

Earliest Cities

Class 6 Social Science

Complete Study Notes

Learning Objectives

Understand the origin and significance of the Harappan Civilization. Explore the remarkable town planning, architecture, lifestyle, crafts, trade, and occupations of the Harappan people. Learn about important cities such as Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Dholavira, and Lothal, and understand the possible reasons behind the decline of one of the world's earliest urban civilizations.

Introduction to the Earliest Cities

The Harappan Civilization, also known as the Indus Valley Civilization, was one of the earliest urban civilizations in the world. It flourished nearly 4,700 years ago along the banks of the Indus River and its tributaries. The discovery of Harappa completely changed our understanding of ancient Indian history and revealed that highly organized cities existed long before many other civilizations.

Archaeologists have discovered several Harappan cities across present-day India and Pakistan. These cities demonstrate advanced planning, excellent engineering, and a well-organized society that valued cleanliness, trade, craftsmanship, and efficient administration.

Discovery of Harappa and the Growth of Early Cities

The ruins of Harappa were first noticed about 150 years ago when engineers were constructing railway tracks in Punjab. Thousands of ancient bricks were removed from the site without realizing their historical importance. Several decades later, archaeologists carefully excavated the area and discovered that Harappa belonged to one of the oldest civilizations in the Indian subcontinent.

As more ancient settlements were discovered, historians recognized them as part of a single civilization known as the Harappan Civilization. These cities developed along rivers that provided water, fertile land, and convenient transport routes for agriculture and trade. The Harappan people built large cities with well-planned streets, public buildings, marketplaces, workshops, and residential areas.

Town Planning and Architecture

One of the most outstanding features of the Harappan Civilization was its carefully planned cities. Most cities were divided into two main sections—the Citadel, built on a raised platform, and the Lower Town, where most people lived.

The citadel contained important public buildings and administrative structures, while the lower town consisted of neatly arranged residential houses. Streets were laid out in a grid pattern, crossing each other at right angles, making transportation and movement easier.

Harappan houses were built using strong baked bricks and often had one or two storeys. Many homes included courtyards, wells, bathrooms, and drainage outlets. One of the greatest engineering

achievements of the civilization was its advanced drainage system. Covered drains ran alongside roads, carrying wastewater away from houses and keeping the cities clean.

The Great Bath: The famous Great Bath at Mohenjodaro was a large public water tank surrounded by changing rooms. Built with baked bricks and waterproof materials, it was probably used for religious ceremonies and ritual bathing.

Daily Life, Crafts, and Trade

The Harappan people lived organized and prosperous lives. Many worked as farmers, craftsmen, traders, potters, metal workers, bead makers, and builders. Skilled artisans produced beautiful pottery, jewellery, tools, seals, toys, and sculptures using stone, clay, copper, bronze, gold, and silver.

Children played with clay toys, miniature carts, and animal figures, showing that recreation was also an important part of daily life. Merchants traded goods both within the civilization and with distant regions.

The Harappans imported valuable raw materials such as copper, tin, precious stones, and shells from different parts of India and neighbouring countries. These materials were transformed into finished products that were traded across vast distances, making the civilization economically strong.

Important Harappan Cities

Several Harappan cities have been discovered, each with unique features. Harappa and Mohenjodaro were among the largest and most important urban centres.

- **Dholavira**, located in present-day Gujarat, was unique because it was divided into three sections and protected by massive stone walls. The city also had an advanced water conservation system designed to store rainwater.
- **Lothal**, also in Gujarat, became an important port city because of its large dockyard. Ships could enter through connected waterways, allowing traders to transport goods to distant lands. This made Lothal one of the earliest known centres of maritime trade.

Decline of the Harappan Civilization

Around 3,900 years ago, the Harappan Civilization gradually began to decline. People abandoned many cities, writing disappeared, trade reduced, and public buildings fell into disrepair. Historians believe several factors may have contributed to this decline. Possible reasons include changing river courses, repeated floods, prolonged droughts, deforestation, environmental changes, and shortages of essential resources. Although the exact cause remains uncertain, the civilization slowly disappeared, giving way to new cultures and settlements across the Indian subcontinent.

Practice Questions

1. What is the Harappan Civilization?
2. Name the two main parts of a Harappan city.
3. Why is the Great Bath of Mohenjodaro famous?
4. Name two important Harappan cities in Gujarat.
5. Mention any two possible reasons for the decline of the Harappan Civilization.

Answer Key

- **ANSWER 1:** The Harappan Civilization, also known as the Indus Valley Civilization, was one of the world's earliest urban civilizations that flourished about 4,700 years ago along the Indus River and its tributaries.
- **ANSWER 2:** The two main parts of a Harappan city were the Citadel and the Lower Town.
- **ANSWER 3:** The Great Bath is famous because it was a large waterproof public bathing tank, probably used for religious ceremonies and ritual bathing.
- **ANSWER 4:** Two important Harappan cities in Gujarat are Dholavira and Lothal.
- **ANSWER 5:** Possible reasons for the decline include changes in river courses, floods, droughts, deforestation, and environmental changes.