

◀ The ruins of Mohenjodaro provide clues about an ancient Indus River civilization.

# Unlocking the Secrets of Mohenjodaro

## 14.1 Introduction

In Chapter 13, you explored the geography of the Indian subcontinent. You learned that the first settlements in India were located in fertile river valleys. In this chapter, you will visit one of those settlements, the city of **Mohenjodaro**.

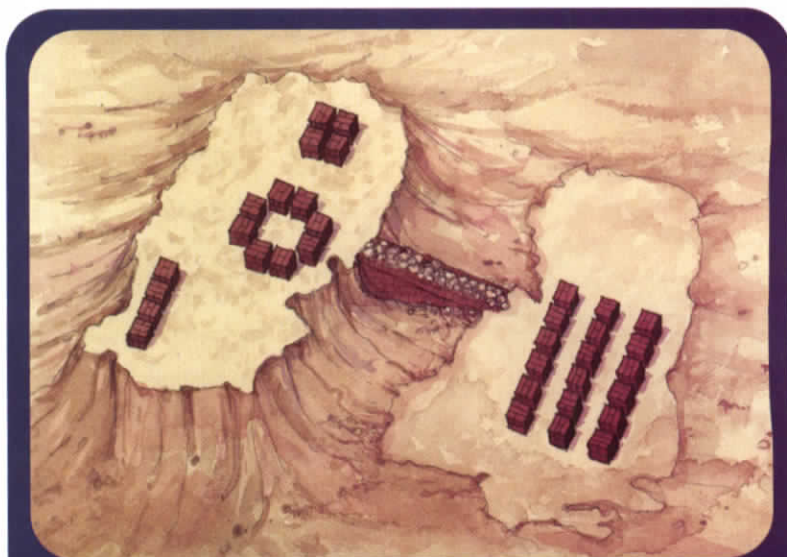
Mohenjodaro was located in the Indus River valley, in northern India. Many other towns also were clustered near the Sarasvati River. These settlements became known as the **Indus-Sarasvati civilization**. It is also called the Harappan civilization, after another city, Harappa. The civilization flourished for 800 years, from about 2700 B.C.E. to 1900 B.C.E.

The cities of Harappa and Mohenjodaro were the two great centers of this civilization. Mohenjodaro means “place or hill of the dead.” Archeologists found its ruins in 1922. Carefully, they excavated (dug up) the ruins. They discovered that the city had two main parts.

The first part was a raised area that was used as a citadel, or fort. The citadel was surrounded by a wall. In times of trouble, people probably gathered in this area.

The second part of Mohenjodaro was below the citadel. The lower city had many houses and workshops. This area was probably where people lived in times of peace.

What was daily life like in Mohenjodaro? In this chapter, you will unlock the secrets of this ancient city. You’ll explore its ruins and study its artifacts. What can these clues reveal about the city’s people and their civilization?



Use this illustration as a graphic organizer to help you explore the ruins of Mohenjodaro.





The photo above is a view of the Mohenjo-daro ruins from the top of the citadel. Use this map to locate Mohenjo-daro on the Indian subcontinent.

**citadel** a fortress built to protect a city

## 14.2 The Mystery of Mohenjo-daro

Mohenjo-daro was built on the banks of the Indus River. From the city's ruins, we can see that the city was carefully planned. To the west, the **citadel** rose up on a platform of mud and brick. Below the citadel, nine streets divided the lower city into blocks, like those of a modern city. The streets were lined with houses and workshops made of mud bricks.

Mohenjo-daro was a large city. At one time, as many as 50,000 people may have lived there. Like the other people of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization, they had an advanced culture. But one great mystery remains. What happened to this civilization?

No one knows for sure. After about 1900 B.C.E., the great cities of the Indus River valley disappeared. Some scientists believe that hostile invaders were to blame. According to this idea, fierce warriors swept in from central Asia and destroyed the local civilization.

Other scientists think natural events caused the decline of the Indus-Sarasvati civilization. Some point to floods and earthquakes that struck the region around 1900 B.C.E. Others suggest

that the Indus River changed course and people moved to the Ganges River valley in search of a steady water supply.

All that remains today of the Indus-Sarasvati people are the buildings and artifacts they left behind. These clues can tell us a great deal about how they lived. Let's explore the ruins of Mohenjodaro and see what we can find out.

### 14.3 Weights and Scale

Inside the walls of Mohenjodaro's citadel, several stone weights and a scale were found near a large building. When archeologists searched the ruins of this building, they found bits of grain such as barley and wheat. They decided the building must have been a **granary**. Workers may have crushed the grain into flour. The flour may have been used for trading with other cities.

The scale and weights found near the granary are interesting clues. They suggest that ancient Indians might have used grain like money. They may have weighed the grain and used different amounts to trade for various goods. Farmers also had their own granaries outside the city, so perhaps the grain in the citadel's granary was collected as taxes.

**granary** a place to store grain



These stone weights were found in Mohenjodaro.





This is the Great Bath as it looks today.

#### **14.4 The Great Bath**

The most dramatic feature of Mohenjo-daro's citadel was the Great Bath. The Great Bath was a pool built of waterproofed brick. It was 39 feet long and 8 feet deep. Small dressing rooms circled the pool. One of the rooms contained a well that supplied the bath with water. Dirty water was removed through a drain that ran along one side of the bath.

