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The Indus Valley Civilization was a cultural and political entity which flourished in the northern region of the Indus River, but it is also commonly referred to as the Indus-Sarasvati Civilization and the Harrapan Civilization. These latter
designations come from the Sarasvati River mentioned in Vedic sources, which flowed adjacent to the Indus River, and the ancient city of Harappa in the region, the first one found in the modern era. None of these names derive from any ancient texts because, although scholars generally believe the people of this civilization developed a writing
system (known as Indus Script or Harappan Script) it has not yet been deciphered. All three designations are modern constructs, and nothing is definitively known of the civilization. Even so, modern archaeology has established a probable chronology and periodization: Pre-Harappan - c. 7000 - c. 5500 BCE
Early Harappan - c. 5500 - 2800 BCE Mature Harappan - c. 1900 BCE Late Harappan - c. 1900 BCE Late Harappan - c. 1500 BCE Post Harappan - c. 1500 BCE The Indus Valley Civilization is now often compared with the far more famous cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but this is a fairly recent development. The discovery of Harappa in 1829 CE
was the first indication that any such civilization existed in India, and by that time, Egyptian hieroglyphics had been deciphered, Egyptian and Mesopotamian sites excavated, and cuneiform would soon be translated by the scholar George Smith (l. 1840-1876 CE). Archaeological excavations of the Indus Valley Civilization, therefore, had a significantly
late start comparatively, and it is now thought that many of the accomplishments and "firsts" attributed to Egypt and Mesopotamia may actually belong to the people of the Indus Valley Civilization. The total population of the civilization is thought to have been upward of 5 million, & its territory stretched over 900 miles (1,500 km) along the Indus
River. The two best-known excavated cities of this culture are Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (located in modern-day Pakistan), both of which are thought to have once had populations of between 40,000-50,000 people, which is stunning when one realizes that most ancient cities had on average 10,000 people living in them. The total population of the
civilization is thought to have been upward of 5 million, and its territory stretched over 900 miles (1,500 km) along the banks of the Indus River and then in all directions outward. Indus Valley Civilization sites have been found near the border of Nepal, in Afghanistan, on the coasts of India, and around Delhi, to name only a few locations. Between c.
1900 - c. 1500 BCE, the civilization began to decline for unknown reasons. In the early 20th century CE, this was thought to have been caused by an invasion of light-skinned people from the north known as Aryans who conquered a dark-skinned people from the north known as Aryans who conquered a dark-skinned people from the north known as Aryans who conquered a dark-skinned people from the north known as the Aryan Invasion Theory, has
been discredited. The Aryans - whose ethnicity is associated with the Iranian Persians - are now believed to have migrated to the region peacefully and blended their culture with that of the indigenous people while the term Dravidian is understood now to refer to anyone, of any ethnicity, who speaks one of the Dravidian languages. Why the Indus
Valley Civilization declined and fell is unknown, but scholars believe it may have had to do with climate change, the drying up of the Sarasvati River, an alteration in the path of the monsoon which watered crops, overpopulation of the sarasvati River, an alteration in the path of the monsoon which watered crops, overpopulation of the sarasvati River, and Mesopotamia, or a combination of any of the above. In the present day,
excavations continue at many of the sites found thus far and some future find may provide more information on the history and decline of the culture. Discovery & Early Excavation The symbols and inscriptions on the artifacts of the people of the Indus Valley Civilization, which have been interpreted by some scholars as a writing system, remain
undeciphered and so archaeologists generally avoid defining an origin for the culture as any attempt would be speculative. All that can be known of the civilization, therefore, is best given with the discovery of its ruins in the 19th century CE
James Lewis (better known as Charles Masson, I. 1800-1853 CE) was a British soldier serving in the artillery of the East India Company Army when, in 1827 CE, he deserted with another soldier. In order to avoid detection by authorities, he changed his name to Charles Masson and embarked on a series of travels throughout India. Masson was an avid
