

# Indus (Harappan Civilization)

## Practices

Over fifty-five burial sites have been found in the Indus Valley. The burials are interpreted primarily as reflections of social structure and hierarchy partially because of the strong DNA affinities among the female population.

Burials were in brick or stone lined rectangular or oval pits. The body was usually interred clothed, shrouded or in a wooden coffin in the north-south direction with the head to the north. From the use of clothing and/or a coffin it is believed that it was considered important that the body did not come into contact with the ground.

Grave goods included pottery with the earlier burials including a cup and a plate which seemed to be indispensable.<sup>1</sup> Later bodies of the individuals were usually buried with their jewelry, women being buried with bangles and men with earrings. Copper mirrors have also been found in the graves of females.<sup>2</sup>

Later burial practices also included cremation where the ashes were placed in burial urns.<sup>3</sup>

Also unlike other civilizations the Harappan did not bury riches with their dead.<sup>4</sup>

The abundance of water facilities and the existence of the bath at Mohenjo-daro suggest that water played an important part in religious rites. Water was most likely used for ritual purification and iconography suggests that terrestrial waters, with their fish, were closely related in belief to the waters of the heavens where swam the stars.<sup>5</sup>

## Deities and Important Concepts

- Evidence exists that the Harappan worshiped a mother goddess and a male god shown wearing a buffalo horned head-dress, sitting in a yogic posture, surrounded by animals.
- They also venerated the natural world especially trees, principally the pipal (Buddha tree) and powerful animals, particularly the bull/water buffalo and the tiger.<sup>6</sup>

## Modern Adaptations

- Burial in a coffin and/or shroud.
- Raise a pitcher or large bowl of water while saying the following:

Water cleanses and purifies everything it touches.  
This water represents the heavens where in swim the stars.

Say the following as you pour the water on each participant's hands

May your heart be free to look at the stars and remember \_\_\_\_\_.

- Planting of a tree.
- Lighting a fire at the funeral site.
- Speaking of the totem animals of the person.

## Sample Readings

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<sup>1</sup> The Language of the Harappans: From Akkadian to Sanskrit, by Malti J Shendge; pg. 31

<sup>2</sup> <http://jeyakumar1962.blogspot.com/2011/11/harappan-burial-practices-krishnapriya.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.timemaps.com/civilization-ancient-india2>

<sup>4</sup> <http://wondersofpakistan.wordpress.com/2009/03/04/indus-valley-civilisation-the-genesis-of-pakistan/>

<sup>5</sup> The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives, by Dr Jane McIntosh; pg. 297

<sup>6</sup> The Ancient Indus Valley: New Perspectives, by Dr Jane McIntosh; pg. 297

While 417 distinct signs have been identified no deciphering of the Harappan language currently exist. Thus we have not direct readings that can be quoted.

### **Resources**

- The Language of the Harappans: From Akkadian to Sanskrit  
By Malti J Shendge
- The Harappan Civilization : Module 1  
[http://download.nos.org/srsec315new/History%20Book\\_L03.pdf](http://download.nos.org/srsec315new/History%20Book_L03.pdf)