

Indus Valley Civilization

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A renowned scholar, Srimat Swami Harshanandaji Maharaj is President, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. The swamiji has a number of inspiring and informative books on Hinduism, youth development, etc to his credit. In this excellent article, Swami Harshanandaji gives us a fresh picture of the oldest civilization on earth.

During the middle of the 19th century, when two engineers, who were in charge of



Statuette of a bearded man: Mohenjo Daro

constructing a railway line, got the mounds at Harappa (now in Pakistan) dug for obtaining burnt bricks to be used as ballast, little did they know that they were digging up a past and a hitherto unknown facet of the history of India. But that was a great, even exciting, discovery.

Suspecting the existence of the remnants of an ancient civilization, systematic excavations

were undertaken in 1921-22 by the Archaeological Department of India. These excavations led to the detection of a proto-historic city, now called 'Harappa'.

Further excavations over the next few decades in about 80 sites all over India revealed some more prehistoric cultures and civilizations. However, almost all the cultures cognate to the discoveries at Harappa were concentrated in the Sind, Baluchistan and Punjab areas, now in Pakistan, while a few were found in Gujarat and Rajasthan also.

By far the most extensively researched findings are at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro (both in Pakistan now). The other sites studied are at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Lothal, Rangpur (both in Gujarat), Bahawalpur Chanhudaro, Amri, Ali Murad, Pandi Wahi, Dabarkot

and Quetta (all in Pakistan now).

The archaeological finds at various levels or depths have been assigned to different periods of history, the oldest being 4000 BC and the most recent one, 2200 BC.

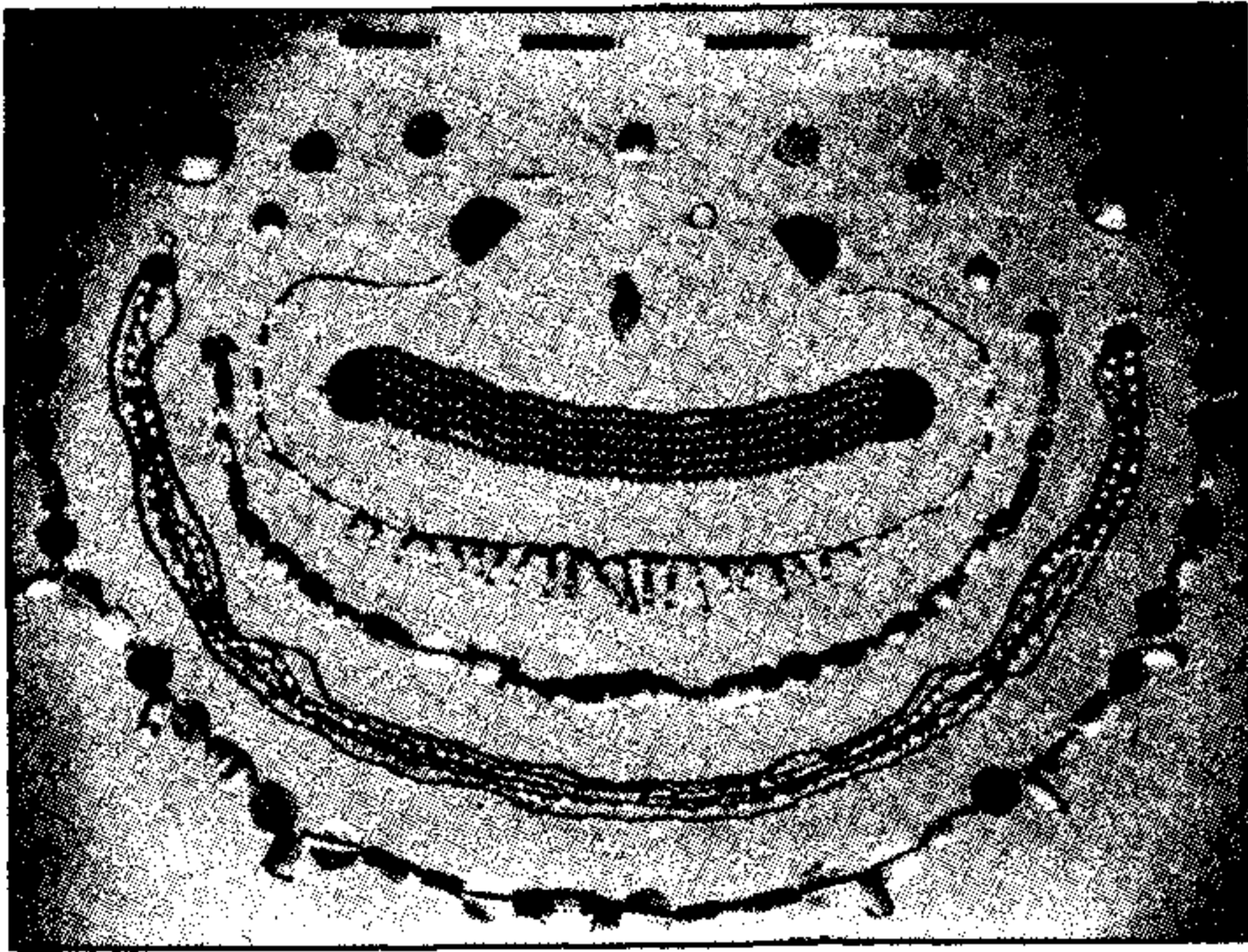
As regards the nature of this civilization and culture, several conjectures have been made as to whether it was pre-Aryan and pre-Vedic called Dravidian, mostly by the European scholars. These scholars opine that this civilization was destroyed by the invading Aryans around 1500 BC. However, researches based on the various findings have revealed that Harappan culture and those of other allied sites were a continuation of the Vedic culture, perhaps a later phase, and that the Aryans were an indigenous people who had always lived in the Indo-Gangetic plains.