numismatist (coin collector) who was especially interested in old coins and, in following various leads, wound up excavating ancient sites on his own. One of these sites was Harappa, which he found in 1829 CE. He seems to have built the city,
wrongly attributed it to Alexander the Great during his campaigns in India c. 326 BCE. Map of the Indus Valley Civilization, c.3300-1300 BCE When Masson returned to Britain after his adventures (and having been somehow forgiven his desertion), he published his book Narrative of Various Journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan and the Punjab in 1842 and the Punjab in 18
CE which attracted the attention of the British authorities in India and, especially, Alexander Cunningham. Sir Alexander Cunningham (l. 1814-1893 CE), a British engineer in the country with a passion for ancient history, founded the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1861 CE, an organization dedicated to maintaining a professional standard of
excavation and preservation of historic sites. Cunningham began excavations of the site and published his interpretation in 1875 CE (in which he identified and named the Indus Script) but this was incomplete and lacked definition because Harappa remained isolated with no connection to any known past civilization which could have built it. In 1904
CE, a new director of the ASI was appointed, John Marshall (l. 1876-1958 CE), who later visited Harappa and concluded the site represented an ancient civilization previously unknown. He ordered the site to be fully excavated and, at about the same time, heard of another site some miles away which the local people referred to as Mohenjo-daro ("the
mound of the dead") because of bones, both animal and human, found there along with various artifacts. Excavations at Mohenjo-daro began in the 1924-1925 season and the similarities of the two sites were recognized; the Indus Valley Civilization had been discovered. Harappa & Mohenjo-daro The Hindu texts known as the Vedas, as well as other
great works of Indian tradition such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, were already well known to Western scholars but they did not know what culture had created them. Systemic racism of the time prevented them from attributing the works to the people of India, and the same, at first, led archaeologists to conclude that Harappa was a colony of
the Sumerians of Mesopotamia or perhaps an Egyptian outpost. Harappa did not conform to either Egyptian or Mesopotamian architecture, however, as there was no evidence of temples, palaces, or monumental structures, no names of kings or queens or stelae or royal statuary. The city spread over 370 acres (150 hectares) of small, brick houses
with flat roofs made of clay. There was a citadel, walls, the streets were laid out in a grid pattern clearly demonstrating a high degree of skill in urban planning and, in comparing the two sites, it was apparent to the excavators that they were dealing with a highly advanced culture. Houses in both cities had flush toilets, a sewer system, and fixtures on
either side of the streets were part of an elaborate drainage system, which was more advanced even than that of the early Romans. Devices known from Persia as "wind catchers" were attached to the roofs of some buildings which provided air conditioning for the home or administrative office and, at Mohenjo-daro, there was a great public bath,
surrounded by a courtyard, with steps leading down into it. As other sites were unearthed, the same degree of sophistication and skill came to light as well as the understanding that all of these cities had been pre-planned. Unlike those of other cultures which usually developed from smaller, rural communities, the cities of the Indus Valley Civilization
had been thought out, a site chosen, and purposefully constructed prior to full habitation. Further, they all exhibited conformity to a single vision which further suggested a strong central government with an efficient bureaucracy that could plan, fund, and build such cities. Scholar John Keay comments: What amazed all these pioneers, and what
remains the distinctive characteristic of the several hundred Harappan sites now known, is their apparent similarity: "Our overwhelming impression is of cultural uniformity, both throughout the several centuries during which the Harappan civilization flourished, and over the vast area it occupied." The ubiquitous bricks, for instance, are all of
standardized dimensions, just as the stone cubes used by the Harappans to measure weights are also standard and based on the modular system. Road widths conform to a similar module; thus, streets are typically twice the width of streets are typically twice the width of streets are typically twice the main arteries are typically twice the width of streets are typically twice the width of streets.
