

Mohenjodaro

Mohenjodaro or “heap of the dead” is the largest city excavated of the Indus Valley, or Harappa Civilization. The city flourished between 2600 BCE and 1900 BCE, although the first signs of settlement in the area have been dated to the period of 3500 BCE (Kenoyer 4). Excavation at this level is impossible due to the high water table that makes even simple excavations of Mohenjodaro difficult (Kenoyer 4). The city covers around 200 hectares of land and at its height may have had a population of 85 000 people (Habib 37). The site is located in the modern Larkana district of Sindh province in Pakistan. Mohenjodaro was the largest city in the southern portion of the Indus Valley Civilization and important for trade and governance of this area.

The two largest cities of the Indus Civilization, Harappa and Mohenjodaro, have a similar layout and show signs of civil planning. The Great Mound, or Citadel, dominates the west end of Mohenjodaro. The mound rises 40 feet above the plain at present time; it would have been higher at the time Mohenjodaro was inhabited. The mound runs 400 – 500 yards north to south, and 200 - 300 yards east to west (Habib 41). There is a gap between the mound and the lower city. Because of the large size and separation from the rest of the city, it is thought the mound may have been used for a religious or administrative purpose (Wheeler 47). This hypothesis is strengthened by the architecture found on the top of the mound. The mound at Mohenjodaro consists of two distinct features: the Great Bath and the Granary or Meeting hall. The Great Bath is a sunken tank on the top of the mound, the tank measures 12 meters long, 7 meters wide and is sunk 2.4 meters below the depth of the mud bricks that surround it (<http://www.mohenjodaro.net/greatbathatdawn24.html>). The Great Bath is one of the first aspects of Indus Valley life that can be related to modern Hinduism. The Great Bath may also be related to the concept of River worship, much like the worship of the Ganges today.

Mohenjodaro is situated between what used to be two separate rivers it was almost an island. This would have made the rivers a very important resource for the city itself, it would have depended on it for most things: trade, transportation and its way of life. It has been suggested that the people of Mohenjodaro were concerned with ritual purification, much like some Hindus of today. This conclusion draws strength from the existence of the Great Bath on the top of the Citadel and a small stone structure that has been excavated at the top of the great staircase leading to the Citadel. It has been suggested this building was a bathroom for ritual cleansing before you entered the Citadel, as there is a well and drainage system in the building (Wheeler 44).

There are a small number of hard facts related to the religion of the Indus Valley Civilization, as their script has not been deciphered, but we do know they were polytheistic. What insights have been gained about their religion come from the thousands of seals that have been found in Indus Valley sites. Mohenjodaro has been a major contributing site for these seals. In 1977, 68% of the seals that had been found had been uncovered in Mohenjodaro itself (Habib 59). The seals show a wide range of subject matter; some have script on them while others have no inscriptions at all. These seals have been found throughout the Indus Valley, yet the script found on the seals shows no regional variation (Habib 60). Although the seals are diverse in subject matter, there does seem to be some dominant themes running through them. Many of the seals show animals. These animals can be divided into three categories: mythical, ambiguous, and actual (Goyal 29). The animals even within these categories are varied too. It has been suggested that the animals on the seals represent the zoomorphic forms of deities, much like the gods of Hinduism today. The Hindus' deities can take animal form when they desire, or at the very least, have an animal that is associated with them (i.e. their mounts) (Habib 54). One

interesting fact is that there are no birds depicted on any seals found to date, just on pottery (Goyal 30).

If the seals were to be used to judge what was important in the religion of the Indus people, then the pipal or asvattha tree would have been of great importance. The tree is depicted on a number of seals that have been found (Goyal 29). The depiction of trees is almost as diverse as the depiction of animals. On some seals, the tree is endowed with a human shape, or has a human head in the top foliage (Goyal 29); in some seals, the trees have rails or wall surrounding them, almost like a sanctuary (Goyal 29).

There are clues that the Indus Valley people may also have worshipped a Mother Goddess. Many terracotta female figures have been found throughout the empire. Most of these figures have been found within what are assumed private homes leading to the assumption that the Goddess may have been the form of divinity worshipped within the home (Goyal 17). Many of these figures are standing figures that are almost nude or depicted as wearing a girdle or band, an elaborate headdress, collar, and necklace (Goyal 17). Feminine figures are also depicted on many of the Indus seals, thus showing the importance of this feminine figure to the Indus Valley Civilization (Goyal 17). Stones that resemble *yoni* stones of modern Hinduism have also been found (Wheeler 109). *Yoni* stones are used to represent the female reproductive organ in modern Hinduism, and it is speculated that the stones found at Mohenjodaro may have had the same function, acting as a representation of the female reproductive principle. This interpretation may just be transference from modern Hinduism to the past in the hopes of better understanding the origin of some aspect of Hinduism.

The people of the Indus Valley also appeared to have worshipped a male god. The most important depiction of a speculated modern Hinduism god is seal number 420 in Mackay's list

(Goyal 19). Many other seals have been found depicting the same figure, but not in the same detail as number 420 (Goyal 19). This seal has been interpreted as depicting a proto-Siva type of figure. The deity has three visible faces, and is seated in a yogic position on a throne flanked by two antelope. The deity is wearing a headdress that has horns, the shape being reminiscent of the crescent moon that modern representations of Siva show on his forehead. Animals also surround the deity and Siva is regarded as the Lord of Animals (Goyal 19). The deity is ithyphallic, and what are thought to be *linga* stones have been found. *Linga* stones in modern Hinduism are used to represent the erect male phallus or the male reproductive power of the god Siva, but again these stones may be something entirely different from objects of religious worship (Goyal 19). Even today, Siva is worshiped in both a human form and in that of the phallus. The deity sitting in a yoga-like position suggests that yoga may have been a legacy of the very first great culture that occupied India.

All interpretations that are made about the Indus Valley Civilization may one day be proven wrong, if the script of this civilization is ever deciphered. There have been some people who have claimed to have deciphered the script, but none of their systems have gained wide spread acceptance. Since the script shows consistency across the empire, there can be little doubt that it is some kind of language, but until we can decipher and translate it, the great city of Mohenjodaro will remain awash in controversy and speculation.

Reference List and Related Readings

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Harappa

Indus Valley Civilization

Indus Valley Seals

Indus Valley Script

Goddess Worship

Siva

Nature Worship in Modern Hinduism

Yoga

Pipal or Asvattha tree

River Worship

Yoni and/or *Linga* stones

Noteworthy Websites Related to Mohenjodaro

<http://www.mohenjodaro.net/>

<http://www.harappa.com/>

<http://www.harappa.com/har/moen0.html>

<http://www.mohenjodaro.net/mohenjodarobibliography.html>

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