The disappearance of the Harappan civilization might have taken place due to the drying up of the Saraswati river, disturbance of the ecological balance, and severe climatic changes resulting in a great famine, probably during the period between 2200 and 1900 BC.

The Harappa town was a square of



Seal depicting Shiva



Necklaces from Mohenjo Daro

about 1.5 km (0.9 mile) on each side, and stood on 4.8 km (3 miles) of land. It was laid out in a grid pattern of streets. The houses were built of burnt bricks, whose dimensions conformed strictly to the *Kashyapa Samhita* (viz, 11.75" x 5.25" x 7.5" and two more sizes). The houses had only one main door for entrance, fixed in the side lanes. There were courtyards inside. Windows opened to the streets. Small houses had just two rooms whereas the bigger ones could have even twenty-five rooms. Bathrooms, latrines and sanitary arrangements were very good. Apart from bricks and mortar, wood was generously used, not only for construction purposes but also for a wide range of furniture, like cots, chairs, stools, tables and easy chairs. Firewood and charcoal were in use in the domestic stoves. Rooms



The Great Bath, Mohenjo Daro

were often set apart for the purpose of worship.

Roads were straight and were maintained well. Special chambers had been constructed for the collection and disposal of garbage.

One of the most striking features of the Harappa town was its big granary or warehouse. There were 12 granaries arranged in two parallel rows, with proper arrangements for ventilation and passages of approach. There were also grain millers built on brick platforms where wooden pestles were used for crushing the grains.

Mohenjo Daro ('the mound of the dead') is situated on the west bank of the Indus river, about 600 km (375 miles) to the south-west of Harappa.

This site, better preserved, is larger than Harappa. The layout is strikingly similar to that of Harappa.

The chief attraction of this site is what is now called 'The Great Bath'. It is built of brick set in gypsum mortar with a damp-proof course of bitumen. The dimensions are: 54 by 33 metres (180 by 108 ft). The outer walls are massive, 2 to 2.5 metres (7-8 ft) in thickness. In the centre there is an open paved quadrangle, with verandas on four sides. At the back of the verandas are galleries and rooms. In the centre of the paved quadrangles is a large swimming bath 11.8 by 7 metres (39 by 23 ft), which is lined by finely dressed brick laid in gypsum

mortar covered with bitumen. There are steps leading down to a low platform for the convenience of the bathers. Arrangements for some kind of steam-bath are also found.

The following are some features common to all the sites of the Indus Valley civilization.

This civilization was more ancient and comprehensive than the ones of Egypt, Sumeria, Assyria and Mesopotamia.

People were mostly vege-



A Model of a Mohenjo Daro Street

tarians and consumed fish also. Apart from wheat, barley and rice they grew several varieties of fruits and vegetables also, like pumpkin, dates and coconuts. They wore clothes made out of cotton, jute and fibres. Several varieties of dressing hair were common among the women. The ornaments used were girdles, ear-rings, bangles, necklaces, nose-rings, anklets, hairpins, and beads. Turbans and head-dresses were used by women too.

The use of metals like gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, nickel, bronze, etc as also many precious stones like diamonds, rubies, emeralds, topaz, was well-known to them. Razors for shaving and highly polished mirrors were made out of these metals.

Soldiers used such weapons as bows and arrows, spears, axes, maces, catapults, and slings.

Weights and measures had been standardized. One scale discovered in the ruins has very accurate markings.

Trade and commerce by land and by sea were flourishing. Contacts had been well established with Sumeria, Babylonia, and Egypt for trade and commerce.

The people were good at arts and crafts also, as can be surmised through the various well-finished toys unearthed from the ruins.

Chanhudaro town was famous for this.

Music and dancing were also known to the ancients. Stringed instruments resembling a lute (*vina*), cymbals, drums (*mridanga*), etc were in use, as can be guessed through their figures on the seals found.

Pots and jars with various drawings and paintings have been recovered from the sites.

Various traditional Indian games like dice, played in modern times, were known to them and were popular too.

As regards the disposal of the dead, the methods of cremation, burial as also leaving the bodies to be eaten up by birds and animals, seem to have existed. Bodies of babies and little children were generally interred in pots and then buried.

One enigmatic aspect of the Indus Valley civilization is the script discovered on the various seals. All attempts over the last few decades by eminent paleographers to decipher them have not yielded much results. Whether the seals were amulets containing some mantras, or whether what is written is some kind of the earliest form of Brahmi script, it is very difficult to say.

Coming to religious beliefs, worship of Shiva-Pashupati, Goddess Durga, lingas and certain animals and trees like bison, fish, serpent, holy basil, and peepal, seem to have existed.

In conclusion, it may be said that the Indus Valley civilization and culture represents the later phase of the Rig Vedic culture and there is no clinching evidence to support the other views that have been hazarded by the European scholars based on insufficient evidence or wrong assumptions. □



A boat: from Harappa