excavated are straight and run either north-south or east-west. City plans therefore conform to a regular grid pattern and appear to have retained this layout through several phases of building. (9) Excavations at both sites continued between 1944-1948 CE under the direction of the British archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler (l. 1890-1976 CE) whose
racialist ideology made it difficult for him to accept that dark-skinned people had built the cities. Even so, he managed to establish stratigraphy for Harappa and lay the foundation for the later periodization of the Indus Valley Civilization. Chronology Wheeler's work provided archaeologists with the means to recognize approximate dates from the
civilization's foundations through its decline and fall. The chronology is primarily based, as noted, on physical evidence from Harappan sites but also from knowledge of their trade contacts with Egypt and Mesopotamia. Lapis lazuli, to name only one product, was immensely popular in both cultures and, although scholars knew it came from India, they
did not know from precisely where until the Indus Valley Civilization was discovered. Even though this semi-precious stone would continue to be imported after the fall of the Indus Valley Civilization, it is clear that, initially, some of the export came from this region. Pre-Harappan - c. 7000 - c. 5500 BCE: The Neolithic period best exemplified by sites
like Mehrgarh which shows evidence of agricultural development, domestication of plants and animals, and production of tools and ceramics. Early Harappan - c. 5500-2800 BCE: Trade firmly established with Egypt, Mesopotamia, and possibly China. Ports, docks, and warehouses built near waterways by communities living in small villages. Mature
Harappan - c. 2800 - c. 1900 BCE. Construction of the great cities and Wohenjo-daro are built according to the same models and this development of the land continues with the construction of hundreds of other cities until
there are over 1,000 of them throughout the land in every direction. Late Harappan - c. 1500 BCE: Decline of the civilization coinciding with a wave of migration of the Aryan people from the north, most likely the Iranian Plateau. Physical evidence suggests climate change which caused flooding, drought, and famine. A loss of trade relations
with Egypt and Mesopotamia has also been suggested as a contributing cause. Post Harappan - c. 1500 - c. 600 BCE: The cities are abandoned, and the people have moved south. The civilization (Artist's Impression) Sign up for our
free weekly email newsletter! Aspects of Culture The people seem to have been primarily artisans, farmers, and merchants. There is no evidence of a standing army, no palaces, and no temples. The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro is believed to have been used for ritual purification rites related to religious belief but this is conjecture; it could as easily
have been a public pool for recreation. Each city seems to have had its own government in order to achieve the uniformity of the cities. John Keay comments: Harappan tools, utensils, and materials confirm this impression of uniformity. Unfamiliar with iron - which was
nowhere known in the third millennium BC - the Harappans sliced, scraped, beveled, and bored with 'effortless competence' using a standardized kit of tools made from chert, a kind of quartz, or from copper and bronze. These last, along with gold and silver, were the only metals available. They were also used for casting vessels and statuettes and
for fashioning a variety of knives, fishhooks, arrowheads, saws, chisels, sickles, pins, and bangles. (10) Among the thousands of artifacts discovered at the various sites are small, soapstone seals a little over an inch (3 cm) in diameter which archaeologists interpret to have been used for personal identification in trade. Like the cylinder seals of
Mesopotamia, these seals are thought to have been used to sign contracts, authorize land sales, and authenticate point-of-origin, shipment, and receipt of goods in trade long distance. Unicorn Seal - Indus Script The people had developed the wheel, carts drawn by cattle, flat-bottomed boats wide enough to transport trade goods, and may have also
developed the sail. In agriculture, they understood and made use of irrigation techniques and canals, various farming implements, and established different areas for cattle grazing and crops. Fertility rituals may have been observed for a full harvest as well as pregnancies of women as evidenced by a number of figurines, amulets, and statuettes in
female form. It is thought that the people may have worshipped a Mother Goddess deity and, possibly, a male consort depicted as a horned figure in the company of wild animals. The religious beliefs of the culture, however, are unknown and any suggestions must be speculative. Their level of artistic skill is evident through numerous finds of statuary.
