Early civilizations of India

Harappan Society
- Foundations
- Society & Culture
- Decline

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**Indus Valley Geography**

- **Indian subcontinent includes India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and the world’s tallest mountains, the Himalayas**

- **General topography:** Mountains in the north, desert in the east (Thar Desert) which both provided natural defense from invasions

- **Indus and Ganges river form flat fertile plains**

- **Southern India is a dry plateau flanked by mountains & a narrow coastal strip of tropical forests**

- **Monsoons (seasonal winds) create climate of summer rains and dry winters**

- **Flooding is unpredictable and droughts can follow floods**
Early Societies in South Asia

- Between 8000 and 5000 B.C.E., cultivators built a Neolithic society west of the Indus River, in the region bordering on the Iranian plateau, probably as a result of Mesopotamian influence.
- By 7000 B.C.E., agriculture had taken root in the Indus River Valley.
- Agriculture spread rapidly and by about 3000 B.C.E. Dravidian peoples had established Neolithic communities throughout much of the subcontinent.
- As in Mesopotamia and Egypt, early cities in India stood at the center of an impressive political, social, and cultural order built by Dravidian peoples on the foundation of an agricultural economy.
- The earliest urban society, known as Harappan Society, brought wealth and power to the Indus River Valley.
**Indus Valley Civilization**

- **7000 B.C.E. - 2500 B.C.E.** Migrations and development of agriculture and farming villages along the Indus River.

- **2500 - 2000 B.C.E.** Harappan civilization of planned cities. Grid system of brick structures in 2 main sites:
  - Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro

- Planned urbanization
- Designed on mud brick platforms to protect against flood waters
- Brick walls protect the city and its citadel (central buildings like stupa)
- Streets designed in 30 foot wide grid system
- Houses with bathrooms separated by streets with sewage drainage system
Foundations of Harappan Society

- Like the Nile, the Indus draws its waters from the rain and melting snow in towering mts.

- For much of its history, enormous quantities of silt would make the soil fertile.

- History of flooding and at times, the Indus has left its channel altogether and carved a new course to the sea.

- Despite its ferocity, the Indus made agricultural society possible in Northern India.

- Wheat, Barley, Cattle, Sheep, Goats, and chickens, a first.
**Harappan Society**

- **Between 3000 B.C.E. and 2500 B.C.E., Dravidian peoples built a complex society that dominated the Indus River Valley until its decline after 1900 B.C.E.**
- **The Agricultural surplus of the Indus fed two large cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-daro**
- **Much of modern-day Pakistan and a large part of Northern India—a territory about 1.3 million square meters (502,000 square miles) and this considerably larger than either Mesopotamian or Egyptian society.**
Harappa and Mohenjo-daro

- No evidence survives concerning the Harappan political system.
- No evidence of a royal or imperial authority
- It is possible, like the early Sumerian city-states, the Harappan cities were economic and political centers for their own regions
- Both Harappa and Mohenjo-daro had city walls, a fortified citadel, and a large granary
- Both featured marketplaces, temples, public buildings, extensive residential districts, and broad grid streets
- Houses with bathrooms separated by streets with sewage drainage system
Harappa & Mohenjo-daro (Cont.)

- The two cities established the patterns that shaped the larger society: weights, measures, architectural styles, and even brick sizes.
- Successful agricultural societies.
- Trade with Mesopotamians exchanging copper, ivory, pearls, and semiprecious stones for wool, leather, and olive oil.
- Formation of social classes.
- No pyramids, palaces, or magnificent tombs but wielded great authority.
- Almost all homes had private bathrooms with showers and toilets that drained into city sewage systems.
- Why isn’t more known?
Harappan Writing

Undecipherable to date.
Citadel
Of
Mohenjo-
Daro
Aerial View of Mohenjo-Daro
The Great Bath, Mohenjo-Daro
Public Well, Harappa
Bath Area, Mohenjo-Daro
Well, Mohenjo-Daro
Granary, Mohenjo-Daro
Drain, Harappa
pottery, Mohenjo-Daro
Bison Seal, Mohenjo-Daro
A Horned-God Seal,
Mohenjo-Daro
A Male Head, Mohenjo-Daro

