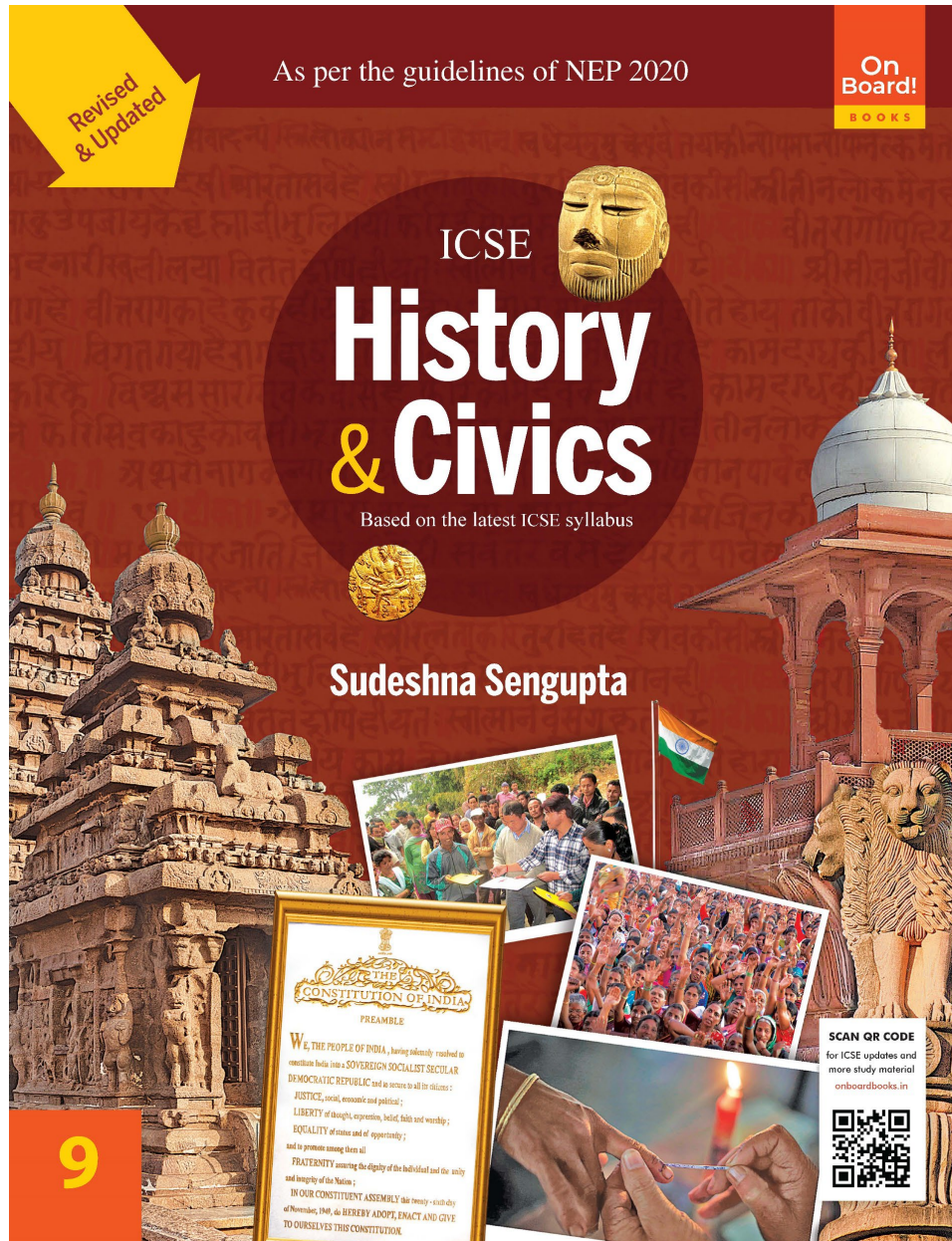


# On Board!

**B O O K S**

# History and Civics 9



# History 9

# Chapter 1: The Harappan Civilization

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# Chapter 1: The Harappan Civilization

The earliest inhabitants were what we refer to as the Palaeolithic men or men of the Old Stone Age. The Palaeolithic men were followed by men who used a more refined style of tools and implements. Gradually, copper was discovered. Later, copper was mixed with tin to make bronze. Thus, man made his transition from the Stone Age to the Age of Metals.

The civilization, under discussion, in this chapter belongs to the Bronze Age.