soapstone seals, ceramics, and jewelry. The most famous artwork is the bronze statuette, standing 4 inches (10 cm) tall, known as "Dancing Girl" found at Mohenjo-daro in 1926 CE. The piece shows a teenage girl, right hand on her hip, left on her knee, with chin raised as though evaluating the claims of a suitor. An equally impressive piece is a
soapstone figure, 6 inches (17 cm) tall, known as the Priest-King, depicting a bearded man wearing a headdress and ornamental armband. Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro A particularly interesting aspect of the artwork is the appearance of what seems to be a unicorn on over 60 percent of the personal seals. There are many different images on these
seals but, as Keay notes, the unicorn appears on "1156 seals and sealings out of a total of 1755 found at Mature Harappan sites" (17). He also notes that the seals, no matter what image appears on them, also have markings which have been interpreted as Indus Script, suggesting that the "writing" conveys a meaning different from the image. The
"unicorn" could possibly have represented an individual's family, clan, city, or political affiliation and the "writing" one's personal information. Decline & Aryan Invasion Theory Just as there is no definitive answer to the question of what the seals were, what the "unicorn" represented, or how the people venerated their gods, there is none for why the
culture declined and fell. Between c. 1900 - c. 1500 BCE, the cities were steadily abandoned, and the people moved south. As noted, there are a number of theories concerning this, but none are completely satisfactory. According to one, the Gaggar-Hakra River, which is identified with the Sarasvati River from Vedic texts, and which ran adjacent to
the Indus River, dried up c. 1900 BCE, necessitating a major relocation of the people who had depended on it. Significant silting at sites such as Mohenjo-daro suggests major flooding which is given as another cause. Priest-king from Mohenjo-daro suggests major relocation of the people who had depended on it. Significant silting at sites such as Mohenjo-daro suggests major flooding which is given as another cause.
troubles during this same time which could have resulted in a significant disruption in trade. The Late Harappan Period corresponds roughly with the people of the Indus Valley - were engaged in driving out the Gutian invaders
and, between c. 1792-1750 BCE, the Babylonian king Hammurabi was conquering their city-states as he consolidated his empire. In Egypt, the period corresponds to the latter part of the Hyksos and the central government's loss of power and
authority. The reason which early 20th century CE scholars seized on, however, was none of these but the claim that the Indus Valley people had been conquered and driven south by an invasion of a superior race of light-skinned Aryans. Aryan Invasion Theory Western scholars had been translating and interpreting the Vedic literature of India for
over 200 years by the time Wheeler was excavating the sites and, in that time, came to develop the theory that the subcontinent was at some point conquered by a light-skinned race known as Aryans who established high culture throughout the land. This theory developed slowly and, at first, innocently through the publication of a work by the Anglo-
Welsh philologist Sir William Jones (l. 1746-1794 CE) in 1786 CE. Jones, an avid reader of Sanskrit, noted that there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there had to be a common source for all of them; he called this source Proto-Indo-European. Later Western scholars, trying to identify Jones' "common source for all of them; he called this source Proto-Indo-European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between it and European languages and claimed there were remarkable similarities between the end of the
source", concluded that a light-skinned race from the north - somewhere around Europe - had conquered the lands south, notably India, establishing culture and spreading their language and customs, even though nothing, objectively, supported this view. A French elitist writer named Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (l. 1816-1882 CE) popularized this
view in his work An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races in 1855 CE and asserted that superior, light-skinned, races had "Aryan blood" and were naturally disposed to rule over lesser races. The early Iranians self-identified as Aryan, meaning "noble" or "free" or "civilized", until it was corrupted by European racists to serve their own agenda.
Gobineau's book was admired by the German composer Richard Wagner (l. 1813-1883 CE) whose British-born son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (l. 1855-1927 CE) further popularized these views in his work which would eventually influence Adolf Hitler and the architect of the Nazi ideology, Alfred Rosenberg (l. 1893-1946 CE). These racialist
views were given further validity by a German philologist and scholar who did not share them, Max Muller (l. 1823-1900 CE), the so-called "author" of the Aryan Invasion Theory who insisted, in all of his work, that Aryan had to do with a linguistic difference and had nothing at all to do with ethnicity. It hardly mattered what Muller said, however,
because, by the time Wheeler was excavating the sites in the 1940s CE, people had been breathing in these theories with the air of the times for well over 50 years. It would be decades more before the majority of scholars, writers, and academics would begin to recognize that 'Aryan' originally referred to a class of people - having nothing to do with
