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Bricks, Beads and Bones The Harappan Civilisation

The Harappan Civilisation, also known as the Indus Valley Civilisation, flourished around 2600 BCE along the Indus River. It is divided into three phases: Early Harappan (6000 BCE - 2600 BCE), Mature Harappan (2600 BCE - 1900 BCE), and Late Harappan (1900 BCE - 1300 BCE). This civilisation is noted for its advanced urban planning, subsistence strategies, social differentiation, craft production, trade, and eventual decline.

Period of the Civilisation and Subsistence Strategies

The Indus Valley Civilisation is categorized into three distinct periods:

- **Early Harappan Culture (6000 BCE - 2600 BCE):** Characterized by small settlements with evidence of agriculture and pastoralism but no large buildings.
- **Mature Harappan Culture (2600 BCE - 1900 BCE):** Marked by urban development, distinctive pottery, agriculture, pastoralism, and craft production. Important sites

include Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Dholavira, and others.

- **Late Harappan Culture (1900 BCE - 1300 BCE):** Represents the decline phase with cultural transformations.

Subsistence strategies included cultivation of wheat, barley, lentils, chickpeas, and millet. Domesticated animals included cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, and pigs. Hunting and fishing supplemented the diet. Irrigation was practiced using wells and canals, with evidence of water reservoirs for storage.

Exam Questions

Q1: What are the three phases of the Harappan Civilisation and their time periods?

Answer: Early Harappan (6000 BCE - 2600 BCE), Mature Harappan (2600 BCE - 1900 BCE), Late Harappan (1900 BCE - 1300 BCE).

Q2: Name some crops and animals domesticated by the Harappans.

Answer: Crops included wheat, barley, lentils, chickpeas, and millet. Animals included cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo, and pigs.

Mohenjodaro - A Planned Urban Centre

Mohenjodaro was a major city of the Harappan Civilisation, divided into the Citadel and the Lower Town. The Citadel housed large public buildings and was built on a high mud-brick platform, separated by a wall from the residential Lower Town. The city featured a grid pattern of streets with an advanced drainage system. Houses had courtyards, bathrooms, wells, and staircases, reflecting concern for privacy and hygiene. The Great Bath, a large water tank, was likely used for ritual bathing.

Social differences are evident from the size of houses and burial practices. Burials included pottery and ornaments, indicating beliefs in an afterlife. Utility objects like needles and pottery were common, while luxury items made of costly materials were rare.

Exam Questions

Q1: Describe the layout of Mohenjodaro.

Answer: Mohenjodaro was divided into the Citadel with public buildings and the Lower Town with residential areas. Streets were laid out in a grid pattern with an advanced drainage system.

Q2: What evidence shows social differences in Mohenjodaro?

Answer: Differences in house sizes, burial goods, and presence of luxury items indicate social stratification.

Trade, Commerce and Politics

The Harappans excelled in craft production, including pottery, bead-making, and seal carving. Centres like Chanhudaro specialized in craft production. Materials such as copper, steatite, lapis lazuli, and gold were procured from various regions, indicating extensive trade networks. External trade was conducted via sea routes to Oman, Bahrain, and Mesopotamia, facilitated by boats and ships.

Seals with animal motifs and an undeciphered script were used for trade and communication. The political structure is debated; some scholars suggest no single ruler, while others argue for centralized control based on uniformity in urban planning and artefacts.

Exam Questions

Q1: What materials were used in Harappan craft production and where were they sourced from?

Answer: Copper from Rajasthan, steatite from Gujarat and Rajasthan, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, and gold from South India.

Q2: How was trade conducted in the Harappan Civilisation?

Answer: Trade was conducted both locally and internationally via sea routes using boats

and ships, with seals and weights facilitating transactions.

End and Discovery of the Civilisation

The Mature Harappan sites were largely abandoned by 1800 BCE, with populations moving to new regions. Late Harappan cultures show changes in material culture. Causes of decline include climate change, floods, river shifts, and deforestation.

The civilisation was discovered in the 1920s through excavations at Harappa and Mohenjodaro by archaeologists like Daya Ram Sahni, Rakhal Das Banerji, and R.E.M. Wheeler. Challenges in research include the undeciphered script and incomplete sites. Religious practices are inferred from artefacts like terracotta figurines, seals depicting Proto-Shiva, and the Great Bath.

The discovery of the Harappan Civilisation significantly advanced the understanding of ancient Indian history, dating Indian civilisation back approximately 3000 years.