## Discovery

In 1924, Sir John Marshall, a noted archaeologist, and his Indian aides Rakhaldas Banerjee and Daya Ram Sahni, proclaimed the discovery of the Indus Valley Civilization. Sir John Marshall named it the Indus Valley Civilization, as two of its earliest sites, Harappa (in the Montgomery district of the Punjab, now in Pakistan) and Mohenjo-daro (in the Larkana district of Sind in Pakistan), lay in the valley of the Indus river. Modern historians refer to it as the Harappan Civilization as Harappa was the first site to be discovered.

## Origin

The Harappan Civilization evolved out of early agricultural villages. Archaeologists have found remains of such early agricultural villages in central and southern Baluchistan. In this context, mention may be made of the early agricultural village at Amri, which archaeologists feel, evolved into Harappan Civilization.

## Extent and main sites

For many years after the discovery of the different sites, it was believed that this civilization was limited to the valley of the River Indus and its tributaries. Later excavations, however revealed that the Harappan Civilization was spread over a much larger area.

**Date:** Modern archaeologists date it roughly between 2500 and 1500 BC.

## TOWN PLANNING

The Harappan Civilization was urban in nature. The first thing that strikes us is the town planning. The two cities, Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, were built on a similar plan.

- To the west of each city was a citadel built on a high platform. On it, public buildings like religious structures and granaries were erected. The citadel was defended by a wall, possibly to protect it against floods or enemy attack. Below it was the town proper.
- The main streets ran from north to south and other streets ran at right angles to the main streets. The streets thus divided the city into square or rectangular blocks.
- Both at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, houses were built of kiln-burnt bricks.
- Large houses with staircases suggest the existence of two or three storeyed buildings.
- Most of the houses had a well. The houses were equipped with drains that carried the waste to the main underground drain of the street.
- There was also an arrangement for street lighting.





Extent and main sites of the Harappan Civilization

## The drainage system

The most unique feature of the Harappan Civilization was the efficient and well-planned drainage system. The extreme importance given to the drainage system shows that the Harappans paid great attention to sanitation and hygiene.

- The kitchen and bathroom had sloping floors to allow the water to drain out into the narrow drains alongside.
- The house drains were connected to the main underground drains, which carried the waste to the large pits outside the city.
- The street drains ran along the sides of the street. They were covered with bricks. They had soak-pits and manholes for clearing.

## ARCHITECTURE

The cities had, besides numerous dwelling houses, a few spacious buildings of elaborate structure and design.

### The Great Bath

The Great Bath was discovered at Mohenjo-daro. It was surrounded by galleries and had rooms on all sides. A well built alongside was the source of water for the tank. The tank was cleaned periodically. The water was discharged into a huge drain connected to the main drain on the street. It was made watertight by using special bricks and gypsum mortar.



## The Great Granary

At Harappa, a Great Granary has been discovered. It was arranged in two rows of six, with an aisle in between. It was used to store surplus foodgrains. The granaries were built close to the river so that grains could be transported easily. Near the granaries, circular brick platforms have been found. They were probably used for threshing grain. A large granary has also been found at Mohenjo-daro.



The Great Granary at Harappa

## Assembly Hall

It had thick walls and is supported on pillars. It may have been used as a prayer hall or an assembly hall, where people gathered to discuss important issues.

## Dockyard

A brick dockyard connected to the Gulf of Cambay by a channel has been discovered at Lothal. It shows that the Harappans were engaged in maritime trade with west Asia. Hundreds of seals belonging to the Persian Gulf region indicate that Lothal was a major port of exit and entry.

The ruins of Mohenjo-daro, Harappa and other towns and cities leave us in no doubt that the cities were largely populated and the inhabitants enjoyed municipal advantages of a very high order, unknown to the people of the contemporary world.

## ECONOMIC LIFE

As in most of the other contemporary riverine civilizations, agriculture was the backbone of the Harappan economy. The main agricultural crops were wheat, barley, dates, peas and melons. Cultivation of cotton was perhaps known. Domestication of animals was also an important activity.

### Trade

The Harappans traded both within the country and outside. Trading links with Mesopotamia have been proved by the discovery of Mesopotamian seals in the Harappan cities and those of Harappa in the cities of ancient Mesopotamia. The discovery of weights and measures suggests that commercial exchanges were quite common. In fact, some of the weights are so small that they must have been used to weigh precious objects.

