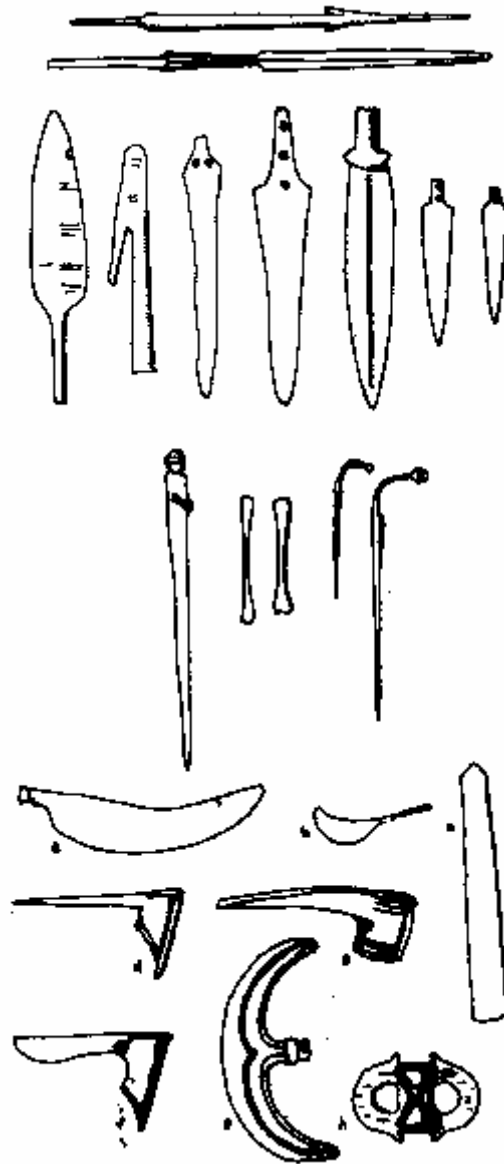
Why did the Harappans spread their settlements so far? It appears that the reasons were economic. For example, the settlement at Shortughai, such a long distance from the Indus, is close to one of the only regions of Asia where lapis lazuli, a blue precious stone, is found. Manda and Ropar are at those points where the Chenab and Sutlej, respectively, become navigable. Perhaps, good timber was acquired from the mountain regions further up and sent to the central Indus valley down these rivers. Bhagatrav, is near the teak forests of the western Ghats. And there are two sites on the Makran coast—an extremely barren land—probably functioning as ports safe from dangerous monsoon storms and currents which affect the coasts of western India and Sind.

Yes, the Harappans needed ports, because they had a busy trade with Mesopotamia. Mesopotamian texts refer to the boats of 'Meluha', a black land with peacocks, as a land from which came gold, lapis lazuli and fine timber. Shankh shells which are only in Indian coastal waters, and Harappan seals and a weight which were used for trade, as well as stone beads decorated in a typical Harappan style, were found at various Sumerian sites dating between 2600 and 1800 B.C. Some trade texts from Sumer refer to merchandise coming in and going out by sea; the exports of Sumer were mainly grain, oil and textiles, and also silver. At Mohenjo-daro, a fair quantity of silver vessels have been found and we infer that silver was imported from Sumer. (The Sumerians themselves were getting silver from Turkey and re-exporting it.)

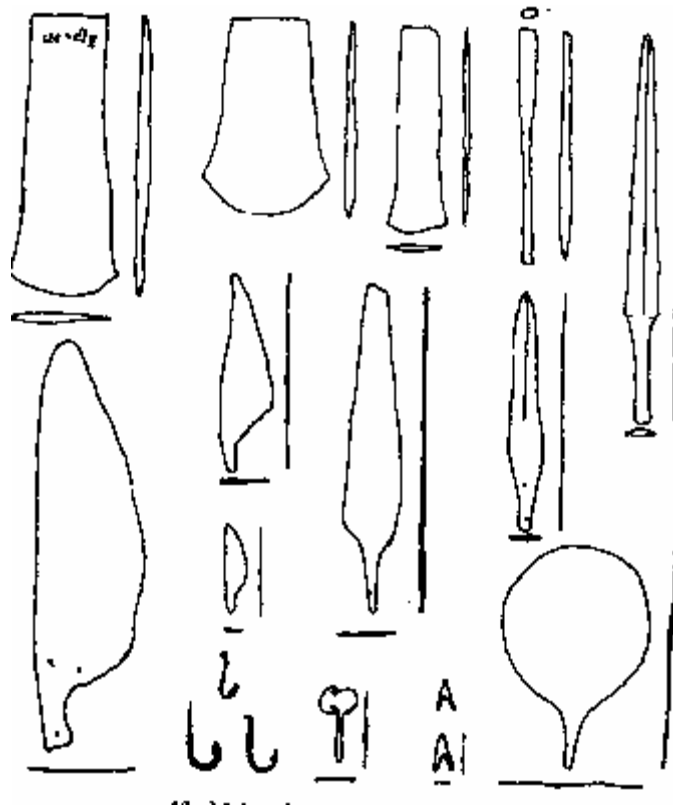
Harappan cities were never as large as the largest Sumerian cities. But whereas the Sumerian cities gradually grew in size and were unplanned, many Harappan towns and cities were laid out on grid plan. Large and narrow streets cut one another at regular angles to form rectangular blocks of buildings between them. Although Mohenjo-daro was inhabited for centuries, the same town plan was maintained, except in the very