Draavidian
A Priest-King, Mohenjo-Daro
Unicorn Seal, Harappa
Female Figures, Harappa
Bull Figurine, Harappa
Elephant Figurine, Harappa
Burial Pottery, Harappa
Male Skeleton, Harappa
Female Skeleton with Child, Harappa
Legacy and Decline

- Evidence of decline appears between 2000 - 1750 B.C.E.
- Environmental factors like floods, soil erosion, earthquakes may explain it
- Migratory Aryans (invade??) to slowly dominate culture
- Evidence to suggest they adopt Harappan ideas of farming and religion which helps to establish a class system (caste system) based on views of elitism
- Harappan deities and religious beliefs intrigued migrants to India and found a new home in new societies.
- During 2000 B.C.E., bands of foreigners filtered into the Indian Subcontinent and settled throughout the Indus Valley and beyond.
- Most prominent were nomadic and pastoral peoples speaking an Indo-European languages who called themselves Aryans or “Noble People”.
The Vedic Age (1500 BCE - 500 BCE)
When the Aryans entered India, they practiced a limited amount of agriculture, but they depended much more heavily on a pastoral economy.

Cattle became the principal measure of wealth in early Aryan Society.*

The early Aryans did not use writing but they composed numerous poems and songs. Their sacred language was Sanskrit.

The earliest of these orally transmitted works were the Vedas, which were collections of songs, prayers, and rituals honoring Aryan gods.

The earliest was the Rig Veda, a collection of 1,028 hymns.
Aryan Migration

- **Pastoral** ➔ depended on their cattle.
- **Warriors** ➔ horse-drawn chariots.
Sanskrit writing
The Vedas

- 1200 BCE-600 B.C.E.
- Written in Sanskrit.
- Hindu core of beliefs:
  - Hymns and poems.
  - Religious prayers.
  - Magical spells.
  - Lists of the gods and goddesses.

Rig Veda ➔ Oldest work.
The Vedas

- 8th – 9th Century B.C.E.
- Dharma (right action), Artha (purpose), kama (pleasure), and moksha (liberation)

Hindu core of beliefs:--- Bhagavad Gita

- Epics- Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Mahabharata- ten times longer than Iliad and Odyssey combined.

Rig Veda ➔ oldest work.
The Aryans and India

- After 1000 B.C.E., they began to settle the area between the Himalayan foothills and the Ganges river. During this time iron tools and implements were being made.

- Eventually, they would settle the entire subcontinent and evolve into more formal political institutions.

- Although they did not build a large-scale political structure, the Aryans constructed a well-defined social order.

- The Aryan social structure rested on sharp hereditary distinctions between individuals and groups according to their occupations and roles in society.
Caste and Varna

- Caste identities developed gradually as the Aryans established settlements throughout India.
- The Aryans used the term Varna (Color) to refer to the major social classes. “Wheat colored v. darker skinned”
- After about 1000 B.C.E., the Aryans increasingly recognized four main Varnas: Brahmins (priests), kshatriyas (warriors and aristocrats), vaishyas (cultivators, merchants, artisans), and shudras (landless peasants and serfs). Untouchables came later.
- Dravidians believed that humans souls took on new physical forms after deaths of their bodily hosts. Sometimes souls returned as plants or animals, sometimes in the bodily shell of newborn humans.
- Transmigration and reincarnation
Varna (Social Hierarchy)

- Brahmins
- Kshatriyas
- Vaishyas
- Shudras

Pariahs [Harijan] ➔ Untouchables
The Caste System

Who is...

- The mouth?
- The arms?
- The legs?
- The feet?

What is a JATI? (thus Born)
The Vedic Age

The foundations for Hinduism were established!
Caste and Social Mobility

- By the end of the Vedic Age, caste distinctions had become central institutions in Aryan India.

- In other empires, states maintained public order in India the caste system served as a principal foundation of social stability.

- Individuals are often more closely identified with their jati than their cities or states, and have played a large role in maintaining social discipline.

- Patriarchal society developed; women influenced affairs within their families but enjoyed no public authority.
**Works Cited**

