

<p>In 1856, British colonial officials in India were busy monitoring the construction of a railway connecting the cities of Lahore and Karachi in modern-day Pakistan along the Indus River valley.</p>	
<p>As they continued to work, some of the laborers discovered many fire-baked bricks lodged in the dry terrain. There were hundreds of thousands of fairly uniform bricks, which seemed to be quite old. Nonetheless, the workers used some of them to construct the road bed, unaware that they were using ancient artifacts. They soon found among the bricks stone artifacts made of soapstone, featuring intricate artistic markings.</p>	
<p>Though they did not know it then, and though the first major excavations did not take place until the 1920s, these railway workers had happened upon the remnants of the Indus Valley Civilization, also known as the Harappan Civilization, after Harappa, the first of its sites to be excavated, in what was then the Punjab province of British India and is now in Pakistan. Initially, many archaeologists thought they had found ruins of the ancient Maurya Empire, a large empire which dominated ancient India between c. 322 and 185 BCE.</p>	
<p>Before the excavation of these Harappan cities, scholars thought that Indian civilization had begun in the Ganges valley as Aryan immigrants from Persia and central Asia populated the region around 1250 BCE. The discovery of ancient Harappan cities unsettled that conception and moved the timeline back another 1500 years, situating the Indus Valley Civilization in an entirely different environmental context.</p>	
<p>Scholars are still piecing together information about this mysterious civilization, but they have learned a great deal about it since its rediscovery. Its origins seem to lie in a settlement named Mehrgarh in the foothills of a mountain pass in modern-day Balochistan in western Pakistan. There is evidence of settlement in this area as early as 7000 BCE.</p>	
<p>The Indus Valley Civilization is often separated into three phases: the Early Harappan Phase from 3300 to 2600 BCE, the Mature Harappan Phase from 2600 to 1900 BCE, and the Late Harappan Phase from 1900 to 1300 BCE.</p>	
<p>At its peak, the Indus Valley Civilization may have had a population of over five million people. The Indus cities are noted for their urban planning, a technical and political process concerned with the use of land and design of the urban environment. They are also noted for their baked brick houses, elaborate drainage systems, water supply systems, and clusters of large, nonresidential buildings.</p>	
<p>The Indus Valley Civilization began to decline around 1800 BCE. Archaeological evidence indicates that trade with Mesopotamia, located largely in modern Iraq, seemed to have ended. The advanced drainage systems and baths of the great cities were built over or blocked. Writing began to disappear, and the standardized weights and measures used for trade and taxation fell out of use.</p>	