race - and, in the words of the archaeologist J. P. Mallory, "as an ethnic designation the word [Aryan] is most properly limited to the Indo-Iranians" (Farrokh, 17). The early Iranians self-identified as Aryan meaning "noble" or "free" or "civilized" and the term continued in use for over 2000 years until it was corrupted by European racists to serve their
own agenda. Wheeler's interpretation of the sites was informed by and then validated the Aryan Invasion Theory. The Aryans were already recognized as the authors of the Vedas and other works but their dates in the region were too late to support the claim that they had built the impressive cities; perhaps, though, they had destroyed them. Wheeler
was, of course, as aware of the Aryan Invasion Theory as any other archaeologist at the time and, through this lens, interpreted what he found as supporting it; in doing so, he validated the theory which then gained greater popularity and acceptance. Conclusion The Aryan Invasion Theory, though still cited and advanced by those with a racialist
agenda, lost credence in the 1960s CE through the work, primarily, of the American archaeologist George F. Dales who reviewed Wheeler's interpretations, visited the sites, and found no evidence to support it. The skeletons Wheeler had interpreted as dying a violent death in battle showed no such signs nor did the cities exhibit any damage
associated with war. Further, there was no evidence of any kind of mobilization of a great army of the north nor of any conquest c. 1900 BCE in India. The Persians - the only ethnicity self-identifying as Aryan - were themselves a minority on the Iranian Plateau between c. 1900 - c. 1500 BCE and in no position to mount an invasion of any kind. It was
therefore suggested that the "Aryan Invasion" was actually most likely a migration of Indo-Iranians who merged peacefully with the indigenous people of India, intermarried, and were assimilated into the culture. As excavations of the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization continue, more information will no doubt contribute to a better understanding of
its history and development. Recognition of the culture's vast accomplishments and high level of technology and sophistication has been increasingly coming to light and gaining greater attention. Scholar Jeffrey D. Long expresses the general sentiment, writing, "there is much fascination with this civilization because of its high level of technological
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early urban cultures. Spanning across what is now Pakistan and northwest India, the civilization was contemporaneous with ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, yet it boasted a unique culture, architectural style, and societal structure. Excavated ruins of Mohenjo-daro,
on the right bank of the Indus River, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first site in South Asia to be so declared. Geographical and Environmental Context The Indus River, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first site in South Asia to be so declared. Geographical and Environmental Context The Indus River, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first site in South Asia to be so declared.
               — a key component of the civilization's economic strength. The region, sheltered by the Himalayas and endowed with monsoonal rainfall, became an ideal environment for a burgeoning population and subsequent urbanization. Discovery and Excavation The existence of this once-great civilization came to light only in the 1920s. Before
these archaeological discoveries, the vast urban centers of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were hidden beneath the soil, waiting centuries to reveal their secrets. Since then, hundreds of sites have been uncovered, providing invaluable insights into the Indus Valley Civilization's life. Urban Planning and Architecture Remarkably advanced for its time, the
Indus Valley Civilization displayed an astonishing level of urban planning and architectural prowess. Cities like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa were characterized by a grid-like street pattern, robust brick houses, and intricate drainage systems — features that portray a society valuing organization and hygiene. Central to many of these cities was a large
public bath, sometimes referred to as the 'Great Bath', which suggests rituals or communal activities. Also notable was the backbone of the Indus Valley economy. They cultivated wheat, barley, peas, and possibly rice, and
domesticated cattle, buffalo, sheep, and goats. The fertile plains and regular flooding of the Indus ensured bountiful harvests. Furthermore, their strategic geographic location facilitated trade. Goods and ideas were exchanged with distant lands, such as Mesopotamia, through overland routes and the Arabian Sea. They crafted beads, pottery, and
other artifacts that were desired in foreign markets. Language and Script One of the enduring mysteries of this civilization is its script. While the language remains unknown, it's evident that they had a system of communication, which played a role in administrative
and commercial activities. The Indus Valley Civilization stands as a testament to human ingenuity, resilience, and the ability to create organized societies. With its meticulously planned cities, robust economy, and intriguing cultural practices, it remains a significant chapter in the annals of human history. Religion and Belief Systems The religious
beliefs of the Indus people remain a matter of speculation, largely because of the undeciphered script. However, numerous terracotta figurines, seals, and the design of certain buildings hint at ritualistic and religious activities. Some seals depict a figure surrounded by animals, often identified as a 'proto-Shiva', suggesting early Hindu practices.
