

Indus
World History
Kienast

The earliest traces of civilization in the Indian subcontinent are to be found in places along, or close, to the Indus river. Excavations were first conducted in 1921-22, in the ancient cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, both now in Pakistan. Historians now call this area the Indus Valley Civilization.

The Indus River Valley civilizations are located centrally between people trading from India to Mesopotamia. Traders had to go through both cities in order to trade. The trade brought in goods like wheat, gold, and copper from Mesopotamia. Indians benefitted from these goods and were also able to make money trading cotton and other products to Mesopotamia. All of the Indus cities also benefitted from steady rains brought to them by seasonal winds that blew off the Indian Ocean, called monsoons.

Another factor that contributed to the strength of early Indian cities was the presence of centralized governments, meaning that Indian cities had a strong government that organized the lives of people. Some kind of centralized state, and certainly fairly extensive town planning, is suggested by the layout of the great cities of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. The same kind of burnt brick appears to have been used in the construction of buildings in cities that were as much as several hundred miles apart. The weights and measures show a very considerable regularity. Most Indian cities had monumental architecture, such as towers called citadels, and bath houses. One magnificent structure, the Great Bath of Mohenjo-Daro, also shows us that social hierarchy was present in India because the structure was likely built for the upper classes. The Indus Valley people domesticated animals, and harvested various crops, such as sesame, peas, barley, and cotton.

The Indus Valley civilization raises a great many, largely unresolved, questions. Why did this civilization, considering its sophistication, not spread beyond the Indus Valley? Most significantly, under what circumstances did the Indus Valley cities undergo a decline? Historians know that a group of people called the Aryans migrated to India around 1500 BCE. The first attacks on outlying villages by Aryans appear to have taken place around 2,000 BCE near Baluchistan, and of the major cities, at least Harappa was quite likely over-run by the Aryans. In the Rig Veda there is mention of a Vedic war god, Indra, destroying some forts and citadels, which could have included Harappa and some other Indus Valley cities. The conventional historical narrative speaks of a cataclysmic blow that struck the Indus Valley Civilization around 1,600 BCE, but that would not explain why settlements at a distance of several hundred miles from each other were all eradicated. The most compelling historical narrative still suggests that the demise and eventual disappearance of the Indus Valley Civilization, which owed something to internal decline, nonetheless was facilitated by the arrival in India of the Aryans.