

**UPSC**  
**Old NCERT Summary (RS Sharma)**  
**The Harappan Culture (Indus Valley Civilisation)**

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### **Introduction to the Harappan Culture (Indus valley Civilization)**

Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) is one of the four great civilisations of the world. It flourished along the flood plains of Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra. The topic, Indus Valley Civilization is an important one for the IAS Exam – Prelims (Ancient History) and Mains (GS-I and Optional) Let's have a broader look at the The Harappan Culture (Indus Valley Civilisation) to get a deeper understanding for your upcoming UPSC Examination.

- The Indus or the Harappan culture is **older than the chalcolithic cultures** which have been treated earlier, but it is far more developed than these cultures. It arose in the **northwestern part** of the Indian subcontinent.

**The Indus Valley Civilisation** is called Harappan because this civilization was discovered first in 1921 at the modern site of Harappa situated in the province of West Punjab in Pakistan.

- It extended from Jammu in the north to the Naramada estuary in the south, and from the Makran coast of Baluchistan in the west to Meerut in the north-east. The area formed a triangle and accounted for about 1,299,600 square kilometers.



## Mohenjodaro

- Nearly 1500 Harappan sites are known so far in the subcontinent. Of these, the two most important cities were **Harappa** in Punjab and **Mohenjodaro** (literally the mound of the dead ) in Sindh, both forming parts of Pakistan. Situated at a distance of 483 kilometres they were linked together by the Indus.
- A third city lay at **Chanhu daro** about 130 km south of Mohenjodaro in Sindh and a fourth at **Lothal in Gujarat** at the head of the Gulf of Cambay. A fifth city lay at **Kalibangan**, which means black bangles, in northern Rajasthan. A sixth called **Banawali** is situated in Hissar district in Haryana. It saw two cultural phases, pre-Harappan and Harappan, similar to that of Kalibangan.
- The Harappan culture is noticeable in its mature and flourishing stage at all these six places. It is also found in its mature phase in the coastal cities of **Sutkagendor** and **Surkotada**, each one of which is marked by a citadel.
- The later Harappan phase is found in **Rangpur** and **Rojdi** in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat.
- In addition to these, **Dholavira** lying in the Kutch area of Gujarat shows Harappan fortification and all the three phases of the Harappan culture. These phases also appear in **Rakhigarhi** which is situated on the Ghaggar in Haryana and is much bigger than Dholavira.

## Town Planning and Structures of Indus Valley Civilization



## The architecture of Indus Valley Civilisation

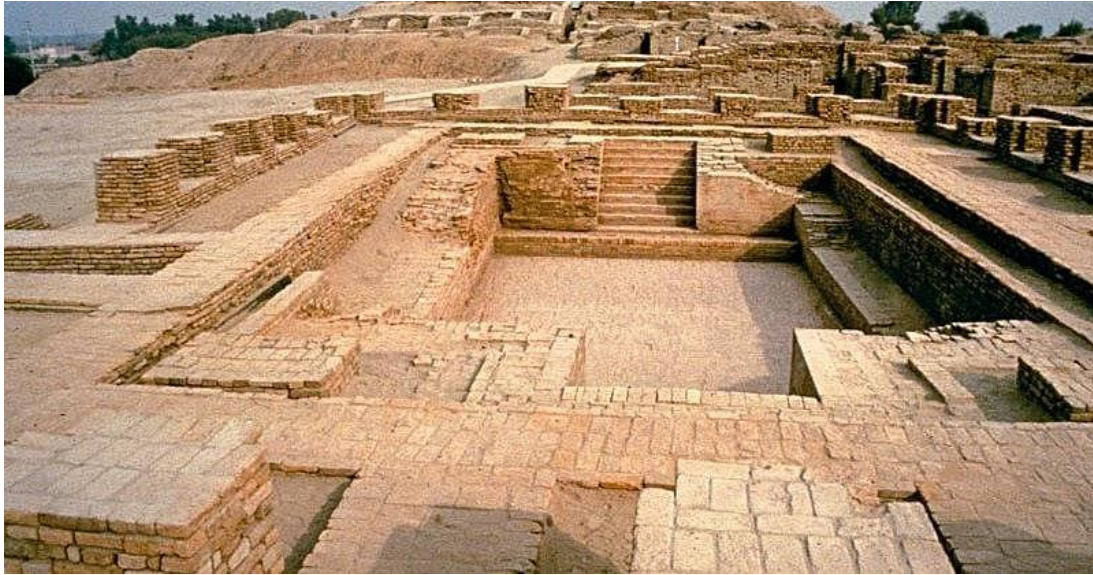
- The Harappan culture was distinguished by its system of town planning. Harappa and Mohenjo-daro each had its **own citadel** in each city lay a lower town containing brick houses, which were inhabited by the common people.
- The remarkable thing about the arrangement of the houses in the cities is that they followed the **grid system**.



