



1.1

The Geography of Ancient India



Geographically, India has it all. If you were to travel around India, you could climb snowcapped mountains, cross wide grassy plains, hack through dense tropical forests, sail down mighty rivers, and skirt around sun-scorched deserts. You might travel under a bright blue sky or get soaked by seasonal rains.

MAIN IDEA

South Asia's physical geography affected the development of Indus Valley civilizations.

mt **MOUNTAINS, RIVERS, AND MONSOONS**

Present-day India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and Pakistan make up the large landmass, or **subcontinent**, of South Asia. This diamond-shaped landmass was originally an island. However, 40 million years ago, the large moving plates on which the continents lie drove the subcontinent into Asia. As the lands collided, they

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** How did physical geography affect the development of Indus Valley civilizations?
- 2. INTERPRET MAPS** What physical feature separates India from the continent of Asia?
- 3. MAKE INFERENCES** What positive and negative effects might the summer monsoons have had on farmers?

pushed Earth's crust upward to form the Himalaya, a 1,500-mile mountain range.

The Himalaya are the world's highest mountains. Many Himalayan peaks rise about 24,000 feet. Thirty peaks, including Mount Everest—Earth's highest point—are over 25,000 feet high.

On either side of the Himalaya lie lower mountain ranges, including the Hindu Kush, which separates what was once northwest India from present-day Afghanistan. These northern mountains form a natural barrier against invaders. The Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Bay of Bengal have provided further protection. The Deccan Plateau, which contains smaller mountain systems, makes up much of southern India.

The two major rivers of northern India, the **Indus** and the **Ganges**, both start in the Himalaya. Like the Tigris and the Euphrates in Mesopotamia, these rivers provide water for irrigation and deposit fertile soil for farming.

Strong seasonal winds called **monsoons** have long been an important element of the subcontinent's climate. These winds bring a dry season in winter. In summer, they bring a wet season with heavy rainfall.

INDUS RIVER VALLEY **mt**

Physical characteristics of the Indus River Valley offered nearly ideal conditions for agriculture. The valley's fertile soil and plentiful water supply most likely encouraged nomadic herdsmen to settle there and farm. Villages emerged. Then, around 2500 b.c., some villages grew into cities—and a civilization developed.

1.2 Harappan Civilization



Historians have studied ancient Egyptian civilization for many centuries. But

evidence of ancient India's great civilization was not discovered until the early 20th century. Then, in 1921, archaeologists unearthed an Indian culture every bit as vast and sophisticated as that of ancient Egypt: the Harappan civilization.

MAIN IDEA

One of the world's earliest and most advanced civilizations emerged in ancient India's Indus River Valley.

mt WELL-PLANNED CITIES

Around 2500 B.C., civilization developed in the Indus Valley. Fertile soil and irrigation delivered food surpluses that generated wealth. As populations boomed, villages grew into large cities. **Mohenjo-Daro** (moh-HEHN-joh DAHR-oh), one of the civilization's major cities, covered over 250 acres. Another important city, **Harappa** (huh-RA-puh), gave the Harappan civilization its name. These cities were the largest of their time. Their influence spread across a 500,000-square-mile area, which was greater than that of either ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia.

Indus Valley cities were among the world's first **planned cities**. Many were built with the same layout and the same features. Such cities had an eastern housing and business area guarded by defensive walls. To the west were public buildings, as well as structures that may have been used to store grain. Main roads as straight as rulers intersected at right angles with streets exactly half their width. Wells were another common feature. People used bricks that were all the same size to build houses. Homes had indoor plumbing with a bathroom and a toilet that emptied into excellent underground sewers.