suggest invasions by the Aryans, a nomadic tribe, although concrete evidence is lacking. Internal Decay: Economic disparities or internal strife might have played a role. Despite the theories, the exact reasons remain shrouded in mystery. Legacy and Contribution to Modern Culture While the Indus Valley Civilization gradually faded, it laid down an
essential cultural and technological foundation. The emphasis on urban planning, standardization of weights and measures, and possibly religious symbols were carried forward and integrated into subsequent South Asian societies. Furthermore, the continuity of some elements from the Indus Valley Civilization can be seen in modern India and
Answers on the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC) What is the Indus Valley Civilization also known as? The Indus Valley Civilization was a Bronze Age civilization also known as the Harappan Civilization was a Bronze Age civilization was a Bronze Age
that existed from around 3300 BC to 1300 BC, with its mature phase from 2600 BC to 1900 BC. The Indus Civilization, also known as the Harappan Civilization after the type site Harappan Civilization of Indus Civilization.
sites. What regions did the Indus Valley Civilization cover? It covered much of today's Pakistan and parts of northwestern India and northeast Afghanistan. How did the Indus Valley Civilization cower? It covered much of today's Pakistan and parts of northwestern India and northeast Afghanistan. How did the Indus Valley Civilization cower? It covered much of today's Pakistan and parts of northwestern India and northeast Afghanistan. How did the Indus Valley Civilization cower? It covered much of today's Pakistan and parts of northwestern India and northeast Afghanistan.
civilizations of the Near East and South Asia, including ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. What are some notable features included well-laid-out streets, baked brick houses, elaborate drainage systems, and extensive water supply systems. How many people did cities like Mohenjo-darc
and Harappa likely house at their peak? Cities like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa likely housed between 30,000 and 60,000 people at their peak. What was the estimated population ranging from one to five million individuals. The Priest-King
2400-1900 BC; low fired steatite; height: 17.5 cm; National Museum of Pakistan (Karachi) What was the economy was substantially supported by agriculture facilitated by the fertile alluvial plains of the Indus River and trade with surrounding civilizations. What remains a significant mystery about
the Indus Valley Civilization? The Harappan language and the Indus Script remain a mystery as the script has not yet been deciphered. What are some theories proposed for the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization? Theories include environmental changes such as a gradual drying of the region, and tectonic activities that might have altered river
courses. What insights do UNESCO World Heritage Sites like Mohenjo-daro and Dholavira provide about the Indus Valley Civilization? These sites provide insights into the urban planning, architectural prowess, and societal structures of the Harappans. Indus Valley Civilization Map (click to see in atlas) Geography The Indus Valley civilization covered
most of what is today Pakistan and the Indian states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Punjab. Settlements which were closely related to the core civilization - and may have been colonies of it - have been found in Afghanistan and central Asia. The huge Indus river system waters a rich agricultural landscape. The Indus plain is surrounded by high
mountains, desert and ocean, and at that time there were dense forests and swamps to the east. PrehistoryPrior to 6500 BCE, the Indian sub-continent was home to hunter-gatherers (as in the rest of the world, has some regions in the Middle East, where farming had been spreading since 8000 BCE). Painting of a horned boar, Bhimbetka rock shelters.
Photo by Bernard Gagnon, Creative Commons. The earliest remains of Neolithic communities have been found in western Pakistan. This is the closest area in South Asia to the Middle East; this, along with the fact that their staple crops, wheat and barley, were those grown to the west, makes it a natural inference that farming peoples arrived here
from outside the region, ultimately from the Middle East. There are some contrary indications to this idea, however. There is evidence for continuity from earlier, hunter-gatherer times in the Middle East, suggesting that local Zebu cattle had been domesticated.
