**Ancient Civilizations in the Indus Valley**

**Harappa**

Archeologists first excavated Harappa, which is located near the modern-day Pakistani town of Sāhiwāl, in 1921. Because of the region’s rich fertile land and the monsoon [climate](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/8ed53f66-8fac-40a0-9ebd-7cf3076f0247), agriculture was important to the life of the city. Farmers domesticated sheep, goats, and cattle and grew wheat and barley. The excavation of the city suggests that these grains were produced in significant amounts, and played an important role in the growth of the city.

At the center of Harappa there was a large granary, a building used for storing grain. The granary was surrounded by a large protective wall, called a [citadel](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/268caff1-2d0e-48f1-bbd9-0b9b1e354554). Moving out from the citadel were rows of homes constructed in a grid. Archeologists think the layout of the city suggests that the government closely controlled the storage, protection, and distribution of grain. Unfortunately little else was left of the town, and archeologists could infer little more until 1922, when they excavated Mohenjo-daro, which is located 400 miles southwest of Harappa.

### Mohenjo-daro

#### Why was Mohenjo-daro an important city in ancient India?

[Mohenjo-daro](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/d4101b94-9de5-439d-8fd9-9d2ae8d86831), located in modern-day Pakistan, was the largest city of the Indus Valley civilization, and it is one of the most advanced ancient cities archeologists have discovered. It was constructed similarly to [Harappa](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/20eb0bb0-b209-4216-b27d-16b97641bd5e). The city was divided into two parts. One part was a largely administrative and religious center, and the other, called the lower city, was purely residential. Similar to a modern downtown, the administrative center consisted of government buildings, religious sites, and assembly areas. It was protected by a [citadel](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/268caff1-2d0e-48f1-bbd9-0b9b1e354554). Like Harappa, Mohenjo-daro was home to a large granary. There was also a large water pool, which may have been used for religious reasons—or residents may have used it to keep themselves clean.

There was also a large building in the citadel that archeologists think was a residence. Most likely, government officials and religious leaders lived within the citadel walls. The rest of the population lived in the lower city.

The lower city had small one-room houses and large multiple-story dwellings with large courtyards and individual bathrooms, suggesting the existence of separate middle and lower classes. There were also extensive water-storage and drainage systems throughout Mohenjo-daro. The extent of these systems and the fact that the drainage systems were covered made them superior to those that researchers have found in other ancient cities. Despite these drainage systems, evidence suggests that Mohenjo-daro suffered damage from several major floods, caused by the nearby [Indus River](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/2360c961-a8af-4622-829b-f15249b4b7cc) and the tectonic uplifts between Mohenjo-daro and the sea.

Mohenjo-daro became an advanced society, in part, because it could obtain necessary resources that were not available in the region through trade with other societies. The nearby Hindu Kush mountains were rich in precious metals and gems, which the Indus Valley civilization traded for Sumerian wool, leather, and olive oil. Artifacts found in the ruins of Mohenjo-daro suggest that its citizens traded with the Sumerians.

### Life in Ancient India’s Major Cities

The Indus Valley civilizations that existed from about 2500 BCE to 1700 BCE were sophisticated. They had written language, well-developed trade, and in-depth mathematical knowledge. The large stores of grain allowed the citizens of the major cities free time to pursue leisure activities such as playing games.

Perhaps the best-known artifacts from the Indus Valley civilizations are square seals found in the ruins of [Mohenjo-daro](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/d4101b94-9de5-439d-8fd9-9d2ae8d86831). These seals contain images of real and mythical animals as well as examples of writing. This language, known as Dravidian, consists of 250 to 500 characters. Historians have only partially decoded the language. Because of this, historians still rely on the artifacts archeologists have uncovered to learn more about the civilization.

The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were also mathematically astute. They developed a place-value system and made advances in geometry. The practical application of their mathematical skills can be seen in their cities, which were laid out on a grid pattern. They also used a standard series of weights and measures for trade.

##### The River Civilizations Decline

By 1900 BCE, the [Indus River](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/2360c961-a8af-4622-829b-f15249b4b7cc) civilizations began to decline. Deforestation destroyed the soil around the river, and the once rich agricultural valley began to turn to desert. As food supplies decreased, people began to abandon the cities. Floods took their toll. Buildings began to decay and struggling fields were overwhelmed by floods. Then, around 1500 BCE, Mohenjo-Daro was raided and destroyed.

Even though a mix of floods and desertification may have contributed to the downfall of Mohenjo-daro, the geography and [climate](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/8ed53f66-8fac-40a0-9ebd-7cf3076f0247) of the Indian [subcontinent](http://app.discoveryeducation.com/techbook2%3Aconcept/view/guidConceptId/9abfb962-270c-4788-8886-6c44360c9173/guidUnitId/896e89c6-35f9-47c3-bdd4-63d392ad4a2b) made it possible for it and other cities to flourish in the first place. The geographic features that separate the subcontinent from the rest of Asia provided natural defenses against other civilizations, and the rivers and monsoons made agriculture possible.