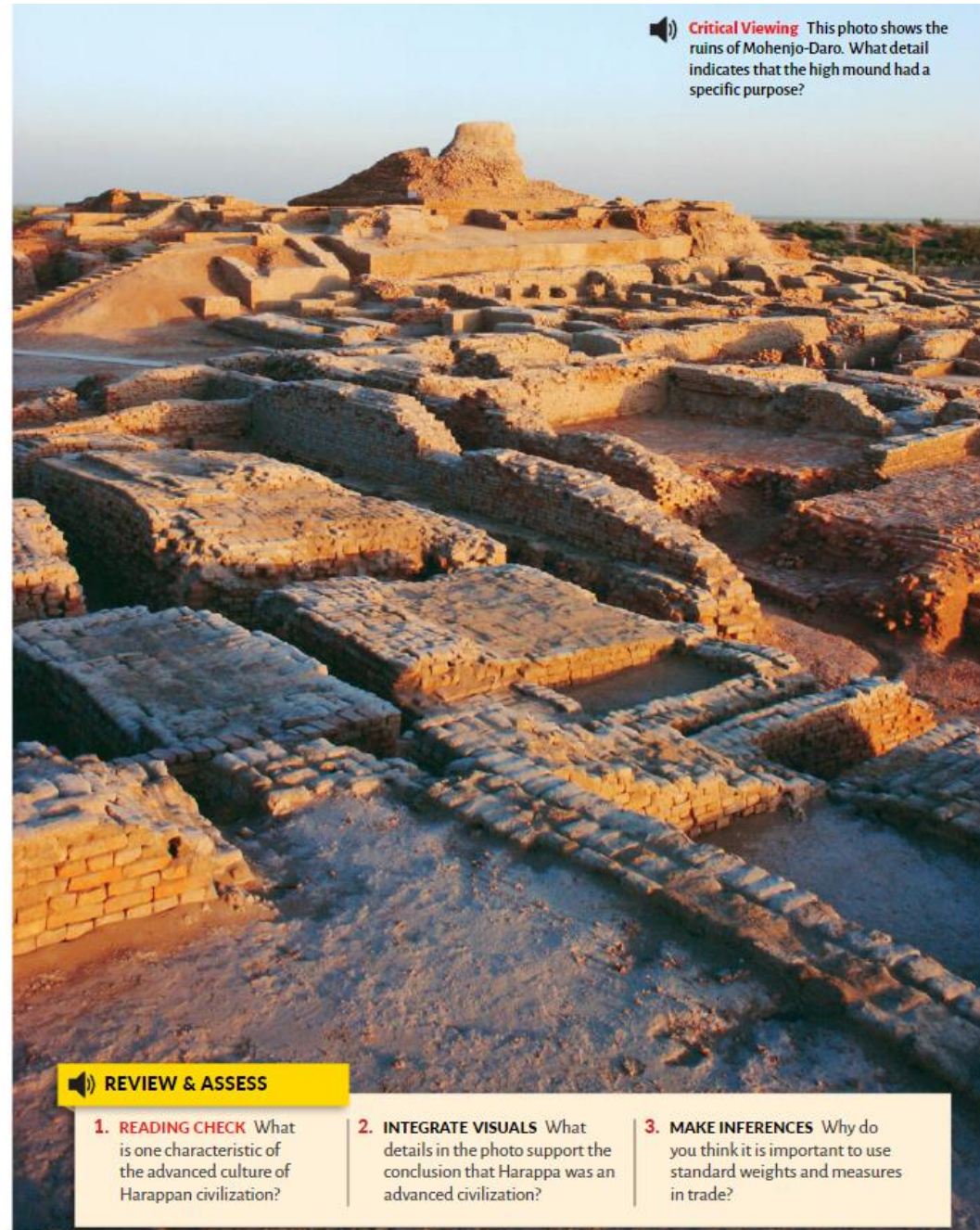
Archaeologists have found similarly styled pottery, jewelry, toys, and tools at more than 1,000 Harappan sites. These similar goods demonstrate strong cultural ties among people living hundreds of miles apart. The similarities also suggest that the Harappan civilization was a single state with a strong central government. However, historians have no idea how it was ruled.

AN ADVANCED CULTURE mt

In fact, there is a lot historians do not know about Harappan civilization because archaeologists have not figured out its writing system. It seems to be based, at least in part, on pictograms, like Sumerian cuneiform. The only writing found is on small items such as pottery, tools, and tiny square stone seals. Traders probably pressed these seals into soft clay to leave their mark on trading goods. Traders also used stone cubes as standard weights and measures.

The Harappans were long-distance traders, using boats and possibly the world's first wheeled vehicles. Their enormous trade network stretched over the mountains into what are now Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. There, archaeologists have found records of Harappan copper, gold, and ivory.

Historians know little about Harappan religion. In fact, much about the Harappans remains a mystery.



Critical Viewing This photo shows the ruins of Mohenjo-Daro. What detail indicates that the high mound had a specific purpose?

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** What is one characteristic of the advanced culture of Harappan civilization?
- 2. INTEGRATE VISUALS** What details in the photo support the conclusion that Harappa was an advanced civilization?
- 3. MAKE INFERENCES** Why do you think it is important to use standard weights and measures in trade?

1.3 Aryan Migrations



Historians believe the Indus Valley suffered a series of earthquakes from which the Harappan civilization never recovered.

Other forces were also in play. Eventually, migrations of Aryan people from the north led to the establishment of another great Indian civilization.

MAIN IDEA

After the Harappan civilization declined, Aryan immigrants forged a new Indian civilization.

According to many historians, around 1500 B.C., waves of new people began crossing the Hindu Kush into India. The migrants were a collection of tribes called **Aryans**, meaning “noble ones.” They belonged to the Indo-European people who had populated central Asia. (Some scholars have begun to dispute this theory, however. They believe that the Aryans were descendants of earlier Indus civilizations and were not foreign invaders at all.)

