

Ancient civilization: Harappa

While the Indus (or Harappan) civilization may be considered the culmination of a long process indigenous to the Indus valley, a number of parallels exist between developments on the Indus River and the rise of civilization in Mesopotamia. It is striking to compare the Indus with this better-known and more fully documented region and to see how closely the two coincide with respect to the emergence of cities and of such major concomitants of civilization as writing, standardized weights and measures, and monumental architecture. Yet nearly all the earlier writers have sensed the Indian-ness of the civilization, even when they were largely unable to articulate it. Thus, historian V. Gordon Childe wrote that:

India confronts Egypt and Babylonia by the 3rd millennium with a thoroughly individual and independent civilization of her own, technically the peer of the rest. And plainly it is deeply rooted in Indian soil. The Indus civilization represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment. And it has endured; it is already specifically Indian and forms the basis of modern Indian culture. (New Light on the Most Ancient East, 4th ed., 1952.)

province, southeastern Pakistan

The force of Childe's words can be appreciated even without an examination of the Indus valley script found on seals; the attention paid to domestic bathrooms, the drains, and the Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro can all be compared to elements in the later Indian civilization. The bullock carts with a framed canopy, called ikkas, and boats are little changed to this day. The absence of pins and the love of bangles and of elaborate nose ornaments are all peculiarly South Asian. The religion of the Indus also is replete with suggestions of traits known from later India. The significance of the bull, the tiger, and the elephant; the composite animals; the seated yogi god of the seals; the tree spirits and the objects resembling the Shiva linga (a phallus symbolic of the god Shiva) of later times—all these are suggestive of enduring forms in later Indian civilization.

It is still impossible to do more than guess at the social organization or the political and administrative control implied by this vast area of cultural uniformity. The evidence of widespread trade in many commodities, the apparent uniformity of weights and measures, the common script, and the uniformity—almost common currency—of the seals all indicate some measure of political and economic control and point to the great cities

Mohenjo-daro and Harappa as their centres. The presence of the great granaries on the citadel mounds in these cities and of the citadels themselves suggests—partly on the analogies of the cities of Mesopotamia—the existence of priest-kings, or at least a priestly oligarchy, that controlled the economy and civil government. The intellectual mechanism of this government and the striking degree of control implicit in it are still matters of speculation. Nor can scholars yet speak with any certainty regarding relations between the cities and surrounding villages. Much more research needs to be done, on many such topics, before the full character of the Indus civilization can be revealed



Great bath of Mohenjo-daro