It seems certain that the people of Mohenjo-daro used the pool to bathe. On a hot, clear day, they probably enjoyed washing themselves in the bath's cooling waters. Some archeologists think the Great Bath was also used for religious rituals. They point out that bathing rituals are important in India's major religion, Hinduism. Ancient Hindu temples often featured bathing pools.

## 14.5 Statue and Beads

In the lower city, archeologists found a stone statue seven inches high. It shows how men in Mohenjodaro might have looked and dressed. The figure has a short, tidy beard and a clean upper lip. His hair is tied with a band. He is wearing a patterned robe draped over his left shoulder. He has a calm and noble expression. Archeologists are not sure who the statue represents. Some think he may have been a priest and a king.



What do these artifacts reveal about the culture of the people who made them?

Beautiful stone beads in many shapes and colors have been found throughout Mohenjodaro. Women probably wore them in necklaces, bracelets, earrings, and rings. Indian bead makers also made beads of clay and baked them in hot ovens called *kilns*. They drilled holes in the beads and strung them into necklaces.

## 14.6 Seals

Small stone seals are among the most mysterious of Mohenjodaro's artifacts. They have been found in large numbers throughout the ruins. The seals are carved with pictographs, pictures used to stand for objects, sounds, or ideas. More than 400 pictographs have been discovered, but archeologists don't know what most of them stand for. Many seals show animals such as buffalo, bulls, tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses, fish, and crocodiles.

No one knows how the seals were used, but scientists have made some educated guesses. Many of the seals have a small loop on the back. Perhaps people wore them as charms to keep away evil. The seals may also have been pressed into wax to make a kind of tag. Merchants might have placed the wax tags on their goods to show who owned them.

What do you think the images on these seals represent?





## 14.7 Sewer System

**sewer system** a network of pipes that disposes of sewage, or waste water

A great achievement of Mohenjodaro was its sewer system. A **sewer system** carries waste away from houses. Mohenjodaro's complex system of drains, pipes, wells, and bathrooms set the city apart from other settlements of its time. Two thousand years would pass before the world would see another system like it, in ancient Rome.

A network of clay pipes connected Mohenjodaro's buildings and homes to the main sewer system. Dirty, used water and waste flowed in channels along the streets. This sewage then emptied into the Indus River. The sewer system made it possible for both rich and poor to have bathrooms in their homes.

Deep wells made of brick were located throughout the city. People stored water, including rainfall, in the wells.

Pieces of Mohenjodaro's sewer system can still be seen in the city's ruins.





## 14.8 Homes

Most of Mohenjodaro's people lived in the lower city, which was three times the size of the citadel. Rows of houses lined the streets. The houses had flat roofs and were two stories high. Like most of the city's buildings, they were made of mud bricks.

The houses faced narrow alleys. The backs of the houses opened onto courtyards where families could gather. The houses had narrow windows on the second floor with screens made of hard clay called *terra-cotta* or a see-through mineral called *alabaster*.

Homes had from one to a dozen rooms. Scientists believe that poorer people lived in the smaller homes, while richer citizens lived in the larger ones.

This narrow alley in the ruins of Mohenjodaro is lined with houses. Notice that there are no windows on the ground floor.





What game pieces can you identify in this picture?

## 14.9 Games

The people of Mohenjodaro enjoyed playing games. They crafted many objects for toys and parts of game sets. Archeologists have uncovered dice, stone balls, grooved clay tracks, and stone game boards.

The game of chess was probably invented in India. An ancient Indian book describes a war game played with dice and pieces called *pawns*. Although modern chess is not played with dice, historians believe the war game is an early form of chess. The small carved game pieces found at Mohenjodaro may have been used to play this game.

The children of Mohenjodaro played simpler games. Some of the objects found by archeologists seem to be children's toys. For example, children probably rolled stone balls along clay mazes and tracks.

## 14.10 Clay Models

Archeologists have found small clay models all around Mohenjodaro. Most of the models are made of terra cotta. In one model, two bulls are attached to a yoke (wooden harness). The bulls are pulling a person in a two-wheeled cart.

The model may be a toy, but archeologists believe it also shows how farm goods were transported to the city's market. On market day, farmers loaded their crops into carts. The crops

Children in Mohenjodaro may have played with clay models like this one.



probably included barley, cotton, dates, melons, peas, rice, sesame seeds, and wheat. Then the farmers hitched their bulls to the carts and headed to the market. There they sold or traded their goods with other farmers.

## 14.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the Indus-Sarasvati civilization by exploring the city of Mohenjodaro. Mohenjodaro was a large and well-planned city. Its people enjoyed a high quality of life. They had private homes with indoor bathrooms. A complex sewer system carried away waste. People had time, after meeting their basic needs for food and shelter, to express themselves through arts and crafts. As the discovery of game pieces suggest, they even had time to play.

Historians and archeologists continue to investigate what happened to this remarkable civilization. Perhaps one day you can help solve the mystery.

In the next chapter, you will learn about one of the world's major religions, Hinduism. This religion began in ancient India. It continues to influence the lives of millions of people today.

The ruins at Mohenjodaro can be clearly seen from the air.

