Name: _____

Date: _____

The Lost Cities of the Indus

Egypt left behind pyramids, and Mesopotamia left ziggurats. Both were remembered in ancient stories and legends. But a third advanced civilization remained forgotten until 1856, when British engineers in present-day Pakistan needed crushed stone to support new train rails. Nearby, they found millions of ancient, identical baked bricks from the ruins of a lost city.

A Forgotten Civilization

The engineers crushed the bricks to level their tracks, but decades later, archaeologists returned to investigate. They eventually discovered more than 1,500 other settlements stretching over 1,000 miles across an area larger than Texas.

Unlike the Nile, the Indus is part of a vast river system that created a web of fertile farmland hundreds of miles from the main river. Seasonal floods spread rich silt and soaked the soil like a sponge. As floodwaters receded, the soaked soil provided fertile farmland for growing crops.

Indus Writing

Thousands of inscribed objects show that the people of the Indus River Valley developed a writing system. Archaeologists have not yet deciphered it because the inscriptions are so short that trying to understand them is like trying to piece together a language from confetti. As a result, their government, religion, and social structure remain a mystery.

Harappa and Mohenjo Daro

The civilization contained thousands of settlements, including several large cities. Two of the best known are Harappa and Mohenjo Daro. Both were planned on a grid of wide, straight streets and surrounded by thick walls. Many people lived in sturdy brick houses with as many as three floors. Some houses had bathrooms and toilets connected to the world's first sewer system. Farmers grew wheat and barley, while herders raised sheep, cattle, and goats.

Common Standards and Distant Trade

The ancient people of the Indus River Valley used precise, standardized weights and measures. Even bricks in different cities were made to the same proportions. Common standards made it easier to trade cotton, lumber, grain, and livestock across the civilization. Indus trade reached well beyond their region, with Indus beads discovered thousands of miles away in Mesopotamia.

Egypt had pharaohs, and Mesopotamia had powerful rulers like Hammurabi. But archaeologists have found no royal palaces or tombs in the Indus cities. There are no monuments celebrating great rulers or victories in war. Evidence suggests that the cities relied heavily on cooperation and trade.

Everyday Life

Archaeologists have also found clues to everyday life. Adults wore jewelry, artisans made decorated pottery, and people played board games with dice. Children played with clay carts, animals with movable parts, spinning tops, rattles, and whistles.

Decline

The Indus River civilization developed around 3000 BCE and flourished for about 1,500 years, growing to a population of more than five million people. Around 1700 BCE, the civilization began to decline, and by 1500 BCE, most cities were abandoned.

Archaeologists have many theories about why the civilization collapsed, but no definite answers. One strong possibility is environmental change. Over time, monsoons weakened and rains failed, creating severe droughts. Rivers shifted course or dried up completely, cutting off water supplies and making farming more difficult. As conditions became more difficult, people gradually abandoned the great cities for smaller rural villages.

The Story Is Still Unfolding

Archaeologists have excavated only a fraction of the many cities and settlements of the Indus River Valley civilization, so our understanding of the region is still evolving. Perhaps one day scholars will decipher the Indus writing and finally allow these ancient voices to speak for themselves.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

The Indus River civilization remained f__r__o__t__n for thousands of years until B__i__i__h railroad e__g__n__e__s uncovered ancient b__i__ks in 1856. Archaeologists later discovered t__o__s__n__s of s__t__l__m__n__s spread across a vast region. A great r__v__r system created f__r__i__e farmland, allowing farmers to grow c__o__s and support large cities such as H__r__p__a and M__h__n__o D__ro. These p__a__n__d cities had s__r__i__ht streets, b__i__k houses, b__t__r__o__s, drains, and s__w__rs. Common w__i__h__s, measures, and brick p__o__o__t__o__s helped connect c__m__u__i__i__s and support t__a__e across the civilization and as far away as M__s__p__t__m__a. Yet unlike E__y__t and Mesopotamia, the I__d__s cities left no p__l__c__s or monuments celebrating powerful r__l__rs. They did leave toys, j__w__l__y, pottery, g__m__s, and thousands of short i__s__r__p__i__ns that scholars still cannot read. Around 1700 BCE, the civilization began to d__c__i__e. Drought, weakening m__n__o__ns, and changing r__v__rs may have contributed as people gradually left the great c__t__es for smaller v__l__a__es.

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. Where are Mohenjo Daro and Harappa?

_____

_____

_____

★2. The text states that, "Even bricks in different cities were made to the same proportions." This suggests that the cities may have had the same government. Why would having the brick made in the same proportions in many areas suggest there was a government?

_____

_____

_____

3. How were the Indus River settlements different from sites in Mesopotamia and Egypt?

_____

_____

_____

★4. Why don't we know what happened to Mohenjo Daro and Harappa?

_____

_____

_____

★ This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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