Exam Questions

Q1: What are some reasons for the decline of the Harappan Civilisation?

Answer: Climate change, excessive floods, shifting or drying of rivers, and deforestation.

Q2: Name key archaeologists involved in the discovery of the Harappan Civilisation.

Answer: Daya Ram Sahni, Rakhal Das Banerji, R.E.M. Wheeler, and Alexander Cunningham.

Key Dates

Time Period / Year	Event / Change	Importance
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Before 2600 BCE	Early Harappan culture	Formation of early settlements and agriculture
2600 BCE – 1900 BCE	Mature Harappan culture	Urban development and peak of civilisation
1900 BCE – 1300 BCE	Late Harappan culture	Decline and cultural transformation
1875 CE	Alexander Cunningham's report on Harappan seal	First recognition of Harappan artefacts
1921 CE	Excavation began at Harappa	Start of systematic archaeological study
1922 CE	Excavation began at Mohenjodaro	Discovery of major urban site
1924 CE	Marshall's announcement of new civilisation	Official recognition of Indus Valley Civilisation
1946 CE	Excavation at Harappa by R.E.M. Wheeler	Advanced archaeological methods introduced
1955 CE	Excavation began at Lothal	Discovery of important port city
1960 CE	Excavation began at Kalibangan	Further understanding of Harappan culture
1974 CE	Explorations at Bahawalpur	Expansion of known sites
1980 CE	Surface explorations at Mohenjodaro	International archaeological collaboration
1986 CE	Excavation at Harappa by American team	Continued research and discoveries
1990 CE	Excavations began at Dholavira	Discovery of major Harappan city

Key Personalities

- **Alexander Cunningham:** First Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), recognized Harappan artefacts in 1875.
- **Ernest John Henry Mackay:** Archaeologist known for excavations at Mohenjodaro and other Indus Valley sites.
- **Daya Ram Sahni:** Led excavations at Harappa starting in 1921.

- **Rakhal Das Banerji:** Contributed to the discovery of Mohenjodaro.
- **R.E.M. Wheeler:** Introduced scientific and military precision methods in archaeology.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Explain the significance of the Great Bath at Mohenjodaro.

Solution: The Great Bath is a large, well-constructed water tank found in the Citadel area of Mohenjodaro. It is believed to have been used for ritual bathing, indicating the importance of cleanliness and possibly religious practices in Harappan society.

Example 2: Describe the evidence that suggests social stratification in the Harappan Civilisation.

Solution: Differences in house sizes, presence of luxury goods in some homes, and varied burial practices suggest social classes. Larger houses with more amenities likely belonged to elites, while smaller houses were for common people.

Practice Set

Easy

- List the three phases of the Harappan Civilisation.
- Name two major Harappan cities.

Moderate

- Explain the subsistence strategies of the Harappan people.
- Describe the urban planning features of Mohenjodaro.

Challenging

- Discuss the possible reasons for the decline of the Harappan Civilisation.
- Analyze the role of trade in the Harappan economy.

Answer Key

- **Easy:** Early Harappan, Mature Harappan, Late Harappan; Harappa and Mohenjodaro.
- **Moderate:** Agriculture, pastoralism, hunting, fishing, irrigation; grid pattern streets, drainage system, citadel and lower town division.
- **Challenging:** Climate change, floods, river shifts, deforestation; trade with distant lands, craft production, use of seals and weights.

Quick Reference

- **Early Harappan:** Small settlements, agriculture, pastoralism.
- **Mature Harappan:** Urban centres, planned cities, craft production.
- **Late Harappan:** Decline and cultural changes.
- **Major Sites:** Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Dholavira, Lothal.
- **Key Features:** Grid streets, drainage, Great Bath, seals, undeciphered script.
- **Trade:** Local and international via sea routes.
- **Decline:** Environmental and economic factors.

Glossary

- **Citadel:** Elevated area in a city used for public buildings and defense.
- **Faience:** Glazed non-clay ceramic material used for beads and ornaments.
- **Grid:** Network of streets intersecting at right angles.
- **Gharial:** Fish-eating crocodile found in the region.
- **Steatite:** Soft stone used for making seals and beads.
- **Unicorn:** Mythical one-horned animal depicted on Harappan seals.
- **Furrow:** Narrow groove made in the ground by a plough.
- **Nodules:** Rounded pieces of carnelian stone used for bead-making.