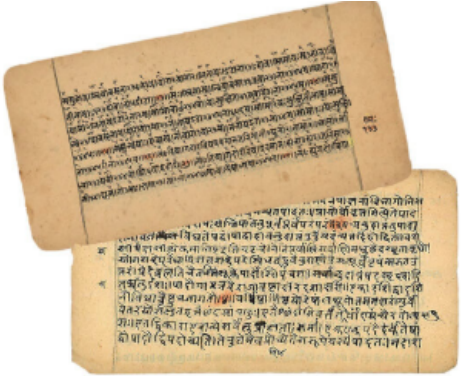
The Aryans were seminomadic herders of horses and cattle and were also fierce warriors. They built only basic houses but rode horses and used wheeled chariots.

Around 1000 B.C., what became known as Vedic civilization expanded south and east. There the people adopted agriculture, cleared the forests to cultivate crops, and settled down in villages. The villages grouped together into chiefdoms and then into kingdoms. As they conquered and mixed with native people, the Aryans had a huge cultural impact on religion, class, and language.

IMPACT ON INDIAN SOCIETY

The Aryans worshipped many gods from nature. They also had gods for friendship and for moral authority. To keep their gods happy, Aryan priests, or Brahmins, performed complicated rituals in **Sanskrit**, the Aryan language. Their religion came to be called **Brahmanism** (BRAH-muh-nih-zuhm).

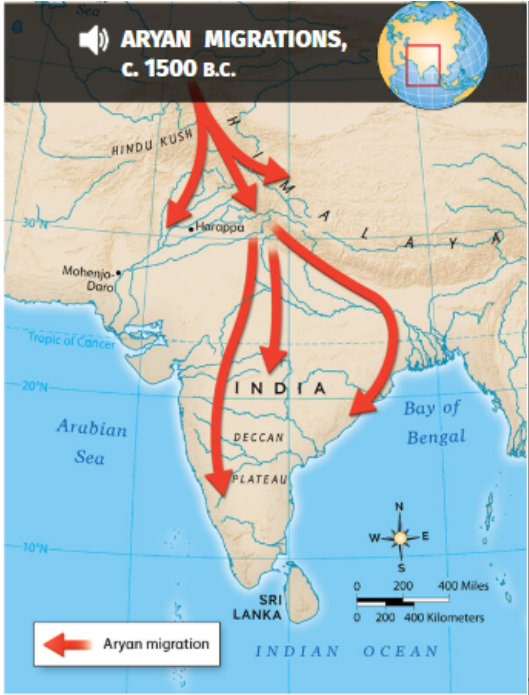
In time Brahmanism's rituals and hymns were recorded in sacred texts called the **Vedas**. The oldest text is the Rig Veda, which contains 1,028 melodic hymns.



VEDAS

The Vedas are four sacred texts that were probably composed between 1500 and 1200 B.C. For a thousand years, people passed the Vedas down orally.

After a written form of Sanskrit emerged, people were finally able to write down the Vedas. These texts tell historians what life might have been like in the Vedic period.



END OF HARAPPA

A combination of natural forces probably contributed to the Harappan civilization's downfall. First agriculture declined when rainfall diminished. Then earthquakes caused flooding and drastically changed the course of rivers. One river, the Sarasvati, no longer flowed near Harappan cities. With reduced access to river water for irrigation, agriculture became more difficult.

As food supplies declined, people abandoned the cities. By 1900 B.C., a simple village way of life had largely replaced the Harappans' advanced urban civilization.

HARAPPAN SEAL

Found at Mohenjo-Daro, this soft stone seal was probably used to mark trade goods. The marks at the top are an example of the Harappan language, which archaeologists have not yet learned to read.

Brahmanism grew powerful because the priests established beneficial relationships with kings. The Brahmins preached that the gods granted the right to rule to the kings. In return the kings upheld the authority of the Brahmins.

Over time, a social class system developed that determined how people lived. Priests were at the top, followed by warriors and nobles. Freeman, farmers, and traders were third in importance. At the bottom were

slaves, laborers, and artisans. Non-Aryans made up most of the lowest class. Many centuries later, another group developed that was considered even lower.

The Aryan hierarchy developed into a rigid **caste system** that was hereditary and could never be changed. People's castes dictated the kind of work they did and whom they could marry. The caste system even dictated what people could eat. Such definitions applied to people's children as well.

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** Who were the Aryans?
- 2. INTERPRET MAPS** What physical features did the Aryan migrations pass through?
- 3. DETERMINE WORD MEANINGS** What does waves mean in the sentence, "Around 1500 B.C. waves of new people began crossing the Hindu Kush into India?"