It seems therefore that farming was not simply brought in to South Asia by colonists from further west, bringing with them their "package" of crops and animals. It looks as though hunter-gatherers already established in the region either developed farming practices completely independently from those in the Middle East, or at the least adapted the
"package" to the extent of domesticating local animals rather than using alien species. In any event, small farming and pastoral villages spread across the northwest of the subcontinent. The earliest of these had no pottery (to use the jargon, theirs was an a-ceramic culture); but by c. 5000 BCE they made pottery, as well as shell- and stone artifacts,
There is evidence of trade links with peoples to north, south and west. By the start of the 4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Indus; and from the mid-4th millennium farming communities dotted the flood plain of the river Industrial farming farm
bull motifs in their art. Trade networks expanded, particularly with the west. Craft manufacture became more specialized and sophisticated. Wheel-thrown ceramics appeared from c. 3300 BCE, the mature, fully urban phase of Indus civilization appeared. Well-
planned citiesIt is a layout plan of archaeological site at Lothal, Gujarat, India. By Nizil Shah at English Wikipedia, CC BY 3.0. The quality of municipal town planning indicates that these communities were controlled by efficient governments. These clearly placed a high priority on accessibility to water. Modern scholars tend to see in this the influence
of a religion which places a string emphasis on ritual washing - much like modern Hinduism. Hygiene was also important to the inhabitants. The urban planning included the world's first known urban sanitation systems. Within their homes, some rooms had facilities in which waste water was directed
to covered drains. These lined the major streets. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. These ancient Indus sewerage and drainage systems were far in advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in contemporary urban sites in the Middle East. The advance of anything found in the Middle East. The advance of a sit
massive protective walls. Most city dwellers were traders or artisans. They lived with others of the same occupation in well-defined neighborhoods. All the houses had access to water and drainage facilities, which gives the impression of a society where even the poor had a decent standard of living (though there may have been extensive "shanty
towns" outside the walls, which have left scant archaeological remains). Although some houses were larger than others, what seems to be missing from the Indus civilization was unique amongst advanced
societies). However, a key feature of Indus cities was a large walled citadel, and it is possible that some kind of ruling group lived in these, separated from the rest of the population. WritingFor an historian's point of view, the most frustrating thing about this civilization is that the script has not been deciphered. Over 400 distinct symbols (some say
600) have been recovered from the sites of Indus Valley cities, on seals, small tablets, or ceramic pots, and on over a dozen other materials. This compares with many thousands of texts from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt; and typical inscriptions are no more than four or five characters in length, most of which are tiny. Ten Indus Signs, dubbed
Dholavira Signboard. Reproduced under Creative Commons 3.0Clearly, the Indus civilization scribes committed most of their writing to perishable materials which have not survived. The lack of decipherable texts means that we can gain no real insight into many of the details of Indus society, and virtually none about its government and politics. Was
it a unified state - or was it numerous kingdoms and city-states? Or perhaps both, at different times? Was it ruled by priests or warriors? We simply do not know. Agriculture, trade and transportationLike all pre-modern societies, agriculture would have played the primary role in the Indus Valley economy. Key staples were wheat and barley, pulses
and millet. Melons, cucumbers, squashes, rice (the growing of which had probably arrived from East Asia) and flax were also grown. For meat, hides and wool, cattle, water buffalo, goat and sheep were kept. An extensive canal network, used for irrigation, has been discovered in the vicinity of the city of Lothal, near the coast of western India; and it is
almost certain, given the vast floods that the Indus river can inflict, that other cities would have had extensive water control systems. Indeed, the massive walls which are a key feature of their urban planning may well have been as much against floods as against floods as against floods as against floods that the Indus river can inflict, that other cities would have been as much against floods as agains
located on a floodplain meant that there was poor availability of raw materials resources nearby. Trade routes linked urban centers with their hinterlands, sources of manufactured goods such as copper tools and drilled beads in areas away from the cities suggest
that rural populations, even hunter-gatherers, exchanged raw materials for finished products. Materials from more distant regions were used in the cities for manufacturing seals, beads and other objects. Judging from the wide area in which Indus civilization artifacts have been found, their trade networks reached out as far as Afghanistan, the coastal
regions of Persia, northern and western India, and Mesopotamia. Many of the (as yet) indecipherable Indus texts were on clay seals on what look like trade goods. Trade would have been facilitated by a major advance in transport technology. The Indus Valley civilization may have been facilitated by a major advance in transport technology.