### Occupations

The agricultural class constituted the largest section of the Harappan population. Then there were potters, carpenters, weavers, blacksmiths, masons, goldsmiths, ivory-workers, stone-cutters, sculptors and jewellers. Harappans were technically more advanced than their contemporaries.

## SOCIAL LIFE

The presence of citadels and lower towns suggests that some kind of social hierarchy was indeed in operation.

### Dress and ornaments

People wore clothes made of cotton and wool. The figurines found from the Harappan sites suggest that men wore a garment similar to modern-day dhoti. Women wore short skirts held at the waist with a girdle. The rich wore gold and silver jewellery. The poor wore jewellery made of bone, shell and copper.

### Amusement

Recreation through games was an important part of the Harappan life. The discovery of dice-pieces shows that the Harappans knew the game of dice.

## ART AND CRAFT

Pottery-making was a developed art. Beautiful reddish glazed pottery with different designs have been discovered from almost all the sites. The Harappans also practised sculpture. We have found sculptures in stone from various sites. The Harappans also made statues of bronze. Equally impressive are the engravings on the seals and sealings.

## Seals

More than 2000 seals have been discovered from the various Harappan sites. Primarily made of steatite, the seals are generally square, flat or rectangular. Some of them have animals like bison, rhinoceros, tiger and buffalo engraved on them. Further, seal impressions on clay indicate that the seals might have been used by merchants to stamp their goods. The inscriptions on the seals bear testimony to the fact that the Harappans were literate. Inscriptions have also been found on pottery and other household articles. This suggests that literacy was not confined to select classes.

## SCRIPT

The script of the period was pictographic, like the one prevalent in the early Sumerian, Minoan and Egyptian civilizations. It is believed that the Harappans used a phonetic script in the beginning and later an alphabetic pattern was developed. However, it has remained undeciphered till date.

## RELIGION

The Harappan Civilization is marked by an absence of religious structures. Yet we can form an idea about the religious life of the people through the various figurines and seals excavated. The numerous female terracotta figurines suggest that the Harappans worshipped Mother Goddess, the early form of Shakti. The Pashupati seal depicting the three-faced deity denotes the early conception of Shiva. The Harappans also worshipped trees.

## DECLINE

Archaeologists have put forward different theories.

- The climatic change in the Indus region may have been responsible for the disappearance of the civilization.
- Excessive deforestation may have resulted in a decrease in rainfall and forced people to evacuate.
- Natural causes like floods may have led to the evacuation.
- The presence of walled city structure does indicate invasions and the coming of the Aryans.

Thus numerous causes, both natural and human, appear to have been responsible for the decline of the Harappan Civilization.



## To Remember

**Introduction**—The Indus Valley Civilization belonged to the Bronze Age.

**Discovery**—In 1924, Sir John Marshall along with Rakhal Das Banerjee and Daya Ram Sahni announced the discovery of the civilization, it was called the Indus Valley Civilization as the two main sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro lay in the Indus Valley, modern historians prefer to call it the Harappan Civilization.

**Origin**—The Harappan Civilization evolved out of early agricultural villages.

**Extent and main sites**—The Harappan Civilization was spread over a much larger area and not just confined to Indus and its tributaries, some of its main sites are Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Ropar, Kalibangan, Banawali, Lothal, Dholavira and so on.

**Date**—While Sir John Marshall placed the civilization between 3250 and 2750 BC, modern historians date it between 2500 and 1500 BC.

**Town planning**—It was an urban civilization where attention was paid to town planning and drainage system, the cities were designed on a similar plan, the cities were divided into a citadel and a lower town, on the citadel public buildings were erected, while people lived in the town proper, the streets cut each other at right angles and had their corners rounded off, houses were not allowed to encroach on streets, there was arrangement for street lighting, Drainage system: It was the most unique feature of this civilization, the house drains were connected to the main drains to carry off the rubbish, street drains were covered with bricks.

**Architecture**—Some of the important buildings were: The Great Bath at Mohenjo-daro was a rectangular tank which was used for ritual bathing, the Great Granary at Harappa was used to store surplus foodgrains, near the granaries circular brick platforms have been found, they were probably used for threshing grain, the Assembly Hall has thick walls and is supported on pillars, it may have been used as a prayer hall, the Dockyard at Lothal shows that the Harappans engaged in maritime trade, these buildings presuppose a highly efficient municipal organization.

**Thank You**