### Grid System of Mohenjodaro

- According to it, roads cut across one another almost at right angles, and the city was divided into so many blocks. This is true of almost all Indus settlements.
- The most important public place of Mohenjo-daro seems to be the **Great Bath**, comprising the tank which is situated in the citadel mound. It is an example of beautiful brickwork. It measures  $11.88 \times 7.01$  metres and 2.43 metres deep. Flights of steps at either end lead to the surface. There are side rooms for changing clothes. The floor of the Bath was made of burnt bricks. It is suggested that the Great Bath served ritual bathing, which has been so vital to any religious ceremony in India.
- In **Mohenjodaro** the **largest building** is a **granary**, which is 45.71 metres long and 15.23 metres wide. But in the citadel of Harappa, we find as many as six granaries.





### Granary in Mohenjodaro

- We come across a series of brick platforms which formed the basis for two rows of six granaries. Each granary measured  $15.23 \times 6.03$  metres and lay within a few metres of the river bank. The combined floor space of the twelve units would be about 838 square metres. Approximately it had the same area as the Great Granary at Mohenjo- Daro. Harappa also shows two-roomed barracks, which possibly accommodated labourers.
- At Kalibangan also we notice in the southern part brick platforms, which may have been used for granaries. Thus, it would appear that **granaries constituted an important part of the Harappan cities.**
- The use of burnt bricks in the Harappan cities is remarkable, because in the contemporary buildings of Egypt mainly **dried bricks** were used. We find the use of **baked bricks** in contemporary Mesopotamia, but they were used to a much larger extent in the Harappan cities. The drainage system of Mohenjo-Daro was very impressive. In almost all cities every big or small house had its own courtyard and bathroom. In Kalibangan many houses had their wells. Water flowed from the house to the streets which had drains. Sometimes these drains were covered with bricks and sometimes with stones. The street drains were equipped with manholes.
- Perhaps no other Bronze Age civilization gave so much attention to health and cleanliness as the Harappan did.

### Agriculture of Indus Valley Civilization

- The Indus people produced **wheat, barley, rai, peas**, etc. They produced two types of wheat and barley. A good quantity of barley has been discovered at Banawali.
- In addition to this, they produced **sesamum** and **mustard**. As 1800 B.C., the people of Lothal used **rice** whose remains have been found. Foodgrains were stored in **huge granaries** in both Mohenjo-daro and Harappa and possibly in Kalibangan.
- Probably, cereals were received as taxes from peasants and stored in granaries for the payment of wages as well as for use during emergencies. This can be said on the **analogy of Mesopotamian cities** where wages were paid in barley.
- The Indus people were the earliest people to produce **cotton**. Because cotton was first produced in this area, Greeks called it **sindon**, which is derived from **Sindh**.

### Domestication of Animals in Indus Valley Civilization

- Although the Harappans practised agriculture, animals were kept on a large scale. **Ox, buffaloes, goats, sheep** and **pigs** were domesticated. The **humped bulls** were favoured by the Harappans.
- From the very beginning, dogs were regarded as pets. Cats were also domesticated, and signs of the feet of both **dogs** and **cats** have been noticed. They also kept **asses** and **camels**, which were obviously used as beasts of burden.



## Terracotta Horses

- Evidence of the **horse** comes from a superficial level of Mohenjo-daro and from a doubtful **terracotta figuring** from Lothal. The remains of the horse are reported from Sutkotada, situated in west Gujarat, and belong to around B.C. but it is doubtful. In any case the Harappan culture was not horse-centred. Neither the bones of horse nor its representations appear in early and mature Harappan culture.
- **Elephants** were well known to the Harappans, who were also acquainted with the **rhinoceros**.

## Technology and Craft in Harappan Culture

- The Harappan culture belongs to the **Bronze Age**. The people of Harappa used many tools and implements of stone, but they were well acquainted with the manufacture and use of bronze. Ordinarily, **bronze** was made by the smiths by **mixing tin with copper** mines of Rajasthan, although it could also be brought from Baluchistan. Tin was possibly brought with difficulty from Afghanistan.
  - The bronze tools and weapons recovered from the Harappan sites contain a smaller percentage of **tin**.