last days of the city. We also notice that uniform sizes of brick were used for all buildings in a town. This indicates that it was not individual house owners who made their own bricks, but that there was organized mass brick production. Similarly, in cities like Mohen-jo-daro, sanitation was not left to individual householders, but there were street drains to clear waste from several houses. Town planning and street drains indicate that the basic amenities for urban life were provided to the citizens.

We see that at most Harappa sites there is a fairly uniform though, generally, simple technology: long stone blades (made from chert stone available only in Sind), simple copper or bronze tools such as axes or fish-hooks or tools for stone cutting, wheeled carts, and a very sturdy, heavy and strong range of pottery. The impression we gain is that the Harappans were not great technological innovators (their metal work, for instance, was not as advanced as the Sumerian metal work) but had achieved an efficient organization of resources and labour so that tools, ornaments or basic household equipment's even if made at a few sites, were dispersed to all their villages and towns (even to people in Gujarat, where there was no earlier tradition of agriculture, let alone of bronze working or town life).



12. Copper and Bronze Tools and Weapons from UR



### 13. Mohen-jo-daro Tools & Weapons

Whereas the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations survived the rise and fall of ruling dynasties for more than 2000 years, the Harappa civilization collapsed after some 600 years. Many settlements (large cities and small villages alike) were deserted. The writing system was forgotten. The technological traditions of metallurgy, seal-cutting and head-making came to an end. Some people seem to have migrated up the Saraswati river and founded new villages. In Sind, Harappan sites were occupied by people with a different culture. In Gujarat, some settlements continued to be occupied but there was no more foreign or internal trade, the Harappan weight system was discarded, and no one now lived in cities.

The reasons for this decline remain a mystery. Did natural calamities impoverish the economy or cause depopulation? Was agriculture too undeveloped to support a trading' economy for long? Or can we suggest that too much dependence on state organization contributed to it, so that if the ruling class suffered a decline, so also did the urban administration, trade networks and technological traditions? Scholars are still attempting to answer these questions.

### Check Your Progress 2

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.  
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What insights do we gain from the 'pyramidist on the culture and belief of ancient Egyptians? Write a short note.

- 2) Identify some of the main features of the Harappan towns.

## 5.7 LET US SUM UP

The river valley civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa evolved as a result of sedentism following the innovation of agriculture. Civilisation emerged soon after, although no causal relationship between settled agriculture and rise of civilisation can be shown. The coming of civilisation was marked by rise of kingship, more integrated political system, enlargement of relationships between tribes and other communities and rise of urban culture. It was also characterised by expansion of trade, increased use of writing, rise of specialists in the areas of crafts, religion and culture, administration and economy. This is evident from the features of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Harappan civilisations. These civilisations contributed to great works of art, architecture and culture. Monumental temples and palaces of the Sumerian kings, the great pyramids of the Pharaohs and Harappan citadels are proofs of it. New technologies of writing, book-keeping and transportation were innovated. It contributed to the growth of economy. The river valleys offered ecological advantages for irrigation, cheap navigation, expansion of agriculture and trade in commodities. This created wealth, consequently powerful dynasties of kings and a flourishing civilisation emerged. These civilisations also decayed after a time; its reasons are still a matter of speculation.

## 5.8 KEY WORDS

**Artefacts:** an object made by workmanship of man

**Booty:** spoil taken in war

**Chronology:** science for computing or arranging units of time

**Citadel:** fortress on commanding height

**Cosmopolitan:** one free from local or regional prejudices

**Estate:** landed property

**Hieroglyph:** pictorial representation of writing, sacred character

**Inscription:** writing embossed on walls or pillars

**Legitimise:** to hold justifiable

**Millennium:** one thousand years

**Sheet-flood:** flood that spreads out on earth surface

**Stylus:** A kind of writing pen.

## **5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS/ EXERCISES**

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) See Section 5.2
- 2) (c)
- 3) (b)
- 4) See Section 5.4.1
- 5) (c)

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) See Section 5.5.1
- 2) See Section 5.6