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Indus Valley Civilization was a cultural and political entity which flourished in the northern region of the Indus subcontinent between c. 7000 - c. 600 BCE. Its modern name derives from its location in the valley of the Indus River, but it is also commonly referred to as the Indus-Sarasvati Civilization and the Harappan Civilization. These latter names are derived from the ancient river mentioned in Vedic sources that flowed in the Indus River valley, the ancient city of Mohenjo-daro, and the ancient names derive from the fact that the Indus River valley was the first civilization to develop 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 origin, development, decline, and fall 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. 2800 - c. 1900 BCE Late Harappan - c. 1900 - c. 1500 BCE Post Harappan - c. 1500 - c. 600 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 city of Mohenjo-daro (noted below) was destroyed, and the civilization declined. 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 cities, a decline in trade with Egypt 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 to date comes from the physical evidence excavated at various sites. The story of the Indus Valley Civilization, therefore, is best given with the discovery of its ruins in the 19th century CE. James Lewis (better known as Charles Masson, l. 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 left the site fairly quickly, after making a record of it in his notes but, having no knowledge of who could have built the city, he attributed it to Alexander the Great. The most interesting artifact 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 a necklace of 19 beads. The girl is wearing a short pleated skirt and a beaded necklace. The Great Bath, a large public bathing area, was discovered in 1887 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 and streets, and the streets were paved with baked bricks. The most famous artifact 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 a necklace of 19 beads. The girl is wearing a short pleated skirt and a beaded necklace. The Great Bath, a large public bathing area, was discovered in 1887 CE which attracted the attention of the British authorities in India and, especially, Alexander Cunningham. 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