bullock carts identical to those seen throughout India and Pakistan today. Most of the boats were probably river craft, small, flat-bottomed boats perhaps with a sail, similar to those plying the Indus River today. The Indus people clearly also had seagoing craft as well. There was an extensive maritime trade with Mesopotamia. Archaeologists have
discovered a dredged canal and what they regard as a docking facility at the coastal city of Lothal in Western India. Religion Reconstructing Indus Valley religion of this civilization and the later religions of ancient India. Some Indus Valley seals show swastikas, which
are also found in Hinduism and its offshoots, Buddhism and Jainism. Many seals also show animals presented in a format reminiscent of later Hindu gods such as Shiva and Indra. The large number of figurines found in the Indus Valley have led some scholars to argue that the Indus people worshipped a Mother Goddess symbolizing fertility, a common
practice among rural Hindus even today. All these pieces of evidence point to the Indus Valley religion having a large measure of influence on the beliefs and practices of the Aryan peoples who came after them. Elephant seal of Indus Valley, Indian Museum. Reproduced under Creative Commons 4.0In the earlier phases of their culture, the Indus
people buried their dead; later, they also cremated them and buried the ashes in urns. The lack of weapons and armor in the graves gave rise to the common idea that the Indus civilization was inherently peaceful, but this is probably faulty. Other civilizations originally thought to have been peaceful, like the Minoans and Maya, have, on further
investigation, turned out to be anything but. The lack of any weapons is simply a function of the fact that no elite goods at all have been found in Indus graves. Arts and CraftsAll kinds of artifacts have been found in Indus graves. Arts and CraftsAll kinds of artifacts have been found in the Indus Valley cities: seals, glazed beads, pottery, gold jewelry, and anatomically detailed figurines in terra-cotta, bronze, and
soapstone. Various gold, terra-cotta and stone figurines have also been discovered, of dancing girls, men (perhaps gods?), animals (cows, bears, monkeys, and dogs) and a mythical beast (part bull, part zebra, with a huge horn). Shell, ceramic, agate and soapstone beads were used in making necklaces, bangles, and other ornaments. All these show
that these cities housed a busy and highly refined craft industry. Science a busy and highly refined craft industry.
Their smallest division, which is marked on an ivory scale found in Lothal, was approximately 1.704 mm, the smallest division ever recorded on a scale very similar to the English Imperial ounce or Greek uncia. The engineering skills of the Indus Valley people were of a very high
order. This can be seen in the large buildings and water-management systems on evidence at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. It is also clear from the fact that harbor buildings were constructed to take maximum advantage of tides and currents. This would have involved very careful measurement and design. Computer-aided reconstruction of coastal
Harappan settlement at Sokhta Koh near Pasni, Pakistan. Reproduced under Creative Commons 2.5 The End of the Indus Valley civilization After c. 1900 BCE, all the major Indus Valley civilization. Reproduced under Creative Commons 2.5 The End of the Indus Valley civilization.
clearly experienced catastrophic population decline. It was once widely thought that the Indus Valley cities were the victims of assaults by Aryan (Indo-European) nomadic invaders from central Asia. This is no longer accepted, but the causes of decline are disputed. It is probable that a combination of factors were involved. Some modern scholars
suggest long-term changes in the climate. Shifts in the monsoon pattern and changes in types of pottery suggest a series of migrations into the region, which may have been highly disruptive for the Indus Valley
cities. Container with four ibexes, perhaps from the Quetta Valley, 2800-2500 BC. Photo by Sailko, Creative Commons 3.0 These migrants had strong links to central Asia, and they were probably groups of Aryan herders entering the Indus region over an extended period of time, rather than as a single militant conquest. As cattle herders, they may
have destroyed or neglected the dikes and canals on which the agrarian life of the Indus peoples depended. There is some evidence of burned-out settlements have also been uncovered. Whatever the explanation, the brilliant
achievements of the Indus Valley civilization gave way to a new chapter in the history of ancient India. Large, well-planned cities vanished, and the material culture of the people of northern India declined sharply as society became less complex. It was to be a thousand years before cities, writing and organized states would come again to the Indian
sub-continent. Further StudyNext article: The Vedic Age Map: Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Coming of FarmingThe Origins of Civilization Articles on Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Coming of FarmingThe Origins of Civilization Articles on Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and South Asia in 2500 BCESee also: The Vedic Age of Ancient India and Sou
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