

Indus Valley Civilization for UPSC IAS Exam

The Indus Valley Civilization was established around 3300 BC. It flourished between 2700 BC and 1900 BC (Mature Indus Valley Civilization). It started declining around 1900 BC and disappeared around 1400 BC.

This is also called Harappan Civilization after the first city to be excavated, Harappa (Punjab, Pakistan).

Pre-Harappan civilization has been found at Mehrgarh, Pakistan which shows the first evidence of cotton cultivation.

Geographically, this civilization covered Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Western Uttar Pradesh. It extended from Sutkagendor (in Baluchistan) in the West to Alamgirpur (Western UP) in the East; and from Mandu (Jammu) in the North to Daimabad (Ahmednagar, Maharashtra) in the South. Some Indus Valley sites have also been found in as far away as Afghanistan and Turkmenistan.

Important sites:

In India: Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Lothal, Dholavira, Rangpur, Surkotda (Gujarat), Banawali (Haryana), Ropar (Punjab).

In Pakistan: Harappa (on river Ravi), Mohenjodaro (on Indus River in Sindh), Chanhudaro (in Sindh).

The civilization was first discovered during an excavation campaign under Sir John Hubert Marshall in 1921–22 at Harappa following the discovery of seals by J Fleet.

Harappan ruins were discovered by Marshall, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni and Madho Sarup Vats.

Mohenjodaro ruins were excavated for the first time by R.D. Banerjee, E. J. H. MacKay and Marshall.

The Indus Valley cities show a level of sophistication and advancement not seen in other contemporary civilizations.

Most cities had similar patterns. There were two parts: a citadel and the lower town.

Most cities had a Great Bath.

There were also granaries, 2-storied houses made of burnt bricks, closed drainage lines, excellent stormwater and waste water management system, weights for measurements, toys, pots, etc.

A large number of seals have been discovered.

Agriculture was the most important occupation. First civilization to cultivate cotton.

Animals were domesticated like sheep, goats and pigs.

Crops were wheat, barley, cotton, ragi, dates and peas.

Trade was conducted with the Sumerians.

Metal products were produced including those with copper, bronze, tin and lead. Gold and silver were also known. Iron was not known to them.

No structures like temples or palaces have been found.

The people worshipped male and female deities. A seal which was named 'Pashupati Seal' has been excavated and it shows an image of a three-eyed figure. Marshall believed this to be an early form of Lord Shiva.

Excellent pieces of red pottery designed in black have been excavated. Faience was used to make beads, bangles, earrings and vessels.

The civilization also was advanced in making art works. A statuette named 'Dancing Girl' has been found from Mohenjodaro and is believed to be 4000 years old. A figure of a bearded Priest-King has also been found from Mohenjodaro.

Lothal was a dockyard.

Disposal of the dead was by burial in wooden coffins. Later on, in the H Symmetry culture, bodies were cremated in urns.

The Indus Valley script has not yet been deciphered.

Causes of the decline of this civilization have not been firmly established. Archaeologists now believe that the civilization did not come to an abrupt end but gradually declined. People moved eastwards and cities were abandoned. Writing and trade declined.

Mortimer Wheeler suggested that Aryan invasion led to the decline of the Indus Valley. This theory has now been debunked.

Robert Raikes suggests that tectonic movements and floods caused the decline.

Lambrick suggests a change in the course of the river Indus caused its decline.

Other causes cited include a drying up of the rivers, deforestation and a destruction of the green cover. It is possible that some cities were destroyed by floods but not all. It is now accepted that several factors could have led to the decline of the Indus Valley civilization.

New cities emerged only about 1400 years later.