Chapter 12: The Indus Valley

# Chapter Summary [Copied from Olszewski 2019, Chapter 12]

* Many domesticated plants and animals in the Indus Valley region were introduced from either the Middle East or Asia. One animal exception was zebu cattle, which were locally domesticated. New evidence shows that local rice, millets, pulses, and sesame also were domesticated in the Indus region. Early villagers also made extensive use of wild plant foods and wild animals.
* Regional networks in the Neolithic period brought exotic items, such as marine shell and lapis lazuli, into the Indus Valley area. These were used to make personal ornamentation.
* During the Early Harappan period, some sites became much larger and have evidence for public architecture such as “citadels” and public baths. Some of the houses at these sites also were much larger in size and may represent the homes of people with more access to resources. There is little evidence, however, in grave goods from burials for distinctions between elites and commoners.
* Pottery during the Early Harappan period shows evidence of several different regional styles.
* The Mature Harappan period was the height of the Indus Valley urbanism phenomenon, with several large sites housing dense populations. These cities were carefully planned and had streets running east–west and north–south. Agricultural productivity was especially high, probably partly because of relatively stable climatic conditions.
* The large cities of the Mature Harappan period were supported by trade and exchange with smaller towns and rural hamlets. Standardized weights were developed to use in these transactions. People during this time also participated in widespread trade and exchange networks with areas such as the Persian Gulf, the highlands of Iran, and Mesopotamia. This has been called the Middle Asian Interaction Sphere.
* Like complex political entities elsewhere, Harappan society included people engaged in many different types of tasks. Among these were craft specialists, farmers, fishers, ritual specialists, and elites. Larger houses in the cities had more items made of exotic materials, suggesting they were the homes of elites. Elite members of society, however, do not appear to have been kings such as were typical for places like Egypt, Mesopotamia, or China.
* Harappan groups had a written script, but it has not yet been deciphered. Symbol sets of the Indus script were generally just 1 to 5 signs long. They are found on seals, pottery, personal ornaments, and tablets. They are thought to represent words, concepts, and syllables. Some may have been economic or owners’ marks, and others may have been ritual charms.
* After 1900 BC, during the Late Harappan period, the large urban cities were abandoned and settlement shifted eastward. There was increased regionalism. These changes may be related in part to instability in the monsoons, which meant that drought conditions became more frequent and people living in the Indus Valley region were unable to produce large enough quantities of food to support dense populations at urban centers. Loss of population likely affected trade and exchange networks as fewer crafts specialists might mean less demand for exotic materials. The use of the Indus script and standardized weights also declined in importance.
* Later on, the Indus Valley area was resettled, likely by descendants of earlier Harappan period groups, but their archaeological signature was different from that of the Mature Harappan period.

# Key Terms

**Harappa**: excavations at this site in the Upper Indus Valley document a sequence of development from the Early Harappan to the Mature Harappan periods and then the Late Harappan period decline. It is significant in part because it shows continuity from preurban to urban societies in the Indus Valley.

**Kot Diji**: a small Early Harappan period site in the Lower Indus Valley with a higher elevation citadel that has large mudbrick buildings surrounded by a perimeter wall. On the lower ground outside the wall were smaller houses built of mudbrick. The settlement appears to have been destroyed by fire (whether deliberate or accidental is not known), but then later occupied during the Mature Harappan period.

**Mehrgarh**: a relatively well-documented site in the Indus Valley region. Its deposits contain a sequence of development from Neolithic period food-producing economies through the Chalcolithic period and into the Early Harappan period.

**Mohenjo-daro**: the largest known Indus Valley city. It has a citadel area with large mudbrick structures such as the so-called Granary and Great Bath. The function of these buildings is not known, although likely they are related to administrative and political task specialists.

**Shortugai**: a Mature Harappan period trading outpost in northern Afghanistan. It is located near mines for the semiprecious lapis lazuli, and people here presumably helped in exporting this stone raw material to craft workshops in the Indus Valley.