

## Harappa: [www.harappa.com](http://www.harappa.com)

Harappa is a gateway to South Asia before 1947. The site has two main objectives. One is to start telling the story of the actual ancient city of Harappa and the civilizations of the Indus Valley, about which very little information is available outside scholarly circles. The second objective is to showcase pre-independence (1947) media from the Indian subcontinent, including film, sounds and a wide range of pictures.

An underlying theme is to explore the common history of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), a history which goes far deeper than current political divisions may suggest.

The story of the actual, literal Harappa (now in Punjab, Pakistan) starts in the early 19th century, with the rediscovery of a city which flourished in 2,500 B.C. Its discovery was the first sign of the ancient Indus Valley civilizations. This story continues today, with the first major excavations by a joint US-Pakistani team at Harappa since the 1940's.

The most basic questions about Harappan civilization remain unanswered. The Indus Valley script has not been deciphered. All we know is that it was the largest ancient civilization, highly sophisticated in its management of trade and resources. Given the very latest research pushing the origin of Indus Valley cultures to 6,000 B.C., they may be the lost origin of many common elements of today's world, including writing, various signs of the Zodiac, mathematics, textiles, toilets and much more.

The web site includes a 90 slide tour of the ancient Indus by Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, one of its foremost scholars. The site tries to weave together the relevant information in ways that broad audiences today can enjoy and find stimulating. The site show actual objects and images the Harappans used, presents detailed analysis of

objects like a unicorn seal, or offers a walk through the ancient Indus city of Mohenjo-daro. In the coming months we will be presenting the mystery of the Rohri flintmines, with the pyramids the largest known ancient industrial enterprise - yet only discovered in the 1990's by an Italian archaeologist. Three dimensional computer recreations of ancient Harappa will also be shown, the first time an ancient Indus city has been reconstructed based on archaeological findings. We will also soon be presenting two complementary interpretations of the Indus script, the result of decades of research by scholars in Finland and India. Most of the major scholars in the field, from the US through Europe and the subcontinent have agreed to contribute to the site; our goal is to make their work accessible and illuminating to the general public.

Another important element of the site is the sale of authentic replicas of ancient Indus goods, made by master craftsmen under archeological supervision. The first such pottery will be on sale by the end of April, and we will soon be making seal replicas, statues and busts, jewelry and children's learning kits available.

The second major objective of the web site is to show media that has not been seen for generations, either by South Asians or the rest of the world. The film and image collections behind the site have been dug up during many years of research in private and public collections in many countries. From rare audio of Gandhi, to little known film of leaders like Nehru or Jinnah, Harappa brings visual history on demand to a wide audience.

The idea is to be a spigot to a rich and undiscovered past. The film collection behind the site consists of hundreds of pieces of archival film, found all over the world, and copied, documented and properly identified. A remarkable private collection like The Shah Collection, a 16mm color archive made by a doctor in the Indian Medical Service starting in 1939, has been brought on-line. As the video capabilities and bandwidth of the Internet grow, the site will much more film material from darkness of archival vaults to the daylight of the net. For the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

India and Pakistan's independence on August 14-15, 1997 we plan to present a wall of 16 unseen films from the period, including "brand-new" footage of Mahatma Gandhi.

The photography and postcard collection is similarly extensive, and backed by one of the largest databases on photographers (over 700) in the Indian subcontinent from 1845 until 1947.

Another important section of the site consists of sounds, mainly the voices of important South Asians from the past. It is complemented with a series of personal essays about people who witnessed life before 1947, and draws on a 200 hour archive of interviews with everyone from Princesses to buffalo shepherds, from old fishermen to some of South Asia's most famous writers and leaders. This oral archive is supported by a wide variety of contextual media, like newspaper clippings and location shots. The first people presented include the Pushto poet Ghani Khan and Princess Abida Sultan of Bhopal.

Both of the site's major objectives have to do with bringing the forgotten and rarely seen to light. The intention is to take users back to a moment in time through authentic media. Visitors coming to find out about the Indus Valley discover that there is much more to discover, just as people coming to see archival photographs or films have the opportunity to learn about ancient India and Pakistan.

The primary audience for the site may seem to be the one billion South Asians around the globe. Thus far, however, half the actual users are non-South Asians and this is what we want. Harappa will remain a doorway to South Asia for those from other places, just as it is a doorway for South Asians to our own past.

The site has been averaging 200 visitors a day this year, or some 6,000 people a month from 51 countries. It includes of 400 discrete pages (not including the no frames versions of many pages),

and is growing at about 25 pages per month. In 1996 it received a Gold Medal for Best Online Reference at the New Media Magazine Invision Awards.

Harappa provides links to many other Internet sites containing related media and information. We have a long list of external contributors. A mailing list informs users when the latest additions are made to the site. The site is produced on a Macintosh system, in tandem with a Windows system on which everything is checked and through which most users access the site.

The web site will avoid the post-independence (1947) period because of the divisive politics involved, and because that would make an enormous task truly impossible. What we seek is a subtle engagement with the present: providing the media and context to make archival glimpses fresh to modern, multicultural audiences.