## Harappan Tools

- However, the kit of bronze goods left by the Harappans is considerable, which suggests that the **bronzes myths** constituted an important group



of artisans in the Harappan society. They produced not only images and utensils but also various tools and weapons such as **axes, saws, knives and spears**. Several other important crafts flourished in the Harappan towns.

- A piece of woven cotton has been recovered from Mohenjo-Daro, and textile impressions found on several objects. Spindle whorls were used for spinning. Weavers wove cloth of wool and cotton. Huge brick structures suggest that **brick-laying** was an important craft. They also attest the existence of a **class of masons**. The Harappans also practised **boat-making**.
- The goldsmiths made jewellery of **silver, gold and precious stones**, the first two may have been obtained from Afghanistan and the last from south India. The Harappans were also experts in **bead-making**. The potter's wheel was in full use, and the Harappans produced their own characteristic pottery, which was made glossy and shining.

### Trade in Indus Valley Civilization

- Trade was important in the life of the Indus people. The Harappans carried on a considerable trade in **stone, metal, shell**, etc, within the **Indus culture zone**. However, their cities did not possess the necessary raw material for the commodities they produced.
- They did not use metal money. Most probably they carried on all exchanges through barter. In return for finished goods and possibly foodgrains, they procured metals from the neighbouring areas by boats and bullock carts.
- They practised navigation of the coast of the Arabian Sea. They knew the use of the wheel, and carts with solid wheels were in use in Harappa. The Harappa had commercial links with one area of Rajasthan, and also with Afghanistan and Iran. They had set up a trading colony in northern Afghanistan which evidently facilitated trade with Central Asia. Their cities also carried commerce with those in the land of the Tigris and the Euphrates.
- Many **Harappan seals** have been discovered in Mesopotamia, and it seems that the Harappans imitated some cosmetics used by the urban people of Mesopotamia.
- The Mesopotamia records from about 2350 B.C. onwards refer to trade relations with **Meluha**, which was the ancient name given to the Indus region. The Mesopotamian texts speak of two intermediate trading stations called **Dilmun** and **Makan**, which lay between Mesopotamia and

Meluha. Dilmun can probably be identified with Bahrain on the Persian Gulf.

### Political Organization in Harappan culture

- We have no clear idea about the political organization of the Harappans. But if we take into account the **cultural homogeneity** of the Indus civilization it can be said that this cultural homogeneity would not have been possible to achieve without a central authority.
- If the Harappan cultural zone is considered identical with the political zone, the subcontinent did not witness such a large political unit until the rise of the Maurya empire, the remarkable stability of this unit is demonstrated by its continuity for nearly 600 years.

### Religious Practices and Beliefs in Harappan culture

In Harappa, numerous terracotta figures of women have been found. Probably the image represents the goddess of the earth. The Harappans looked upon the **earth** as a **fertility goddess** and worshipped her.

The Male deity in the Indus Valley:



**Pashupati Seal**

The **male deity** is represented on a seal. This god has three-horned heads. He is represented in the sitting posture of a yogi, placing one foot on the other. This god is surrounded by an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and has a buffalo below his throne. At his feet appear two deer. The depicted god is identified as **Pashupati Mahadeva**.



## The Harappan Script

- The Harappan invented the art of writing like the people of ancient Mesopotamia. Although the earliest specimen of Harappan script was noticed in 1853 and the complete script discovered by 1923, it has not been deciphered so far.
- There are nearly 4,000 specimens of Harappan writing on stone seals and other objects. Unlike the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, the Harappans did not write long inscriptions. Most inscriptions were recorded on **seals**, and contain only a **few words**. Altogether we have about 250 to 400 pictographs, and in the form of a picture, each letter stands for some sound, idea or object. the Harappan script is **not alphabetical** but mainly **pictographic**.

## Weights and Measures

- Numerous articles used for weights have been found. They show that in weighing mostly 16 or its multiples were used for instance, 16, 64, 160, 320 and 640. Interestingly the tradition of 16 has continued in India till modern times and till recently 16 annas made one rupee.



### Harappan Weight System

- The harappans also knew the art of measurement. We have come across sticks inscribed with measure marks, one of these is made of bronze.

## Harappan Pottery

- The Harappans were great experts in the use of the **potter's wheel**. We come across numerous pots painted in various designs.



### Harappan Pots

- Harappan pots were generally decorated with the designs of trees and circles. The images of men also appear on some pottery fragments.
- **Seals:** The greatest artistic creations of the Harappan culture are the seals.



## Harappan Seals

- About 2000 seals have been found, and of these, a great majority carry short inscriptions with pictures of the **one-horned bull**, the **buffalo**, the **tiger**, the **rhinoceros**, the **goat** and the **elephant**.
- **Images:** The Harappan artisans made beautiful images of metal. A **woman dancer** made of bronze is the best specimen. Except for a necklace she is naked.



