

6th – In the Earliest Cities II



Residential area: In the town area, away from the citadel, platforms were built for houses. These platforms enabled houses in the city to be built above the flood level. Most of the houses were plain and uniform in plan; the rooms of each house were arranged around a courtyard. Each house had a single entrance and one of every three houses had a well too. Many houses had a well too. Many houses had a separate bathing area as well. Some of the houses were double storied.

Drainage: As the houses were built, a careful drainage system was laid out. The drain in houses invariably led to a cess- pool or manhole. The drains along the main roads were covered and were inspected and cleaned regularly. The drainage system of the Indus cities stands out as remarkable among the cities of the world at that time.

What did the people eat? A number of crops were cultivated - cereals like wheat and barley, pulses, oilseeds like mustard and sesame, and millets like bajra, ragi and jawar. Fish, meat, milk, date and fruit were also a part of the diet.

In search of raw materials: Raw materials are substances that are either found naturally (such as wood, or ores of metals) or produced by farmers or herders. These are then processed to produce finished goods. For example, cotton, produced by farmers, is a raw material that may be processed to make cloth. While some of the raw materials that the Harappans used were available locally, many items such as copper, tin, gold, silver and precious stones had to be brought from distant places. Gold could have come all the way from present- day Karnataka, and precious stones from present -day Gujarat, Iran and Afghanistan.

What did they wear: Archaeologists have found evidence of cotton and woven cloth. Spindles (used to spin cotton thread) made of clay have been found in many sites. Men wore flowing lengths of cloth, while the women wore skirts. Both the men and the women seem to have draped a shawl over their shoulders. Both men and women wore ornaments made of gold, silver and beads of semi- precious stones like jade, lapis.

Food for people in the cities: While many people lived in the cities, others living in the countryside grew crops and reared animals. These farmers and herders supplied food to crafts persons, scribes and rulers in the cities. The Harappans reared cattle, sheep, goat and buffalo. Water and pastures were available around settlements. However, in the dry summer months large herds of animals were probably taken to greater distances in search of grass and water.

Did they know how to write? The people of the Indus civilization had developed a form of writing. This was one of the world's earliest known scripts. Writing was in the form of brief inscriptions found mainly on seals of different materials like, clay, baked clay and steatite. Archaeologists reveal that the writing is usually from right to left.

Metallurgy: The Indus people alloyed copper and tin to make bronze, which was more malleable and stronger than copper. Knives, axes and chisels were made of stones.

Pottery: Beside agriculture, probably the most popular occupation was pot making. A variety of pots, both plain and decorated, have been found. Many pots were painted red, with designs in black suggesting geometric patterns.

Art and craft: Two finely sculpted works of art were recovered from Mohenjodaro. The other is that of the famed dancing girl in bronze. Many terracotta figures of



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animals, carts, toys and human figures were recovered from the sites. Some of the toys had parts which moved, for example, bulls and rams that could shake their heads and tails. There are toy birds which can move up and down ropes.

Seals: Many seals have been found in the Indus Valley, mainly made of steatite. Most of them show figures of animals, with writing on the top portion. Most of them are square in shape, a few round and some cylindrical.

Religion: Seal representing a male figure sitting in the form of a yogi, a figure like a mother goddess and papal trees tell us a little about the faith of the people. They may have worshipped Pasupati, an early form of Shiva, and mother goddesses. Evidence of burial practices has been found at cemeteries at Harappa, Lothal and a few other sites. The dead were buried wearing ornaments and with few pots.

Trade: The people of the Indus civilization had established a flourishing system of trade-both by land and sea. The two large structures at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, identified as granaries, suggest the store of grains. The grains probably came from villages. The villages may have traded the grain for some of the goods produced in the cities. Besides roads, the Indus river system must have been used for trade. Ornaments made in the Indus Valley have been found by archeologists in Mesopotamia, which suggests that there was trade between the two civilizations.

The end of the Indus civilization: This advanced civilization appears to have declined suddenly after 2000BCE. Why it declined remains a puzzle, but a few reasons have been suggested. The cities might have been destroyed by earthquakes or floods. The other factor could be the falling quality of the soil due to excessive deforestation. Environment disasters like earthquakes might have caused rivers to change their course. The resulting floods and droughts might have caused crops to fail, and spread epidemics.

A Closer Look- Harappan town in Gujarat: The city of Dholavira was located on khadir beyt in the Rann of Kutch, where there was fresh water and fertile soil. Some of the other Harappa cities, which were divided into two parts, Dholavira were divided into three parts, and each part was surrounded with massive stone walls, with entrances through gateways. There was also a large open area in the settlement, where public ceremonies could be held. Other finds include large letters of the Harappans script that were carved out of white stone and perhaps inlaid in wood. This is a unique find as generally Harappa writing has been found on small objects such as seals.