**A women dancer specimen**

We get a few pieces of Harappan stone sculptures. One steatite statue wears an ornamented robe over the left shoulder under the right arm, and its short locks at the back of the head are kept tidy by a woven fillet.





## Priest King Statue

### When was the Origin, Maturity and End of the Harappan Culture(Indus Valley Civilization)?

- The mature Harappan culture, broadly speaking, existed between 2550 B.C. and 1900 B.C. Throughout the period of its existence, it seems to have retained the **same kind of tools, weapons and houses**. The whole style of life appears to be uniform. We notice the **same town-planning**, the **same seals**, the **same terracotta works**, and the **same long chet blades**.
- But the view stressing changelessness cannot be pushed too far. We do notice changes in the pottery of Mohenjodaro over a period of time. By the nineteenth century B.C., the two important cities of the Harappan culture, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, disappeared but the Harappan culture at other sites faded out gradually and continued in its degenerate phase in the outlying fringes in **Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh**.
- While the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia continued to exist even after 1900 B.C., the urban Harappan culture disappeared about that time. Various causes have been suggested. It is held that the amount of rainfall in the Indus region slightly increased around 3000 B.C. and then decreased in the earlier part of the second millennium B.C. This may have adversely affected agriculture and stockbreeding.
- Some describe the decline to the decreasing fertility on account of the increasing salinity of the soil caused by the expansion of the neighbouring desert. Others attribute it to sudden subsidence or uplift of the land which caused floods. Earthquakes caused changes in the course of the Indus which led to the inundation of the hinterland of Mohenjodaro. And still, others point out that the Harappan culture was destroyed by the Aryans, but there is very little evidence for this.
- The **consequences of the disintegration of the largest Bronze Age cultural entity** are still to be clarified. We do not know whether the urban eclipse led to the migration of merchants and craftsmen, and the dissemination of the elements of Harappan technology and way of life in the countryside.

Something is known about the post-urban situation in Sindh, Punjab and Haryana. We find agricultural settlements inside the Indus region, but their connection with the preceding culture is not clear. We need clear and adequate information.

Harappan Culture(Indus Valley Civilization) forms the backbone of India as it is one of the major civilizations of the world. Indus Valley Civilization is an important topic for IAS Exam, it is suggested that Indus Valley Civilization should be well-read by the UPSC aspirants.

### In this document you have learnt

- It extended from Jammu in the north to the Narmada estuary in the south, and from the Makran coast of Baluchistan in the west to Meerut in the north-east. The area formed a triangle and accounted for about 1,299,600 square kilometers.
- The Mesopotamia records from about 2350 B.C. onwards refer to trade relations with **Meluha**, which was the ancient name given to the Indus region. The Mesopotamian texts speak of two intermediate trading stations called **Dilmun** and **Makan**, which lay between Mesopotamia and Meluha.
- Most inscriptions were recorded on **seals**, and contain only a **few words**. Altogether we have about 250 to 400 pictographs, and in the form of a picture, each letter stands for some sound, idea or object.
- About 2000 seals have been found, and of these, a great majority carry short inscriptions with pictures of the **one-horned bull**, the **buffalo**, the **tiger**, the **rhinoceros**, the **goat** and the **elephant**.
- We notice the same town-planning, the same seals, the same terracotta works, and the same long chert blades.

### FAQs related to Harappan Culture (Indus valley civilization):

1. What is the Indus Valley culture called Harappan culture?  
The Indus Valley civilisation is also known as the Harappan civilisation because the first site of the archaeological remains of the Indus Valley civilisation was found at the modern site of Harappa, West Punjab, Pakistan.
2. Is Harappan civilization important for UPSC?  
Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) flourished around 2500 BC, which is often called the age of matured IVC. It forms the backbone of India as it is one of the major civilizations of the world. An important topic for the IAS Exam, Indus Valley Civilization should be well-read by the aspirants.
3. What is the connection between Indus Valley Civilization and Harappa?  
The Indus civilisation is also known as the Harappan Civilisation, after its type site, Harappa, the first of its sites to be excavated early in the 20th century in what was then the Punjab province of British India and is now in Pakistan.

4. What was the most unique feature of Harappan Civilization?

The most unique feature of the Harappan Civilization was the development of urban centres. Mohenjodaro is the most well-known site of Harappan Civilization. The most remarkable feature of Harappan civilisation was its urbanisation. The Harappan places which were small towns, show an advanced sense of town planning